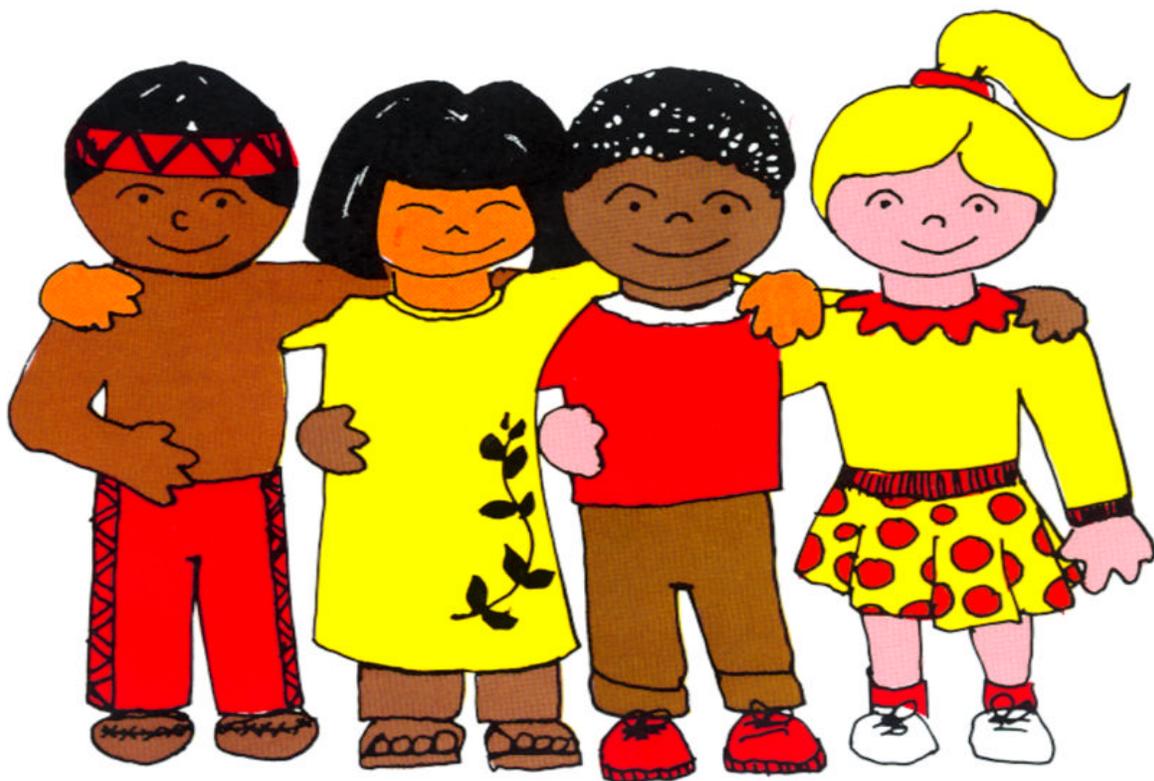


# RACISM AND THE CHURCH



A Report of the  
Commission on Theology and Church Relations  
of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod

February 1994



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## Overcoming the Idolatry

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## Preface

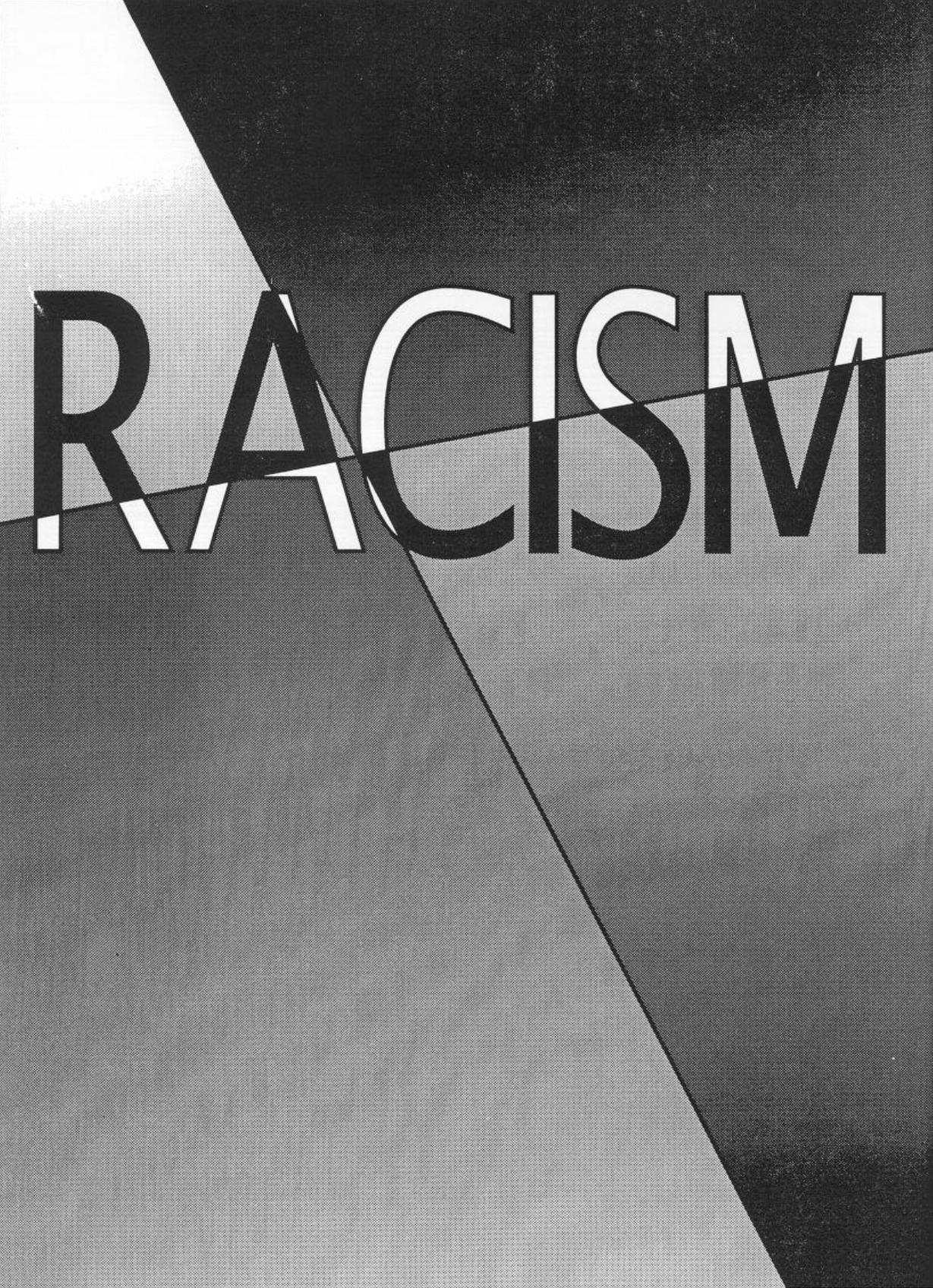
In April 1986 the officers and staff of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations, at the request of the President of the Synod, met with a number of African American pastors in the Synod to discuss issues related to black ministry and to share matters of mutual interest. Following this meeting, the Executive Director of the Commission on Black Ministry expressed appreciation for this opportunity to exchange ideas and opinions and, at the same time, forwarded a request from black leaders in the Synod that a document on racism be prepared. The Commission on Theology and Church Relations responded positively to this request and immediately placed this study on its agenda.

Calling on all of its members “To Combat All Racism,” the Synod at its 1992 convention in Pittsburgh urged “the rapid completion of the CTCR study” and asked the members of the Synod “to make maximum use of this study upon its completion and to pray the Lord of the church to bless this study and cause it to effect appropriate changes in attitudes and actions.”<sup>1</sup> The Commission on Theology and Church Relations joins in the prayer that this document on *Racism and the Church* will be a blessing to the Synod, assisting us all not only in understanding the problem of racism, but also, with God’s help, in dealing with it in our own personal and corporate life. For those who wish to explore in more detail what the Scriptures teach regarding racism and its consequences, a Bible study has been included with this report (pp. 45-56).

*Note: The design for the cover of this report was prepared by Patrick Cooper, New Orleans, who submitted the winning youth entry in a contest sponsored by the Commission on Theology and Church Relations at the 1989 Youth Gathering in Denver, Colorado. The theme of Mr. Cooper’s entry was “Red and Yellow, Black and White, They Are All Precious in His Sight.” Artwork found throughout the text of this report was created by other youth who submitted prize-winning entries.*

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<sup>1</sup> 1992 Resolution 3-03 “To Combat All Racism,” 1992 *Proceedings*, 113-14.



**RACISM**

# Racism and the Church

## Overcoming the Idolatry

### Introduction

“That to which your heart clings and entrusts itself,” Dr. Martin Luther wrote in the Large Catechism, is “really your God.” “If any one boasts,” he continued, “of great learning, wisdom, power, prestige, family, and honor, and trusts in them, he also has a god, but not the one, true God.”<sup>2</sup> If anyone should claim superiority over others and treat them as inferior because of racial origin or characteristics, we may add, that person, too, has a god, but not the one true God. Racism is at its core idolatry—even though, to be sure, it also violates any number of other specific commandments. Racism grounds the identity and security of human life not in the God who alone is our Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier, but in self. It is a sin against the First Commandment because it fails to receive other human beings as gifts from God. It is to this malady of the human heart and life that we address ourselves in this report.

By focusing in this discussion on the sin of racism as a form of idolatry we do not imply, of course, that it merits condemnation harsher than other sins that manifest a refusal to cling to God alone and to no other. All sins ultimately have their origin in the failure to fear, love, and trust in God above all things, and they need to be judged as such. For this reason Luther saw the First Commandment of the Decalogue as “the chief source and fountainhead from which all the others [commandments] proceed.”<sup>3</sup>

It is important to recognize that the sin of racism, like all other sins, cannot be overcome by human strength or resolve. Of the commandments Luther said, “they are set on so high a plane that all human ability is far too feeble and weak to keep them.”<sup>4</sup> Therefore, only by the power given by Christ, who alone is our Deliverer from sin and whose death earned for us forgiveness for all of our offenses, are we able to combat the sin of racism.

As we begin this study, two additional points need to be made. First, in this report we have made use of the African American experience as the primary paradigm for analyzing and understanding the issue of racism in the church. This is not to suggest or even imply that the racism suffered by any other racial group is any less offensive or burdensome than what African Americans have known. There are important reasons, however, for this focus. While the degree of racism against individual groups in American society has varied historically, African Americans since their arrival on this continent have been among the most frequently targeted objects of racism and have suffered some of the most negative consequences of it. With them the problem has been most widespread. Moreover, they are not only the largest single minority group in American society but also the largest minority within the Lutheran church.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> LC I, 3, 10.

<sup>3</sup> LC I, 329.

<sup>4</sup> LC II, 2.

<sup>5</sup> In their recent study of religion in contemporary American society, summarized in the book *One Nation under God* (New York: Harmony Books, 1993), Barry A. Kosmin and Seymour P. Lachman observe that “numbering nearly 30 million, the African-American population is the nation’s largest and, historically, its most important minority. Today it comprises almost 12% of the total U.S. population, a decrease from 20% in 1800.” “The most significant ethnic factor in American religion,” they point out, is “the historical tradition of a separatist and racially aware black church” (130).

Second, since many of the concepts and terms that characterize the contemporary discussion of racism have been taken from the physical and social sciences, we have found it helpful in part I of this document to make use of the language of these disciplines in describing the nature of the problem we confront when we discuss racism. Our purpose in this section is purely descriptive—to define terms and to review some of the concepts widely used by both proponents and opponents of racism today. We believe that this will enable us to proceed in a more informed way in evaluating the tenets of racist ideology on the basis of the Holy Scriptures, the Word of God. This we do in part II.

With these preliminary considerations in mind, we begin our discussion of racism by analyzing in part I the nature of the problem before us. In this section, which includes also an excursus presenting a historical perspective on the issue of racism in American Lutheranism, we offer a definition of racism, present a rationale for engaging the question at this time, and underline the importance of recognizing that racism is an ideology. In part II we set forth the biblical principles that apply to the theological issues raised by racism, and we do so in terms of the three articles of the Apostles' Creed. Part III provides specific counsel for overcoming the sin of racism in the church.

## **I. Racism and the Necessity of a Christian Response**

### **A. What is Racism?**

The church's response to racism is complicated by the lack of agreement among sociologists and anthropologists regarding certain facets of this issue. In fact, there is less than complete consensus regarding the very definition of the term "racism" itself. Our purpose in this study is not to resolve such differences. Yet, to clarify the nature of the problem before us, we need to present briefly a commonly accepted definition of racism and to examine a number of other concepts related to this issue. Differing understandings of how racism should most precisely be defined should not divert attention away from the main thrust and purpose of this document, namely, to offer a biblically informed Christian response to this problem.<sup>6</sup>

#### **1. Definition of Racism**

"Racism" has been defined as "the theory or idea that there is a causal link between inherited physical traits and certain traits of personality, intellect, or culture and, combined with it, the notion that some races are inherently superior to others."<sup>7</sup> According to this definition, racism refers to the belief that organic, genetically transmitted differences (whether real or imagined) between human groups are associated with the presence or absence of certain socially relevant qualities or abilities that are determinative of people's social worth and their value as human beings.<sup>8</sup> Racist ideology also makes judgments about people's worth on the basis of their

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<sup>6</sup> Our biblically shaped response to racism must be carefully distinguished from the critique of racism that Christians hold in common with many non-Christian people of good will and which is reflected in this section of the document.

<sup>7</sup> *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 15<sup>th</sup> ed., s.v. "Racism," by Pierre L. van den Berghe.

<sup>8</sup> Pierre L. van den Berghe, *Race and Racism* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1967), 11. In his article on "Racism" in *Britannica*, van den Berghe notes that some sociologists distinguish between "racism" and

inclusion in nonbiological and nonracial groupings such as religious sects, nations, linguistic groups, and ethnic or cultural groups.<sup>9</sup>

Because racism assumes, explicitly or implicitly, that one human group is better than another in ways that entail superior social or individual value, it manifests itself in actions that adversely affect the lives of others. This is the case especially when those who are in a position to enforce their prejudices use their influence to harm others regarded as inferior, and even to exploit them.<sup>10</sup> Racist thought seeks to justify self-aggrandizement, cruelty, and paternalism in favor of the “superior” group and to inflict low self-image, subservience, deprivation, loss of equal privilege, and even slavery upon the “inferior” group. To be sure, one does not need power to be a racist nor is racism limited to “a majority group.” Nevertheless, the misuse of power has been and remains an integral factor in the apparent intransigent nature of racist ideology.

As we seek to understand the various elements of racist thought and behavior, we also need to consider a number of important terms employed in discussions of this issue. We recognize that in practice, as well as in common parlance, these terms are often not clearly and easily distinguished. However, if we wish to take seriously the nature of the problem before us and to engage in a credible witness to what God’s Word says about this matter, we should be familiar with a number of terms and their use in discussing the problem of racism. We call attention to the following.

a. *Race*. One of the crucial issues in responding to the phenomenon of racism is the use of the term “race” itself. This word generally conveys the idea that the human family is divided into a number of biologically distinct groups. The closeness of common descent and shared physical distinctiveness (such as color of skin, hair type, facial features) define one’s “racial” identity.<sup>11</sup>

Most anthropologists today point out, however, that human populations constitute a genetic continuum where “racial” distinctions, due to such factors as migration and intermarriage, are relative, not absolute.<sup>12</sup> In other words, traits attributed to race are present on a “more-or-less basis” (e.g., skin color pigmentation) in distinction from other traits that manifest themselves on an “either-or” basis (e.g., blood type group). Social scientists point out that there is far more trait variation within the human species than is visible to the naked eye. Consequently, the biological meaning of “race” has become so problematic that

some social scientists argue that *race*, as a biological phenomenon, does not exist. Others take the less extreme position that while different races exist, extensive interbreeding in many societies has produced large numbers of people of mixed ancestry. The assignment of these people to racial categories depends on social, rather than on biological, criteria.

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“racialism,” applying the former term to the *theory* or *doctrine* of racism and the latter to the actual *practice* of discrimination and prejudice.

<sup>9</sup> van den Berghe, *Britannica*.

<sup>10</sup> See Joseph Barndt, *Dismantling Racism* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1991), 28-31.

<sup>11</sup> When anthropologists today use the term “race,” they are most typically referring to some heuristic group under study and are not referring to a “race” as that term is popularly understood. The concept of “race” was initially popularized in western thought by anthropologists. The work done by physical anthropologists later involved in the study of genetics led to the rejection of any serious scientific use of this concept. See Alaka Wali, “Multiculturalism: An Anthropological Perspective,” in *Report from the Institute for Philosophy & Public Policy*, Spring/Summer 1992, 6-8.

<sup>12</sup> *The Harper Dictionary of Modern Thought*, 1988 rev. ed., s.v. “Race/Racism,” by Michael D. Biddiss.

Thus the social consequences of biologically inherited traits is the fundamental issue of the sociological study of race.<sup>13</sup>

The studies of anthropologists and sociologists have helped us to see more clearly the difficulties and ambiguities inherent in the concept of “race.” But the problem of racism arises when this term is used to indicate that biologically distinct groups (races) differ not only in their physiology but also are inherently superior or inferior in terms of their intellectual capacity, morality, human potential, and social worth. Because such human traits, according to racist ideologies, are biologically determined, they are passed on from one generation to the next.<sup>14</sup> This is a basic presupposition of racism.

b. *Culture.* *The American Heritage Dictionary* defines “culture” as “the totality of socially transmitted behavior patterns, arts, beliefs, institutions, and all other products of human work and thought characteristic of a community or population.”<sup>15</sup> Culture is the “social heritage” of a community.<sup>16</sup> In the judgment of most contemporary authorities, culture is a more useful and scientifically verifiable way of identifying, explaining, and understanding differences among human beings than is race.

Culture is a unique collection of customs and patterns of behavior. But, as many authorities also point out, culture refers not merely to the external social “artifacts” of a community. It is, so to speak, a blueprint within the mind by which people perceive the world, live within a particular group, and adapt to life on this planet. Culture consists of a group of assumptions about the world and according to which one organizes that world, defines, values, manipulates, and responds to that world. Peoples of different cultures not only “see” and “inhabit” different “worlds,” but they also have dissimilar feelings about the same universe in which they live. So important is culture that its loss can even jeopardize a person’s very physical survival.<sup>17</sup>

The social and physical sciences teach us that it is erroneous to think that culture is merely an accumulation of quaint, if not esoteric, customs that have an equivalent in every other culture. We raise this point because racist thinking often diminishes or even rejects altogether the role of culture in defining the differences between human groups.

c. *Ethnic Group.* A third term and/or category we need to keep in mind when we evaluate racist thought and behavior is the expression “ethnic group.” An ethnic group is generally defined in terms of sharing a common language, a common set of religious beliefs, or

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<sup>13</sup> *Encyclopedia of Sociology*, 1993 ed., s.v. “Race,” by Susan R. Pitchford.

<sup>14</sup> Although trait variation in plants and animals is not regarded as evidence of species differentiation, racists regard this phenomenon in human beings as absolute evidence of species differentiation. Consistent with this view, racists have sought to maintain the racial purity of their particular group and to accomplish this goal through a policy of strict segregation.

<sup>15</sup> *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, 1992 ed., s.v. “Culture.”

<sup>16</sup> *The Harper Dictionary of Modern Thought* (s.v. “Culture,” by Ronald Fletcher) defines “culture” as follows: “the total body of material artifacts (tools, weapons, houses, places of work, worship, government, recreation, works of art, etc.), of collective mental and spiritual ‘artifacts’ (systems of symbols, ideas, beliefs, aesthetic perceptions, values, etc.), and of distinctive forms of behaviour (institutions, groupings, rituals, modes of organization, etc.) created by a people (sometimes deliberately, sometimes through unforeseen interconnections and consequences) in their ongoing activities within their particular life-conditions, and (though undergoing kinds and degrees of change) transmitted from generation to generation” (195).

<sup>17</sup> *Encyclopedia of Anthropology*, 1976, s.v., “Acculturation,” 1-2. This is not to say, of course, that the behavior patterns and cultural traditions upon which a person depends for survival are in every case morally acceptable. Viewed according to the standard of God’s will for human beings, some cultural practices are evil.

some other cultural characteristics—but *without* physical considerations.<sup>18</sup> This term designates a group of people who share a common history based on distinctive features and values that are identified with that group. Sometimes the terms “ethnic group” and “nationality group” are used interchangeably. It may be more precise to use “ethnic group” to refer to a group’s culture (behavior), and “nationality group” to point to its national origin.

Historically, some of the people who settled in the United States have developed as ethnic groups in a deliberate effort to preserve the identity and heritage they had in their homeland. In other instances, American society has itself actually created ethnic groups even while advocating a policy of assimilation. Two examples may be given. There is the case of the Japanese Americans who, having arrived voluntarily in the United States of America at the turn of this century, eagerly sought assimilation. But, under pressure from all sides—labor unions, the *San Francisco Chronicle*, the city council, and even the state legislature—they were finally driven out of San Francisco, their port of entry. Mostly shopkeepers in Japan, they were forced to take up truck farming to survive. Ethnic group formation was well under way.<sup>19</sup>

African Americans are another example of American society quite literally creating an ethnic group. They did not come from one nation but from many different societies and cultures. They were also physiologically diverse. Unlike the Japanese, however, they did not migrate voluntarily, but were kidnapped and forcibly transported to this country. Even before they were unloaded from the slave ships, concerted efforts were made to strip them of any knowledge of their history, their culture, and their identity as human beings. Slaveholders deliberately attempted to impose on them a new identity.<sup>20</sup> Emerging from this effort at cultural destruction was the ethnic group currently known as “African Americans.” It is important to note that the same forces of ethnic group formation that operate in society may also be present in religious institutions.

What we have said here underlines an important distinction that needs to be made between “racial groups” and “ethnic groups.”<sup>21</sup> Groupings of people sometimes identified as “racial groups” may in fact be “ethnic groups.” The physiological differences among African Americans, for example, are so numerous that it is impossible for an objective observer to identify them as a unitary biological group. This distinction between racial and ethnic groupings is critically important for those seeking a better understanding of the nature of racism and its ideological roots.

d. *Ethnocentrism*. The term “ethnocentrism” refers to what may be a positive appreciation of and preference for one’s own culture. From birth human beings are generally led to believe that their own cultural ways are the best, if not the only way of going about life. People are not only aware of their native culture, but they are also emotionally attached to it. In fact, it is doubtful if any cultural system could survive without some degree of ethnocentrism.

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<sup>18</sup> van den Berghe, *Britannica*.

<sup>19</sup> Carey McWilliams, *Brothers under the Skin* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1964), 140-69.

<sup>20</sup> This new identity ultimately consisted of restricting the definition of “humanity” to whites and was codified in the law of the land. For example, Chief Justice Roger Brooke Taney of the U.S. Supreme Court ended his famous Dred Scott decision of 1857 by saying that “he had no ground to assert that Negroes were not ‘beings of an inferior order . . . so far inferior that they had no rights which the white man was bound to respect.’” Pierre L. van den Berghe, *Race and Racism*, 78.

<sup>21</sup> See van den Berghe, *Race and Racism*, and other basic texts on racial and ethnic minorities for discussions of this distinction.

But ethnocentrism may easily degenerate into that “view of things in which one’s own group is the center of everything, and all others are scaled and rated with reference to it.”<sup>22</sup> This way of thinking becomes problematic when the standards of one culture become the basis for making selections and determining opportunities for people from a variety of racial, cultural, and ethnic groupings. When institutions sanction and implement these standards, forced assimilation and/or exclusion result.

This leads us to an insight that will be helpful to keep in mind for our later discussions of a Christian response to racism: the principle that every culture must be analyzed and understood in terms of itself, not on the basis of another culture. Anthropologists call this “emic analysis.”<sup>23</sup> This principle requires, for example, that to understand the Hispanic family system one would have to examine it from within the context of Hispanic culture, not by comparing it with the family system of white middle-class Americans. Emic analysis is of critical importance for Christians who desire to proclaim the Gospel to groups that differ culturally from their own.

e. *Majority/Minority Groups*. The expressions “majority/minority groups” do not always necessarily refer to statistical groupings. These terms may also be used to designate social and political dominance and/or the lack of such dominance. They have come to convey the following technical meanings: (1) “patterned dominance” which is neither a random nor an unpredictable relationship; (2) a stratification system with a hierarchy of superiority and inferiority; (3) “categorical status,” that is, individuals have an ascribed status regardless of what they do in life (castes); and (4) unequal distribution of power. Thus, when someone is referred to as belonging to either a majority or a minority group, this can also be a way of telling them who they are, where they belong in the social world, and how they are expected to behave.<sup>24</sup>

Not everyone who belongs to a “majority group” based on race, of course, actively participates in the subordination of those belonging to a “minority group,” applauds such a practice, or even thinks in terms of racial privilege. But there is a broader sense in which everyone in such groups is involved in the problem of racism. Since all are born into their

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<sup>22</sup> William Graham Sumner, *Folkways* (Boston: Ginn and Company, 1906), 13.

<sup>23</sup> In emic analysis, “the subjects one is studying have their own (folk) categories (cognitive categories), assumptions about those categories, taxonomies and part-whole systems in terms of which they logically relate these categories to each other, as well as values concerning items classified according to these categories. To understand the behavior of subjects, then, it is crucial that the field researcher identify the cognitive properties of these emic categories; otherwise interpretation of behavior cannot claim to reflect units of behavior which are meaningful to the people studied” (*Encyclopedia of Anthropology*, s.v. “Emics,” 142). “Emic analyses are therefore those which stress the subjective meanings shared by a social group and their culturally specific model of experience” (*Dictionary of Anthropology*, 1986, s.v. “emic/etic,” 92).

<sup>24</sup> While the terms “majority” and minority have widely accepted and legitimate usage in professional literature, in popular discourse they often provide an example of the language of prejudice. Those who use these terms today are rarely conscious of the fact that they and other terms like them are indeed a part of the language of prejudice.

The particular set of relationships that majority/minority groups have is frequently related to the number of minority groups in a given society. If there is only one minority group in a given society, it is likely to absorb all of the anxieties and frustrations of the dominant group and become the object of many of its power manipulations. If there are several minority groups (as in American society), they will be ranked, and quite often the majority will play one minority group off against another. This was done most conspicuously in the Hawaiian Islands. Not infrequently, this will affect the way in which minorities respond to each other.

The pioneering work in the ranking of minority groups has been conducted by Emory S. Bogardus in his development of the Social Distance Scale. Prejudice, as Bogardus sees it, is a special case of social distance. See Emory S. Bogardus, *A Forty Year Racial Distance Study* (Los Angeles: University of Southern California, 1967).

respective groups (one does not choose to join or have the privilege of resigning), racial privileges and liabilities accrue to each individual regardless of his or her choice.

f. *Prejudice*.<sup>25</sup> Prejudice is an attitude of deep dislike (that is, an aversive or hostile attitude towards an individual or group) based on faulty and inflexible generalizations. It is an attitude acquired without, or prior to, adequate evidence or experience. Unlike a simple misconception, prejudice actively resists evidence to the contrary.

Prejudice also has an emotional component connected with it. It is characterized by a rigid or inflexible attitude or predisposition to respond in a certain way to its object. When the object of prejudice is a group, the individuals included in it may be viewed as a group only in the mind of the prejudiced person despite the fact that its individual members may have little similarity or interaction with each other. Prejudice entails systematic misjudgment of the facts.

Characteristic of prejudice is the tendency to select certain facts for emphasis, while downplaying others. New experiences are made to fit old categories through selection of only those cues that harmonize with a prejudgment or stereotype.<sup>26</sup> Because of their emotional quality, prejudicial attitudes are generally quite persistent and resistant to change.

Prejudice is learned. It is not usually acquired through direct contact with its object, however, but with prevailing *attitudes* toward it. Thus, a prejudiced person's claim to "know" members of a racial "minority group" may be no more than knowledge of prevailing attitudes toward the individuals included in this grouping.

Even though they are intimately related, racial prejudice and racial discrimination are sharply distinguished by sociologists.<sup>27</sup> While prejudice is a psychological or attitudinal phenomenon, discrimination always refers to behavior (particularly *social* behavior). An individual may be prejudiced without necessarily engaging in discriminatory behavior. By the same token, a person may participate in discriminatory behavior that is not necessarily motivated

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<sup>25</sup> Still regarded as a standard reference is Gordon Allport, *The Nature of Prejudice* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1954). See pages 1-79 for a basic discussion of the nature of prejudice.

<sup>26</sup> While a stereotype frequently accompanies prejudice, it should not be confused with prejudice. "Whether favorable or unfavorable, a stereotype is an exaggerated belief associated with a category. Its function is to justify (rationalize) our conduct in relation to that category," and it is usually sustained by selective forgetting (Allport, *The Nature of Prejudice*, 187). Not all stereotypes, of course, are false, nor do they necessarily have a negative function or purpose. Blacks may well jump higher than Asians and Norwegians are probably taller than Mexicans, but such generalizations are harmless as long as they involve no judgment as to the relative worth or merit of groups being so compared. Over time stereotypes may change, but the underlying prejudice does not. Thus, attacking stereotypes alone will not eradicate the roots of prejudice.

<sup>27</sup> "One of the biggest misconceptions about intergroup relations is that prejudice and discrimination can only occur jointly (Simpson & Yinger, 1965). But, as Merton (1976) noted, there are four, not two, possible relationships between prejudice and discrimination: (1) the presence of both, (2) the absence of both of them, (3) prejudice without discrimination, and (4) discrimination without prejudice.

"Virtually all the attention of commentators on intergroup relations has been on the first two relationships. This undue concentration on the joint presence or absence of prejudice and discrimination makes the latter two relationships—prejudice without discrimination and discrimination without prejudice—appear as anomalies. Prejudice without discrimination refers to situations in which prejudiced persons do not 'act out' their intolerant attitudes because of such external constraints as the threat of formal sanctions (for example, civil right laws, affirmative action mandates, or judicial injunctions) or the fear of informal sanctions (for example, social ostracism) by unprejudiced colleagues, neighbors, or friends.

"Similarly, discrimination without prejudice occurs when unprejudiced persons manifest discriminatory behavior out of fear of informal sanctions (such as ostracism, harassment, physical assault, property destruction) from prejudiced colleagues, neighbors, and friends; laws, policies, and other formal practices that legitimize or condone intolerant behavior; or ignorance, when individuals are unaware that their actions have discriminatory effects or consequences" (*Encyclopedia of Social Work*, 18<sup>th</sup> edition, s.v. "Racism," 1:946).

by personal prejudice. However, discrimination and prejudice very often go hand in hand, since each fosters and reinforces the other. Prejudice gives rise to and helps people rationalize discriminatory behavior, and discriminatory actions often produce and/or reinforce prejudicial attitudes toward the objects of discrimination.

g. *Power*. Power in and of itself is not evil. Every society and institution by definition distributes power according to certain patterns and norms for the maintenance of order and the common good. However, when power is used—whether by a society, institution, or individual—to enforce prejudice against others, that exercise of power becomes evil. When racism involves the misuse of power, it results in harm to the object of the prejudice.

Power can be exercised in numerous ways. It may manifest itself as coercion (even brute force), authority (the recognized right to give orders and have them obeyed), prestige (symbolic and honorific), or sheer dominance (clearly and largely uncontested superordinate power). The misuse of power by those who practice racism may often be more subtle than it is brazen. Easily recognizable is legally enforced segregation. Less detectable is the unassuming imposition of one's will on others, or the advancement of one's own welfare at the expense of others—something still possible even if individual prejudices or hostile attitudes toward another are to a great extent removed.<sup>28</sup>

## 2. Racism as an Ideology

Crucial for an understanding of the nature of racism and its pervasiveness in our time is the recognition that racism is a belief system. In the words of Alan Davies, an ideology is “life . . . squeezed into the idea, and made to conform to its dictates.”<sup>29</sup> As an ideology or belief system racism seeks to provide a rationale to justify racial divisions, and, as history has shown, may even seek to divide and rule society and the world along racial lines. Racism also has a certain coherence to it. It draws conclusions about the nature, purpose, and/or destiny of the human family that are based on the theory that because of biological, hereditary, or cultural differences, other members of the human family are socially or morally inferior.

As an overt belief system racism is now publicly spurned and commonly declared abhorrent in our society. But racism as an ideological reality is, unfortunately, not dead. Quite

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<sup>28</sup> Cf. Judith Lichtenberg, “Racism in the Head, Racism in the World,” in *Report from the Institute for Philosophy & Public Policy*, Spring/Summer 1992, 3-5.

<sup>29</sup> Alan Davies, “The Ideology of Racism,” in *The Church and Racism*, Gregory Baum and John Coleman, eds. (New York: The Seabury Press, 1982), 11. Concerning racism as an *ideology*, the *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement* (1991, s.v. “Racism”) states the following: “In recent years an effort has been made to distinguish between racialism and racism. One can understand racialism to be the use of racial or ethnocentric characteristics to determine value or access or participation and, by the same token, to exclude others from such. Racialism may not necessarily be value-laden as such. It does not say that one person is better than another because of race but simply that one chooses not to associate with people on account of their race. But racism has become a political ideology, on the basis of which the social reality is being interpreted and political and economic decisions made. In essence a racist ideology attaches value to ethnocentric characteristics and seeks to maintain deterministic relations between biological characteristics and cultural attributes. However, one must not lose sight of the fact that, ultimately, racism is about power. As an ideology it is the means whereby the dominant group, as determined by racial characteristics, imposes its will upon others so as to exclude them from effective participation in decision making and to exploit them for economic gain.”

In this connection, see also Shelby Steele, *The Content of Our Character* (St. Martin's Press, 1990; repr. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1991), in which Steele argues that race should not be a source of power or advantage or disadvantage for anyone in a free society. He rejects the “marriage” of race and power.

the contrary, racism in its varied forms shows up at every level of our life today, and it is precisely because it most often possesses “an incognito character” that it is so ominous.<sup>30</sup> It can, and usually does, manifest itself at the level of the *individual*. An individual may act on the belief that members of a group, as a group, are inferior in human or social value simply because of apparent biological, cultural, ethnic, or national differences.

It is possible also to speak of *institutional* racism with respect to the way institutions operate (through their laws, customs, practices, procedures). Here the focus is on how institutions *function*. The term “institutional racism” is not used to question the intentions or even necessarily the behavior of individuals who manage such institutions. In many instances, these individuals may not even realize that a given institution functions to the disadvantage of a given group of people.

Finally, racism may also manifest itself at the level of *culture*. This is the view that all cultures are inferior to one’s own culture, and that those inferior cultures consistently produce inferior results. Viewed from a historical perspective, cultural racism is sometimes referred to as “cultural imperialism” or cultural colonialism.”<sup>31</sup>

## *Excursus:*

### *A Historical Lutheran Perspective*

*It is not possible to understand the problem of racism in the church today without also placing the issue into the broad historical context of Lutheranism in America. Therefore, after making a few preliminary observations concerning the rise of racism in modern times, we present a perspective on racism in the history of the Lutheran church in America.*

*The concept of “race” first appeared in discussions at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, but racism did not gain wide acceptance as a “scientific” theory of behavior until the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which has been called the age of racism par excellence.<sup>32</sup> By the latter half of that century racism was acknowledged as a fact by the vast majority of western scientists, and it was popularized through the writings of such people as Joseph-Arthur, comte de Gobineau, Houston Stuart Chamberlain, Rudyard Kipling, Alfred Rosenberg, and Adolf Hitler.<sup>33</sup>*

*As an American phenomenon, historians generally agree, the origins of racial prejudice based on biological considerations were closely tied to the practice of slavery and colonial expansion.<sup>34</sup> Europeans promoted racism on this continent in the form of slavery shortly after embarking on their voyages of discovery. As they saw it, slavery was a matter of economic expediency, if not necessity.<sup>35</sup>*

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<sup>30</sup> Davies, “The Ideology of Racism,” 15. See also Lichtenberg, “Racism in the Head, Racism in the World.”

<sup>31</sup> See James M. Jones, “The Concept of Racism and Its Changing Reality,” in Benjamin P. Bowser and Raymond G. Hung’s *Impacts of Racism on White Americans* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, 1981), 27ff. See also Barndt, *Dismantling Racism*, for distinctions between “individual,” “institutional,” and “cultural” racism (51-122).

<sup>32</sup> van den Berghe, *Britannica*.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> See Alan Davies, “The Ideology of Racism,” 11-15; also Alan Davies, *Infected Christianity: A Study of Modern Racism* (Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1988), 3-26; van den Berghe, *Race and Racism*, 17-21; 77-95.

<sup>35</sup> van den Berghe, *Race and Racism*, 77-78.

What developed as the “American dilemma,” therefore, is by no means a recent invention. The founding fathers of this republic not only condoned slavery, they “institutionalized” it by declaring slaves to be three-fifths of a person for purposes of congressional representation by whites, but nonpersons themselves before the law. Thus, racism as a part of the fabric of American society has a long and tenacious history.

In the history of racism, the church did not play the role of the disinterested party, existing in a social vacuum or morally neutral environs. Nor did the Lutheran church in the United States remain aloof or untainted by the racism that became so much a part of American society. Racism within the Lutheran church was essentially no different from that which existed in the secular society. It was subject to the same forces that manifested themselves historically in this country. We may cite as an example the Lutheran church’s attitude toward slavery.

When Lutherans who came to America in the 18<sup>th</sup> century confronted slavery, they were not of one mind on this issue. Some in the Lutheran church opposed the institution. Among the first to do so were the Swedes. When Gustavus Adolphus proposed establishing a colony in the New World, he took the position that the colony would “gain more by free people with wives and children” than with slaves.<sup>36</sup> Other Lutherans, however, supported slavery and saw no moral inconsistency in their stance. In 1708 a Native American, the first slave on record to seek membership in the Lutheran congregation in New York City, caused a crisis. His Lutheran owner protested his acceptance by the church out of fear that he would lose his property. The crisis was resolved when, at his confirmation, Thom promised to “continue to serve his worldly master and mistress as faithfully and truly as if he were yet in his benighted state.”<sup>37</sup>

In 1735, when colonial Lutherans formally took notice of Negro slaves becoming members of the church, the constitution of Wilhelm Berkenmeyer, a Lutheran pastor in the Hudson valley, specified that

*a pastor shall previously ascertain that they [Negro slaves] do not intend to abuse their Christianity, to break the laws of the land, or to dissolve the tie of obedience [slavery]; yea, he must have a positive promise that Christianity will not only be entered upon, but that the same shall be practiced in life.*<sup>38</sup>

Berkenmeyer, himself a slave owner, evidently saw no contradiction between the principles of Christian ethics and slavery. When criticized for owning slaves, his defense was that it was nobody else’s business inasmuch as he had purchased the slaves with his own money.<sup>39</sup> If the Christian faith has anything whatsoever to say about slavery, as far as Berkenmeyer was concerned, the onus of responsibility is on the slave, with no apparent responsibility on the part of the owner.

At almost the same time that Berkenmeyer’s constitution was adopted, the first Lutheran congregation in the South (Hebron Church in Madison County, Virginia) sent a delegation of three to Europe to solicit funds. One of the reasons for requesting funds from European Lutherans, as the Rev. Mr. Stoeber put it, was so that

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<sup>36</sup> Israel Acrelius, *A History of New Sweden* (Philadelphia: The Historical Society of Pennsylvania, 1874), viii.

<sup>37</sup> Julius F. Sachse, *Justus Falckner: Mystic and Scholar* (Philadelphia, 1903), 104.

<sup>38</sup> Harry J. Kreider, *Lutheranism in Colonial New York* (New York: Edwards Brothers, Inc., 1942), 56.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

*every effort [could] be made to lead the heathen, who still walk in darkness, to Christ [and that those who receive the pamphlet should] send contributions across the ocean for the quickening of the poor fellow believers and the conversion of the heathen.*<sup>40</sup>

*The committee came back from Europe with \$10,000, but there is a little evidence that those Lutherans ever used this money to try to lead “the heathen, who still walk in darkness, to Christ.” Part of the money was used to purchase slaves to work the land that supported the pastor. By 1748 the congregation owned nine slaves.*<sup>41</sup>

*The issue of slavery almost led to the destruction of the Lutheran church in colonial Georgia. The Salzburger (immigrants from Austria) were adamantly opposed to slavery even before they arrived in Georgia in 1734.*<sup>42</sup> *Part of the agreement signed by every member of the community bound them to reject slavery. Within three years of their arrival, however, the leader of the Salzburger, the Rev. Johann Martin Boltzius, knew firsthand that at least one of his members, Mr. Kiefer, was secretly housing slaves on his farm.*

*By 1750 the issue of slavery forced Boltzius to make a decision: either consent to the introduction of slavery in Georgia or preside over the demise of the Lutheran community.*<sup>43</sup> *Boltzius (a devout pietist) decided, much against his personal convictions, in favor of slavery.*<sup>44</sup> *By the early 1770s, however, two slaves were listed as part of the inventory of church property (they were Boltzius’ personal servants) and two other Lutheran pastors were among the largest slave owners in the community.*<sup>45</sup>

*Perhaps the strongest statement in favor of slavery by a Lutheran synod was issued in 1835 by the South Carolina Synod when it said,*

*Whereas individuals and Societies of the North, calling themselves abolitionists, under the pretense of ameliorating the conditions of our servants, have created an excitement deeply affecting our interest, and calculated to sever bonds of attachment which exist between master and slave; and whereas this unjustifiable interference with our domestic institution is opposed to the Constitution of our common country, is subversive of our liberties as men and contrary to the precepts of our blessed Savior, who commanded*

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<sup>40</sup> William Edward Eisenberg, *The Lutheran Church in Virginia 1717-1962* (Roanoke, Virginia: The Trustees of the Virginia Synod, Lutheran Church in America, 1967), 13.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 13-14.

<sup>42</sup> While the colony of Georgia was chartered by the English crown, it was initially organized and administered by a group of private citizens known as the Trustees. Their goal was to create a colony where the virtues of the English yeomen could be practiced. One of the laws (established by the Trustees) governing life in the colony was a prohibition on slavery. The Salzburger’s opposition to slavery made them especially welcome in the colony.

<sup>43</sup> The colony of Georgia had hardly been formally established (1734) before a number of its citizens began petitioning the Trustees concerning the introduction of slavery. Among other things, they were encouraged to do so because slavery was permitted in all of the surrounding colonies. The debate about slavery in Georgia became so heated that one observer states that “the whole province dwelt, as it were on the brink of a [revolutionary] volcano” (W. D. Weatherford, *American Churches and The Negro* [Boston: The Christopher Publishing House, 1957], 141). Boltzius, however, continued to oppose the introduction of slavery until 1750.

<sup>44</sup> The justification for Boltzius withdrawing his objection to slavery came from his mentor in Germany, the Rev. Samuel Urlsperger. Urlsperger counseled, “If you take slaves in faith, and with the intent of conducting them to Christ, the action will not be a sin, but may prove a benediction” (George Fenwick Jones, *The Georgia Dutch from the Rhine and Danube to the Savannah, 1733-1783* [Athens and London: The University of Georgia Press, 1992], 268-69).

<sup>45</sup> In 1758 Rev. Boltzius’ slave Mary gave birth to a female named Christine (Baptism #460, *Jerusalem Recordbook*). Two of the pastors to the Salzburger, the Revs. Rabenhorst and Lemcke, owned 12 of the 59 young slaves baptized between 1753 and 1781. (See *Jerusalem Recordbook*.)

*servants to be obedient to their masters, and the example of the holy Apostle Paul, who restored to his lawful owner a runaway slave; therefore:*

*1. Resolved, unanimously, that this Synod express their strongest disapprobation of the conduct of Northern Abolitionists—and that we look upon them as the enemies of our beloved country; whose mistaken zeal is calculated to injure the cause of morals and religion.<sup>46</sup>*

*This was perhaps one of the strongest pro-slavery statements made by any Lutheran body. It is also important to note that an appeal to the teachings of Jesus and to the example of St. Paul was made to justify that slavery. (Cf. pp. 62-64 in the Bible Study of this document.)*

*Not all Lutherans were so accepting of slavery. Pastor Henry Melchior Muhlenberg would have no part of it, even though one of his sons was a slaveholder. The Franckean Synod was quite forthright in its opposition to slavery. It refused to have fellowship with anyone engaged in that kind of immorality.<sup>47</sup> This was also the second Lutheran synod to ordain an African American for the office of the holy ministry.<sup>48</sup> The president of Gettysburg Seminary, Dr. Samuel S. Schmucker, required his wife to sell her slaves and turned his home on the seminary campus into one of the stations on the underground railroad.*

*We get a glimpse of what was probably the most widespread attitude of pre-Civil War Lutherans towards slavery at the third annual convention of the Tennessee Synod in 1822 when, in response to a lay delegate's question as to whether slavery was to be considered an evil,*

*the Synod unanimously resolved, that it [slavery] is to be regarded as a great evil in our land, and it desires the government, if it be possible, to devise some way by which this evil can be removed.<sup>49</sup>*

*Notwithstanding their obvious ambivalence concerning the question of slavery, Lutherans in the United States launched their second major organized outreach effort towards African Americans, free and slave, in 1817 with the passage of the so-called Five Point Plan by the North Carolina Synod. By the onset of the Civil War, that is, within 44 years, African Americans constituted 10 to 20 percent of the membership of the Lutheran synods of the South. At no other time in the history of American Lutheranism have African Americans made up so large a proportion of the membership of the Lutheran church.*

*Immediately following the Civil War, American Lutherans adopted a new policy of working with black Americans. The Tennessee Synod was the first to articulate this new policy in 1866 when it urged African American Lutherans to form separate black congregations as well as*

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<sup>46</sup> *A History of the Lutheran Church in South Carolina*, prepared and edited by "The History of Synod Committee" (Columbia, SC; The South Carolina Synod of the LCA, 1971), 242.

<sup>47</sup> In 1837 the Franckean Synod (a small group of clergy in upper New York) declared itself against pulpit and altar fellowship with any church that had slaveholders. It was joined by the East Ohio and Allegheny Synods in 1844, the Pittsburgh Synod in 1845, the Wittenberg Synod in 1852, and the Synod of Northern Indiana in 1859 (Thomas R. Noon, "Early Black Lutherans in the South [to 1865]," *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly* 50 [Summer 1977], 52).

<sup>48</sup> The person ordained was William Alexander Payne. Payne never served a Lutheran congregation. He subsequently went on to become one of the leading bishops in the African Methodist Episcopal Church. Prior to Payne's ordination, Jehu (John) Jones had been commissioned by the New York Ministerium in 1832 to serve as a Lutheran missionary in Africa. Jones never made it to Africa. He did organize the first all-black Lutheran congregation in 1834, located in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

<sup>49</sup> Jacob L. Morgan, Bachman S. Brown and John Hall, eds., *History of the Lutheran Church in North Carolina*, published by the authority of the United Evangelical Lutheran Synod of North Carolina, 1803-1953, n.d., 82.

*a separate ecclesiastical organization. It based this recommendation on the grounds that “God has made (plainly marked distinctions) between us [whites] and them [blacks], giving different colors, and so forth.”<sup>50</sup> The North and South Carolina Synods followed suit, passing almost identical resolutions. The 1866 policy decision marked the beginning of a policy of organizing African Americans into separate congregations in the Lutheran church.*

*That 1866 decision might have had merit as a mission strategy. There were, however, some deficiencies. First, the decision did not recognize the legitimacy of black culture, and therefore was not aimed at making Lutheranism an indigenous part of the African American community. Second, the call for a separate ecclesiastical organization would suggest that the policy was not ultimately aimed at bringing African Americans into full participation in the life of the Lutheran church. The Synodical Conference appears to have proceeded in much the same way in 1877 when it began its mission outreach to the black community. That practice continued until 1947 when the Synod adopted a policy of integrating black pastors into its districts.*

## **B. Necessity of a Christian Response**

We confront the issue of racism now because of the urgent need to assess where we are as individuals and as a church body committed to putting into practice our Christian faith. As individual Christians we must exercise constant vigilance in the face of persistent and devious efforts of Satan, who seeks to make an agony of our common life in this world and ultimately to separate us from the reconciling love of God. With utmost seriousness, we hear the apostles admonish us: “Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil” (Eph. 6:11); “Be sober, be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking some one to devour” (1 Peter 5:8). Have we been faithful, we must ask ourselves, as those baptized into Christ’s death and resurrection, in drowning “by daily contrition and repentance” also this wretched work of our old Adam so that the new man may “daily emerge and arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever”?<sup>51</sup>

As a church body The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod has made numerous efforts over the years to deal with the evil of racism. Since 1956 the Synod has adopted resolutions, held conferences, and created new structures and policies aimed at addressing the problem in its midst.<sup>52</sup> The same can surely be said of numerous other church bodies. The question remains, however, whether such efforts have effectively isolated the real causes of racism and applied to them a biblical solution. To underline the necessity and the urgency of our present task, we consider the following.

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<sup>50</sup> Quoted from Richard C. Dickinson, *Roses and Thorns* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1977), 24-25.

<sup>51</sup> *Luther’s Small Catechism with Explanation*, 1986 edition, 23.

<sup>52</sup> At its 1992 convention the Synod adopted Resolution 3-03 “To Combat All Racism,” in which it urged its members “to repent of any attitude or practice of racism as individuals and congregations” and resolved that “the Synod repudiate all racism and urge its members to celebrate God’s love in Christ and their forgiveness and acceptance as God’s children by loving and serving all fellow humans as they have been loved and served, without any exception of persons, and to work toward social justice in their neighborhoods and work places and all areas of society” (1992 *Convention Proceedings*, 114).

## 1. The Changing Reality of Racism

Recent decades have witnessed significant changes in race relations in our society, as well as in the church in the United States. Many institutions have taken positive steps to include previously excluded groups. There also is social sensitivity at least to the terms “racism” and “prejudice.” To avoid the stigmas that such labels bring, it has become increasingly important for the members of our society to maintain the self-image or self-perception of being nonprejudiced and nonracist.

It might be argued, however, that this change in self-consciousness has not been all for the good. It has served, at times, to camouflage what is a more subtle form of racism to which few have not at some point succumbed.<sup>53</sup> We have in mind here the well-intentioned person who genuinely professes egalitarianism or equal rights for all. He or she truly has the desire to reduce the consequences of racism. But there is present also a kind of ambivalence that we may call “aversion.” Such a person experiences a conflict between negative feelings (which are not always conscious) toward African Americans, for example, and a conscience that seeks to repudiate or disassociate these feelings from a nonprejudiced self-image (“I’m not prejudiced, but . . .”). At the emotional level, the discomfort and uneasiness that often accompanies such aversion may lead to the avoidance of interracial contacts. And, a sense of superiority may develop, with the result that positive rather than negative characteristics are ascribed to oneself. For example, a person may not believe that African Americans are lazier than whites. He or she may simply suspect that whites are more ambitious than blacks.

No doubt many such proponents of egalitarianism, though internally ambivalent, have been among those responsible for the formulation and implementation of affirmative action programs. Critics point out that though well-meaning, these programs have often in fact undermined serious efforts at integration. The problem is that the focus of attention is frequently on the *consequences* of racism, not its causes. The consequences of racism are viewed as the causal agents in the continuing cycle of oppression. According to this way of thinking, the defect to be remedied is thought to reside within the victims of racism rather than within the persons and structures responsible for the defect in the first place.<sup>54</sup> Not surprisingly, programs are then devised to treat the victims of racism as the cause of their own victimization.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Alan Davies (“The Ideology of Racism”) writes concerning the changing reality of racism, “all pre-war myths of white supremacy (e.g., Afrikanerdom), where they still exist today, seem more as defence mechanisms against the winds of change than as triumphalistic visions of a soon-to-be-realized future. But their demise does *not* mean that racism itself is dead. On the contrary, the rebirth of racism is one of the most ominous signs of our era. Racism, like a Hindu god, may have many incarnations. Precisely because the ideology is no longer respectable, racist views today possess an incognito character, incarnating themselves in systems of social, political and economic power, concealing themselves behind bland bureaucratic facades. This is not so much ideological as ‘structural’ racism: a racism that need not identify itself as racist, but which can exercise great demonic energy in the world. It is mostly this form of racism that confronts us today. To struggle against it is far harder than to struggle against the unenlightened minds of old-fashioned racists . . .” (15).

<sup>54</sup> This is not to suggest that we should avoid dealing with the consequences of racism but look only to the removal of its causes. In some ways, people may feel that they can only deal with the consequences. To use a familiar illustration, if the neighborhood bully is beating up one’s child every day and taking his lunch money, the reaction is first to remedy the consequences. Certainly, to sit around and wait for a change of heart only perpetuates the hurt, while the offender goes unchallenged.

<sup>55</sup> Some authorities refer to this as the “victim blame argument.” See James M. Jones, “The Concept of Racism and its Changing Reality,” 46.

## 2. The Problem of Integration

### a. Integration and Black Ministry

A second reason for dealing with racism and its manifestations in church and society at this time is the issue of “integration.” The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod made concerted efforts to deal with this problem.<sup>56</sup> We may point to developments such as the following:

1877: The Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference, of which the Missouri Synod was a member, commissioned its first missionary to work among African Americans.<sup>57</sup>

1903: The Synodical Conference opened its first school, Immanuel Lutheran College and Seminary, to train African American church workers. Two other schools were subsequently opened to train African Americans for professional church work: Luther College (founded 1903 in New Orleans, Louisiana) and Selma Academy (founded 1922 in Selma, Alabama).<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> For a complete history of developments in this regard, see Jeff G. Johnson, *Black Christians: The Untold Lutheran Story* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1991), 198-221; 225-30.

<sup>57</sup> The Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America (hereafter referred to simply as the Synodical Conference) was an association of independent Lutheran churches organized in 1872 that existed for nearly one hundred years. It originally consisted of the Illinois, Minnesota, Missouri, Norwegian, Ohio, and Wisconsin synods.

The Synodical Conference’s entry into Negro mission work appears to have been driven by a crisis and actually was somewhat accidental. Up to the mid-1870s, the Synodical Conference had been involved in foreign mission work in connection with the Leipzig and Hermannsburg Mission Societies in Germany. That arrangement was suddenly terminated because of theological differences between the Synodical Conference and the German mission societies. The Synodical Conference suddenly found itself abruptly cut off from any foreign mission work at a time when its constituency was extremely interested in such endeavors. As the mission committee of the Synodical Conference put it, “If we make no use of the desire of our Lutheran Christians to do something for heathen missions, they will surely apply their money where we would not like to see it go” (F. Dean Lueking, *Mission in the Making* [St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1964], 85).

A mission-minded delegate to the July 1877 convention proposed that the Synodical Conference begin mission work among American Negroes. The resolution was adopted with almost no debate. Within three months of the passage of that resolution, a missionary had been commissioned and sent out to survey the field.

The Synodical Conference appeared to be unaware of the fact that there was a black constituency in the United States. Before the Civil War, there had been thousands of black Lutherans in the South. At the very moment when the Synodical Conference was trying to decide where to begin its work among black people, the Lutheran synods of the South were trying to get some Lutheran body to take over the work that they had been conducting for over half a century. The Synodical Conference finally made contact with those black Lutherans when, in 1891, the Evangelical Lutheran Alpha Synod of Freedmen in America invited the Synodical Conference into North Carolina.

<sup>58</sup> The Synodical Conference began training African Americans for the teaching and pastoral ministry as early as 1882 at Addison, Illinois, and at Concordia Seminary in Springfield, Illinois. Shortly after Immanuel Lutheran College and Seminary in Greensboro, North Carolina, opened in 1903, the Synodical Conference passed a rule requiring all black persons who were preparing for professional church work to be trained at Immanuel. This regulation apparently had nothing to do with the ability of African American students to function at Addison or Concordia Seminary, Springfield, inasmuch as a number of blacks had functioned quite successfully at those institutions for over twenty years. Required attendance at Immanuel also had little to do with the ministry in the black community because no white pastor or teacher working in the black community was required to attend Immanuel, not even for orientation. The regulation was based solely on the color of one’s skin.

Luther College in New Orleans was closed in 1925 after having graduated only one student in its twenty-two year history. Immanuel was closed in 1961. Selma Academy (now Concordia College Selma) still exists and at the date of this writing is in the process of becoming a four-year educational institution.

1947: The Missouri Synod began the process of integrating the congregations and black pastors of the Synodical Conference into its various districts. In fact, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod officially adopted a policy of what is called “integration.”<sup>59</sup>

1956: Subsequent to the 1954 United States Supreme Court ruling that “separate but equal” facilities for black persons in public schools do not meet the constitutional requirement for equal protection of the law, the Missouri Synod in 1956 resolved to follow a policy of integrated congregations.<sup>60</sup> Since 1956, the Synod has adopted numerous resolutions aimed at implementing the spirit of that resolution.

1961: The process of integrating the congregations and pastors of the Synodical Conference into the various districts of the Synod was completed.<sup>61</sup> In 1964 the United States Congress passed the Civil Rights Act, which was followed by other legislative acts and court decisions (e.g., Affirmative Action) to implement the 1954 Brown vs. Board of Education decision and the Civil Rights Act.

1977: The Synod organized the Commission on Black Ministry “to plan, to coordinate, and to expand black ministry” in its midst.<sup>62</sup>

This summary indicates that The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod does indeed have a positive record in dealing with the question of integration and black ministry, and for this we thank God. At the same time, we need to consider a number of questions. First of all, the Synod’s decision in 1947 to begin integrating black congregations and pastors into the districts of the Synod does not appear to have been motivated primarily by the desire to deal directly or decisively with the underlying problem of racism. Rather, that decision, which granted synodical membership to African American pastors and congregations, was made ostensibly and chiefly to prevent the imminent collapse of the Synodical Conference’s administration of black ministry.<sup>63</sup>

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Minority group students began enrolling in Missouri Synod schools before the 1947 decision to grant black pastors and congregations membership in the Synod. Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, admitted an African American student in 1944 and graduated a Japanese American student in 1945.

<sup>59</sup> Some feel that this 1947 action of the Missouri Synod should more properly be called an instance of desegregation, inasmuch as it involved primarily the removal of restrictions on the membership of African Americans within the Synod. We have referred to this action as “integration” because the language of the document leading to the inclusion of African Americans in the Missouri Synod specifically refers to “integration,” not “desegregation.”

<sup>60</sup> The Synod adopted Resolution 26 “Race Relations in National and World-Wide Church Work,” which incorporates Memorial 409 “Establishment of Congregations on a Nonsegregated Basis” (1956 *Proceedings*, 757-59; cf. 753-54).

<sup>61</sup> In 1961 the Southern District was the last judicatory within the Missouri Synod to implement the 1947 decision to grant African Americans membership in the Synod.

<sup>62</sup> 1977 Resolution 10-01A “To Establish Administration for Black Ministry,” 1977 *Proceedings*, 199.

<sup>63</sup> These policies, together with the organization of the Synodical Conference Mission Board, ultimately led to the administrative ineffectiveness of that Board. Beginning in 1927 (the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Synodical Conference’s work among blacks) black pastors and their congregations began petitioning the Synodical Conference for a more effective organizational system for managing black ministry. These petitions continued until 1938 when those involved in black ministry petitioned for the formation of a separate synod. During that same period, approximately 50 percent of the black pastors left the ministry. The largest (geographically and numerically) and most rapidly growing of the three black mission fields (the Eastern Field) of the Synodical Conference extended from the Atlantic to the Pacific coast. Between 1924 and the 1947 decision to integrate black pastors and congregations into the Missouri Synod, the superintendent of the Eastern Field (located in Greensboro, North

The Synodical Conference's approach to black ministry had given rise to a dilemma. As a result of the Conference's work for the growth of black ministry, an increasing number of black congregations had become, or were on the verge of becoming, self-supporting. However, black pastors and their congregations were not allowed to become members of the constituent synods of the Synodical Conference. Fundamental questions regarding the full inclusion of black brothers and sisters in Christ in the life and work of the church, including the basic problem of racism, remained unresolved.

A second stage of the Synod's policy of integration began in 1956 when it resolved that integration should take place within local congregations. No doubt the Synod was influenced by such factors as the 1954 Supreme Court decision abolishing the legal/moral basis for segregation and by the steady decline of inner-city white congregations (including the sale of property to non-Lutheran black churches).<sup>64</sup> Beginning in 1956, the Synod adopted a number of resolutions in response to growing interest in the issue of integration. Between 1975 and 1985 alone more than 56 resolutions concerning some aspect of integration were presented to the conventions of the Synod.<sup>65</sup> A cursory reading of these resolutions, however, reveals that integration as a means of carrying out God's mission among black people was not working as well as many in the Synod had hoped. In 1962 the Synod noted the "disturbing fact that [after nearly one hundred years] our membership gains among Negroes in the United States have been less than 17,000 when they should have been 229,000 if they had kept pace with our acquisition among the rest of the population."<sup>66</sup>

The Synod called attention to this fact again in 1981, when it underlined the need "To Open Every Ministry to Black Professional Church Workers" as a way of eliminating "the stigma of racism in the placement process of our church."<sup>67</sup> The Synod's hesitancy to proceed aggressively to this end is reflected, however, in the language of another resolution adopted in 1981. The Synod resolved that colleges and seminaries "be encouraged *to continue considering* employment of at least one Black faculty or professional staff member" (emphasis added).<sup>68</sup> This same hesitancy may well account for the disturbing fact that integration as a way of involving African Americans in synodical work at the managerial or executive level has not been working. The impression is given, therefore, that while the members of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod believe in integration, they have not practiced it effectively at the level of church-wide structure.<sup>69</sup>

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Carolina) was unable to visit some of the congregations under his supervision because of distance, finances, and the lack of time.

<sup>64</sup> See Memorial 409, 1956 *Proceedings*, 752-53.

<sup>65</sup> See "What Synod Says . . . Synodical Resolutions 1975-1986 . . . About Multicultural Ministry," published by the Board for Parish Services, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, n. d.

<sup>66</sup> 1962 Resolution 2-20 "To Develop a Synodwide Mission Approach to the Negro American," 1962 *Proceedings*, 97; Overtures 9-05A-B, 1981 *Convention Workbook*, 313.

<sup>67</sup> 1981 Resolution 9-01 "To Open Every Ministry to Black Professional Church Workers," 1981 *Proceedings*, 209.

<sup>68</sup> 1981 Resolution 6-20A "To Consider Employment of Black Faculty and Professional Staff," 1981 *Proceedings*, 193.

<sup>69</sup> See *A Preliminary Report of the Review of District College and Agency Data*, Summit Conference of Synodical Leaders Involved in Black Ministry, St. Louis, January 31<sup>st</sup>-February 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1985.

## **b. Integration and Assimilation**

The reason for the apparent failure of the Synod's longstanding policy of carrying out black ministry through integration may in turn be due in large part to a failure to give careful thought to precisely what integration means, not only theoretically but also practically. Little consideration seems to have been given to this matter.

Integration, as popularly understood, means "opening up the system, letting in those who desire to come in." A review of black ministry programs in the history of the Synod reveals, however, that integration has in fact been understood as "assimilation." These two activities have often been confused with one another. As a sociological phenomenon, assimilation refers to the disappearance of all former cultural differences so that the individual is no longer distinguishable from the group into which he or she has been assimilated. This, of course, cannot happen unless one is let "in." Integration, on the other hand, does not refer to the disappearance of differences so that the individual "integrated" becomes indistinguishable from the group (that, more appropriately, is called "cultural conversion"). Nor does integration entail primarily the removal of barriers that would hinder entry into the given group (that, more appropriately, is "desegregation"). Properly understood, integration denotes "the bringing of different racial or ethnic groups into free and equal association."<sup>70</sup> In practical terms, this means structural participation so there is equity with respect to "input" (institutional participation and decision-making) and "outcome," that is, all those who participate in a given institution receive equivalent goods, services, and benefits.

Integration *as assimilation* is perceived by many among ethnic minorities, including especially African Americans, as a call for the surrender of one's heritage and identity in order not only to "get in," but also to become what others label as fully "human." This kind of assimilation into the church (as an institution that bears the Christian faith), therefore, strikes at the very heart of the African American identity and sense of selfhood, producing self-hatred, alienation, powerlessness, and dependency. The response of many is not to join "integrated" churches,<sup>71</sup> but to join those churches which unambiguously proclaim God's goodness and wisdom in his creation, his continuing sovereignty over his creation, his victory over every kind of sin (even the sin of racism) through the work of his Son, and his promises to empower them continually to live out Christ's victory and deliverance in this world and in the world to come. Such churches recognize and affirm the wonderful variety and diversity of the membership of the body of Christ, while at the same time rejoicing in its unity in Christ.

## **3. The Subtleties of Racism: Racial Disadvantage**

Few today will fail to recognize conspicuous oppression and enslavement of racial groupings as blatantly racist. Often more difficult to recognize are the subtle and varied forms by which the heritage of racism continues to disadvantage members of minority groups. This is what we mean by "racial disadvantage."

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<sup>70</sup> *Webster's New World Dictionary*, Second College Edition (1970), s.v. "Integration."

<sup>71</sup> In 1967 the Lutheran Church in America took the position that integration is a goal of the white majority (1967 Consultation of the Coordinating Committee of the Lutheran Church in America). Leronne Bennett says forthrightly that when the terms "assimilation" and "integration" are used, "the standard reference is white, the orientation is white," that is, "integration means [the] interaction of blacks and whites within a context of white supremacy" (Chester L. Hunt and Lewis Walker, *Ethnic Dynamics* [Homewood, IL: The Dorsey Press, 1974], 354).

By virtue of the historical realities of racism, racial minorities do not have the same legacy of advantage as do white Americans. Therefore, in our increasingly pluralistic and diverse society, to insist upon mere access to already existing institutions or to advance “equal opportunity” in those institutions may be only a way of perpetuating the disadvantage of a prior inequality. Racial disadvantage becomes increasingly intense and offensive if access to society’s institutions demands conformity to ethnocentric norms unrelated to the common goods and services for which these institutions exist. We may cite, for example, the case of the California judge who prohibited the use of the Spanish language anywhere in the courthouse, not only in the performance of official duties, but during coffee breaks.<sup>72</sup>

Because racism is so much a part of the American worldview, it is often difficult for us to recognize it when we see it. We become insensitive to expressions of it. Many examples could be given, but consider something as simple as the language we use in our dealings with each other. Take the use of the word “qualified.” To speak of someone as “qualified” to some may carry no racial overtones. To others it is a code word in the lexicon of derisive terms.

#### **4. The Crisis of Self-Identity**

Some anthropologists have argued that racism is one way in which individuals in modern western society have sought to answer the questions “Who am I?” or “What does it mean to be human?”<sup>73</sup> Suggesting that there are uniquely western answers to these questions, they hold that this response was prompted by the move out of ethnically homogeneous societies and by confrontation with the diversity of the human family. Furthermore, these anthropologists theorize that as human societies become more complex, the issue of what it means to be human is raised with increasing urgency. Ultimately, the most enduring answer is felt to be a religious one.<sup>74</sup> While racism is an extremely complex social phenomenon, the question of self-identity remains, both for perpetrator and victim, an ongoing problem of profound proportions.

#### **5. Crimes of Racism**

The crimes that have been committed in the name of racism will not, nor should they for various reasons, be forgotten.<sup>75</sup> We reject the notion that anyone should feel guilt-ridden for the crimes committed by one’s forebears. But future generations must be ever mindful of the extremes to which sinful human beings will go when they yield to the lust for power coupled

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<sup>72</sup> Personal memorandum from Dr. Jeff Johnson.

<sup>73</sup> The concept of “race,” first used at the end of the eighteenth century, was a new tool used by Europeans to organize their understanding of themselves and the entire human family. That theory (i.e., the existence of a number of distinctive biological categories) is the way Europeans sought to make sense of and “locate” themselves in a world that was suddenly made larger and populated with more diverse peoples. Race was their way of solving the identity crisis precipitated by the very rapid expansion of their world. See *Encyclopedia of Sociology*, 1992 edition, s.v. “Race.”

<sup>74</sup> This position has been advanced most thoroughly by the anthropologist Victor Turner. He believes that this is one explanation for the growth of the number of religious groups (some of which we might label as highly esoteric), as well as an increase in religious behavior in American society (Victor Witter Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* [Chicago: Aldine Publishing Co., 1969]).

<sup>75</sup> Shelby Steele states, “I think one of the heaviest weights that oppression leaves on the shoulders of its former victims is simply the memory of itself. This memory is a weight because it pulls the oppression forward, out of history and into the present, so that the former victim may see this world as much through the memory of his oppression as through his experience in the present” (*The Content of Our Character*, 150).

with the power of hatred, lest the horrors of the past be repeated. Racism has led to atrocities against native Americans in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, to the wholesale murder of the Holocaust in our lifetime in Europe, to the killing of hundreds of thousands of Armenian Christians after World War I, to the tragedies of South African apartheid, and most recently to the agonies of “ethnic cleansing” in the former Yugoslavia. The horrifying depths to which those taken captive by the evil of racism have fallen serve as a sobering reminder of the gravity of the problem we all face and to which only the church, entrusted with the message of God’s reconciling Gospel, can bring ultimate resolution.

## **II. Biblical Perspective on Racism**

Racism, as we have seen, is a *belief* system founded on the supposition that inherent, biological differences (or, in some cases, ethnic or cultural differences) among various human groups not only determine social or human achievement, but also the value of individual members of the human family. Those who adhere to its claims usually act as if their race is superior and therefore entitled to the right to rule over others. We do not hesitate at the outset to label racism and its supporting rationale as fundamentally incompatible with what the Scriptures teach concerning human beings and their relationship with God. However, the question before us is, what are the scriptural principles that lead us to make this judgment? It is to the theological issues raised by racism that we now turn, and we do so in light of what we have learned from the Scriptures to confess concerning the God who has created, redeemed, and sanctified us.

### **A. God Is the Creator of All Human Beings**

Standing in the middle of the Areopagus in Athens 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). The apostle here proclaims that God created out of one man all members of the human family, established their allotted place in human history, and desires that they all seek him (Acts 17:27). Against all claims to racial or ethnic superiority, the apostle unambiguously affirms the unity of humankind. Without differentiation, all of humanity owes its origin to God’s creative act. Fitting also on earth, therefore, is the celestial hymn of the twenty-four elders in Revelation 4: “Worthy art thou, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power for thou didst create all things, and by thy will they existed and were created” (Rev. 4:11).

Racist lines of demarcation between human beings declaring some to be 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.

### **B. The Dignity of All Human Beings Is Given by God, Not Achieved or Earned**

Our God, “who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread forth the earth and what comes from it,” is the God “who gives breath to the people upon it and spirit to those who walk in it” (Is. 42:5). Not even the tragic fall of humankind into sin has erased the central

biblical affirmation, so eloquently summarized by Luther, that “God has made me and all creatures.” “To the Lord your God,” Moses wrote to those upon whom the Lord has set his heart in love, “belong heaven and the heavens of heavens, the earth with all that is in it” (Deut. 10:14). In repentance the people need to remember that “the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and terrible God, *who is not partial* and takes no bribe” (Deut. 10:17; emphasis added). *No* human being, however distinguishable from a human standpoint, is any less fully God’s creature—created in his image (Gen. 1:26-27; 9:6; cf. Acts 17:25, 26).

No less central to the biblical doctrine of creation is the truth 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. Instead, it is bestowed in love by him who, the psalmist thankfully acknowledges, “didst form my inward parts” and who “knit me together in my mother’s womb” (Ps. 139:13). Contemplating the miracle of his own creation, the psalmist is moved to declare, “I praise thee for thou art fearful and wonderful. Wonderful are thy works!” (Ps. 139:14).

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 a statement about the comparative worth of a person as a human being. Ironically, the twisted logic of racism makes use of biology to wrest from God the means by which he continues his creative work.

### **C. God Created All Human Beings to Honor and Serve Him Alone**

When God created Adam, he made a creature who would live in a unique relationship with himself (Gen. 1:26-28; 2:15-17). Unlike the rest of all creation, Adam and Eve were created to worship and serve God in a most personal, intimate way. To be sure, to live *under* their Creator in obedience to the Word, and in utter dependence upon him, meant at the same time that they were to live *over* the rest of creation. But Adam and Eve were not autonomous beings. They were to rule over creation in God’s behalf but with accountability to him (Gen. 1:26, 28). And they were to place their trust in God alone and to serve him alone (Deut. 10:12, 20).

When Adam and Eve disobeyed God in the garden they succumbed to the temptation to be “like God” (Gen. 3:5), God’s rival. This is the sin of pride: the deification of self and the rejection of one’s relationship to God as creature to Creator. In their solidarity with Adam, all who are born into the human family joined in Adam’s sin (Rom. 5:12). The grave consequence of humankind’s rebellion against God is that Adam’s progeny worship and serve “the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed for ever! Amen” (Rom. 1:25). The effects of this root sin of idolatry are tragic also for the relationship of human beings to one another. Indeed, “Idolatry opens the floodgates for vices which destroy society and turn creation back into terrible chaos. In this way the curse of God’s wrath accomplishes its purpose.”<sup>76</sup>

“That to which your heart clings and entrusts itself is, I say, really your God,” Martin Luther wrote in the Large Catechism on the First Commandment, “You shall have no other gods.”<sup>77</sup> By definition, 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

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<sup>76</sup> Ernst Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans*, trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1980), 49.

<sup>77</sup> LC I, 3.

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.”

#### **D. 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 “descended from David according to the flesh and designated Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead” (Rom. 1:3). 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 3:23-38).<sup>78</sup>

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. As a human, Jesus descended from Adam, whom God created (Luke 3:38), and whom all human beings have as progenitor. To deny the full humanity of any fellow human being is at the same time to compromise the apostolic truth that in Christ “the whole fullness of deity dwells *bodily*” (σωματι κω~s, Col. 2:9), that is, that he truly “was made man” (Nicene Creed).

Christians of differing national or ethnic origins must also be wary of the temptation to claim Christ as *exclusively* their own, as if to say that their view of him most closely approximates the biblical portrayal of him.<sup>79</sup>

#### **E. God Sent His Son Jesus Christ to Be the Savior of All Human Beings, in Whatever Nation or Culture They May Be Found**

God our Savior, St. Paul wrote to Timothy, “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. 2:3-6). “In Christ,” he writes also to the Corinthians, “God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their

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<sup>78</sup> Matthew’s genealogy not only traces Jesus’ descent from Abraham, placing him in the mainstream of Israel’s history, but also makes it clear that his was a “mixed bloodline.” His ancestors include (1) Tamar or Tamar (a Canaanite, a non-Israelite who engaged in prostitution and bore Perez, and an ancestor of David); (2) Rachab or Rahab (also a Canaanite, a non-Israelite, a prostitute, the mother of Boaz, Ruth’s husband); (3) Ruth (a Moabitess, a non-Israelite, descended from Lot’s incest with his daughters, and the grandmother of David); and (4) Bathsheba (a Hittite, a non-Israelite, who bore David’s progeny). According to the tenets of racist ideology, Jesus was a mixed-race Savior (cf. Ray Bakke, *The Urban Christian* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987], 75-76). Luke’s genealogy traces Jesus all the way back to Adam, and through Adam to God. Its intent is to signal what the rest of Luke’s gospel makes clear, viz., that Jesus is the Savior of all.

<sup>79</sup> Alan Davies writes in this connection, “In itself, there is nothing wrong in the attempt of Christians with different national and racial origins to claim Christ as their own; indeed, unless the Christian saviour belongs in some sense to all Christians and all types of Christians, Christian universalism is devoid of real significance. It is legitimate, therefore, for national churches to portray Christ as German, Latin, Anglo-Saxon, Afrikaner, or black—not to mention a score of other possibilities—*provided* both that he is not confined exclusively to any of these national and racial classifications and that the Jesus of history—a Jew of the first century—is not obscured behind the Christ of faith, so that his initial and essential Jewishness is downgraded or abolished” (Davies, *Infected Christianity*, 117).

trespasses against them” (2 Cor. 5:19). In obedience to Christ’s command to make disciples of all nations, the apostles proclaimed the Gospel to Jew and Gentile alike. Peter learned from the vision in Simon’s house, with specific reference to the Gentile Cornelius in Caesarea, that “God shows no partiality, but in every nation any one who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him” (Acts 10:34-35). In response to the questions “Is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also?” St. Paul does not hesitate to answer, “Yes, of the Gentiles also, since God is one” (Rom. 3:29-30). Again and again in the apocalyptic vision of St. John, we read that God in Jesus Christ has completed his work of salvation for and in all kindreds, peoples, languages, and nations (Rev. 5:8-9; 7:9, 10; 11:9; 13:7; 14:6; 17:15).

Racism as “the ideological doctrine of a providential selection and election of human races”<sup>80</sup> stands in diametrical opposition to the Gospel of God revealed in the Scriptures, according to which God has acquired the forgiveness of sins for *all* people by declaring that the world for Christ’s sake has been forgiven. God’s love for the world is indiscriminate and embraces people of all cultures. In its more subtle form, racism may also manifest itself in the limited focus of Christian mission activities, undermining Christ’s mandate to “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matt. 28:19). Biological homogeneity and/or cultural uniformity—often more implicitly than explicitly—become a justifying rationale for not proclaiming the Gospel to certain individuals and groups, or at least not proclaiming it with equal fervor. The scope of God’s redemptive work is narrowed, a stumbling block is placed in the way of its free and full proclamation, and the work of God’s Spirit is quenched (1 Thess. 5:19).

## **F. Jesus Christ Has Removed All Barriers That Stand between Human Beings, Making Peace through His Cross**

As the Gospel was being proclaimed in the ancient world, the apostles had to deal with the historic wall of separation that existed between Jews and Gentiles.<sup>81</sup> The apostles’ solution to this problem was not the removal of differences, but the proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ who through his work on the cross made Christians one. St. Paul wrote to the Ephesians, “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). Those who were once segregated in hostility, have now been united with one another and with God. They are bound together in a baptismal unity that transcends all differences of race, social status, or sex that divide human beings.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Rudolf Siebert, “The Phenomenon of Racism” in *The Church and Racism*, 4.

<sup>81</sup> See Markus Barth, *Ephesians*, in *The Anchor Bible* series (New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1974), 1:291.

<sup>82</sup> In his classic work on Ephesians, John Mackay wrote that Ephesians “presents the basic structure which humanity needs for true expression of the communal life. That structure is the fellowship of believers in Jesus Christ, which constitutes the essence of what we call the Christian Church. The Church is the universal community designed by God to transcend and embrace all differences of race, station, and sex that divide mankind. It constitutes the pattern for all true community, so that the surest way to achieve human harmony in the secular order is to extend the bounds of the Christian community throughout the world. For it is the measure in which men are reconciled to God, practice the worship of God, seek the Kingdom of God, and live with one another in peace as Christian

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). Racism in the church, in its essence, is a blatant denial of the unity of the body of Christ, into which all who have been baptized into his name have been incorporated: “For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit” (1 Cor. 12:13). “There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all” (Eph. 4:4-6). This unity, it should be emphasized, *transcends* differences among human beings. It does not call for the elimination of those differences. Moreover, when those who participate in the Lord’s Supper do so unrepentant of the sin of racism, they “despise the church of God” (1 Cor. 11:22). “The cup of blessing which we bless,” asks Paul, “is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread” (1 Cor. 10:16-17). What better way to receive forgiveness also for the sin of racism than through this sacrament which unites us with our brothers and sisters in Christ, even those whom we may be tempted to “despise” as inferior.

### **G. 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,” which is to characterize the life of those who have been 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 wills that those whom he has loved also become the bearers of his love to his whole creation. He requires his disciples to love all those whom they encounter in life. A distinguishing feature of the love he creates by his Spirit in the lives of his people is its nondiscriminatory 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. “If anyone says, ‘I love God,’” says John, “and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from him, that he who loves God should love his brother also” (1 John 4:20-21).

Employing a logic similar to that countered by James in the second chapter of his letter, some may argue that the command to love one’s neighbor carries with it the freedom to love one particular neighbor of one’s choice. The apostle’s response to this way of reasoning is that such self-indulgent use of the divine mandate to love one’s neighbor is sin. The law of love cannot be made an excuse for respect of persons. That is to say, keeping one precept of the law does not give one license to disobey the full requirements of the law of love. James says, “If you really fulfill the royal law, according to the scripture, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself,’ you do well. But if you show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors” (James 2:8-9).

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brethren, that society shall be influenced, directly and indirectly, to seek peace and concord” (*God’s Order* [New York: The MacMillan Company, 1953], 22).

Love for our neighbor requires that we defend him or her against wrong (Prov. 31:8-9) and pursue those things that are just and fair. As the Decalogue had already made clear, and as the Old Testament prophets unceasingly reminded the people, the worship of the Lord (Yahweh) entails a respect for the rights of others (e.g., Ex. 20:12-17; Amos 5:14-15; Is. 1:10-17; Micah 6:6-8). Such regard for the rights of the neighbor is reflected in Old Testament legislation designed to help especially those who are in danger of being victims of injustice and oppression, e.g., widows, orphans, and foreigners (Ex. 22:21-24; Lev. 19:33-34; Deut. 24:14-15; Is. 10:1-4; Jer. 7:5-7; 9:23-24; 21:12; 22:3; Zech. 7:9-10). God is a God of justice, and it is not his will that human beings exploit others. The welfare of one's neighbor also requires that in the civil realm Christian citizens work to extend justice to others by advocating the passage of just laws, the rescinding of unjust laws, and the responsible enforcement of all law (Rom. 13:1-7; 1 Peter 2:13-17).

Racism's insensitivity to the plight of those suffering wrong, its readiness to relieve itself from the responsibility to help those in need, and its callousness in the face of the biblical mandate to "honor all men" (1 Peter 2:17) must be resolutely and vigorously resisted if the church is to be faithful to the apostolic command to "do good to all men, and especially to those who are of the household of faith" (Gal. 6:10). Such resistance is possible only through the power of God's Spirit working through Word and sacraments, leading sinners to true repentance and to faith in Christ's forgiveness, and filling them with the all-embracing love of their Savior.

## **H. 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**

No one particular group is the best or more effective medium through which God can communicate to his creatures. God is not bound by, nor is he 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 present "heard them speaking in his own language" (Acts 2:5-6).

At the same time, the Spirit of God moves those who believe the Gospel to worship their Lord in culturally divergent forms.<sup>83</sup> Touching on this point is the discourse of Jesus with the

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<sup>83</sup> Cultural imperialism is the attempt to suggest that a particular cultural way of worshipping is the only correct, appropriate, or acceptable way of worshipping God. Luther proceeded differently. His insistence that the people have the Gospel and worship in their own cultural idiom (e.g., his translation of the Bible into German, his introduction of ethnic hymnology, etc.) were important ingredients of the reformation of the church. The Lutheran confessional writings speak to this issue with unmistakable clarity. The Apology of the Augsburg Confession states that when the Creed speaks of "the church catholic" it does so to make it clear that the church is "made up of men scattered throughout the world who agree on the Gospel and have the same Christ, the same Holy Spirit, and the same sacraments, whether they have the same human traditions or not" (Ap VII and VIII, 10). The church is properly defined to avoid the mistaken impression that it is "only the outward observance of certain devotions and rituals" (*gewisse Ordnung etlicher Cerimonien und Gottesdiensts*; 13).

"For the true unity of the church it is enough to agree concerning the teaching of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments. It is not necessary that human traditions and rites and ceremonies, instituted by men, should be alike everywhere" (30). The unity of the church is not harmed by "differences in rites instituted by men" (33). The apostles themselves "adapted in modified form to the Gospel history" "certain Old Testament

Samaritan woman at the well. The issue raised by the woman of Samaria was whether proper worship takes place on Mt. Gerizim or in Jerusalem. To this Jesus responded, “neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father . . . true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for such the Father seeks to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth” (John 4:21-24). In the new covenant, true worship is not tied to the place or cultic tradition of either Gerizim or Jerusalem, however important such tradition may be for each. True worship takes place where, through the Gospel and sacraments (“as through means”), God “gives the Holy Spirit, who works faith, when and where he pleases, in those who hear the Gospel” (AC V, 2).

The Lutheran confessors emphasized that “it is sufficient for the true unity of the Christian church that the Gospel be preached in conformity with a pure understanding of it and that the sacraments be administered in accordance with the divine Word. It is not necessary for the true unity of the Christian church that ceremonies, instituted by men, should be observed uniformly in all places” (AC VII, 2-3). The Scriptures permit us readily to affirm particular cultural and ethnic expressions in Christian worship. Deeply problematic, however, is any claim that one particular culturally shaped response to God’s goodness and grace is in and of itself superior to others.<sup>84</sup> God’s work through the means of grace is effective in or through many and varied cultural forms, through which God is properly worshipped.

## **I. 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 living and abiding Word of God, 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). As the new birth in which God binds us to Christ’s death to sin and imparts to us the new life of the Holy Spirit, Holy Baptism places us into the way of Jesus, whose free love was for all persons and toward all persons. Baptism, therefore, frees us from all sins that characterize life apart from God. Just as speaking evil of others, quarreling, malice, and hatred toward others was

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customs” (40). Even accommodation to mistaken traditions regarding the time of the celebration of Easter is permissible without burden of conscience (see citation from Epiphanius, 42).

<sup>84</sup> Cultural racism raises an issue of particular importance to the church. When the Synodical Conference first began working with African Americans in 1877, it found that in every city it entered (e.g., Little Rock, Arkansas, and Atlanta, Georgia), by its own account, the majority of the black population claimed membership in a Christian church. In 1891 when the Missouri Synod was invited into what became its largest African American mission field (the Eastern Field), that invitation came from African American Lutherans (the Evangelical Lutheran Alpha Synod of Freedmen in America), that is, people who held the Christian faith. In 1916 when Rosa Young invited the Missouri Synod into what became its rapidly growing African American mission field (the Alabama Field), that invitation came from a highly committed Christian.

The history of this period reveals that our Missouri Synod fathers did not recognize fully that one of the more important integrating elements of African American life and culture is Christianity. From the beginning African Americans were labeled “heathens” and attempts were made not only to impart a theology, but to impose a particular cultural expression of Christianity on black converts as though the Synod possessed the only acceptable way of expressing the faith of Jesus Christ. One could not be genuinely Christian, as some in Missouri saw it, if one did not sing, for example, German chorales. The new converts were forbidden to sing spirituals simply because they were spirituals. The new African American Lutheran congregations had to be organized the same way German Lutheran congregations were organized. These were all imposed on African Americans when they came into the Lutheran Church on the grounds that they were important and necessary conditions of being Lutheran.

far from the mind of Christ, so too the minds of those regenerated in Baptism are to be free from such evils. Likewise, as the body of Christ broken for the forgiveness of sin and as the blood of Christ shed for the many, 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.

The struggle against the sin of racism and the sins it entails is a continual striving to be conformed to the Lord Jesus in a spiritual war that seriously threatens to erode faith and to disparage the witness of the church to the Gospel of her Lord. Therefore, 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.

Significantly, the "catalogs" of vices that we find in the New Testament list especially those sins that are destructive of human relationships (see e.g., Rom. 1:28-32; Gal. 5:19-21; Col. 3:5-9). While not mentioned expressly as such, racism belongs in this category of the sins of the flesh, for it is in its very nature divisive of human associations not only in the fellowship of Christ's church but in society in general. Against this sin also, then, St. Paul exhorts us to "stand therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the equipment of the gospel of peace . . . And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (Eph. 6:14-17).

### **III. Combatting Racism in the Church**

In the first two sections of this study, we have discussed what racism is and why the church needs to address the problem at this time. We have also focused on the scriptural truths that speak to the issue. In this last section, we shall do two things: (1) describe some of the barriers Christians face and will have to overcome as they confront racism in their midst; (2) outline some guiding principles for combatting and overcoming racism in the church and in the community.

#### **A. Barriers to Overcoming Racism**

As we Christians—who are at the same time saints and sinners—confront the sin of racism, we must first of all realize that we will have to overcome a host of obstacles that are constantly being erected by the world, the devil, and our own sinful flesh. A first and crucial step in tackling the problem of racism is the identification and removal of these barriers. We call attention, therefore, to the following hindrances to overcoming racism, recognizing that this is, of course, not an exhaustive list.

##### **1. Denial**

By "denial" we mean the refusal to confront a problem by denying that it exists. No matter what form it takes, denial is an age-old strategy that Satan uses to blind people to the reality of their sins and thereby to hold them in bondage. Since denial involves a refusal to recognize, confess, and repent of sin, it is a matter of grave spiritual consequence. When we deny sin, God cannot enter with his forgiveness and with his healing power. We, not someone else, then become the victims of our own self-deception (1 John 1:8). However, with the exhortation to confess sin comes the promise that our heavenly Father "will forgive our sins and cleanse us

from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). As often as we confess our sins, we claim God’s promise to wash us and make us as “white as snow” (Is. 1:18) in the life-giving waters of our Baptism. For this reason we also approach Christ’s table frequently and eagerly to receive his true body and blood, “Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins,” so that we might be strengthened in faith and holy living.

## **2. Untenable Assumptions**

The first untenable assumption that frustrates attempts to deal with racism in the church is what some have called the “good will assumption.” This is the popular belief that “all Christians” (i.e., people of “good will”) will automatically recognize that racism is morally wrong and that they will therefore spontaneously do the right thing. Thus, the church (so the thinking goes) need not concern itself with this issue. However, the biblical depiction of the total depravity of sinful human beings and of the effects of sin in our life makes it clear that members of the church also can be guilty of something as deplorable as racism (both by sins of commission and of omission). Only the continuous application of Law and Gospel will diagnose and cure the problem.

Related to this is a second assumption that the preaching of Law and Gospel merely in some abstract, detached sense—without careful and specific applications of the way the sin of racism actually works in the lives of people—will root out the sin. Lutheran pastors may well be surprised to discover that their devout members are carrying burdens of racism that they as pastors have been addressing for years. Pastors may often be too shy about speaking concretely to what racism is and what it does to people. Therefore, people may hear but not really understand how God’s Law—as well as his Gospel—applies to them personally and specifically when it comes to the sin of racism.

A third assumption that frequently impedes efforts to identify and remove racism is the notion that solving this problem is a short-term process. If our description of the nature of racism in its many and changing forms has merit, then we can be certain that there is no “quick fix” to this problem. Improvement will come about only by repeated exposure to its sinfulness and calls to repentance, followed by Christ’s sure and clear word of absolution, which alone has the power to change hearts and lives. Careful instruction will also need to be given concerning how such racist attitudes are passed along to the next generation, and how patterns of behavior at church, at home, at work, and at school (i.e., in all life situations) may be broken. In the early Christian church, it took a long time before the attitude of Jewish Christians toward Gentiles and patterns of interaction between these two groups began to change (Gal. 2:14). But by God’s grace and the Spirit’s power, change did—and still can—occur.

A fourth untenable assumption is that racism in the church will be solved by “education,” that is, merely by imparting the “right facts” to people. As necessary and helpful as this approach is, it will not eradicate racism by itself. The sin of racism is not merely a matter of the intellect. The intellect itself is blinded by the power of sin and is set in opposition to God’s will concerning attitudes toward others (Eph. 4:18-19). To be sure, the intense spiritual struggle involved in combatting racism requires laying out and applying the facts. But these facts and their application do not themselves change the attitudes and behavior of people. What is required, once again, is the wise, discerning application of the living and active Word of God, which is “sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart” (Heb. 4:12). Once God’s

Law has done its work, our hearts can then be “sprinkled clean from an evil conscience” (Heb. 10:22) by the Gospel and our new nature “renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator” (Col. 3:10).

### **3. Paternalism**

“Paternalism” is the claim or attempt to supply the needs or to regulate the lives of others, like a father does in the case of his children. Paternalism grows out of attitudes of self-importance and is frequently rationalized as an expression of Christian concern. To the detriment of healthy intergroup relations, however, paternalism tends to trivialize minority group persons, portraying them as incapable of caring for themselves or functioning responsibly. The opposite of paternalism is the assumption by members of a minority group that *all* members of the majority group will always patronize them and subject them to paternalistic patterns of behavior. Paternalism and its opposite are often built into the ethos and language of both majority and minority group cultures. Only when dealt with honestly and openly in the common recognition that there is but “one God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all” (Eph. 4:6), can such mindsets be changed and this barrier overcome.

### **4. Different Meanings and Frames of Reference**

When majority and minority groups come together to discuss the issue of racism, they frequently use the same terms, but assign completely different meanings to them (e.g., “qualified,” “minority”). Unless carefully planned and executed, such discussions only serve to confirm preexisting suspicions and tensions. This barrier, however, can be transformed into an avenue to further understanding. Since different meanings given to the same terms are based on varying life experiences, and because not all groups will have the same experiences, conversation aimed at increased understanding between people in this area can do much to remove the walls that exist. It is also important that when Christians work together to resolve these differences they be careful to avoid giving offense by their imprecise speech, and that they be careful not to take offense where none is intended (Rom. 12:14, 17; 14:5, 13).

### **5. Fear of Differences**

The fear of racial and cultural differences can be strongly counterproductive in human relationships. Within the church, ethnic caucuses, for example, can be met with concern about what “they” really want, the fear that “they” will cause divisions and disunity in the church, or that “they” want to “take over” in the church.

But ethnic differences need not be divisive. It has been observed that “ethnicity is far from being a divisive force in society. It can be viewed as a constructive (if not) . . . an inevitable one.” While it is true that “diversity may lead to misery in the world,” it is also true that without the ability to find a place for themselves in the midst of diversity, people “may not be able to cope with the world at all.”<sup>85</sup> Christians above all are in a position to recognize that “the body

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<sup>85</sup> Andrew Greeley, quoted by Edwin G. Clausen and Jack Bermingham, in *Pluralism, Racism, and Public Policy—The Search for Equality* (Boston: G. K. Hall & Co., 1981), 228-29.

does not consist of one member but of many,” and that “if one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together” (1 Cor. 12:14, 26).

## **6. Fear of Change**

The dismantling of racism will necessarily bring marked changes in attitudes, actions, relationships, and structures. However, many people feel threatened by the prospect of change of any kind. The fear of such change may immobilize some and lead others to fight desperately, perhaps even irrationally, to maintain the status quo. The church must constantly work to assist its members in evaluating and accepting change properly, not on the basis of personal “likes” and “dislikes,” but according to God’s will and in keeping with his mission that the church faithfully proclaim the Gospel of his Son to all people. Making everything work *for* this mission, and not against it, is a compelling reason for change. And, we keep in mind that the Gospel we proclaim to others is the same Gospel we claim for ourselves—the good news that saves us, sets us free, and strengthens us for service to Christ.

### **B. Guiding Principles**

The following principles are commended to the church for guidance in responding to the evils of racism. They are purposely designed to be general in nature. This is because we do not believe that it is possible to anticipate specifically what actions might result from the application of these principles to the various causes and consequences of racism that presently confront the church and hinder the full proclamation of the Gospel. As we reflect on these principles we need to emphasize once again that it is this Gospel alone, not our human efforts, that provides us as Christians with the power to deal with racism.

#### ***1. The unity of the body of Christ is to be reflected in the church’s structure, life, and work.***

On the night before his crucifixion, Jesus prayed for his disciples “that they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that thou hast sent me” (John 17:21). St. Paul wrote, “For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit” (1 Cor. 12:12-13).

The implication of this principle, based on Scripture passages such as those cited above, is unmistakably clear: the unity of the church transcends every race and culture and is to be manifested in the full acceptance and inclusion of all peoples. There is no “Anglo-Caucasian,” no “African-American,” no “Hispanic-American,” no “Vietnamese-American,” or other “hyphenated” citizen in the sight of God, as if to imply that some are more worthy than others to join the company of those who call on his name. We must quickly add that to affirm a particular race and culture does not imply separatism. Rather, such affirmation is a way of identifying those persons whom the Lord has given to his church, together with their special gifts, for the benefit of all.

**2. *The Scriptures require that the church confront moral evil in its midst, including the sin of racism.***

Reminding the Ephesian Christians to “take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them,” St. Paul continues by exhorting them to “look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, making the most of the time, because the days are evil. Therefore, do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is” (Eph. 5:11, 15-17). Racism must be regarded among the “works of darkness” that produce nothing of any value to anyone. The church, aware of its history in the United States, must continually employ methods—grounded in the Word and sacraments and in the proper distinction between Law and Gospel—to expose, condemn, and remove it. Not to do so is to participate in perpetuating institutional and cultural racism and to hinder effective and God-pleasing outreach with the Gospel.

**3. *The church will commit itself to respond to racism in both word and deed by showing love and respect to all for whom Christ died.***

Honor and esteem for all people will be reflected in the church’s public witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ (1 Peter 2:17; Gal. 6:10; 2 Cor. 6:3). The community of the baptized will make it known that it seeks to be enriched by all God-pleasing differences. By accepting all people as the objects of God’s inestimable love, believers make known God’s way of countering racism. God’s love, which has equally saved, forgiven, accepted, and blessed all his children, will cause his people to commit themselves to love and to respect other human beings equally, and to do so in deeds, not only with pious-sounding resolutions and good intentions.

**4. *When a Christian congregation finds itself in a changing or changed community, it will reach out to the newcomers and genuinely welcome them to become members of the Christian family.***

One of the more obvious consequences of racism in the history of Christian churches in our country is “white Anglo-Caucasian flight” from neighborhoods and communities in ethnic transition. The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod has not been an exception. It has been a source of great sadness to witness the relocation of large urban congregations of the Synod to suburban areas, with the subsequent sale of their urban facilities to other church bodies, and often with little or no thought given to providing for witness to the new entrants to the community. And, such relocation is due to what some are even bold to say publicly without shame, “*they* are moving into our neighborhood.”

Christian congregations need to be ready to serve new entrants to their community as soon as they arrive, and not after most of the former members of the congregation have already fled. Concern ought not merely be to “save the congregation.” Survival of the congregation as an institution is not an acceptable reason for Christian outreach. The opportunity to share Christ with as many people as possible, celebrating diversity and fostering unity by the power of God’s Spirit, is the finest expression of Christian identity and purpose.

- 5. *When a Christian congregation includes new members of differing backgrounds, it will do all in its power to create a healthy climate for them in order to make them feel that they are truly welcome as members of that family.***

There is no room in the body of Christ for the establishment of a “we/they” dichotomy. Such a mindset brings to light the sad truth that if the congregation had a preference, it would never choose to have these folks, so different from the rest, in the same religious organization. Merely to tolerate anyone, however, is another expression of exclusion.

What attracts and convinces new entrants to a community is the eagerness of a Christian congregation to welcome them and to “give themselves away” to the newcomers. They are drawn to congregations that encourage them in every demonstrable way to assume all the rights and privileges of their membership and to “take over” as part of the new generation of believers. An attitude such as this will lead to the kind of harmony God wills for his church, and will keep the congregation from becoming entrapped in patterns of assimilation that promote and perpetuate racism in the church rather than remove it.

When a congregation under the guidance of the Holy Spirit genuinely welcomes new members, changes will take place. These changes will reflect the full range of cultures represented in the Christian family. Openness to change in such things as the order of worship, the hymnody, the expressions of love and friendship, as well as the recreational life of the congregation, will reveal the congregation’s eagerness to embrace all people in the love of Christ. Changes grounded in the truth of God’s Word and motivated by love for his people will enhance every aspect of the life and work of the congregation.

- 6. *In its new expression of life together, the Christian congregation will through the power of God’s Word encourage all of its members to exercise their responsibilities and prerogatives of Christian service.***

The Christian congregation will actively involve the various groupings in its midst when it comes to decision-making, service on boards and committees, preparation for ministry in the church, representation of the congregation at the district and synodical level, employment in the congregation, or any other aspect of the life and work of the congregation or church-at-large. It will operate on the basis of the insight revealed to St. Peter, “Truly I perceive that God shows no partiality” (Acts 10:34), not only in the granting of salvation but also in the full bestowal of the gifts of the Spirit (Acts 10:44-48).

- 7. *When the church decides to share the Gospel in a community which is made up of a racial or ethnic group different from the majority of the members of the church, its goal and firm commitment will be to carry out the ministry of Word and sacrament by making use of the cultural forms of that community.***

When the church decides to bring the Gospel to any community, it must “translate” the Gospel into the idiom of that community. The process of “translating” the Gospel into the idiom of the community (racial or ethnic) means articulating it in the cultural forms of that community so that the people can understand and respond to what is said. (This is sometimes referred to as “indigenization.”) This way of proceeding is very much in keeping with St. Paul’s missionary principle, “I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some” (1 Cor.

9:22). As people “hear” the truth of the Gospel in the context of their lives they are led by the Spirit of God to believe in and worship Christ.<sup>86</sup>

Indigenization occurs when the church shares the Gospel by working “inside” a particular community’s culture (e.g., using its language, art, and music). The entire lifestyle there, including the worship of the congregation, will strive to be biblically and confessionally Lutheran, while at the same time being a true expression of that group’s specific culture. These are in no way mutually exclusive.

All cultures, of course, contain structures and practices that are evil. The church must challenge all those aspects of culture that express the demonic and dehumanizing forces of evil, while affirming and celebrating the positive values of that culture.

The Lutheran reformers were classic examples of people who practiced indigenization with respect to the Gospel ministry. They did not define their task in ways that allowed for the abandonment of the historic and biblical Christian experience, or the creation of a new version of the “faith of the fathers.” On the contrary, they insisted on the primacy of Scripture and the centrality of the sacraments in the life and work of the church. They sought to unite themselves with the historic community of faith, with its creeds and confessions, and to preserve those scriptural practices and worship forms Christians had developed over the centuries. All of this was done “inside” the culture of the people they sought to serve.

***8. The church will regard those groups it hopes to serve not as “objects” of its ministry but as those whom our Lord calls to be “full partners” in the Gospel.***

All people who are baptized into the Christian faith receive their life from Christ himself. “To be baptized in God’s name is to be baptized not by men but by God himself.”<sup>87</sup> They receive this gift through the ministry of others. They have also been called to a life of service to others, since our Lord has called us all to a life of service to others (John 13:15; Phil. 2:4-11). However, great sensitivity must be exercised so that certain people and/or groups are not categorized as people to be continuously “acted upon” by others in a way that implies that they are second-class members of the kingdom of God. Similarly, when we approach members of “minority” or “majority” groups with the Gospel of Christ, we must view them as people who are being called to full participation in the life and mission of the institutional church at all levels—local, national, and international.

***9. As the church responds to the Lord’s mandate to “make disciples of all nations” in our time, it will recognize the special challenge of the core city as it confronts the problems of racism.***

In our time, the cities of the world continue to be of critical importance for God’s mission. The cities of contemporary America, in particular, are centers for the gathering of peoples from every nation. As in the ancient world, they are cultural centers where questions concerning the identity and meaning of human life are intense and receive their severest test, thus

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<sup>86</sup> Paul G. Hiebert, in his book *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1985), writes in this connection: “On the cognitive level, the people must understand the truth of the gospel. On the emotional level, they must experience the awe and mystery of God. On the evaluative level, the gospel must challenge them to respond in faith” (54).

<sup>87</sup> LC IV, 10.

making them fertile ground for new religions. Our cities, especially our inner cities, reverberate with the cry for healing and peace, needs that only the Gospel can satisfy. With its myriad challenges and unprecedented opportunities, the peoples of the city must not be abandoned by the church or deemed less worthy of its attention due to factors arising from the problem of racism.

***10. Given the complexity of life in the city and the enormity of the missionary task, pastors and congregations will work in concert with, not in opposition to, Christians of other church bodies.***

In contemporary urban centers it is in many instances not possible for individual believers or congregations to carry out their mission to proclaim the Gospel to all in isolation from the rest of the community. Pastors and their congregations should be encouraged, therefore, to discover ways to cooperate with other Christians and members of the local community in programs or projects that confront racism and other community problems—e.g., drugs, hunger, homelessness, teenage pregnancies, and gangs. Such cooperative activity has a long history in many ethnic communities and can be carried out by members of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod in ways that are fully consistent with the Synod’s traditional understanding of inter-Christian relationships.<sup>88</sup>

## **IV. Conclusion**

We in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod have before us a wonderful opportunity to commit ourselves to strive toward making racism a thing of the past, and to demonstrate before a watching world how people of all cultures and groups can become one in Christ, who has made of many one body for the edification of all. Racism is sin. To the extent that racism continues to exist within the church the world is defining the purpose of God’s creation. But those whom God has created, redeemed, and sanctified are to have fellowship with him and with each other, and to serve him and their fellow human beings. In Ephesians 2 St. Paul is unmistakably clear on this matter. In Christ God has destroyed all barriers between himself and human beings, as well as all barriers between human beings. As the apostle puts it, Jesus Christ came “that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace”(2:15).

If the church is to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ effectively to a world that is becoming smaller and smaller and at the same time being violently torn apart by racial and ethnic differences, the church itself will do well to pay heed to the counsel of St. James, who said, “But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves,” and “show me your faith apart from your works, and I by my works will show you my faith” (James 1:22; 2:18).<sup>89</sup>

We now stand at the threshold of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It is time to let our light shine and, through the proclamation of the glorious Gospel of our blessed God, to lead the way to the inclusion of all our sisters and brothers in Christ in the full exercise of the rights and privileges

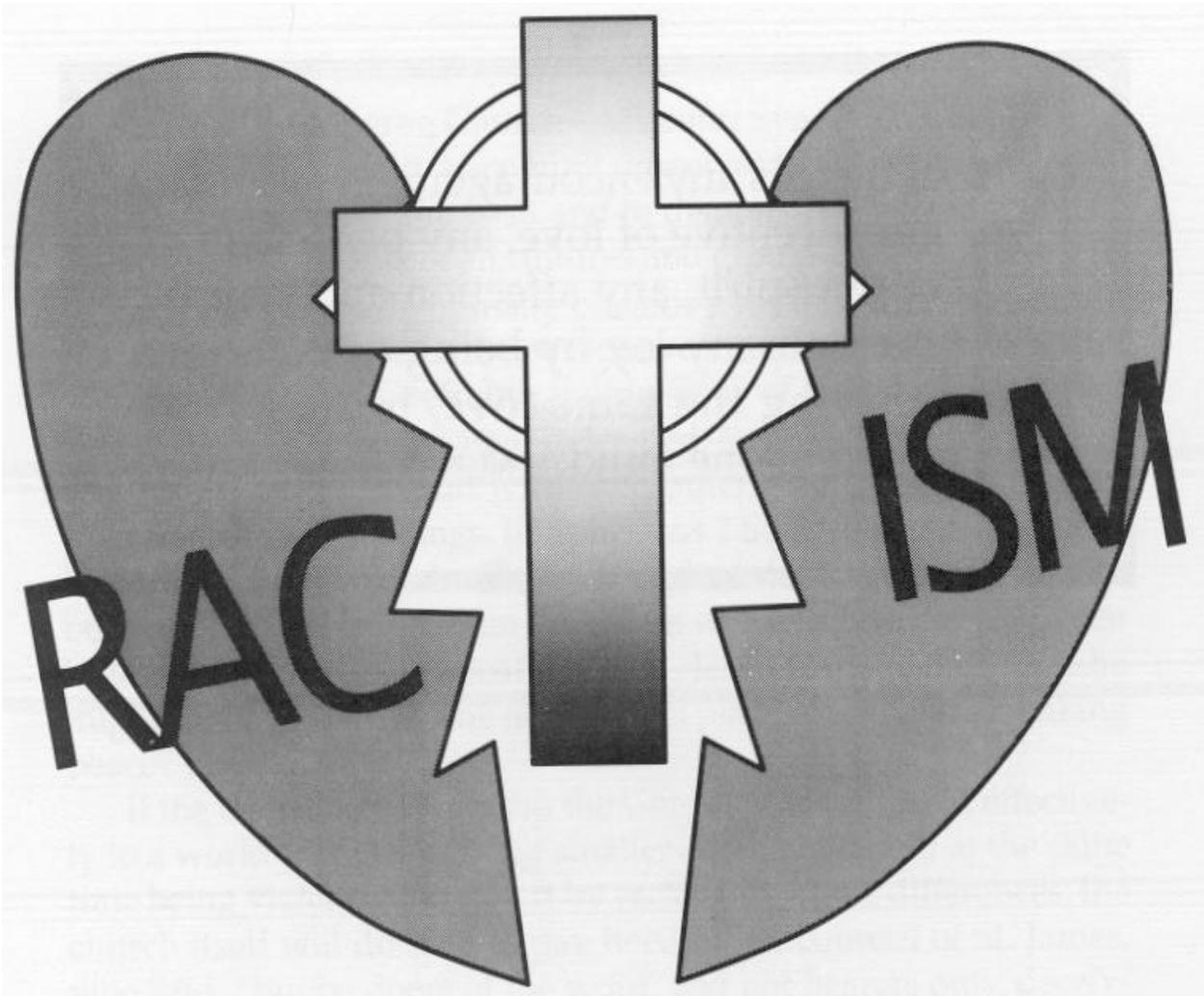
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<sup>88</sup> The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod historically has made a distinction between *communio in sacris* (fellowship in sacred things) and *cooperatio in externis* (cooperation in externals). The former relationship refers to fellowship with other Christians at the altar or in the preaching of the Word of God. The latter has to do with joint efforts in social action and welfare and in other areas not directly affecting Word and sacrament (See e.g., 1974 CTCR Report on *A Lutheran Stance toward Ecumenism*, 16, and 1967 *Theology of Fellowship*, 18).

<sup>89</sup> As in the popular dictum, “If you gonna talk the talk then you gotta walk the walk.”

that belong to them as priests. What a beautiful opportunity we have to let God's will be done on earth as it most certainly is done in heaven, where there is not now, nor will there ever be, any partiality shown to anyone. We must all continually seek God's help in helping each other in our Synod to resist the temptations toward racist thinking and to eradicate its poisonous effects in our lives, that we may walk together in true unity of mind, heart, and purpose, even as we are one in Christ.

**S**o if there is any encouragement in Christ, any incentive of love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Phil. 2:1-2



# Bible Study\*

## Chapter 1: Coming to Terms with Terms

Pete, Bill, and Jennifer had spent three days attending a sales conference at a hotel in a nearby city. It had been a good conference, and on the drive home they were discussing their impressions of the sessions they had attended. Then there was a pause in the conversation as each of them absentmindedly watched the landscape float by the window of the car. Finally, Jennifer broke the silence.

“Something just occurred to me. Remember all of the people at the hotel—not those behind the desk, but the others—the ones who served the banquet, those who carried our luggage, and all of the ones who cleaned our rooms each day?”

Bill responded, “I don’t remember much about them except that they were all friendly and helpful.”

“Think about what they looked like.”

“I think I know what you’re getting at, Jennifer,” said Pete. “Remember, Bill? All of those people were Hispanic. In fact, a number of maids spoke Spanish to each other.”

“You’re right! When I asked one of them a question, I could barely understand her reply. You’d think that if they want to live in this country they’d make the effort to learn the language!”

Back at the hotel Jaime and Estrella were eating lunch in a small room off the lobby. Jaime was speaking.

“Someday I want to be as rich as white people are. They come to this hotel, pull out a credit card, and take any room they want and eat whatever they care to.”

“Me too,” said Estrella. “And then I can be just as rude as white people are. Oh, some of them are all right. But one white man asked me a question, and when I tried to answer in English, he looked at me as though I were illiterate. I’ll bet he doesn’t know Spanish, and if he did, I wonder if any of us could understand *him!*”

The conversations recorded above demonstrate a lack of meaningful interaction between two groups of people. They are separated by economics, culture, and language, which demonstrates the fact that people can be different from each other and often are. However, when one takes the differences one step further and presumes that members of a particular group or race are inferior to others in social worth or human value because of those differences, that is racism (p. 9-10 of Study).

Racism shows itself in many ways, some of them subtle and some of them blatant. When most Americans think of racism, they undoubtedly think of that particular form of racism that played such a prominent role in our country’s history, the subjugation of black people through institutionalized slavery in the early history of the United States. This raises questions about the relationship between racism and slavery. Racism as such is not discussed in connection with

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\* NOTE TO THE LEADER: This Bible Study follows the outline of the proceeding document and is divided into four sections. The leader will note that each chapter contains more material than can likely be covered in one session and that more than four sessions may be required to complete the entire Study. Since the Commission has prepared this Bible Study as a guide for exploring what the Scripture teaches concerning the problem of racism, congregations may also wish to make use of it in developing their own studies which take into account their particular situation.

slavery in the Scriptures. Nevertheless, both the Old and New Testaments present us with a considerable amount of information on the practice of slavery. On the basis of texts such as the following, what do we learn about it (Ex. 21:2-3; 22:3; Lev. 25:39-43; Num. 31:7-11; Deut. 5:15; 15:12-18; 2 Chron. 28:8-15)? What is specifically prohibited in Ex. 21:16 and Deut. 24:7? How would you describe the attitude of Jesus and the apostles toward slavery (see, for example, Matt. 18:22-25; Eph. 6:5-9; Col. 3:22-4:1; 1 Tim. 6:1-2; Titus 2:9-10; 1 Peter 2:18-25)?

We recall that an official resolution of the South Carolina Lutheran Synod in 1835 rationalized its acceptance of the slavery of black people in America on the basis of the Bible and thus condemned abolitionists as being in disagreement with “our blessed Savior, who commanded servants to be obedient to their masters, and the example of the holy Apostle Paul, who restored to his lawful owner a runaway slave” (p. 19-20). It is true that St. Paul required slaves to be obedient to their masters “as to Christ.” See, for example, St. Paul’s words in Eph. 6:5-8.

In light of the above, how would you answer the following questions:

1. What is the relationship, if any, between racism and slavery?
2. How was slavery in America different from slavery in the Old and New Testaments? How was it the same?
3. What element is specifically missing that distinguishes the American institution of slavery from what we see in the Bible?
4. Do you think this distinction was properly understood by those Lutherans who attempted to defend American slavery? In the two columns below list the attitudes that some Lutherans expressed concerning slavery:

**Pro**

**Con**

Which of the above-mentioned New Testament passages might also have been used in support of these two positions?

5. What relevance, if any, do St. Paul’s words about slavery have for the particular form of slavery that occurred in this country—slavery that was rationalized on the basis of racist ideology and racial prejudice?
6. What new “dignity” do Paul’s words give to the old indignities of slavery?
7. In Titus 2:10, what is a primary reason for being an obedient slave?
8. Note also the obligations of *masters* when they claim Christ as their Master (Eph. 6:9 and Col. 4:1).

The South Carolina Synod resolution refers also to Paul's example of restoring "to his lawful owner a runaway slave" as further justification of opposition to the abolition of slavery. The reference is to Onesimus, a slave of Philemon, a prominent and devout Christian slave owner. Onesimus apparently fled from his master, taking some of Philemon's possessions before running off (Philemon 18), and ended up in Rome where he sought out Paul. There Onesimus ministered to Paul during Paul's imprisonment. Notice that while Paul's letter to Philemon explains the situation and is intended to accompany Onesimus when he returns to his master, Paul makes a strong case for a change in the relationship between master and slave in verses 14-16. In your own words describe this new reality.

1. What is at the heart of Paul's appeal in these verses?
2. On what basis did Paul want Philemon to respond?
3. If Philemon thought deeply about this new relationship with a person who is "more than a slave," for he is now "a beloved brother," what must his conclusion be?
4. Discuss what you think the conversation between Philemon and Onesimus would probably have been after Philemon had read Paul's letter.

On page 16 of the Study it is asserted that "As an overt belief system racism is now publicly spurned and commonly declared abhorrent in our society. But racism as an ideological reality is, unfortunately, not dead." Three levels of racism are described: the individual level, the institutional level, and the cultural level.

1. After reviewing page 22 ("The Changing Reality of Racism"), what examples of *individual* racism did you discover in the Study and in your own experience?
2. After reviewing "Integration and Black Ministry" and "Integration and Assimilation" (pages 23-25), what examples of possible *institutional* racism did you discover from the Study and from your own experience?
3. If a person from a racial group different from your own was invited and encouraged to join your congregation, what would that person need to "give up" and "take on," if anything, to be a full member? If you were that person, what would you be willing to "give up" and "take on" in order to belong to a congregation composed of a majority of people of another racial composition from your own? Do you think your congregation would, in this circumstance, practice "integration" or "assimilation"?
4. The Study (p. 17) identifies *cultural* racism and states: "This is the view that all cultures are inferior to one's own culture, and that those inferior cultures consistently produce inferior results." Discuss ways in which *your* cultural attitudes may cause you to consider other cultures to be inferior. Is it possible that, based on one's Christian beliefs, some cultural assumptions and practices are *not* acceptable? If so, give examples. What does this not say about the *people* in that culture? Is it possible that, based on one's Christian beliefs, some

assumptions and practices in *your* culture are not acceptable? If so, give examples. What does this say about the people in your culture?

### **For Further Discussion:**

What does Gen. 3:1-3 have to say to the question “What does it mean to be human?” (see Study, pp. 28-30). Who do all human beings have as common ancestors (Gen. 3:20; 9:18-19)? How does this help answer the questions, “Who am I?” and “What does it mean to be human?” (see Study, p. 27). What bearing does our use of the Gospel and sacraments have on these questions (Gal. 3:26-27; Acts 2:38; Matt. 26:28; Rom. 1:16)?

## **Chapter 2: The Bible and Our Origins**

Much has been written, especially by African Americans, concerning the self-hatred they have felt toward themselves as individuals and as a race. To be black meant being ashamed of one’s color, hair, facial characteristics, culture, and background. Racism, of course, thrives on encouraging this self-hatred and shame.

However, the Bible tells us that Christians have received a new way of looking at themselves and others (2 Cor. 5:16-17, Col. 3:11). Indeed, the Scriptures insist that our relationship to God has much to say about our relationship to other human beings (1 John 4:11). Also, our relationship to others has much to say about our relationship to God (1 John 4:20).

The Study (p. 28) refers to a time when St. Paul was in Athens, a center of Greek culture and learning, and was given the opportunity to present “this new teaching,” which the Athenians thought consisted of “strange things to our ears.” (See Acts 17:16-24.)

1. Referring to the numerous statues erected for the worship of numerous gods, what was especially noted by Paul (v. 22)?
2. How did Paul begin his argument concerning the one and only God? To what god did he especially refer? Why?
3. Although not identified by Paul, who is the “one” from whom the Lord “made . . . every nation of men” (Acts 17:26a)? What did God especially “determine” for every nation (Acts 17:26b)? What does that tell us about every nation?
4. For what reason, according to Paul, did God determine “living places” for humans?
5. According to this account, if Paul were addressing the subject of “Racism and the Church,” what do you think would motivate his approach? What do you think should motivate Christians as they study and discuss this subject?

The Study makes the following assertion: “By definition, racism grounds the identity and security of human life in self rather than God, in creature rather than the Creator” (p. 29).

1. When one’s *identity* and *security* are rooted in one’s biological or cultural origins (or anything else), to what has that person succumbed?

2. What *do* all races share in common according to Rom. 5:12? To what does this lead according to Rom. 1:25?
3. How is racism a form of creature-worship?
4. According to John 1:14, what did the “Word” become? Both Matthew and Luke trace the human “family tree” of Jesus.

Why, according to footnote 78, are Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba important in the listing of Jesus’ ancestry? According to racist ideology, what kind of savior would Jesus be? What especially does the genealogy of Jesus imply about salvation?

5. In response to the universality of sin, the Bible declares emphatically the universal nature of grace. See 1 Tim. 2:3-6; 2 Cor. 5:19. (See also Rev. 5:8-9; 7:9-10; 13:7-8; 14:6; 15:2-4; 21:22-26.) What happened to our “identity and security” (p. 29) because of Holy Baptism? See Rom. 6:4. What kind of “new Adam” comes forth from our daily baptismal renewal in Christ? What does this say to any theories of superiority/inferiority due to genetic origin? (See also Col. 3:5-11.)
6. The Study states that “In its more subtle form, racism may also manifest itself in the limited focus of Christian mission activities” (p. 31). Discuss this statement in light of the following assertion: “In 1962 the Synod noted the ‘disturbing fact that [after nearly one hundred years] our membership gains among Negroes in the United States have been less than 17,000 when they should have been 229,000 if they had kept pace with our acquisition among the rest of the population” (p. 25).

Jesus tells us that one of the great characteristics of His disciples is love. See Jesus’ words in John 13:34-35.

1. From where do Christ’s disciples obtain this love? (See 1 John 4:7-11.)
2. According to James, what is it that love cannot do (James 2:1, 8-9)? Apply this insight to the subject of “Racism and the Church.” How may “partiality” or “favoritism” show itself today?
3. If any “partiality” is to be shown, according to Scripture, to whom should it be demonstrated? See Ex. 22:21; Deut. 24:14-22; Is. 10:1-2; Jer. 7:5-7; 9:23-24.
4. How do these passages apply in general to your congregation? How is your congregation responding to this biblical requirement to show a special kind of partiality? Are there areas where it is failing?
5. The Study states: “Racism’s insensitivity to the plight of those suffering wrong, its readiness to relieve itself from the responsibility to help those in need, and its callousness in the face of the biblical mandate to ‘honor all men’ (1 Peter 2:17) must be resolutely and vigorously resisted if the church is to be faithful to the apostolic command to ‘do good to all men, and especially to those who are of the household of faith’ (Gal. 6:10)” (p. 33). On the basis of this

Study, suggest ways that you as a Christian individual, as a Christian congregation, and as Christian citizens might respond to this challenge.

### **For Further Discussion:**

1. Read Eph. 4:1-6, Rom. 12:3-5 and 1 Cor. 12:12-27. What implications do these passages have for the way we relate to persons of different racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds and characteristics?

2. How do the following commandments apply to the issue of racism:

First (Ex. 20:2-6)

Fifth (Ex. 20:13; cf. 1 John 3:15)

Eighth (Ex. 20:16)

How does the summary of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Table of the Law (Commandments 4-10) apply? (See also Matt. 22:29.)

3. If we have sinned against our brothers and sisters in Christ by causing sinful divisions based on race, etc., what do we need to do (1 John 1:8-9)?

4. How do Baptism (Acts 2:38; Eph. 4:4-6) and the Lord's Supper (Matt. 26:26-28; 1 Cor. 10: 14-17; 11:17-34) enable us to deal with our sins and to live differently?

## **Chapter 3: Barriers to Overcome**

Judith and Amy were just finishing up their work in the kitchen in preparation for the mission festival the next day at Trinity Lutheran Church when they heard voices and the sound of footsteps coming down the stairway.

"Oh dear!" exclaimed Judith, "I wish I had locked the side door to the church. You never know who might be trying to get in."

"I thought the same thing," said Amy, "but I didn't think we'd be here that long."

Just then the door on the other side of the basement opened, and a young family appeared—a man, a woman, and two young children. They all looked hot, sweaty, and tired.

"I wonder who they are," whispered Amy.

"I have no idea. They're not from around here, and that's for sure! What language is he speaking to his wife?" asked Judith.

"Spanish, I think."

Just then the man noticed Judith and Amy. "Excuse me," he said. "Where can I find the pastor?"

"I don't think he's here," Amy responded.

"May I have a glass of water for my children?" asked the woman. "The air conditioner in the car broke down, so they're very thirsty."

“Well, yes, I guess that’s okay,” said Judith hesitantly. “Are you folks from around here?”

“No, we’re visitors. I’m Pastor Rodriguez, and this is my wife, Maria, and our two children. I’m the mission speaker for tomorrow. Pastor Thompson was going to meet us here and take us to a motel. But I guess we’re a bit early.”

“Oh, the *mission* speaker!” Amy fairly shouted.

“You’re a *pastor*, and you know Pastor Thompson!” said Judith.

“Judith, hurry with that water for the pastor’s children. Mrs. Rodriguez, please sit on this folding chair. You look exhausted. Now, I’ll phone Pastor Thompson’s house and see if he’s on the way.”

“It’s nice to have you here,” said Judith, as she handed a glass of ice water to each child. “We’re looking forward to your sermon and Bible class tomorrow, Pastor.”

In this story it is clear that Judith and Amy were nervous even before they saw Pastor Rodriguez and his family. Why? When the “visitors” appeared, they became even more nervous. Why? What made them change their attitude? How do you think Pastor and Mrs. Rodriguez felt before they identified themselves? After they identified themselves, how do you think they felt? How do you think Amy and Judith felt about themselves when they found out who the Rodriguez family members were?

One of the great challenges for the New Testament church was a barrier that existed between Jews and non-Jews (Gentiles). If that challenge had not been met and dealt with satisfactorily, there is no doubt, at least humanly speaking, that Christianity would have been doomed to be a tiny sect outside Judaism with no message of salvation for all people everywhere.

One of the most dramatic accounts concerning this barrier is recorded in Acts 10. This is the story of the conversion of a Gentile, Cornelius, and what this meant to the Jewish Christian leaders, beginning with Peter.

Verses 1-8 of Acts 10 describe Cornelius’ background (devout and God-fearing, which apparently meant that he respected and followed the moral teachings of the Jews without being a convert to Judaism) and the dream he had.

Verses 9-23 relate Peter’s vision and his readiness to go with Cornelius’ servants. Explain the vision of the “large sheet.” What meaning did it convey to Peter about the Old Testament dietary laws?

Peter came to the house of Cornelius and entered it (vv. 24-27). However, crossing the threshold into a Gentile’s home was a momentous step. Why? (See Peter’s statement in v. 28a.) To what did Peter refer in verse 28b when he spoke of what God had revealed to him?

In verse 33 Cornelius has unwittingly issued a challenge. Is Jesus Christ meant for everyone or for Jews only? It is as though he were saying, “We’re all here waiting, Peter. Now what?” What was Peter’s response in verse 34? What did Peter do in verses 35-43? What is remarkable in Peter’s words in verse 43? What happened in verses 44-46? What did Peter conclude in verses 47-48? What did he do?

On pages 35-38 of the Study, several “Barriers to Overcoming Racism” are listed and described. Because of their background as devout Jews who observed the dietary and ceremonial laws of the Old Testament, what forms of “denial” prevented the early Christians from sharing the Gospel with Gentiles?

It is important to note that the barrier between Jews and Gentiles that should have been recognized as no longer existing did not come down immediately. Read what happened to Peter in Acts 11:1-3. After Peter explained what had happened (vv. 4-17), what did the “apostles and brethren” do (v. 18)?

Yet it still was not over. The same problem plagued St. Paul’s ministry. (See Acts 15:1-5.) After hearing the testimony of Paul and Barnabas, the Council at Jerusalem sent a letter (Acts 15:23-29) that should have settled the whole matter. It did not, and much of Paul’s great epistle to the Galatians was written to counter the false teaching that the Gospel of God’s grace through faith is not intended for all people.

The early Christians were dealing with untenable assumptions that, if left unchallenged, would have distorted and eventually negated the Gospel itself (e.g., the legalistic requirements of the Judaizers). In the Study’s section on “Untenable Assumptions” (pp. 36-37), discuss the four untenable assumptions that are described. In what ways can acceptance of these assumptions distort the Gospel? If possible, give examples of how this might happen.

Another “barrier” listed in the study is that of “Different Meanings and Frames of Reference” (p. 37). How did the Holy Spirit prepare Peter and Cornelius to get past their differing frames of reference? What were still present for each? (See Acts 10:25-26 for Cornelius and Acts 10:34 for Peter.) What frames of reference has the Holy Spirit given us to deal with differing “frames of reference”? What is the most important thing the Holy Spirit did to Cornelius and Peter even before they began talking to each other? How does the Holy Spirit do something similar to you and your “frame of reference”?

Although the barriers that have developed between races are in many cases very high and thick, in Christ they have already been brought down. See Eph. 2:11-22. It is our task in faith to realize that the barrier is down and to live with and in the new reality of the Gospel’s power.

Yet there is fear—fear of changing neighborhoods, fear of economic realities that accompany change, fear for one’s life or property, fear of being misunderstood. On the other hand, there is resentment, the resentment of a young African American woman who said, “I have no respect for a society that crushes people and then blames them for not standing up under the weight.”

Discuss the fears that you, like Judith and Amy, have concerning other races and cultures. How do you deal with these as people who are “crucified with Christ” (Gal. 2:20)? Discuss the bitterness that you, like Pastor Rodriguez, might feel toward those who judge you immediately by the color of your skin or the clothes you wear. How do you deal with that bitterness as a person who is “crucified with Christ?” What other signals from the Bible can you share with each other when you confront your own fears (real or imagined) or bitterness (real or imagined)? Discuss.

### **For Further Discussion:**

1. Read the words of the Confession of Sins and the Absolution from *Lutheran Worship* (pp. 158-59). Reflect together on these words in light of the case related in this lesson. What specific sins do you think came to Amy and Judy’s minds when they said these words to Pastor Rodriguez and his family? What effect do you think the words of Absolution, living in their Baptism, and the reception of the Lord’s Supper had on their conduct towards one another?

2. What do we need to do if we have thought and acted like Judy and Amy? (Luke 18:13)

3. As it touches our own lives, how will the Gospel affect our thoughts and conduct towards those of another race? (Gal. 5:19-26)

## Chapter 4: Guiding Principles

Hank and John, elders at St. Paul Lutheran Church, were talking with each other before their meeting.

“Last week,” said Hank, “our automatic washing machine broke down, and my wife and I had to take our clothes to the laundromat—you know, the one on the corner a couple of blocks from the church? Anyway, I was really amazed at who was there.”

“What do you mean, Hank?” asked John.

“Well, you know how in a small town like ours we think we know everybody. But I’ll tell you, I didn’t know anyone there that night. They were all young people. Seemed by their clothes to be strapped for money, and most of them had a child or two with them.”

“You’re right about that,” replied John. “There are new people moving in all around us. I noticed that a family moved into the old Peterson farmhouse down the road from us. Don’t know yet who they are. But you can be sure we’ll find out!” he chuckled.

“Well, one thing I know, John. If those folks showed up for church on Sunday, they’d sure stick out, and I’m not sure they’d feel very welcome. I’m not saying that that’s right, but that’s the way it is. Maybe we need to talk about that at our elders’ meeting.”

It’s happening in rural America. It’s happening in small town and cities. It’s happening in the near and far suburbs surrounding major urban centers. We’re changing. The complexion of America is changing. Ethnic and racial and cultural groups are moving where they haven’t been before. Predominantly African American congregations are being visited by Yuppies who have moved back into the inner-city core. Rural America is home to migrant workers and those who stay because of jobs at a local industry. Asian Americans, Hispanics, and African Americans are moving into the suburbs, and suburbanites are moving into the country. With all of this movement, racism often follows.

The Study commends “to the church for guidance in responding to the evils of racism” (p. 38) several “Guiding Principles.” This final chapter leads us into a consideration of them.

### **1. The unity of the body of Christ is to be reflected in the church’s structure, life, and work.**

Perhaps it is because it seems so obvious that in general it is inconceivable that anyone would find fault with this first principle. However, when we are faced with diversity that we had not expected, we may become nervous, just as Hank and John were nervous about their congregation’s reaction “if those folks showed up for church on Sunday.”

a. Are there people in your community who, if they came to your church, would feel uncomfortable or make you feel uncomfortable? Discuss reasons for your answer.

b. Look up several of the Scripture references in the Study that discuss the unity that Christians possess. See especially John 17:20-21; Eph. 4:3-6. In light of these passages, discuss the Study statement (p. 38): “there is no ‘Anglo-Caucasian,’ no ‘African-American,’ no ‘Hispanic-American,’ no ‘Vietnamese-American,’ or other ‘hyphenated’ citizen in the sight of God.”

c. At the same time, what can be the benefit of recognizing our “hyphenations” in the community of faith?

**2. The Scriptures require that the church confront moral evil in its midst, including the sin of racism.**

Discuss this on the basis of 1 Cor: 5:1-13.

**3. The church will commit itself to respond to racism in both word and deed by showing love and respect to all for whom Christ died. (See Acts 11:1-18.)**

a. In what ways have churches tended not to confront racism?

b. What would “showing love and respect to all for whom Christ died” look like in your congregation?

c. How would the difference between “integration” and “assimilation” (p. 26) fit into “showing love and respect” in your congregation?

**4. When a Christian congregation finds itself in a changing or changed community, it will reach out to the newcomers and genuinely welcome them to become members of the Christian family.**

One of the most effective ways for a congregation to get ready for change is to anticipate it and “practice” for it.

a. For example, how well does your congregation welcome *any* stranger who walks into your church on a Sunday morning? What things do you need to do *now* to be a friendlier and more openly welcoming congregation?

b. Do you seek out not only those who are “like you” in your community but also those who are not? Do you accept them in the same spirit that Jesus did (and does)?

c. What things can you individually and as a congregation do to “get ready” to “welcome the stranger”?

d. Briefly look at 1 Cor. 9:19-23. Apply the principles given in this passage to the issue under discussion here.

- 5. When a Christian congregation includes new members of differing backgrounds, it will do all in its power to create a healthy climate for them in order to make them feel that they are truly welcome as members of that family.**

Discuss this principle in light of what James writes in 2:1-13 of his letter.

- 6. In its new expression of life together, the Christian congregation will through the power of God's Word encourage all of its members to exercise their responsibilities and prerogatives of Christian service.**

(As you discuss the following questions, see Acts 13:1-3. Note that Simeon, who was called Niger, perhaps was black.)

- a. What, if any, "we/they" dichotomies are present in your congregation?
  - b. When the traditions and nondoctrinal assumptions of a congregation are questioned by newcomers, what can be done to sort out what is essential from what is a matter of taste or preference? What should guide your choices? (See 1 Cor. 2:2; 2 Cor. 4:5.)
  - c. In what ways can your congregation make it possible for people to be more fully included and given meaningful responsibility?
- 7. When the church decides to share the Gospel in a community which is made up of a racial or ethnic group different from the majority of the members of the church, its goal and firm commitment will be to carry out the ministry of Word and sacrament by making use of the cultural forms of that community. (See Acts 17:16-34.)**

- a. Why is "indigenization" important in "translating" the Gospel? Give examples of what this might look like. What might be the dangers of indigenization?
  - b. In what ways has the Gospel been indigenized in your congregation over the years? What are the advantages? Disadvantages?
- 8. The church will regard those groups it hopes to serve not as "objects" of its ministry but as those whom our Lord calls to be "full partners" in the Gospel.**

(Before you discuss the following questions, read together 1 Peter 2:9-10.)

- a. How have we at times made young people, the elderly, young adults, singles, the divorced and the widowed . . . "objects" of ministry? What can this do to such people?
- b. Why is this even more a tendency when relating to people of races and cultures other than one's own?
- c. How can others become "full partners" in the Gospel?

9. **As the church responds to the Lord’s mandate to “make disciples of all nations” in our time, it will recognize the special challenge of the core city as it confronts the problems of racism.**

Discuss this principle on the basis of 1 Cor. 6:9-11.

10. **Given the complexity of life in the city and the enormity of the missionary task, pastors and congregations will work in concert with, not in opposition to, Christians of other church bodies.**

Our experience in the cities has not been good. In fact, we have closed as many churches in the city as we have opened churches in the suburbs.

- a. Why has this happened?
- b. Do you agree that the Lord calls us to bring the Gospel everywhere, even into the heart of the cities of our nation? If so, what will that require in attitude, in ministry, in financial support, and in commitment?
- c. We generally refer to our relationships with other Christian churches as “cooperation in externals.” What might this include? What might this *not* include?

In the final paragraphs of the Study, this thought is conveyed: “What a beautiful opportunity we have to let God’s will be done on earth as it most certainly is done in heaven, where there is not now, nor will there ever be, any partiality shown to anyone” (p. 43).

What can you do today to plan that the fruits of this study on “Racism and the Church” will continue in your life and the life of your congregation?

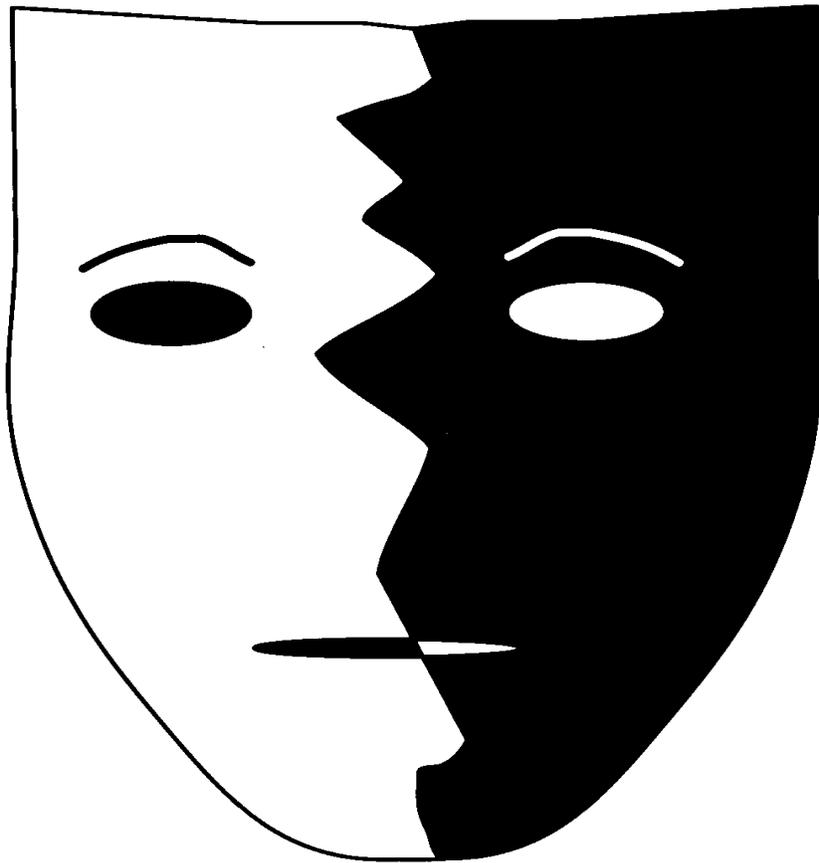
### **For Further Discussion:**

You may wish to conclude this Bible study by reading 1 Peter 3:15 and discussing the following question:

On the basis of this passage, how would you summarize the manner of our Christian witness, especially as we address the issue of racism?

**L**et us “walk together in true unity of mind, heart, and purpose, even as we are one in Christ” (p.59).

# RACISM



is only skin deep.  
Look behind the mask  
into the **Heart!**

