

Racism

A CHRISTIAN RESPONSE



The Christian response to racism is centered in the Gospel of Jesus Christ and is shaped by clear Biblical principles.

God is the Creator of all human beings.

The Apostle Paul spoke of “the God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth,” declaring that this God is the One who “made from one every nation of men to live on all the face of the earth ...” (**ACTS 17:24, 26**). He proclaims that God created out of one man all members of the human family, established their place in human history and desires that they all seek him (**ACTS 17:27**). All of humanity owes its origin to God’s creative act.

Any and all attempts to identify certain people or groups as somehow lesser members of humankind are, therefore, a blasphemous affront to our Creator. Likewise, any affirmations of superiority or comparative worth that are based on differences in the nature of persons as human beings are to be regarded as an indictment of God’s work as Creator.

The dignity of all human beings is given by God, not achieved or earned.

Not even the fall of humankind into sin has erased the central Biblical affirmation, so eloquently summarized by Luther, that “God has made me and all creatures.” No human being, however distinguishable from a human standpoint, is any less fully God’s creature than any other human being since all are created in His image (**GEN. 1:26-27; 9:6; CF. ACTS 17:25-26**).

In racist ideology, the worth or value of an individual or group is determined principally, if not solely, by genetic origin and/or biological characteristics. Race, biologically defined, becomes the basis for drawing conclusions concerning aptitudes, abilities and personality characteristics of individuals, for the purpose, in turn, of making statements about the comparative worth of a person as a human being.

Scripture teaches, however, that the value of all human beings is grounded ultimately in the value God places upon them. The value of a person is not determined by observable degrees of relative worth.

God created all human beings to honor and serve Him alone.

When Adam and Eve disobeyed God in the garden, they succumbed to the temptation to be “like God” (**GEN. 3:5**), God’s rival. Thus, “Sin came into the world through one man ...” (**ROM. 5:12**). The grave consequence is that Adam’s descendants worship and serve “the creature rather than the Creator ...” (**ROM. 1:25**).

Racism grounds the identity and security of human life in self rather than God, in creature rather than the Creator, apart from whom a human being *has* no identity or security. Self-indulgent pride in “race,” therefore, must be regarded as idolatry in one of its crassest forms. It is an attempt to be “like God.”

In Jesus Christ, God became a Man and so identified Himself fully with every member of the human family.

Of Jesus Christ, the Apostle John wrote, “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father” (**JOHN 1:14**). He was “made like his brethren in every respect” except for sin (**HEB. 2:17; CF. 4:15; 5:2**). The genealogies of Jesus reveal that He is bound by ties of kinship not only to Israel, but to all of humanity and that His mission embraces all of humankind (**MATT. 1:1-17; LUKE 3:23-28**).

Any claim that there is something about the nature of another human being as such that renders that person to be of inferior value not only denies the Biblical doctrine of creation, but also calls into question what the Scriptures teach about the incarnation of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

God sent His Son Jesus Christ to be the Savior of all human beings, in whatever nation or culture they may be found.

God “desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and

there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all ..." (1 TIM. 2:4-6). Again and again in Revelation, we read that God in Jesus Christ has completed His work of salvation for all kindreds, peoples, languages and nations (REV. 5:8-9; 7:9-10; 11:9; 14:6).

Racism stands in opposition to the Gospel revealed in Scripture, according to which God has acquired the forgiveness of sins for *all* people by declaring for Christ's sake that the world has been forgiven. God's love for the world is indiscriminate and embraces people of all cultures.

Jesus Christ has removed all barriers that stand between human beings, making peace through His cross.

St. Paul writes, "But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near in the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who has made us both one, and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law of commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby bringing the hostility to an end" (EPH. 2:13-16).

Racism in the church poisons and cripples all sincere efforts "to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (EPH. 4:3). Physical characteristics or cultural customs are made to serve as "a dividing wall of hostility" that separates brothers and sisters in Christ-to which the only appropriate response must be, "Is Christ divided?" (1 COR. 1:13).

Love produced in Christians by the Holy Spirit embraces, without distinction, all people in their need.

Foremost in the list of "the fruit of the Spirit" that is to characterize the life of those set free from the tyranny of their sinful flesh is love (GAL. 5:22; CF. 5:13-26). The "new commandment" given by Jesus to His disciples is that they love one another as He has loved them, for "by this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (JOHN 13:35; CF. 1 JOHN 2:8-11; 4:20-5:3; PHIL. 2:4-5). The Savior requires His disciples to love all those whom they encounter in life. A distinguishing feature of the love that He creates by His Spirit is its non-discriminatory character. Just as "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son," so now those who live by faith in God's Son are to live in love for all people — a love made possible only through the power of God's Spirit working through Word and Sacraments.

Through the means of grace, the Holy Spirit works within the context of all cultures to bring people to faith in Jesus Christ and to move them to worship Him.

God is not dependent on one group or the other to make effective the Gospel and the Sacraments. Rather, He enters His creation and communicates with human beings in terms that are comprehensible to them in their differences. The day of Pentecost demonstrates this dramatically. The apostles proclaimed the Word of God to people "from every nation under heaven." Each person "heard them speaking in his own language" (ACTS 2:5-6).

Through the means of grace, God empowers Christians "to abstain from the passions of the flesh that wage war against the soul;" including the sin of racism.

The Gospel makes us new creatures through the Holy Spirit, enabling us to discard the sins of the unregenerate life (1 PETER 1:12, 22-23; 2:1-3; 4:1-5). Just as speaking evil of others, quarreling, malice and hatred toward others was far from the mind of Christ, so, too, the minds of those regenerated in Baptism are to be free from such evils. Likewise, the Lord's Supper unites us to the full and complete humanity of Him who is the Creator of all and the Savior of all. We Christians must not underestimate the evil of racism in the human heart, but we are to return daily in repentance to the Christ who loves us, so that also in this matter the victory of Christ's own grace and love may be manifested in our personal lives.

On the basis of what the Bible teaches regarding racism, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod has adopted numerous resolutions over the years calling on its members (both individually and corporately) to repent of racist attitudes and actions, to combat racism both in the church and in the world and to reach out with the all-embracing Gospel of Christ Jesus to people of *all* races and ethnic groups (E.G., 1969 RES. 9-04; 1971 RES. 4-32 AND 9-32; 1973 RES. 9-22; 1977 RES. 10-18A; 1979 RES. 4-11; 1981 RES. 8-07; 1983 RES. 1-18; 1992 RES. 1-06 AND 3-03). In 1994, the Synod's Commission on Theology and Church Relations prepared a report on *Racism and the Church: Overcoming the Idolatry*, which was distributed throughout the church and was commended by the Synod for study and conversation (1995 RES. 2-05A).

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