

Awakenings 2025: Wholeness & Beauty in the Life of the Church

Day 2 (Friday) Plenary Session Notes

Friday Night Session: Friday, March 07th, 7:30pm – 9:30pm



- **Rev. Dr. Willie James Jennings: “The Home Mission: The Redemption of Place”**
 - What does it mean to participate with the Spirit in the imagination, building, and joining with God in place?
 - The coldness that is in the air does not match the coldness that is coming from this part of the country (DC). So many Christians are making it difficult for people to survive in America.
 - Those of us who want to give witness to the redeeming life of God: We must be beautifully and joyously clear about what that redemption means now.
 - It is precisely redemption that I want to consider.
 - ***“At the place where flesh touches the land, there is redemption. We know this because God became incarnate all the way to the bone, and to the dirt. In Jesus we learn that the Creator has embraced the Creation. This means that redemption is of the body, and of place.”***

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- What does it mean to give witness to the redemption of the body in place? The problem we face together is that our visions of redemption separate the body from the land, and from the building — building understood as noun and verb. How we form the built environment (*i.e. all the aspects of what it means to live in a place*).
- **Our geographic imaginations are insulated and in need of freedom.**
- Enslavement is all around us — from the multiple wars being fought over war right now, to our pandemic of homelessness, to our unrelenting struggles against the oligarchic forces of real estate and development. We can see the urgent need for the deliverance of our geographic imagination.
- **Salvation means we participate in the work God has done and is doing to make place sacred.** What does it mean for a place to be sacred? What does it mean to make a place sacred? What does it mean for a human creature to be sacred? Or for a non-human creature to be sacred?
- Colonial Modernity: With it, the translation of the world into ‘owned’ existence. And the transformation of all that is into ‘property’ or on its way to becoming ‘property.’
- Settler Colonialism: Colonial settlers formed the ‘**delusion condition**’ — a term that builds on the magisterial thought of Howard Thurman, who talked about people being caught in deception. *This is belief that everything should be and eventually will be owned.* This is the acceptance of property relations down to the bone and dirt. Land and the bodies inside are seen as commodity. This is a counterfeit vision of the sacred.
- What is the sacred? What is sacrality?
 - “*The sacred is that which has been and is being touched by God, touched by the Divine Light. The sacred is that which has been marked by God’s presence, even by God’s indwelling.*”
- Indwelling is an ancient idea that explains presence, both human and divine. The only one who has the right to indwell is the Divine. It is the ability to indwell that establishes spiritual freedom. It requires the indwelling of ownership. Property is experienced / claimed as the extension of the self. (*i.e. “That’s mine!”*)
- This spirit of property becomes a replacement for the Holy Spirit. Let’s call this (*jokingly!*) a ‘*pneumatology of ownership.*’
- We have a distorted love of land that weaves tragic belonging with a desire for private property. We claim, proclaim, and protect possession above all other things.
- This is actually counterfeit ‘sacrality.’
- What does it mean to venerate?
 - John of Damascus (651-750): “*To venerate is to bow down in respect.*” There is veneration bound to worship, which would include reverence and respect.
- Remember: “*All policing practice follows zoning policy.*” Zoning policy directs movement and generally establishes formal and informal protocols of the massive discretionary powers of the police. The police in their practice organize the sacred.
- Our counterfeit vision of the sacred turns veneration towards relentless segregation — this makes a certain space ‘holy’ and another space ‘evil.’ **This makes no sense in a world that God has created. How can a space that God has created be ‘evil?’**