
THOUGHTS ON CHRISTIANITY & RACISM TODAY



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Thoughts on Racism

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I. Introduction

Racism is a scourge upon the human race and a prominent theme in today's social conversation. Racism is a hate-sin and a hate-crime. Its history is as old as the human race and as intractable as evil itself. Its prominence in American history, from slavery to *de jure* segregation in the South to *de facto* segregation in the North is a blight upon our national record. Its eradication is an important social goal of which Christians are enthusiastic supporters. Racism is incompatible with Christ's disciples, who are to "regard no one according to the flesh" (2 Cor. 5:16).

However, this goal of eliminating racism is being undermined by the recklessness with which the accusations of racism are being hurled about. Typically, the term itself is left undefined. Not just individuals, but whole classes of persons are being labeled as racist while other groups are said to be incapable of racism. The word "racism" is often modified by other terms such as "implicit," "structural," "institutional," and "systemic." A whole nation is branded with the evil: "America is a racist nation." Yet the meaning of racism is left vague and illusive.

We have a pastoral concern about this. It is important that sin be identified so that it can be repented of and repudiated. Imprecise accusations lead to unresolved guilt feelings. Believers are being told they are guilty of something though they are not quite sure of what that something is. Worse, if they deny that they harbor any negative attitudes or feelings against people of other races; or claim that they are not guilty of prejudicial, bigoted, or discriminatory attitudes or actions against other races, this denial itself is said to be evidence of racism. The accusation itself is unfalsifiable: one is guilty no matter

what, without recourse, except to admit to what one does not believe is true.

Consequently, it is vital that we understand what racism is and what it isn't. An accurate, carefully nuanced definition with accompanying descriptions is necessary if we are to confess our guilt where it is real as well as avoid manipulation by externally imposed false guilt.

II. What Racism Isn't – 1

What then is racism? Let me start by answering what *racism is not*. This may prove to be the most helpful way to clarify what we *should* mean when we speak of racism.

Preferences

First, a *preference for what is familiar* is not necessarily racism or bigotry or sinful preference. A recent publication, *the Human Network* supplies statistical and transcultural support for what we all already know about our fondness for the familiar. The author, Matthew O. Jackson, introduces the term *homophily* (homo=same; philia=love; love of the same) which he defines as “the general tendency of people to interact with others who are similar to themselves.” This phenomena, he maintains, “occurs along many dimensions including gender, ethnicity, religion, age, profession, (and) educational level.” He cites an example of homophilia in Africa’s Great Rift Valley, where nomadic hunter-gatherers group themselves along common features such as height, weight, and strength.

It doesn’t take much for us to manifest our preference for the familiar. During the filming of “The Planet of the Apes,” the actors and actresses dressed as gorillas ate their lunches in one group, and those dressed as chimpanzees in another. It is doubtful that we can attribute this to speciesism, rather, it is something more benign. Scan the sidelines of any typical college or professional sports team and one will find athletes grouped primarily according to race: the black players standing or sitting together, and likewise the white. Is this wrong, or sinful, or evil? It can be. It may be that “like seeks like” because it hates or prejudices all that are unlike. On the other hand, it may be merely an expression of the universal preference for the

familiar. The rich, the famous, the poor, the middle class, the educated, the uneducated all tend to seek out their own. We are comfortable with that which is familiar to us. We live with, play with, work with, worship with “our people.”

The word “home” is surrounded with sentiments of warmth because home is where we are most at ease. “There is no place like home,” we say. The reason is obvious: home is that place like no other where things are the *most* familiar and therefore with which we are the *most* comfortable.

By the same token, we all experience a measure of discomfort with the unfamiliar. My transition from a lower middle-class high school to an upper middle-class college fraternity was an uncomfortable one. So also was my visit for tea at Lambeth Palace in London with the Archbishop of Canterbury David Coggan along with other foreign theology students. Let’s just say I was the proverbial fish out of water. We are uneasy when we encounter an unfamiliar environment, whether a neighbor’s house or a foreign culture. A middle class American suddenly thrust into the midst of an elite social event is unsure of himself. It is unclear to him what is expected of him. On the other hand, he is perfectly at ease at his church’s cookout. We are comfortable with our own people and our own culture. We are uncomfortable and perhaps even threatened by a strange or foreign cultural context. This in part explains why like seeks like, and explains such without resorting to motives such as hate or racism.

Recognizing differences

Second, *a recognition of racial, ethnic, gender, and cultural differences is not necessarily racist, sexist or bigotry*. It is not sinful to observe a concentration of intellectual ability in the Jewish community, a

concentration of athletic, musical, and rhetorical ability in the African-American community, or a concentration of academic aspiration in the Asian community. It is not sexism to recognize that men are physically stronger than women, or that women place greater value on relationships than men. Stereotyping is wrong. It is wrong to deny that people cannot be other than what typifies their culture, race or gender. Yet it is not necessarily wrong to recognize that the British are not the French, the French are not the Germans, the Germans are not the Italians, the Cubans are not the Peruvians, and the West Africans are not the East Africans. We may recognize these differences and indeed must, lest we be guilty of reverse stereotyping, assuming that all nationalities, ethnicities, and races are alike. Ironically, the charge of racism works in both directions. Ignore racial or cultural differences and one may be accused of being insensitive, even wrongly unaware of the expectations or customs of a given group, of assuming that *all* groups are like one group. Respond to racial or cultural differences by treating groups differently and one may be accused of being biased or prejudiced for not treating all groups alike. We want to confess our sins of race-based hatred or bigotry. Yet we also want to be sure not to afflict others with false guilt. It is important that our guilt feelings be a result not of a general sense of unease about that which is of itself not sinful, but only because of actual evil as God defines evil, of which we ourselves are guilty.

III. What Racism Isn't – 2

We are addressing the emotionally charged issue of racism, risking as we do inflaming the very emotions that we wish to cool. We have urged so far first, that a preference for what is familiar is not necessarily racism; and second, that recognition of racial, ethnic, gender, and cultural differences is not necessarily racist, sexist, or bigotry. This leads to our next point.

Privileging one's own

Third, *neither is it necessarily racist to privilege one's own*. For example, we all do, and must privilege our own spouses and children. We favor them with our time, resources, affections, and whatever advantages or opportunities we can arrange. The Bible both assumes and requires that parents care not for every child, but their own children, and that children honor not every adult, but their own parents (Eph 6:1-4; Ex 20:12; 1 Tim 5:4, 8, 16; 2 Cor 12:14). We rightly and properly privilege our own families.

By extension, we privilege our extended family, our tribe, our region, our nation. We root for the home team. Our college is our *alma mater*. We love our native land. The Apostle Paul has “great sorrow” and “unceasing anguish” not for everyone equally, but uniquely he tells us for “my brother, my kinsman according to the flesh,” his fellow Jews (Rom 9:2, 3). Civil authorities are required to protect and promote the well-being not of the whole world, but of the citizens of that land over which they rule (Rom 13:1ff).

American civilization, it has been pointed out, has been characterized by “white privilege” from the beginning. Actually, it was narrower than merely “white privilege.” Rather, it was “Anglo-Saxon Protestant privilege.” When

New York and New Jersey were added to the English colonies, it broadened to include “Dutch privilege,” at least in those regions. This ethnic bias reflects no more than the normal alignment of peoples all over the world. Every continent the world over preferences groups according to language, ethnicity, race, tribe, and culture. That is why borders are drawn as they are across the globe. The Poles are separated from the Hungarians, the Vietnamese from the Chinese, the Kenyans from the Tanzanians because of wars that established “privilege” within one’s borders for one’s own race or ethnic group or tribe and excludes others. Early America was biased against Germans, Irish, Southern and Central Europeans, Catholics, Jews, Hispanics, Asians, and particularly Africans. Gradually the barriers and biases have come down. The capacity peacefully to assimilate each of these groups, to extend liberty and equality to each of these groups is a unique strength of American civilization.

America has been a land of so-called “white privilege” largely because it has been 90% white through most of its history. In this respect we could say that Asia has been characterized by yellow privilege, Africa by black privilege, Latin America by brown privilege, and Native American territories by red privilege. That 100% of American’s presidents have been white is no more meaningful than to say 100% of Africa’s tribal chiefs have been black. The same is true of 90% of America’s professionals, college professors, judges, and business leaders. Of course, they have been white, since for 90% of America’s history 90% of its population has been white. This is not to say that minorities, be they white (e.g. Irish, Jewish) or people of color (African-Americans, Asian-Americans, Hispanic Americans), have not been unfairly or unjustly denied certain rights or opportunities. They have.

All such occasions are a stain upon our history. African-Americans in particular have had lingering barriers and bigotries to overcome, from slavery to Jim Crow, to today. Bigoted privileging is evil and degrading.

Still we want to say that the un sinful privileging of one's own should not be lumped together with the evil denial of central rights, liberties, and dignities due to others, such as life, liberty, property, due process, franchise, the rule of law, trial by jury of one's peers, and so on.

Rational risk assessment

Fourth, *rational risk assessment is not necessarily racist.*

When Jesse Jackson admits to feeling fear when a group of young black men approach him, while acknowledging not feeling the same fear when approached by a group of young Asian men, is that because of racial bigotry? When a young black man in the 1950's in the Southern United States was approached by a group of young white men and admitted to freezing with fear, was that admission an acknowledgment of racism? or stereotyping? or bigotry? Or is it the truth that in both cases the fears arose on the basis of a rational risk assessment? When a disproportionate number of violent crimes are committed by young black men, is it racism or realism that fuels the fears? Not all white youth persecuted blacks in the 1950's South. Only a minority did. Yet were the fears of the isolated black man justified? Did those fears arise out of anti-white bias or reasonable fears, given the circumstances? Risk assessment based on an individual's or group's clothing, grooming and countenance may not be racist but rational. An individual from an ethnic minority encountering a group of skin-headed, tattooed, leather-jacketed, Harley-riding young white men may respond with apprehension, not because he is racist, but because he is reasonable. Those are scary white men. Risk assessments

based on crime statistics may not be racist but statistically justified. Fears may be based not on race *per se*, but neighborhoods, not on skin color but concentrations of crime, not on ethnicity but external markers of tendencies.

Regrettably, when one is a part of a group that is guilty of bad behavior, the innocent members of that group experience the repercussions. Ask the advocates of “Critical Race Theory,” who lump together all white people as oppressors based on the history of slavery, segregation, and bigotry in America. Or to cite a different and more reasonable kind of example, an affluent white man driving through an impoverished neighborhood will be looked upon with suspicion. Residents may wonder if he is up to no good. They may even call the police. Why? Because the only affluent white men driving through that neighborhood are there to pick up drugs. There is a history of bad behavior by white men (drug deals) in minority neighborhoods. An Italian-American selling used cars or running a cement company may be suspected of having a connection with organized crime. Why? Because the mafia is dominated by Italians. The consequences for the innocent young black man walking through the white neighborhood, or the affluent white man driving through the minority neighborhood, or the honest Italian businessman running his business are regrettable. Yet the suspicions of onlookers should be expected and accepted at least initially (until proven otherwise) as understandable even if undeserved.

Why are we bothering to make these four distinctions between what is necessarily racist and what isn't (and distinctions five through eight which are forthcoming)? Why are these distinctions important? Because race-based hatred is a terrible evil. Because race-based prejudice and bigotry are degrading denials of universal human dignity.

Because the evil of racism is trivialized and heroes of the Civil Rights Movement are diminished when the charge of racism is hurled about wildly and is confused with so-called implicit (that is, hidden) bias or petty micro-aggressions.

IV. What Racism Isn't – 3

We have been tip-toeing through the minefield of today's racial tensions attempting to identify more precisely what is and what is not properly called racist. So far we have argued:

1. Preference for the familiar is not necessarily racist;
2. Recognition of racial, ethnic, gender, and cultural differences is not necessarily racist;
3. Privileging of one's own is not necessarily racist;
4. Rational risk assessment is not necessarily racist.

All four of the above may be racist. It may be that often they are based on racist assumptions and attitudes. Yet they are not necessarily so and often are quite benign and harmless. This leads us to our next point.

Unequal outcomes

Fifth, *unequal outcomes among racial groups does not necessarily indicate racism*. All humanity is equal in the eyes of God. We all equally are made in God's image, are of equal value, endowed with equal dignity, and our lives are equally sacred. Therefore, laws must be applied equally. Therefore, hate of anyone based on race, ethnicity, or culture is evil. Justice, in a just society, is blind. Lady Justice is blindfolded. She does not render judgements on the basis of class, race, sex, or religion.

All people, regardless of race or class, are equal in the eyes of the law, in the courts, and before human judges. Partiality or favoritism in the application of justice is strictly forbidden and repeatedly condemned in Scripture. God is not partial and neither are human judges to be. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibits all discrimination on the

basis of race, color, and religion, to which amendments and Supreme Court decisions have added a number of “etceteras.”

However, an equal distribution of opportunities, goods, and services, of wealth and material things is not a concern of justice properly understood. It is not a goal of justice. Because the gifts, abilities, opportunities, and efforts of people are inherently unequal, the outcomes cannot but be unequal. Any attempt to equalize incomes and outcomes are inherently unjust and oppressive, requiring the suppression of opportunity and coercive redistribution of material wealth for some to the benefit of undeserving others.

For example, the National Basketball Association is 90% black. Does injustice require that its rosters represent the national racial distribution? Is the fact that 60 plus percent of the player are *not* of European descent evidence of racial bias? Should the government mandate that the NBA equalize its racial composition to “look like America?” Would any attempt to do so not involve an injustice against black athletes who are more qualified according to ability and skills to play in the NBA? Of course it would. Today’s injustice cannot remedy yesterday’s injustice without committing a new injustice.

Strictly speaking, the Bible is not concerned with the unequal distribution of outcomes if those outcomes are righteously obtained. The Bible is not concerned that some people are rich while others are poor. It *is* concerned about ill-gotten wealth. It *is* concerned about the powerful robbing the poor of what is lawfully theirs (Amos 4:1). It *is* concerned about powerful people bribing judges and manipulating the law so as to confiscate the property and

deny the rights of the needy. It *is* concerned about the failure of the rich and powerful to show kindness and generosity towards the poor. It *is not* concerned about unequal outcomes *per se*, recognizing that such inequality is a permanent part of the human condition (Deut 15:11; Mt 26:11).

Discriminating choices

Sixth, *discriminating choices are not necessarily racist*. Discrimination is another largely undefined term. Is discrimination bad? Yes, most people would reflexively respond, automatically hearing “racial” whenever they hear “discrimination.” *Racial* discrimination, discrimination *based on race* is evil. Yet is discrimination *per se* evil? No. We all do and must discriminate all the time. When we marry, we discriminate against a whole world of people of the opposite sex in favor of the one we choose. Our discrimination in that case factors into the decision age, class, race, appearance, weight, education, and a number of other external characteristics, plus internal character qualities and personality traits. On the basis of some or all of these criteria we discriminate, choosing *one and rejecting the rest*.

Daily we discriminate as we choose what we shall wear, what we shall eat, where we shall drive, what we shall buy, and with whom we shall meet. Life is virtually nothing but a series of discriminating choices by which we accept and reject options.

What we should mean by “discrimination” is sinful, wrongful discrimination. Discrimination based on racial bigotry or class is evil. Discrimination based on prior prejudice against a group is evil. When we apply the law unevenly; when we treat people unfairly based on

immutable external characteristics such as skin color; when we deny people that to which they have a right to expect of us; these are examples of evil discrimination and the Christian community stands fourfold against them. Yet having discriminating taste is not. We push this point to remind ourselves that words have meaning, careful word choice leads to careful thinking and careful distinctions, and helps us to avoid making false accusations.

National well-being

Seventh, *concern for national well-being is not necessarily racist*. Different nations have different cultures. The Dutch have their windmills, wooden shoes, dairy farms and tulips. The French have their world-renowned cuisine. The Spanish and Italians have their beautiful Mediterranean architecture. The British have their habits of reserve and understatement. The Germans have their order and tidiness. Americans are innovators, and the Japanese are perfecters. Love of nation is a universal phenomenon. People everywhere love their country and its distinctive and familiar ways. They naturally and justifiably want to see these distinctives preserved. When immigration overwhelms assimilation, when the influx of foreigners threatens to alter the ways, the mores, the values, the ethos of a nation's way of life, they understandably will want to limit and control that influx.

Does America have a culture? It does. Harvard professor Samuel P. Huntington (1927-2008), in his important book *Who Are We?* (2004), likens the United States not to a melting pot, but to tomato soup. The original soup dating to the colonial era was the Anglo-Protestant culture of the early settlers: the English language, Christianity, English concepts of the rule of law, representative governments, the responsibility of rulers, the rights of individuals, equality,

and the Protestant values of individualism, hard work, and a vision of mission to humanity (“a city set on a hill”). Immigration adds celery, spices, parsley and other ingredients that “enrich and diversify taste,” as he puts it, yet are “absorbed into what remains fundamentally tomato soup.” It is vital to many Americans that their culture, so defined, be preserved, and rightly and understandably so.

The culture of the United States is not the culture of Bogota, or Kampala, or Riyadh, or New Delhi. It is not racist to want to slow the immigration from non-western nations in order to assimilate those who are already here to the customs, ideals, traditions, principles, and laws of our American civilization. It is unfair automatically to attribute the desire to slow the rate of immigration to that of the rate of assimilation to a fear of “the browning of America.” It is not necessarily racist to recognize that a multi-racial society is a novel experiment in the history of humanity. Tribalism is the norm from one end of the globe to the other. It is not un-Christian to recognize how fragile the foundation is of a nation that rests not on ethnic unity, not on so-called “blood and soil” nationalism, but convictions about governance. It is not un-Christian to fear the tribe-like divisions that are growing in our own day under the name of critical race theory and intersectionality. It is not un-Christian to fear that the ethnic-religious violence evident in the Balkans, China, the Middle East, Rwanda and throughout Africa, not to mention World War I and World War II, may one day engulf our own land. Consequently, it is a valid Christian concern to want carefully to grow the American population, adding foreigners at a pace at which they can be assimilated, and at a pace that will not destabilize the country and compromise its essential values.

Youthful banter

Eighth, *youthful banter is not necessarily racist*. It may be vulgar. It may be cruel. It may be obscene. Yet it still may not be racist. This comes up because of the dredging up of statements of alleged offenders from 40 years ago made when they were teenagers. It also has been in the news because of the hazing of students that has highlighted physical or social features associated with race. Banter and hazing may be vulgar, cruel, and obscene, yet still not necessarily racist.

During my youth I was variously called “slinky” (because I was so skinny), “Mr. Green Jeans” (never did understand this one), and “rabbit ears” (because I was knocked off my pitching game by the taunts of the San Pedro High School baseball team). A kid with a big nose was heckled, “Would you rather have a million dollars or a nose full of nickels?” A black kid with an unusually large head was called by the other black kids “hog head.” They called another with a thin pointed head “ski-slope” because of his long, smooth forehead. There were limits. The n-word was never used. Still, the German kid was called a “kraut” (note the epithets related to ethnic foods). Whites regularly were called “honkies.” A fair-skinned white boy was “Casper.”

All of this is foolish. Much of it is insensitive. But is it racial hatred? Is it expressive of racial superiority? This is where we want to encourage people to lighten up a bit. Ever thus has male adolescent banter gone on and ever thus has it been indiscriminate. All races are perpetrators. All races are victims. All physical features are considered fair game. All of it is ridiculous but rarely was it racist and seldom does it require retrospective repentance.

V. What It Is and Its Legacy

The threshold of tolerance for racism since the mid-20th century is very low and should be. The Soviet Union under Stalin executed or sent to the Gulags whole classes of persons based on group identity. Aristocrats, merchants, Ukrainians, Cossacks, Kulaks (prosperous peasants) were murdered or imprisoned by the millions. Germany under Hitler did the same: Slavs, gypsies, and most notoriously, Jews were slaughtered in concentration camps solely because of the groups to which they belonged. Newsreel pictures of emaciated and dead bodies stacked like firewood shocked the world. Post-World War II television images of firehoses and police dogs and bleeding black protesters in the American South awakened the racial conscience of Middle America. The “killing fields” of Pol Pot in Cambodia wiped out a third of that nation’s population solely on the basis of class, eliminating all who were educated, prosperous, urban or in any way westernized. Given the scale of and/or visibility of these group-based evils, whether based on race, ethnicity, or class, the result was a world-wide revulsion of race or group-based hatred.

For the above reasons, the worst accusation that one can hurl at a person today is that he or she is a racist. One may be an adulterer. One may abandon one’s spouse and children in favor of one’s lover. One may be publicly known for the most deviant and shameful sexual practices. All this comparatively gets a pass. However, a racist is a pariah, ranked alongside of a child molester and a wife beater for the simple reason that taken to its logical extreme the result is Gulags and Death Camps. One known to have uttered racial slurs or harbored racist attitudes is publicly

shamed and shunned today as thoroughly as a heretic in 17th century Puritan New England.

Consequently (here is the downside), the accusation of racism itself is a potential political weapon that the unscrupulous can use to leverage power. Those with the status that is necessary credibly to charge others with the evil of racism wield tremendous influence in today's society. They are able to control conversations (because they make up the rules) influence public policy, and even shape personal perceptions.

Given the lethality of the accusation, we have sought carefully to exclude from that which necessarily is racist such things as preference for the familiar, recognition of racial differences, privileging of one's own, rational risk assessment, unequal outcomes, discriminating choices, concern for national or cultural integrity, and youthful banter. All eight of these categories of behavior *may* be racist. Often they are. Or they *may not* be racist. This means that no one should be pre-judged simply because an individual or group may manifest one or more of these eight patterns of speech or conduct.

Definition

What, then is racism? Racism is the harmful attitudes (contempt, hatred, scorn) and actions (discrimination, bias, partiality, bigotry, prejudice, injustice) directed toward others on the basis of race. It is the belief that some races are inherently superior, others inherently inferior. It is hatred directed against a group and its members on the basis of their immutable physical characteristics (e.g. skin color). It is classifying people and treating people not as individuals but according to their group identity. By this definition, there was widespread personal and legal racism

in America's past. Bigoted comments about Jews, Asians and other minorities were common in my childhood and youth. By this definition, systemic, institutional racism was present in America throughout most of our history. Race-based slavery was racist and evil. Race-based legal segregation was racist and evil. Race-based denial of access and opportunity was racist and evil. All this should be recognized, regretted, and repudiated.

Legacy

The legacy of this racist past continues to the present. Among the important after-effects is mistrust. There is mistrust of the police in minority communities. Given the Bull Connors of previous generations, given the history of vigilante justice, of unprosecuted lynchings, this is to be expected. There is mistrust of the courts. Again, given the manipulation of the judicial system in the past by the white majority, particularly in the South, this is understandable. There is mistrust of the healthcare industry. Once again, given the unequal application of healthcare in the past, one standard for whites, another for blacks, and given medical experimentation without consent (e.g. Tuskegee Syphilis Study), this is natural. There is mistrust of the housing and banking industries because of the "redlining" practices of the past which determined loans and interest rates not on the basis of individual merit, but group identity, minorities being worsted in the process. There is mistrust in employment opportunities. There is mistrust in admissions policies. We could go on and on. This mistrust is warranted and deep-rooted. Its sources should be recognized, regretted, and repudiated. Continuing mistrust should be understood and accommodated by the majority culture.

Today

Yet this historically justifiable mistrust may distort one's perceptions today. The sins of the past may influence one to misinterpret the present, to read into the words and actions of individuals and whole institutions meaning that is not there. Today there are individual racists of every stripe, of every nationality, every race, and every ethnicity. There continues to be racists (as we have defined them) in America. It would be absurd and even dangerous to deny this. There will always be hatred and bigotry based on race as long as the world exists because hate is endemic to the human condition. Undoubtedly there are scores of anti-minority and anti-Semitic and other haters in the United States today.

At the same time, we can be thankful that racial attitudes have changed dramatically. For example, polls measuring racial attitudes, intermarriage, and the integration of public life all show that the world is a different place than it was in 1950 or even 1965. Racial slurs and demeaning ethnic humor and stereotypes that were tolerated in the past are utterly banned from private and public discourse. I can recall an otherwise kindly older woman warning me that Jews were unpatriotic and could not be trusted if money was involved. These kinds of opinions were not uncommon. Whereas segregation at mid-century was *de jure* (legal) in the South (the Jim Crow regime) and *de facto* (in practice, if not in law) in the North, the America of the post-Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Voting Rights Act of 1965, the America of 66 years later, the America of today *is a very different place*. With blacks playing a prominent role in every aspect of American life, with Americans electing a black President (twice), a black Vice President, and having appointed a black Attorney General, a black Secretary of State, a black Secretary of Defense,

with dozens and dozens of black legislators, judges, police chiefs, and so forth, and with American blacks being the richest people of African descent in the world, progress is to be celebrated. Asian prominence in academia and the white-collar professions tell a similar story. As we have noted, to say that racism today is as prevalent as it was during slavery or Jim Crow, is to trivialize the suffering endured by those who were the victims of the personal indignities and legal oppression of those eras. To identify today's problem of racism with yesterday's is to dishonor the heroism of the early civil rights leaders, and to slander our nation today. Moreover doing so inflames racial tensions today, and sadly, divides Christians from each other.

VI. Barriers to Social Progress

Some undoubtedly will object to what we have presented so far, maintaining that we fail to understand racism's continuing structural, or systemic nature. Racism may not be personal. Rather it continues in a more subtle, institutional and therefore more insidious form, it is claimed. While we want to avoid being superficial, we want to ask the obvious question. Where? What structures? What systems? What institutions? It is important to be specific. Where in our society are minorities denied access? Where is bias evident? Where does discrimination continue? What doors are still closed? Yes, there are racists. Yet that does not mean that the nation itself, as a defining characteristic, as an organizing principle, is racist. Indeed, wherever racism is structural, it is in fact prosecutable, with candidates lining up to make the charges. This is the answer to anyone who accuses an institution, a business, a region, a state, or the nation with racism – identify it and let us join with you to expose and prosecute it. Structural, institutional, and systemic racism, by normal definitions, is illegal and has been since the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the 1965 Voting Rights Act.

Inevitably, those making the case for structural racism today appeal to disparities in outcome – in law enforcement (number of minorities arrested, prosecuted, imprisoned, killed by police), in average income, in accumulated wealth, in percentages within various professions, in numbers of minority businesses, etc. These social phenomena are said to demonstrate that the whole structure of society is thoroughly racist, designed to favor whites and suppress minorities, and must be torn down.

However, if the only “proof” of racism is unequal outcomes, this is an overly simplistic explanation (see “What Racism Isn’t – 3”). Outcomes *may* provide evidence of discrimination. Yet outcomes alone *cannot* be decisive and may not even be important. The culture of the home, for example, has far more to do with who succeeds in school, or who achieves high monetary income, or who is involved in criminal activity, and as a consequence who succeeds in life.

Are we saying that there are no systemic or political barriers to social progress among minorities? No, but the structural barriers we see are *not racial* in nature. We can identify several of them, each of which is more important than anything we’ve heard from those most vocal about minority oppression.

Family breakdown

First, *the breakdown of the family* is a major institutional, structural, systemic barrier to equality of outcome. 85% of all men in prison were reared in homes without a father. The vast majority of Americans living near or below the poverty line are in single-parent households. Those looking for explanations for persistent high incarceration rates and persistent poverty must consider the erosion of the family in underclass regions from the inner city among blacks to Appalachia among whites.

Failing public schools

Second, *failing public schools* are a major institutional, structural, systemic barrier to equality of outcome. Countless minority students are trapped in failing schools, while the progress of the successful charter-school movement is obstructed by teachers’ unions and politicians. Thomas Sowell has documented the tragedy of this

opposition in his latest book, *Charter Schools and Their Enemies*. Given the direct connection between progress in education and economic prosperity, those looking for explanations for the persistent income gap between blacks and other groups must consider the failure of the public schools to educate.

Reduced police presence

Third, *reduced police presence in minority neighborhoods* is a major barrier to equality of outcome. The campaign against “broken window” policing, the campaign to defund the police, the media slander of policing in America as systemic racist (for which there is *no* statistical support) has had and always will have an immediate effect: robbery, murder, and mayhem in under-policed neighborhoods. Crime rates in the inner cities spiked everywhere during the summer of 2020 as a direct result of the anti-policing propaganda.

Culture of the underclass

Fourth, *the culture of the underclass* is a major barrier to equality of outcome. J. D. Vance has demonstrated in his book *Hillbilly Elegy* that today’s social pathologies know no racial boundaries. Appalachian whites suffer from all the same cultural maladies as do inner-city blacks and Hispanics: crime, glorification of violence, drug and alcohol abuse, illegitimacy, single-parent households, contempt for education, a vanishing work ethic, and all with the same result: poverty. Why? Because the shared values of the inner cities and many Appalachian white communities mitigate against social progress. The astonishing success of Caribbean and African blacks in America today, educational, professional, and financial, provide further evidence that the problem for many minorities is not racial, but cultural.

These four factors are all but ignored by those presenting themselves as advocates for equality and social progress for minorities. Why? Perhaps because these advocates have a different narrative driving a different agenda. What is that? Simply this: America is so thoroughly oppressed by a white, heterosexual, patriarchal social structure that the entire system must be destroyed. Why should Christians care about this false narrative? Because if this false narrative succeeds, the end result will be the perpetuation and ultimate multiplication of human suffering, particularly that of those the false narrative claims to help.

VII. Escalating Racial Tensions Today

As recently as the aftermath of the 2008 national election America widely was proclaimed to be a “post-racial” society. President Obama had been elected. This remarkable milestone was greeted all across the political spectrum as a sign that our national racial past could be put behind us. A new era of racial harmony and equality had arrived. Instead, by 2020 we were more racially polarized as a nation than at any time since the O. J. Simpson trial (1995), or given the race-inspired riots during the summer of 2020, since the 1960’s. The deterioration in race relations from the high optimism of 2008 to the alienation of today is one of the tragedies of our times.

Obama presidency

How did it happen? I can give my opinion. Others will have theirs. Here is my explanation. By 2010 the Obama presidency was widely unpopular. The recovery from the “Great Recession” of 2008 was slow by historic standards. The economy was stagnant, businesses were being suffocated by regulations, and gasoline prices skyrocketed. Obama-care had been pushed through Congress without a single Republican vote. The mid-term election was one of the greatest reversals in the history of electoral politics. The Republicans gained 63 seats in the House and seven seats in the Senate. They won the popular vote by nearly 7%. They gained six gubernatorial seats and flipped control of 20 state legislatures, gaining 680 seats nationwide. It was a rout of historic proportions.

Humiliating defeat led to a Democratic change of strategy heading into the 2012 Presidential election. The Democrats all but gave up on the white blue-collar voters. Instead, they concentrated on building a “rainbow coalition” made up of

“people of color,” of liberal whites and of LGBTQ voters. This included painting the opposition, in this case that most moderate of moderates Mitt Romney, as a racist. Of course, this had been done before to George W. Bush, and before him John McCain, and before him Bob Dole. George H. W. Bush, Ronald Reagan, and Richard Nixon had all been accused of racism. However, in 2012 the accusations were intensified. Then Vice-President Biden declared in a speech at a black church, “They’re going to put y’all back in chains.” Ultimately the strategy was successful. However, racial polarization was the inevitable impact. So was the resentment of the almost 50% who voted for the man (Mitt Romney) whom they called a racist.

Trump election

By 2016 the Republican base had had enough of the Democratic attacks and wanted a fighter. They were tired of moderate Republican apologizing, backtracking, and defensiveness. They wanted a counter-puncher and got one: Donald Trump. The neglected and all-but-abandoned white working class switched parties. Coal miners and steel workers put Trump “over the top” in key states, crashing the so-called “blue wall” and winning the election.

Did Republicans nominate and the nation elect a racist in 2016? Let’s return to our definitions. Does Donald Trump hate minorities? Does he think that racial minorities are inferior to whites? Does he approve of legal or social barriers to minority progress? His hiring practices don’t support these views. Neither does his social life. Neither do his policies. Does he say things that are racially insensitive? Certainly. Is he overly friendly with dictators and tyrants and shady domestic characters who say nice things about him? Indeed. But a racist? Who can know what goes on in another person’s heart? Hearts are revealed in actions. His

policies were in fact beneficial to minorities, resulting in low unemployment, rising wages and the creation of inner-city enterprise zones, as black commentators such as Thomas Sowell, Shelby Steele, John McWhorter, Glenn Loury, and Jason Riley have pointed out.

Racial incidents

That hasn't stopped the left from interpreting the election of 2016 as a racist backlash against eight years of a black President. The heightening racial tensions post-2012 (remember Michael Brown and Ferguson was in August 2014, Freddie Gray and Baltimore in April 2015) intensified in 2016 with hand-wringing, protest, opposition, "the resistance," and the certainty that Trump was the most racist President America ever elected. Consequently (many concluded), *the America that elected him must be thoroughly, inherently, and systemically racist*. Little progress, it was implied, had been made since 1860 or even 1960.

The media joined forces with the left in arguing this point. How so? By turning every case of bad behavior or alleged bad behavior by police as a referendum on racism. Do the police occasionally do bad things? Yes. Does this bad behavior sometime involve minorities? Yes. Do the numbers show bias? Do they show disproportionate bad behavior involving minorities? They don't. Police misconduct by all reasonable criteria of measure (factoring in crime itself) is indiscriminate. Yet because these incidents do happen, and because they are caught on film, the impression can be created that this is what happens all the time. "I'm so... tired of seeing Black people killed by police," LeBron James complained. These incidents, inevitable in a fallen world, can be represented as systemic and institutional and the result can be *protest and riots*

forever. When the occasional is represented as the habitual, the anecdotal is represented as the institutional, and police misconduct is represented as racially motivated simply because the race of the police officers involved differs from those of the victim, even in the absence of evidence of racism, the result will be racial polarization, and radical calls for overhauling the entire American system.

I have wandered far into politics, something that I am loathe to do. My point is not to defend or blame any particular politician or political party. Rather it is to point out that there are those who have an interest in promoting the narrative of systemic racism. Contrary evidence is ignored. Facts are dismissed as part of the racist system itself. Let me repeat so as not to be misunderstood: racism is evil, painful and alive in America and throughout the world today. There are racists in America and in every walk of life, including our police forces. However, America is not characteristically or systemically racist.

Why do we wish to make the point? Because the racism narrative is polarizing and destructive. Because the narrative needs to be refuted. Because black Christians swayed by the narrative have become alienated from white Christians. Because young white Christians are weighed down by guilt about “whiteness,” “white privilege” and the alleged benefits they unjustly have received from systemic, institutional, and structural racism. Because Christians care about the truth. Because the Bible says, “Thou shall not bear false witness.” Because the Bible also says, “Thou shalt love your neighbor” whether he be red or yellow, black or white, “as yourself.”

VIII. New Tribalism

The Apostle Paul presents us with the Christian ideal: “we regard no one according to the flesh” (2 Cor 5:16) “Flesh” here indicates all manner of worldly criteria: class, ethnicity, wealth, race, education, or physical appearance. Having once misjudged Jesus Christ according to fleshly criteria (wrong family, wrong schools, wrong hometown, wrong profession, wrong agenda), we are determined, says the Apostle, not to make that mistake again. He contrasts the Christian ideal with that of his opponents: “those who boast about *outward appearance*” (2 Cor 5:12). We don’t judge, assess, evaluate people on the basis of immutable physical characteristics or superficial social circumstances.

One race

Our reasons for not doing so run deep. They take us all the way back to Genesis 1:26,27:

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. (Gen 1:27)

All human beings are made in the image of God. All human beings may be traced to a common parentage. All human beings belong to a single race, the human race. Christians have not always lived in a way consistent with these primary truths. Yet as ideals, they have prevailed, twice abolishing slavery (in the Middle Ages and again in the 19th century), and more generally inspiring concepts of equality and essential rights and liberties in the West. Matthew Henry, writing in the late 17th and early 18th centuries underscores the importance of the first chapter of Genesis in explaining,

God made but one male and one female, that
all the nations of men might know
themselves to be made of one blood,
descendants from one common stock, and
might thereby be induced to love one
another.¹

There it is. The implication of our common ancestry is that
we might “be induced to love one another.”

Redemption as well as creation requires that we not judge,
prejudicially assess, harmfully discriminate against others
on the basis of worldly criteria. Christ has created a new
humanity, which is also a restoration of the undivided old
humanity. Citing the hostile division between Jew and
Gentile as the example, the Apostle Paul argues that Christ
has “broken down... the dividing wall of hostility... that he
might create in himself one new man” (Eph 2:14-15). What
was true of the sharpest division, Jew from Gentile, is true
of all lesser divisions. We are one new humanity in Christ.
In Christ,

*There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is
neither slave nor free, there is no male and
female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.*
(Gal 3:28)

A strict equality of dignity, of worth must prevail in the
Christian church. Because God is impartial, we must be
impartial (Acts 10:1-11:18). Those who worship an
impartial God are not permitted to show partiality or
favoritism based on race, class, ethnicity, or national origin
(Jas 2:1-13).

¹ Henry, *Commentary*, I:10.

Tribalism

Consequently we cannot but be alarmed by the re-introduction of racialism that has emerged in recent times. Critical race theory (CRT), now widely utilized both in government agencies and in the private sector, essentially is Marxist class analyses applied to race. Marxist theory divided all of humanity into two groups: the oppressors (the aristocracy, business owners, and managerial class) and the oppressed (workers). Group identity was crucial. Group identity determined guilt and innocence. Wherever Soviet Marxism went it divided the population into these two groups. Those who were not workers (or in Asia, not peasants) were presumed guilty and shot, starved, or sent to the Gulags to die. Personal attitudes and actions were deemed irrelevant because the evils of the capitalist system were understood to be structural and systemic. Everyone in the upper classes benefited from the system and so everyone in those groups had to be eliminated either by extermination or incarceration.

CRT applies this blunt class analysis to race. The oppressors? Whites, especially white males. The oppressed? All non-whites and to a lesser degree, all females, and the alphabet soup of persons represented by LGBTQ+. A hierarchy of oppression was developed, known by the name of “intersectionality.” The more oppressed groups to which one belongs (eg. black, female, lesbian puts one at the top), the more one is seen to have been oppressed, the more one understands oppression (because one has experienced it) and the more value is placed on one’s narrative. “Narrative” is the operative word because there is no objective truth, particularly touching race, racism, structural racism, bigotry, oppression, inequality, equity, and social justice. Claims of truth and facts, the so-called ideals of equality and rights, even the

language of liberty and freedom, they *claim* (without any sense of irony), are nothing more than tools by which the majority oppresses minorities. Power is the real issue, not so-called truth. White females may speak in a limited way because while they are victims of the white patriarchy they are also the beneficiaries of white privilege. Minority-males may speak more loudly than white males and females, minority females louder still, and minority female homosexuals loudest of all. All this is based solely on group identity. White heterosexual males are silenced because they are the chief beneficiary of “white privilege.” Their “narrative” is worthless because they have participated in and profited by racism and know nothing of oppression or injustice. Any objection that a white male raises is written off as “white fragility,” an excuse-making exercise prompted by fragile white egos that can’t bear to hear the truth about themselves. Worse, any denial that one is racist is taken as proof that one is blind to one’s own racism, a chief characteristic of racism. Note: any accusation of racism is unfalsifiable. Admission and denial are both taken as confirmation.

Behind it all is the evil of “whiteness.” It has become commonplace in some circles to use “whiteness” as a universal term under which to gather all that about America that they don’t like. Remarkably, “whiteness,” “white supremacy,” and “white privilege” have been identified with hard work, self-reliance, saving, investment, facts, logic, standard English, the meritocracy, truth, objectivity, colorblindness, equal opportunity, rights, human rights, and Western civilization more generally. A bit of wisdom might suggest that if a term ought not to be applied to all groups (eg. “blackness,” “black privilege,” “black fragility”) it ought not to be used at all.

Individual examples of bigotry, prejudice, and racial hatred are not hard to find. They can be found in every ethnic and racial group. Those who have been the victims of this form of evil, overwhelmingly white against black, for most of America's 400-year history, deserve our careful listening and understanding. Yet little of today's discussion has anything to do with one's own personal attitudes and actions, or with any factual evidence of structural, institutional, or societal racism. Instead it is a toxic brew of neo-Marxism and neo-racism masquerading as anti-racism. Christians need to ask themselves, is this where we want to see the nation go? Is this where we want to see the church go? Is this trajectory good for our neighbors, whom we are called to love?

IX. Listening to Others

The much sought after honest national conversation on race will only be possible if it is a two-way conversation, with neither side making up the rules. Nevertheless, those who urge that majority culture be quiet so that minority voices alone may be heard have a point. Many of us need to hold our tongues and listen. However, the need to listen also raises an obvious question, which minority voices? Minority opinions, perspective and convictions are not uniform. There is as much diversity in the minority community as the majority. If we were thinking more productively we would not care about the race or sex of a particular voice but the wisdom it offers. No one cared that Jeanne Kirkpatrick (1926-2006), former ambassador to the U.N., was a woman. When she urged that we distinguish between authoritarian regimes (like Latin American dictators) and totalitarian regimes (like Marxist and Fascist governments which seek total control over every aspect of their citizens' lives as well as world domination) she provided us with an important insight.

Thomas Sowell

Here are some minority voices that I wish more people would listen to. Let's begin with Thomas Sowell (b. 1930), North Carolina born, reared in Harlem, Harvard undergraduate degree, Ph.D. from the University of Chicago, and former Marxist. Sowell, a Senior Fellow at Stanford University's Hoover Institution, is perhaps the most brilliant scholar in America today. He is the author of over 30 books. His relatively short book, *Black Rednecks and White Liberals* (2005) is remarkable. Sowell, an admirer of the early Civil Rights Movement (up to the mid-1960s) is a sharp critic of the entire civil rights industry

today, its race hustlers, self-appointed leaders, and failed policy proposals.

Shelby Steele

Shelby Steele (b. 1946), a native of Chicago, the son of founding members of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), Steele earned his Ph.D. in English from the University of Utah, and is another Senior Fellow at Stanford's Hoover Institution. His book *White Guilt* (2006) describes how white Americans are manipulated by guilt over their racist past into supporting destructive policies pushed by liberal politicians and civil rights leaders. He collaborated with his son to produce the documentary, *What Killed Michael Brown?* which explodes the whole "Hands up, don't shoot" mythology (it never happened).

Walter Williams

Walter Williams (1936-2020), born in Philadelphia and reared by his mother, Williams aggressively attacked racism while serving in the Army from 1959-1961, even to the point of court-martial. He earned a Ph.D. in economics at UCLA at a time when he describes himself as "more sympathetic to Malcom X than Martin Luther King." He was a visiting scholar at Stanford's Hoover Institution and Distinguished Professor of Economics at George Mason University. He argues in his book *The State Against Blacks* that "The welfare state has done to black Americans what slavery couldn't do, and that is to destroy the black family."

Glenn Loury

Glenn Loury (b. 1948), born in the South Side of Chicago, Loury fathered two children out of wedlock and supported them through work in a printing plant prior to his academic career. He eventually won a scholarship to Northwestern University, from which he graduated in 1972 with a degree

in mathematics. He went on to earn a Ph.D. in economics at M. I. T. in 1976. In 1982 he became the first black tenured professor of economics in the history of Harvard. He has taught at Brown University, another Ivy League institution, since 2005. He identifies as a born-again Christian, hosts *The Glenn Show*, and is author of *The Anatomy of Racial Inequality* (2002).

John McWhorter

John McWhorter (b. 1965), a native of Philadelphia and self-identified liberal, McWhorter earned his Ph.D. from Stanford University. He is a professor of linguistics at Columbia University, and a senior fellow at the Manhattan Institute. He is the author of *Doing Our Own Thing: The Degradation of Language and Music and Why You Should, Like, Care* (2003) and *Losing the Race: Self-Sabotage in Black America* (2000), in which he argued that the social problems face by black Americans are not caused by racial discrimination but by factors in the black community itself: crime, breakdown of the family, disdain of education, separatism, and victimhood. Most recently he published *Woke Racism: How a New Religion Has Betrayed Black America* (2021) in which he criticizes the anti-racism of Ibram X. Kendi (*How to Be an Antiracist*) and Robin J. DiAngelo (*White Fragility*) as a new religion which stifles dissent and punishes heretics.

Jason Riley

Jason Riley (b. 1971) writes a weekly column for the *Wall Street Journal*, is a member of its editorial board and regularly serves on the discussion panel of Fox News. In 2014 he published *Please Stop Helping Us: How Liberals Make It Harder for Blacks to Succeed*. More recently he published *Maverick: A Biography of Thomas Sowell* (2020).

Others

There are others as well. Larry Elder (b. 1952), was reared by southern parents (his father was a Marine Corps sergeant) in Los Angeles, and graduated from Crenshaw High School, a rival of my own Banning High. He received his undergraduate degree from Brown University and his law degree from the University of Michigan. In 2000 he won a Los Angeles Area Emmy Award for his news special *Making Waves*, and in 2015 he was honored with a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame. He is a popular radio talk show host and recently was a candidate for governor in California in the unsuccessful 2021 recall election of Gavin Newsom.

Candace Owens (b. 1989) studied journalism at the University of Rhode Island, worked as an intern at *Vogue* magazine, and early in her public career was a critic of political conservatism. In 2017 she was converted to conservatism overnight and became a critic of identity politics and claims of structural racism. In 2018 Kanye West tweeted, “I love the way Candace Owens thinks.” She argued during the Brett Kavanaugh Supreme Court hearings that “believe women” was the reason “our ancestors got lynched.” In 2020 she joined Ben Shapiro’s *Daily Wire* and now hosts a podcast, *Candace*.

For an explicitly Christian voice, the Reverend Voddie T. Baucham, Jr. (b. 1969), recently published *Fault Lines: The Social Justice Movement and Evangelical’s Looming Catastrophe* (2021). Voddie is another native of Los Angeles, a graduate of Los Angeles City Schools, and played football in college. His undergrad degree is from Houston Baptist University. He earned his M.Div. at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and a D.Min. at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary. He is

currently Dean of Theology at African Christian University in Lusaka, Zambia. He is sharply critical of Critical Race Theory and Intersectionality and progressive voices within evangelicalism.

These are the authors whose books and articles have most influenced my understanding of racial and cultural dynamics and how those dynamics affect education, employment, marriage, family, religion, and justice. I commend them to you, not in every particular, yet together as an illuminating counterbalance to the dominant, and I think divisive and destructive conversation taking place today.

X. Understanding Others

Can we really ever understand each other? Can the majority culture ever truly understand what it is like to live as a minority in America? Some argue vehemently that the majority cannot and consequently must limit themselves to listening and not interjecting their opinions. Why? The claim is that it is impossible for them to understand the minority experience. Only those who have lived as a minority in the United States know what it is like. It is patronizing and infuriating when the majority pretends to do so.

Conversation stoppers

An especially egregious example of this insistence on non-comprehension can be found in the response of Gregory Thompson, Duke Kwon (found here: thefrontporch.org/2021/07/sanctifying-the-status-quo-a-response-to-reverend-kevin-deyoung/) to Kevin DeYoung's critical review (found here: thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevin-deyoung/reparations-a-critical-theological-review/) of their book, *Reparations*. Essentially they argued that DeYoung disagreed with them because of his "whiteness." They deliberately avoided his arguments, choosing not to interact seriously with them. Instead they leveled *ad hominem* attacks on his methodology which, without demonstrating how, when, or where, claimed he "centers whiteness," "privileges white voices," and "prioritizes the comfort of white people." Theological and biblical issues were pushed aside by them and racialized. Rather than acknowledging that the differences between them are doctrinal, biblical, or philosophical, they attributed those differences to race, skin color, as well as participation in and benefit from the white majority culture. Rather than furthering dialogue, the

implication of their response was to disqualify and silence one side of the discussion. Those who do not agree with their view of reparations are by definition either racist or blind to the racism by which they benefit.

The problem with this all-too-common view would seem obvious and is itself racist. It also proves too much. We might legitimately ask, can any two people understand each other? They seem to think that *they* understand DeYoung. Yet following the logic of their argument, no two people ever have the same experience or experience their circumstances in the same way. Ever. It follows then that the minority cannot understand the majority, and they cannot understand DeYoung. Indeed no one could ever understand anyone else. Conversation ends. This is what happens when race, not theology, “whiteness,” not doctrine, not biblical interpretation, not philosophy, but “whiteness” is the problem.

Outsider insights

Instead of settling for this epistemological nihilism, we all should recognize that there are wonderful people who understand us, our pain, our isolation, our loneliness, our alienation, and whose understanding comforts us. This is true though they may be of another race or gender and though they may not agree with us. Sympathy and empathy are universally recognized virtues. We humans are able to enter into the pain of others. Deep insights have been offered to the world by those who have written about subjects which they themselves did not experience. Harriet Beecher Stowe, author of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852), was greeted by Abraham Lincoln: “So you are the little woman who wrote the book that started this great war.” Yet she had never visited the South. Wonderfully insightful books about World War II, the best, in my opinion, ever written, have

been written by men who never experienced the war: Rick Atkinson's trilogy about the United States Army in North Africa and Europe, and Ian Toll's trilogy of the Pacific War. Both were born after the end of the war. It can be argued that their books are superior to those written by those who actually lived through and even fought in the war because those with firsthand experience of the conflict were too close to the action to evaluate it objectively. These post-war authors were not emotionally invested in a particular point of view as were its participants. This fact needs to be kept in view.

Human beings are capable of compassionate, insightful contributions to subjects of which they themselves have no first-hand experience. *Sympathy* (sym = with; pathos = suffer) is the capacity to stand alongside another in *their* suffering. *Empathy* (em = within; pathos = suffer) is the capacity to suffer internally because of the suffering of another. The alternative is the above skepticism which (following the logic of a "woke" ideology) implicitly denies that any two human beings could ever understand each other, since all human experience is unique to the individual.

Analogies

Certainly we should always be "slow to speak" and "quick to hear," particularly when hearing of the suffering of others that we have not experienced (Jas 1:19). It can be annoying beyond words to be interrupted when describing our pain by a listener who rushes to equate his previous experience with our current one, when it's nothing like our experience! Once when describing a football injury that placed me in a hospital bed for a month and a body cast for five months I was interrupted by someone who said, "That is like when I broke my thumb." No, actually it was

nothing like when you broke your thumb. Nevertheless, we *are* able to understand *by analogy* the experience of others and humbly and sympathetically to interact with their experience as well. All human relationships assume that we are able to do this truly, if imperfectly.

Those who do not belong to a *racial* minority may belong to a *religious* minority. My Jewish neighbors speak of the difficulty of rearing their children as minority Jews during the Christmas season. Evangelical, Bible-believing Christians more and more find themselves a despised minority in a dominant culture that is hostile to their most cherished beliefs. One may be a regional minority, living in the South yet from the West or North. I've heard non-Southerners say, "They (Southerners) talk about us as if we were foreigners." One may travel overseas and live as an American in a foreign land. My typical English classmates in Bristol, England treated Americans as though we were all noisy, loud dressers, boorish, and ignorant. There was considerable prejudice to overcome. Everywhere and always it is difficult to be a minority.

No, those of the majority culture can never *perfectly* understand the minority experience. Yet by analogous experiences of minority status (religious, regional, national), considerable understanding can occur and meaningful dialogue result. To me, this means that we give to each other the benefit of the doubt in our racial discussions, and by extension, our biblical and theological discussions. Some may be too close to a given issue. Others may be too remote. Never should I dismiss another perspective simply because of race, class, nationality or sex. Never should I place a racial label on an opinion or conviction, such as the highly offensive "whiteness" or

“blackness.” Everyone should speak with humility – “slow to speak, and quick to hear.”

XI. Open Border: Wearing Two Hats

We all wear a variety of “hats.” We may be at once children, parents, siblings, citizens, and Christians. Our identity as Christians supersedes all other dimensions of identity. We are Christians first and everything else second.² Might there be times when we are forced by conflicts between these identities to hold two mutually exclusive convictions, aspirations, and hopes?

The correct answer is, yes. For example, as a parent I may want my child to be spared pain and sorrow. Yet as a Christian I may want God to do whatever it takes for my child to be saved and sanctified. I can hold these two desires in dynamic tension: please spare but please don’t spare. Likewise, I can be of two minds regarding open borders and immigration more broadly. I may be of one opinion as a Christian, and another as an American.

Christian view

As a Christian I may see large-scale immigration as an opportunity. The world is coming to us. Foreign-born residents of the United States provide us with the opportunity to show acts of kindness to the “stranger who sojourns among (us)” (eg. Ex. 22:21; 23:9; Lev. 19:33-34; Deut. 10:18, 19; 1 Kings 8:41-43; 2 Chron. 6:32-33; Jer. 7:6; Zech. 7:10; Mal. 3:5). Even more importantly, it provides opportunities to evangelize those who may never have heard the gospel. Because their lives have been uprooted, they may be open to the gospel for the first time in their lives. This often is the case for new immigrants

² For more on this subject see Terry L. Johnson, *Who Am I? What the Bible Teaches about Christian Identity* (Durham, UK: EP Books, 2020).

who are nominal Christians, Muslims, or Hindus, among others. Recognizing this opportunity, our congregation is offering “English as a second language” (ESL) courses. We also are hosting dinners for international students. Among the most impactful things ordinary members can do simply is to invite these internationals (ESL and college students) into their homes for a meal. Each of us should consider what we might do. The world is at our doorstep.

American view

However, as an American I may reasonably conclude that open-border immigration is bad for the country. I may draw this conclusion not because I harbor bigotry against foreigners but *because I love my American neighbor*. I may recognize that massive immigration has an adverse effect on wages, especially for lower-income workers whose paychecks are undercut by cheap labor from poor nations. I may observe that illegal immigration at the southern border overwhelms American border towns with non-Americans. I also may be concerned that illegal immigration allows criminal elements into the country who otherwise would have been denied entry.

I may recognize further that traditional American culture is a distinctive thing worth preserving, and even a familiar, comforting thing worth keeping. American civilization, with its emphasis on basic rights and freedoms, on hard work, democratic institutions, free markets, religious liberty, separation of church and state, and rule of law is unique in human history. It has produced unparalleled peace and prosperity for *all* of its citizens. I want this civilization preserved for my children and grandchildren. Yet (and here is the point), if America’s historic strengths are to be preserved, the rate of immigration should be slowed to that which can be thoroughly assimilated to these

central American values. Because I love all my American neighbors, I don't want immigration to destabilize our familiar culture by a flood of foreigners who do not share our basic convictions, values, and way of life. Again, assimilation is the key. I may reasonably be convinced that if we are to preserve the best of American civilization, we must slow immigration to a rate at which the newcomers can be thoroughly assimilated. This conviction may have nothing to do with bigotry, racial discrimination, or hate. Indeed, it may be motivated by the opposite: love for my near neighbor.

We wear two hats. Notice that I haven't actually taken off my Christian hat when I donned my American hat. Jesus teaches me to love my American neighbor about whom I am concerned. Neither have I taken off my American hat when I donned my Christian hat, because I believe the conversion of my foreign neighbors is in the best interest of the world, my nation, and the individuals themselves. The difference between the two hats simply is that of perspective and emphasis. Because I am an American *Christian* I want to serve the immigrant community. Yet because I am an *American* Christian I also want to protect my American neighbors. At once I may warmly welcome newly immigrant families while advocating a reasonably calibrated immigration policy.

XII. Higher Principles

It is distressing to watch the unfolding of evangelical Christian naiveté. Too many among our ranks are ready to surrender our higher gospel principles for high-sounding but harmful and divisive movements and their slogans. One would have thought that our higher principles were inviolable – the dignity of each individual, the sanctity of all human life, the unity of the human race in sin and redemption, these all rooted in the image of God and the impartial justice of God. Is it too much to say that the point of Christianity’s saving message is that group identity means nothing, that salvation is by faith in Jesus Christ whether one is a Jew or Greek (see Rom. 1:18-5:21 for example)? The Christian religion understands and accommodates both the natural preference for and priority of the familiar and at the same time repudiates tribalism, bigotry, and race or class-based hatred. Christianity has created a new humanity in which worldly social and racial distinctions disappear (Gal 3:28; Eph 2:11-22).

It is these higher principles that require that we carefully examine movements and slogans before we endorse them. Christians shouldn’t be jumping on each new political band-wagon that comes to town, even when clothed in sacred language. Christians should be especially careful when the mass media, rarely friendly and typically hostile to orthodox Christianity, uniformly promotes a cause or movement. Let me highlight a few prime examples.

Social justice

Wherever a word is placed in front of the word “justice,” watch out. The meaning of justice likely is compromised, as in “economic justice,” “health-care justice,” and “environmental justice.” Christians, we have been told, are

supposed to be in favor of “social” justice. If by “social” one means that the laws of a nation are to be equally applied without regard to immutable characteristics such as race, skin color, national origins, or sex, this is correct. However, strictly speaking, justice, if it is to be justice, must be individual and not social. What we must have is a blind-folded lady justice. Justice must be indifferent with regards to color and class and sex. Laws must be written without regard to group identity. *Justice must be administered without regard to the racial or social group to which one belongs.* Both Testaments condemn in the strongest terms partiality whether towards the rich or the poor.³ It cannot, should not, and must not be “social.”

Once justice accounts for group identity, it becomes injustice. Why? Because it then discriminates for the in-group and against those of the out-group. This is where affirmative action, the policy of preferential treatment based on group membership, slides over into injustice. For each person helped by affirmative action, another person, the person more qualified according to the objective criteria of employment, college admission, or promotion, is wronged. This is defended today by those who claim that to be “anti-racist” one must promote race-based discrimination against whites and Asians, one must *promote racism* if you will. An impartial meritocracy is an ideal because it guards against bias in all its forms. The most qualified person, without regard to race, class, or sex should get the job, the spot at the elite college, and the promotion.

³ Ex. 23:3; Lev. 19:15; Deut. 1:17; Ps. 82:2; Prov. 18:5; 24:23; 28:21; Jas. 2:1-9.

Black Lives Matter

Nowhere is it more vital that serious Christians look beyond slogans to the substance when we evaluate “Black Lives Matter” (BLM). Is Black Lives Matter a slogan, a movement, or an organization? The answer is, it is all of the above. As a statement of fact, the phrase “black lives matter” (BLM) is irreproachable and self-evident. Of course black lives matter, just as all lives matter. Does anyone beyond a few cranks deny this? We doubt it. Was there a time in America when it was *not* self-evident that black lives matter? Shamefully, yes. Slavery and segregation diminished the dignity of black lives, resulting in considerable suffering. As a reminder of this past the slogan serves a positive purpose.

However, this is not the message that its originators intend. Their point is that black lives *don’t* matter in America *today*. This claim simply is untrue, a slander of non-black Americans and American society as a whole. The agenda of the BLM movement is revealed when one responds to “black lives matter” by adding “all lives matter,” as we have above. This is unacceptable to BLM advocates because, it is alleged, black lives don’t matter in an America in which white lives do. The accusation itself is a politically motivated and agenda-driven rather than supported by the data-based evidence that we referenced earlier. For this reason use of the slogan is problematic for Christians unless we are also willing to say all lives matter without regard to one’s group identity.

Beyond the slogan, BLM as an organization is highly politicized, promotes Marxist-inspired social analysis, and boasts self-professed Marxists among its founders. Its agenda is radical, including hostility and what it calls “hetero-normativity.” It is difficult to see how any serious

Christians could support BLM as an organization, not if one considers its ultimate goals.

Equality, equity, liberty

The definitions of equality and equity have been tweaked in recent years. *Equality* has been re-assigned to legal questions: equal justice before the law. *Equity* has been redefined so as to refer particularly to social benefits: equal job and wealth distribution. This re-definition or refining of terms is itself a recognition that legal equality has been largely achieved. Discrimination on the basis of race, ethnicity or gender are illegal. Even Martin Luther King's emphasis shifted in the mid-1960s (post-Civil Rights Act and Voting Rights Act) from *freedom* rights to *benefit* rights when the goal of the former was legislatively achieved. Emphasis shifted then to equality of wealth and employment or equality of outcome, which we investigated earlier.

Of itself, material equality is an admirable goal. The social order is healthier when wealth is broadly distributed rather than concentrated in the hands of a few, as in the cases of the so-called “robber barons” of the late 19th and early 20th centuries (e.g. Rockefeller, Carnegie, Ford, etc.) or the “tech bros” of Silicon Valley today. One of the strengths of the American social order has been a large middle class that is neither poor nor rich.

However, there is a built-in tension between equality/equity and liberty that needs to be recognized. If the goal of material equality is pursued legally and legislatively it comes into direct conflict with liberty. Why? Because a strict material equality is possible only by use of coercive power, that is, at the point of a gun. The societies which in modern times most consistently pursued a strict material

equality were the Soviet Union, Pol Pot's Cambodia, Communist China, and Castro's Cuba. In each case personal liberty was crushed. It had to be. Why? Because people are inherently unequal. They are unequal in ability, in circumstances, and in desires. Some are smarter than others, some work harder than others, some have more skills than others. Some grow up in families that better prepare them for "success" in this world than do others. Equalizing all these factors require that some be suppressed and robbed at the expense of others. This injustice is built into the pursuit of "equity" as now defined and yet defended in terms of the greater justice of material equality among the whole.

History teaches a cautionary tale: all evil is justified in the name of the good. No one does evil while labeling it as such. No one says "I'm now going to do this wicked thing." We all convince ourselves that we are "doing good" for our family, our people, or our nation. See Putin's invasion of Ukraine for a recent example; see Hitler's pursuit of the good of the German people as an even more infamous one. This is why we must be discerning when high-sounding language is used, whether positively (justice, equity, equality) or negatively (injustice, inequity, inequality). Let the people of God not be naïve. Let the disciples of Christ be wise as serpents and innocent as doves.

Let's end with this: is race essential or incidental? Is race more central to who I am than my identity as an American? If a substantial number of any racial group answers yes to this question our nation is on the road to Yugoslavia and Rwanda. Once any single group goes tribal; once it elevates tribal affiliation above all other markers of identity then all other groups will elevate tribal identity above all other

markers of identity as a matter of self-defense. Christians should not want to contribute to this development.

More importantly, is race more central to who I am than any identity as a Christian? This can never be for a disciple of Christ. My identity as a Christian is essential, my racial identity is merely incidental. With the apostle we are committed to regard no person according to the flesh, according to mere external criteria (2 Cor. 5:16).



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