

*The following article is by Tom Ascol and reposted from Founders Ministries (access the original [here](#)).*

Anthony Bradley has been a loud voice in the social justice movement among reformed and evangelical Christians in America. He actually helped awaken me to the threat of this movement to the gospel. It was his comment on Twitter on December 22, 2017 that started bringing into focus what I had only been seeing through a haze over the previous year or so. In response to Jonathan Leeman's article suggesting that evangelicals don't need a better gospel, Bradley wrote,

*Here's the problem (and this will be hard) [sic]: from a black church perspective, evangelicals have never had the gospel. Ever. Read the book "Doctrine A Race" [sic]. Here then is the actual Q: When will evangelicals embrace the gospel for the first time ever? #BlackChurch*

Having found a vantage point that made him feel justified to consign to hell evangelical leaders like R. C. Sproul, James Boice, E. V. Hill and Tony Evans (who, if they "never had the gospel" must have necessarily been guilty of preaching "another gospel," a practice which Paul anathematizes in Galatians 1:8-9), it is not surprising to find Bradley now going further to indict "Great Commission Christianity" (GCC). He is nothing if not consistent.

In an article recently published by Fathom, Bradley asserts his thesis in the title: "The Great Commission Christianity Keeps Blacks Away from Evangelicalism." He laments "evangelicalism's inability to successfully integrate its churches and institutions following the Civil Rights Movement." The underlying cause for this perceived malady (from his standpoint) is "evangelicalism's reduction of the mission of Christianity to the extra-biblical phrase 'The Great Commission' serves as an obstacle preventing white evangelicals from connecting the gospel to the lived experiences of African Americans."

Bradley uses the rest of the article to deconstruct "The Great Commission Christianity" in favor of what he calls "Cosmic Redemptive Christianity" (CRC). His effort is an exegetical, factual, and historical sleight-of-hand that would make David Copperfield proud.

## Exegetical

The word “go” in Matthew 28:16-20 is based on a participle and not an imperative verb in the original Greek language. Because of that, Bradley asserts that “the Greek grammar simply does not support ‘go’ as an imperative command unless you are reading a revivalist agenda into the exegesis of the text.” Based on that dismissive oversimplification of an exegetical fine point, Bradley leaps to the unwarranted conclusion that “Great Commission [sic] Christianity is a truncated view of the gospel, the kingdom, and redemption that may permanently keep evangelicalism one of America’s only predominantly white spaces.”

The force of his logic here escapes me. The exegesis does not support his conclusion.

## Factual

Bradley buttresses his case by quoting and misquoting (or at least misciting) Robbie Castleman, assistant professor of biblical studies at Brown University, on the history of the phrase, “The Great Commission.” Here is Bradley’s quote of Castleman:

*It turns out that this passage may have got its summary label from a Dutch missionary Justinian von Welz (1621-88), but it was Hudson Taylor, nearly 200 years later, who popularized the use of ‘The Great Commission.’ It seems, then, that Welz or some other Post-Reformation missionary probably coined the term ‘The Great Commission’ **and today’s evangelicalism inherited a slogan that’s more a handicap than they may realize** [emphasis added].*

I used the bold highlight to mark the words that Bradley added to what Castleman actually wrote in the article to which Bradley linked. The first sentence is quoted accurately. The second sentence has some problems.

***So it seems** like Welz or some other Post-Reformation missionary probably coined the term “The Great Commission” and **since that time, the passage has been the theme for countless mission talks and conferences. (It may be of some comfort to Web-sceptics to know that I ended up finding this bit of history in a hard-bound book on the history of world missions belonging to a colleague here at John Brown University.)***

This time I added the bold to show what Castleman actually wrote that Bradley either omits or changes in the article he cites.

This could be a simple mistake. Perhaps Bradley was reading a different version of Castleman's article that actually states what he quotes her as saying and inadvertently linked to the wrong source. It happens. But it is beyond merely interesting, one might even say, fortuitous, that the salient point which he wants to make—that "Great Commission Christianity" is deficient and racist—is found in the words that he erroneously attributes to her from the article he cites.

It is a factual error.

## Historical

The three missionaries that Bradley mentions as propagating the GCC that, from his vantage point, discriminates against blacks, give the lie to his accusations that "Great Commission Christianity" teaches a "truncated view of the gospel, the kingdom, and redemption."

The seventeenth century Austrian, Justinian von Welz, formed the "Jesus-Loving Society" and challenged Christians to give, volunteer and go throughout the world to make disciples for Jesus. As part of his efforts he proposed rigorous schools of training and eventually sailed to Suriname in 1666 where, within two years, he died as a martyr. Many believe that his testimony inspired the work of William Carey, the second missionary proponent of GCC who preached a "truncated gospel" that Bradley mentions.

Carey is widely known as the Father of Modern Missions. He was very much a proponent of conversionistic Christianity which Bradley generously labels as "not heretical....not necessarily wrong...." but "accidentally deficient." The deficiency, he believes stems from its "hyper-focus on saving individuals and the work of the church [that] says nothing about the redemption of creation."

Tell that to the generations of Indian women who have lived free from the widow-burning practice of Sati since Carey gave his life preaching a "truncated gospel" on that content. In fact, as Dibin Samuel puts it in a *Christianity Today* article, "In addition to abolishing Sati system, Carey also protested against other cultural institutions that oppressed women like

polygamy, female infanticide, child marriage, euthanasia and forced female illiteracy.”

Not bad for a truncated gospel.

Hudson Taylor, the third missionary mentioned by Bradley—the one who “popularized the use of ‘The Great Commission’—gave his life in the last half of the nineteenth century to preaching the GCC version of the gospel in China. His life and labors helped plant the gospel and faithful gospel churches in that vast nation and inspired other missionaries like Amy Carmichael and Jim Elliot to give their lives to make Christ known to unreached peoples, too. Today, the mission organization that he founded continues to service missionaries who preach the gospel and support all kinds of work meeting “holistic needs of the materially poor through community development work.”

Again, not bad for a deficient gospel.

Bradley’s article is so fraught with errors that it reads more like an agenda searching for another opportunity to promote itself than an honest attempt to talk about the great commission. As I read it, I was reminded of something that Al Mohler said last week in the infamous Q&A panel at the 2019 Shepherd’s Conference. While responding to a question about social justice issues he said, “I’m afraid we’re going to lose an enormous number of evangelicals to various kinds of social gospel because that’s a lot easier to find satisfaction in than evangelism.”

The last thing we need is for Christian leaders to be throwing shade at the work of evangelism. Bradley quotes Tim Keller’s definition of the gospel as corrective to the truncated gospel of the GCC. But it seems he has forgotten what Keller himself has said: “Jesus didn’t come primarily to solve the economic, political, and social problems of the world. He came to forgive our sins.”

The problem isn’t with the great commission. The problem is with those whose cultural agendas have so shaped their perspectives that they fail to appreciate the significance of what it means to make disciples of all nations.

*\*Thank you to Tom Ascol for permission to repost this article. Go to [Founders.org](http://Founders.org) for this and more articles from a reformed Baptist perspective. Relevant to the subject discussed above, the 2019 Southeast Founders Conference audio and video is now available [here](#).*

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