

Ending Racism?

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In the fall of 1999 several representatives of the Convention of Atlantic Baptist Churches attended a **Consultation on Racism** in Mississauga, Ontario, hosted by the Public Affairs Committee (PAC) of Canadian Baptist Ministries (CBM). The impetus for this Consultation was the **Atlanta Covenant**, a Covenant calling all Baptist Conventions and Unions worldwide to make the first decade of this new century, a decade of racial reconciliation and justice.

This was a very intense and emotionally challenging event. Over the course of the two day Consultation, numerous people spoke on the subject of Racism, often sharing personal examples as well as an analysis of the problem of racism in the Canadian context. We heard from a variety of communities including African-Canadian, First Nations, Chinese, and Portuguese.

I returned to Atlantic Canada, determined that as God would give me opportunity, I would work towards understanding racism (historically, culturally, and biblically) and combatting it. The following points are an inadequate summary of some of the content of this event.

- Racism exists within each one of us, in our churches, seminaries, and denominational bodies. Much of it is inadvertent and unintentional.
- Racism is not just about how we see others, but most fundamentally, reflects how we see ourselves.
- It is offensive to ethnic groups in Canada that we presume to send missionaries to other parts of the globe when we have not confronted our own racism at home.
- "Hope deferred breaketh the heart!" One pastor, an African Canadian, spoke of the difficulties African pastors have in preaching messages of hope each Sunday, when the social and economic circumstances of their congregations are often so difficult and racism is a daily reality.
- Victims of racism become weary in telling their stories and always being the ones to cry out for help. To end racism we need advocates from within the dominant culture.
- In a truly non-racial society, ethnic differences should not be ignored, but celebrated, as they shape who we are.
- The educated elite of ethnic groups have often left the church, and the church is the poorer for their absence.
- The fundamental issue is racism is **POWER**. The dominant society is characterized by an inherent attitude of arrogance and control and are able to take a lot for granted. Marginalized groups are often characterized by anger, bitterness and resentment. Therefore, it is not surprising that racial tensions lie just below the surface and can explode with what may appear (from the perspective of the dominant culture) to be little provocation.
- The Church **should** be different. Racism is sin.

- In confronting and combatting racism, the church needs to be **intentional** ("we must needs go through Samaria"!).
- Oppression has affected spirituality. It may cause some to reject God or the church while it may help others to develop a deeper and stronger dependence on God and on the community of believers.
- In order for the dominant culture to effectively eliminate racism within our churches and Church bodies, we must have the attitude of the Apostle John who said, "I must decrease that they might increase."

Is it possible to end racism? I don't know, but I do know that each day that passes will either further entrench racism or help to dismantle it. If you would like to respond to this page, please [email me](#).