

IV. Actions Against Racism

Working to defeat racism requires creative, industrious, well-thought-out actions and plans today. Sit-in demonstrations and protest marches had their place in past decades, but today the world needs to see concrete actions and examples. Academic studies and formal resolutions by various bodies are only starting points for the work that needs to be done. What is required are concrete actions.

Here are some specific suggestions for concrete action against racism:

1. Develop personal friendship across racial/ethnic barriers.

2. Initiate an effort to begin a pulpit exchange on a regular basis between your congregation and another congregation of a different ethnic/racial perspective.

3. Sponsor or participate in seminars and activities that strive to bring people of different racial and ethnic backgrounds together.

4. Pray that God will open doors to racial/ethnic reconciliation for you and your church to walk through.

Study Question: What other specific steps can you take personally to work to end racism in your life, including your home, workplace, church, neighborhood, city, state and country?

My answer: _____

Suggested Reading

"Brothers and Sisters to Us: U.S. Bishops' Pastoral Letter on Racism in Our Day." USCC, Washington, D.C., November 14, 1979.

"What We Have Seen and Heard." Black Bishops' Pastoral on Evangelization. St. Anthony Messenger Press, *Origins*, October 18, 1984.

"The Church and Racism: Toward a More Fraternal Society." Pontifical Justice and Peace Commission, *Origins*, February 23, 1989, 18:37, 613-627.

"The Bible Speaks on Race." Pamphlet. The Christian Life Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention, Nashville, Tenn.

"Issues and Answers: Race Relations." Pamphlet. The Christian Life Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention, Nashville, Tenn.

"Issues and Answers: Human Rights." Pamphlet. The Christian Life Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention, Nashville, Tenn.

"Help for Families: Marriage Across Barriers of Religion, Race, and Culture." Pamphlet. The Christian Life Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention, Nashville, Tenn.

"Critical Issues: Refugees." Pamphlet. The Christian Life Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention, Nashville, Tenn.

"Declaration of Human Rights." Pamphlet. The Christian Life Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention, Nashville, Tenn.

Perkins, Spencer and Rice, Chris. *More than Equals: Racial Healing for the Sake of the Gospel*. Downers Grove, Ill., InterVarsity Press, 1993.

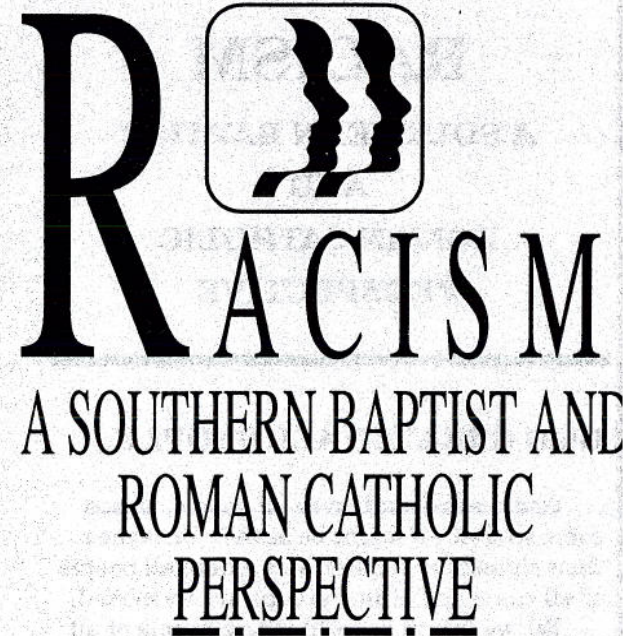
Seymour, Robert. *Whites Only: A Pastor's Retrospective on Signs of the New South*. Judson Press, Valley Forge, 1991.

"One People Under God." Pastoral Letter to Miami Catholics from Archbishop Edward McCarthy. *Origins*, January 7, 1983.

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RACISM

A SOUTHERN BAPTIST AND ROMAN CATHOLIC PERSPECTIVE

GOD CREATED ALL PEOPLE

God created and loves all people. Jesus came so that all might be saved. Churches then should be communities where all people of all races and ethnic groups are welcomed.

Yet we live in a world where people of all races are not treated equally. Churches are not havens for people of all racial/ethnic groups. The 11:00 hour on Sunday morning is still the most segregated time of the week. The world and the churches are both tainted with the sin of racism.

Racism is a word that does not appear in the Bible, yet the Bible speaks very clearly about the behavior of Christians toward the stranger, the foreigner and the marginalized of society.

I. Racism Is Not of God

The Bible is clear on the underlying principle in racism: how we are to treat other people. God created every human being. Red and yellow, black and white, and every skin tone in between came from the common origin. God created every human being as a person of worth and dignity.

Racism is both individual and institutional. Individually, racism is

expressed through prejudice. Prejudice is a human fact. It is born of fear and lack of knowledge of the other. Racism is the institutionalization of personal prejudice. It is the power to enforce personal prejudice through society's institutions.

Prejudice and racism are rooted in human sinfulness. Jesus said Christians are to love others as we love ourselves. Our faith teaches us that we are all sisters and brothers. Each of us was created by God and is loved by God. In Christ there is no place for favoritism (Acts 10:34). Jesus mandates that we bring and share the gospel with all nations.

Racism results in domination and inequality. It disregards the full humanity of the other by limiting their potentiality. All of us participate, in one form or another (individually and institutionally), in the sin of racism.

Such an attitude is foreign to God. As Christians we are called to love others. Love is never equated with domination.

Study Question: Why is it important to distinguish between prejudice and racism?

My answer: _____

II. Racism Abounds in the World Today

Racism is woven into the fabric of many nations today. Adolf Hitler exalted racism in Germany in the 1930s and 1940s. Ethnic discrimination abounded beneath the surface of the defunct Soviet Empire. Our own nation's history, and that of a number of other nations, was marked by slavery and colonization. Reports of ethnic struggles all over the world dominate the daily news.

We Southern Baptists and Roman Catholics have not been exempt from the taint of racism. We acknowledge our own participation in this plague on humankind. Churches and Christians must call the world to repentance for the sin of racism while recognizing that the accusing finger points back at us as well. We Christians simply cannot do enough against this enemy.

Each of us must examine his or her own heart, soul and lifestyle in order to see how deeply affected we are by racism. In such examination, we must remember that the God who calls us to repentance greets us with forgiveness and a second chance.

After personal examination, repentance and forgiveness, Christians must be challenged to move from rhetoric to concrete actions. Institutional change begins with individual acts. How credible can churches be in calling others to reconciliation if they do not model the reconciling work of the cross? In spite of our failures, both the Southern Baptist Convention and the Roman Catholic Church are involved in seeking ways to move beyond racism. For instance, in 1992 the Southern Baptist Convention appointed a task force to study ways to involve minorities in the various institutional levels of the denomination.

Roman Catholics in Illinois had a historic state conference on racism in February, 1994, and the Catholic Conference of Illinois plans to issue a statement on racism.

Study Questions: How can individuals repent of racism? What is the role or place for repentance within the church?

My answer: _____

III. A Responsible Reaction to Racism

The challenge to work against racism is deeply rooted in the Bible and is embodied in Galatians 3:28 (NIV), "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." (All verses hereinafter are taken from the New International Version.) Other appropriate verses are Matthew 22:37-39, "Jesus replies: 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'"

As we walk today in the newness of life that Jesus has given us, let us continue to strive to treat all people, without regard to skin color or any other distinguishing physical characteristics, as God would have us. And as we do this, let us remember that the battle against racism is not complete. The Civil Rights Movement made much progress against this evil. The concern about apartheid in South Africa worked to begin the progress of burying that system. The ethnic strife in the former Soviet empire and Eastern Europe continues. Vigilance and persistence are twin virtues in this arena. The work will not be accomplished in one year or one generation. Every generation of Christians is called upon to do battle with sin, including that of racism.

Study Questions: Do you agree that the thrust of the biblical message is anti-racist? What biblical passages most strongly support such an assertion?

My answer: _____

