Amanda Tyler interviews the Rev. Dr. Aidsand Wright-Riggins about race, reconciliation, religious liberty, Christian supremacy, and more in this wide-ranging conversation.

The relationship between race and religious liberty has a complex – and, at times, troublesome – history. We must know what we must repent of before we can take steps toward repentance or reconciliation in this country. For instance, Dr. Wright-Riggins discussed Founders such as Thomas Jefferson who were champions of religious liberty while holding people in bondage and chains. Instead of religious liberty, African Americans had to prioritize racial liberty and racial justice as they fought for their very survival. Why do you think it is important to acknowledge this complex history today? How has this racial history of religious liberty affected people’s assumptions about who religious liberty is for? How can we be intentional now about framing religious liberty for everyone? How do you think further understanding our country’s history moves us towards repentance and reconciliation?

Dr. Wright-Riggins argues that part of the difficulty in talking about these hard issues, such as race, religion, or gender, is that we all have privilege and blind spots in areas of which we are not aware. For instance, he discusses how his work during his college years was for the liberation of the Black man without him seeing the privilege Black men had over Black women. Have you had instances in your own life where you have later realized a privilege you have that has kept you from seeing other people or their struggles more fully? Why do you think it is so hard for us to learn about our privileges? Do you think it’s our responsibility to work to shift benefits to oppressed groups once we acknowledge and recognize our privilege? If so, how do we begin to do that? What are examples we can draw on from history of that being done well?

Dr. Wright-Riggins discusses repentance, reconciliation, and reparations (18:03). At 19:31, he says, “I am not so much as interested in the handing out or the delivery of goods and services as much as I am concerned about how do we begin to rethink the structural narrative or the structures in this country that lead to the disparities in the first place.” One of his examples was that for every $5 in wealth he has as a
life-long employed black man who makes a decent income, his white neighbors in his community have access to thousands of dollars of wealth. Dr. Wright-Riggins argues that the conversation needs not to be simply the distribution of benefits to those having suffered, but it also needs to include changing the system to make it a more equal playing field going forward. How does Dr. Wright-Riggins’ framing of reparations differ from what you may have heard about reparations before the podcast? What are other examples of structural inequality that you think Dr. Wright-Riggins may be referring to that need to be addressed? What do you think could be a first step towards reparations in your community?

At the end of the podcast, Dr. Wright-Riggins talks about his switch from traditional ministry to his work in the civil sector. He describes his work as mayor of Collegeville, Pennsylvania, as not traditional ministry, but “more ministry in the workplace as a lay person attempting through the exercise of my faith to try to authentically be transformative and bring civility and character to the civil order” (23:10). What ways do you want to be authentically transformative in areas of life that you see as your ministry? How can promoting the Christians Against Christian Nationalism statement be a part of that process?