“The Grand Betrayal”
By Lindsey Schirn, RPLP undergraduate student fellow

Michael Emerson, a sociologist and professor of sociology at the University of Illinois Chicago, spoke about his forthcoming book *The Grand Betrayal: The Agonizing Story of Race, Religion, and Rejection in American Life* at a Religious and Civic Leaders Gathering on October 18. In his book, Emerson proposes a new theory that many attending white Christians are faithful followers of a different religion: the “religion of whiteness.” Furthermore, Emerson argues, drawing on extensive interview and survey research, that two-thirds of attending white Christians subscribe to this religion of whiteness.

“The religion of whiteness centers around white people assuming being white is normative,” Emerson stated. To them, white is superior, and this is justified by the belief that God is on their side. Within the religion of whiteness, there are two groups: the “white veil,” which comprises 75 percent of the faith, and the “white might,” which comprises the other 25 percent.

“The white veil are the deniers. They are the ones who say there is no racial privilege. That works well because the other 25 percent, the white might, are foot soldiers—think of them as those who stormed the capitol. These guys are totally into race and feel it as a calling to defend the superiority of whiteness,” stated Emerson.

Emerson believes that a consequence of the “newfound religion of whiteness” is the feeling of a grand betrayal on behalf of Christians of color. Emerson stated, “when people or institutions which a person defends and trusts significantly violate that trust, and when you cannot trust your institutions, it shakes people.” Moreover, Emerson believes that one of the critical challenges in overcoming this grand betrayal is to live into Christian teaching and those of others that teach altruism and caring for people other than their kin, especially those who are vulnerable or have less power in society.