

I first became aware of Maria Garriott shortly after the spring riots in Baltimore, when I somehow came across her blog, “Loving vs. Looting Baltimore.”¹ I was intrigued by the name of her website, “A Thousand Resurrections,” and I then read her book of the same title, which is an intense and amazing account of her family’s voluntary, decades-long life and ministry in the violent and drug-ridden Pen Lucy neighborhood of Baltimore.

Although the book is a “page turner,” I’ve had to put the book down time and time again in sheer cognitive and emotional overload as I’ve been confronted with the realities of life in inner-city Baltimore, which is, in most respects, life in inner-big-city America.

I’ve also ordered another book that Maria recommends, *Merciful: The Opportunity and Challenge of Discipling the Poor out of Poverty*, by Randy Nabors. She says it gives “a balanced interpretation of generational poverty, how some government programs create

dependency, and the responsibility of the Church,” and in my view, Maria has earned the right to make such an evaluation.

Now that the last year of highly-publicized white-on-black and black-on-white tragedies have finally awakened our national conscience, the news is filled—as recently as this morning—with lots of ideas about what we should do. Massive public attention to police and prison practices led to significant changes in the 1930’s and the 1960’s, and we may be poised on the brink of significant and much-needed reforms in our own time.

We seem to be recognizing that aggressive policing, mandatory prison sentences, and the “war on drugs” have brought more unintended consequences than intended ones. Ubiquitous cell phone cameras are bringing new levels of accountability. At least in some quarters, our nation is beginning to grapple in earnest with the consequences of our Jim Crow efforts to erode Emancipation and with the consequences of fifty years of trying to erode the Voting Rights Act.

Religious groups—many of them Baptist—are pushing back against the century-long erosion of our usury laws, erosion that today actually allows “payday lenders” to charge the poorest and most desperate among us an average of 400% interest. That’s right. *Four hundred percent*. There are more payday lenders in Texas than McDonald’s and Whataburger’s combined.²

These are political issues that will be bandied about a great deal as the electoral season heats up, but they are also, and perhaps more fundamentally, moral issues. As criminologist Patrick Anderson put it:

¹ www.athousandresurrections.com/looting-vs-loving-baltimore/

² Aaron Weaver, “The Problem of Predatory Lending: Texas Baptists and Usury,” *Christian Ethics Today*, Winter, 2015, 19-21. In colonial America, all thirteen colonies capped interest on loans between 5-8%, and the Protestant reformers such as Martin Luther thought the cap should be 5-6%.

When a twelve-year-old boy playing with a toy pistol is shot and killed by a rogue policeman in mere seconds after arriving on the playground, it is *evil*. For a street corner black man, selling single cigarettes to other poor people who cannot afford to purchase a full pack, to be strangled and killed by police officers is *evil*. For more young black males to be incarcerated in America's prisons than matriculated in America's colleges is *evil*. For a man who foolishly chooses to run from a police officer after being pulled over with a busted tail light to be shot eight times in the back and killed by a police officer is *evil*.

For hundreds of innocent persons to be incarcerated in prison, some to be sentenced to death, after faulty investigations, prosecutorial misconduct and mandatory minimum sentencing is *evil*. For children to be left behind while mothers in need of substance abuse treatment are caught up in prisons and locked away from their children for years is *evil*.

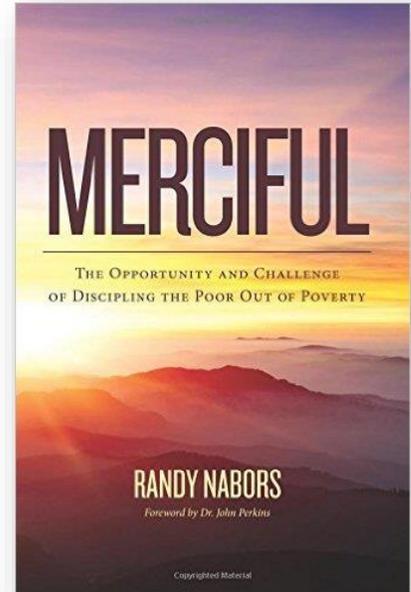
*Where have we been, we God-fearing Christians? Where is our theological imagination when it comes to issues of justice?*³

All of this describes the trajectory on which I've been traveling since discovering *A Thousand Resurrections*. Many of us have roots in Baltimore. All of us live near Baltimore. What does God have for us to do to push back this darkness in our time? Our MISSION Team is wrestling with these questions, and I ask you to wrestle, too.

We cannot do less than to continue and to increase our investment in the youth and families of our Oakland Mills neighborhood. But how about Baltimore?

How about Baltimore?

Dave



³ Patrick Anderson, "Deliver Us from Evil," *Christian Ethics Today*, Spring, 2015, 2-3.

Racial Map of Baltimore
(red is Black; blue is White)

