



Racism and Embodied Reconciliation

A position paper by the College Church Elders

Introduction

In 2020, the killings of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor and George Floyd captured our attention and reminded us of the ongoing challenge of racism in America. In the months that followed, Americans mourned, protested, and wrestled with these events and showed a remarkable willingness to change the way they think about racial justice.

As elders, we decided that this was an opportunity for us to listen, learn, and wrestle with the American church's own history of racism. We shared articles, blogs and videos with each other, read a book together, and spent time discussing what we were learning over a period of several months. We shared our personal reflections with one another, and identified core beliefs, convictions and resolutions that we shared in common. We started writing and sharing our thoughts with others who have thought deeply about these matters. They offered valuable input and feedback. The result of this process is the Position Paper that we present to you, humbly and hopefully, below.

Our purpose is two-fold:

One, to offer theological and moral clarity to the issue of racism and racial justice.

Two, to share our vision for a preferred future at College Church, the steps we believe we need to take to get there, and to invite accountability as we take these steps.

The College Church Elders, January 2021

We Believe

We believe that every human being is created in the image and likeness of God and therefore has infinite value and worth.

Genesis 1:27, James 3:9

We believe that all human beings have a common ancestry.

Genesis 3:20, Acts 17:26

We believe that Jesus came to reconcile lost sinners to God and to one another by means of His death on the cross. We believe that the church has been given this ministry of reconciliation.

1 Corinthians 12:13, 2 Corinthians 5:11-21, Colossians 1:20, Ephesians 2:14

We believe that, one day, a great multitude from every nation, tribe, people and language will worship at Jesus' throne. We believe that the church is called to witness to this future reality by making disciples of all nations and by making every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.

Revelation 7:9, Matthew 28:19-20, Ephesians 4:3

Therefore

Racism is sin because it is a failure to recognize and honor the image and likeness of God in each person and it is a failure to love others as God has loved us.

Genesis 1:27, Matthew 22:39

Racism—whether individual or systemic—is detrimental to human flourishing and a hinderance to the work of the gospel and the Kingdom of God.

Acts 10:28, James 2:1, Proverbs 28:16

We renounce any doctrine of racial superiority or racial separateness, while, at the same time, honoring the value of distinct cultures.

Colossians 3:11, Galatians 3:28, Acts 10:28, 34, Ephesians 2:11-12, James, 2:9

We believe that the scourge of racism and its effects can only be removed through a combination of Spirit-wrought heart change, obedience to the gospel, and deep, culture-wide systemic change.

2 Chronicles 7:14, Daniel 9:8-9, 2 Corinthians 5:16-17

We believe that the church has been uniquely designed and equipped to take the lead in the work of racial reconciliation.

Ephesians 2:11-22

We Lament

We lament that, in America, Sunday morning is often the most segregated hour of the week. We lament that local churches are often far less diverse than the communities they gather in. In this way, the American church has failed to demonstrate the reconciling power of the cross.

We lament that, historically and presently, we as White American Evangelicals have, by and large, failed to champion the cause of racial justice, and have often hindered it.

We lament that far too many White American Evangelicals, like us, have been content to remain quiet, make excuses, or deny the existence of systemic racism and patterns of racialized violence—all while so many have personally recounted their experiences of it, including many of our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ.

We believe God calls *all* Christians

We believe God calls *all* Christians to honor every human being, regardless of their background or circumstances, to seek their good, and to love their neighbors as they love themselves—without exception.

Matthew 7:12, 22:39; Acts 10:28

We believe God calls *all* Christians to cross the road of racial and socio-economic difference, and to pro-actively pursue relationships with people of different backgrounds and circumstances.

John 4:1-26, Mark 5:1, Matthew 8:5-13, 15:21-28

We believe God calls *all* Christians to enter into solidarity with the marginalized and the oppressed, to “grieve with those who grieve,” to speak up for those without a voice, and to spend one’s power and influence on behalf of the weak.

Romans 12:15-16, Proverbs 31:8-9, Psalm 82:2-4

We Confess

We confess our failure to address and stand against the evil of racism by diminishing its severity, averting our gaze, and even perpetuating such injustice - deliberately or implicitly.

We confess our failure to acknowledge the ways we have benefited from our privileged status, often at the expense of others.

We confess our habit of choosing comfort and familiarity over the hard, costly work of bridging divides and finding common ground.

We Resolve

We resolve to listen to the stories of those who experience racism.

We resolve to learn from their experiences, with a humble and teachable heart, so that we might better understand and love our neighbor.

We resolve to lament the presence, pervasiveness, and impact of racism; to grieve with those who grieve, and to take responsibility for any part we might have played in their pain—with the hope of establishing greater solidarity, trust, and healing.

We resolve to remember that reconciliation with God and with our neighbor are two sides of the same coin. We cannot say that we love God if we fail to love our neighbor. When we gather at the Lord's Table, we will reflect on the implications of Jesus' sacrificial death for our relationships with one another, and the debt of love we owe to one another—across our differences.

1 John 4:20, 1 Corinthians 11:17-34, Romans 13:8

We resolve to humbly seek out regular opportunities to listen to and learn from diverse voices, both directly (preaching, teaching, testimonies) and indirectly (books, articles, movies, quotes, etc.).

We resolve to disciple both children and adults by immersing them in the story of God's reconciling love, calling and equipping them to imitate Jesus by becoming road-crossers, bridge-builders, reconcilers and peacemakers; and spurring one another to love indiscriminately.

2 Corinthians 5:20, Hebrews 10:24, Romans 12:13

We resolve to speak clearly to the issues of our day through a biblical lens—and call out prevailing views that are unbiblical and unchristian, as needed.

1 Chronicles 12:32

We resolve to foster mutual, long term partnerships with believers of different ethnicities and backgrounds with the goals of learning from one another, serving one another and finding common ground and common cause in our common faith and mission.

1 Thessalonians 2:8

We resolve to prioritize solidarity with the multi-ethnic Body of Christ over our physical and ideological comfort and safety.

John 13:34-35

Finally, we resolve to pray for God's Kingdom to come, and His will to be done, on earth as it is in heaven, as we strive in the Spirit's power to imitate Jesus' righteousness with our lives, cultivate unity and diversity in the church, and do justice in the world. *Micah 6:8, Matthew 6:10*

Glossary

Culture: the customs, arts, social institutions, and achievements of a particular nation, people, or other social group.

Ethnicity: the fact or state of belonging to a social group that has a common national or cultural tradition.

Kingdom of God: Put simply, the Kingdom of God is “God’s reign, through God’s people, over God’s place” (Jeremy Treat). The Kingdom of God is wherever God’s will is being done. Jesus came announcing that “the Kingdom of God is at hand.” This meant that God’s rule was being manifest “on earth as it is in heaven” through Jesus’ life and teaching. God’s rule continues to advance today through the church, in both word and deed, as we share the gospel, care for the poor, the widow, the orphan and the immigrant, seek justice for the oppressed and love our neighbors, including our enemies.

Multiethnic Church: A multiethnic church is a church that accepts and involves people of all backgrounds as equal and fully participating members and ministers in the church. As a result, the congregation is enriched and deepened by the diversity of perspectives and expressions of faith, and the reconciling power of the gospel is demonstrated to the watching world. A church is considered multiethnic when the dominant race makes up no more than 80 percent of the congregation. (*Galatians 3:28, Revelation 7:9*)

Race: a human construct for grouping people on the basis of physical characteristics or shared ancestry.

Racism:

1. The *belief* that some races are inferior or superior to others.
2. Prejudiced, discriminatory or antagonistic *actions* against a person or people on the basis of their membership in a particular racial or ethnic group.

Reconciliation: The process of two parties overcoming their enmity and entering into solidarity through a process of confession, forgiveness and acceptance. (*Ephesians 2:14-16*)

Solidarity: The unity that comes about as a result of mutual concern and purpose. Specifically, the oneness that arises from a common faith in Jesus Christ. (*Ephesians 2:19*)

Systemic Racism: Racism is not just an individual expression, but principalities and dark powers of this world utilize laws and institutions to discriminate in areas such as housing, employment, banking, education, the legal system, and politics. (*Ephesians 6:10-17; Colossians 2:8-15*)

White privilege: The inherent advantages possessed by a white person as a member of the dominant race in a society characterized by racial inequality and injustice. This is not to negate hardships individuals encounter; but to recognize that some rights and opportunities are offered, whether requested or not, based on the color of a white person’s skin.

References for Further Study

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