

## The Sin of Racism

Racism is rooted in the belief that a group or groups of people are by heredity and nature intrinsically superior to the rest of humankind. Racism demands, supports and legitimates the use of power in order to define, devalue, dominate and discriminate against those considered inferior. Racism provides the social, rational and philosophical justification for debasing, denying and doing violence to persons on the basis of ethnic identity. Racism emerges as a dogma which is deliberately cultivated and transmitted by a "dominate" group and informs pervasively the principles of human relationships and the character of social institutions.

Robert Staples, an African-American sociologist and author of the book *Urban Plantation*, defines racism as "the generalized and final assigning of values to real or imaginary differences to the accuser's benefit and at the victim's expense, in order to justify the former's own privileges or aggression." In other words, racism is an attempt to support one's privilege, advantage or aggression, based upon one's perceived racial superiority.

The danger of racism is that it is idolatry of the worst sort. It is an attempt to make God into our own image. It is an evil endeavour which locates the blessedness of God, not in justice, mercy or righteousness, but in the texture of one's hair, the thickness of one's lips and the colour of one's skin. Racism places salvation not in confession, repentance and grace, but in phony anthropologies, fallacious genetics and delusive sociologies.

Unfortunately, it is often people with deep religious beliefs who are prejudiced against those who have conflicting points of view. There exists a tendency toward exclusivity, divisiveness, narrow definitions of religious orthodoxy, domination of minority groups by those who hold power, and the derogation or condemnation of those of another sex or ethnic group. The claim of "God's will" is often used to justify these acts of discrimination or injustice.

Racism leads to religious wars, denigration of women and children, the horror of ethnic cleansing, slavery, criminal actions against indigenous peoples, clan and civil wars, and gross violation of civil and human rights.

In 1963, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. This document states clearly, "that any doctrine of racial differentiation or superiority is scientifically false, morally condemnable, socially unjust and dangerous, and that there is no justification for racial discrimination in theory or practice."

While some progress has been made since this UN declaration, the evil of racism is still prevalent in today's world. Racism in many parts of the world has resulted in mass murder and displacement of millions of persons. The evil of neo-Nazis, "skin-heads" and anti-Semitic groups are on the rise in North America. Our cities still erupt in racial violence. Large groups of our citizens feel discriminated against in education, social programs, and employment opportunities. Sunday morning at 11:00 a.m. is still the most segregated hour of the week in Canada.

#### THE OBVIOUS RESULTS OF RACISM INCLUDE:

- A. The sin of idolatry, for the demonic reality has introduced hierarchy as the principle relationship and creation, and seeks to usurp the prerogatives of God.
- B. An authoritarian posture which develops philosophies and theologies of cultural discrimination.
- C. Social, rational and philosophical justification for debasing and denying persons on the basis of ethnic identity.
- D. The invasion of the human spirit that serves as a demonic power possessing the souls of people and nations.
- E. The gross distortion of the character of community that may distort the consciousness of future generations.
- F. The attempt to reject God's intention of wholeness for all people, and the denial of the purposes of the Church to bring people together in Jesus Christ.

Most of us are both guilty of racism and victims of racism. We are the sinners and the sinned against. As Christians, our understanding of Scripture leads us to the following conclusions:

1. All humankind is created in the image of God and is called to full participation in the human community. This participation is heightened when we are called to be the people of God.
2. God is eternal love and, while this love extends to all, God's grace transforms those who respond to that love in repentance and faith, irrespective of race, colour or culture.
3. Racism is a sin. It is idolatry for it elevates race to the highest value which should be reserved only for God. It is a rejection of the essential dignity of all people, and is in opposition to the Good News of salvation in Jesus Christ.

Most fair-minded people regard racism as sin, and yet, most of us, to some extent, are guilty of racism. We sometimes, wittingly or unwittingly, use language which is insensitive to people of other ethnic origins or cultures.

For example, we may address an audience as "you people," not realizing how condescending it is to the people if they are of a culture different than our own. We all need special grace, positive resolve and specific prayer if we are to be truly free of this prejudice.

The Convention of Atlantic Baptist Churches adopted a resolution in 1991 condemning all forms of racism. In the resolution, we agreed to the following actions:

1. That we, with repentance for our sinful participation, knowingly and unknowingly, by action and by silence, condemn all forms of racism and discrimination that accompanies racism;
2. That we deliberately choose to practice Christ's love to people who are different from ourselves;
3. That we, by example, teach our children respect for all people;
4. That we seek opportunities to build bridges of common concerns and interests with people of other races, cultures and language groups who do not share our same race, origin or language;

5. That we, as individual Christians and local churches, seek avenues of contact with other Christian churches or groups who do not share our same race, origin or language; and
6. That we commit ourselves to pray for an end to racism in our communities and world.