

H5

STATEMENT ON RACIAL JUSTICE

Justice seeks to restore the harmonious relationships and order that God intended in Eden. As a result, we condemn racial¹ inequality and embrace ethnic unity in diversity.

Creation

God intends for all people to flourish together in harmonious unity. God says, “*Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness*” (Genesis 1:26). The triune God does not create alone but in community, and in community humanity reflects the image of God. The image of God in community is expressed in diversity (Genesis 1:27; Colossians 3:9-11).

Such harmonious unity requires intimate relationship with God and vulnerability to one another (Genesis 2:18, 3:8; 1 John 1:3). Only in sacrificial relationship with one another is unity found (Genesis 2:24-25; Galatians 3:28).² God intends that humanity fill the earth (Genesis 1:28), which is fulfilled in the diversity of languages and cultures (Genesis 10:5; Acts 17:24-26).

Fall

When sin entered the world, shame distorted and devastated community (Genesis 3:7), resulting in a lust for power, domineering hierarchy, and violence (Genesis 3:14-19; 4:8). At Babel, instead of spreading out to fill the earth (Genesis 1:28; cf. 10:5), people chose uniformity, settling in one place with one language (Genesis 11:1-2). When humanity was dispersed, uniformity continued to be imposed by oppression based on our differences (e.g., through slavery [Exodus 1:13-14]), creating destructive inequalities.

As centuries progressed, oppression based on our differences continued. In our own nation, this has included the genocide of native peoples and chattel slavery of Africans, justified with a system of racial hierarchy that was seen by some as “biblical.”

¹ The term “race” is a social construct classifying people by physical characteristics and has been used as a basis for discriminatory hierarchies. As a result, this document uses “race” and “racial hierarchy” for these oppressive dimensions, while “ethnic” expresses the unique and God-given differences between cultures.

² While a wife was typically seen in the ancient Near East as an acquisition by a husband into his broader family, Genesis 2:24 radically calls for a husband to leave his father and mother in loyalty to his wife. Such sacrifice, therefore, is critical to this relationship.

Some of the ways racial supremacy has been expressed are the displacement of Native Americans, vagrancy laws of the Reconstruction period, Jim Crow laws of segregation, discrimination against Hispanics, exclusion of Chinese immigrants, internment of Japanese-Americans during World War II, anti-Semitism, redlining and housing codes, and disproportionate criminalization of communities of color.

Sadly, the Church too often has been complicit in racial hierarchy and inequality. Homogeneity in churches can create a refuge for those wearied by the painful realities of racism or simply reflect demographic realities. However, homogeneity that precludes engagement with people different than us leads to the perpetuation of racial division.

When our churches fail to cultivate unity in diversity, we may assimilate diversity in uniformity or allow diversity to become division. Such assimilation becomes problematic when the majority fails to recognize its dominance and the minority struggles to express its contribution; consequently, the culture of leadership may remain unchanged even when its color diversifies. Division ensues when both majority and minority retreat from the challenges of engaging with those different than themselves. As a result, our witness is compromised before the intractable racial divisions of our world (John 17:21; Acts 6:1; Galatians 2:11-14).

When we fail to connect issues of justice to the gospel, the Church fails to fulfill its calling in matters of justice and race (Luke 4:18-19; Isaiah 58:6-12).

Daniel and Nehemiah acknowledged and repented of corporate sin even when it was not their own personal sin (Daniel 9:3-20; Nehemiah 1:6-7). Similarly, we acknowledge and repent of any complicity in and perpetration of sins of racial injustice (Leviticus 4:13-14; Psalm 19:12-13).

Redemption

Complicity in and perpetration of racial hierarchies can be redeemed by Jesus Christ. Our common identity in Christ and joint adoption as children of the Heavenly Father enables us to heal the divisions created by sin (John 17:21-22; Galatians 3:26-28; 6:15). God's Word leads us, not partisan loyalties, or cultural pressures. The Church, at its best, has been at the forefront of this work. Avoiding racist actions is not enough; God's heart for the oppressed and marginalized (Exodus 22:21-22; Leviticus 19:34; Psalm 9:9; Isaiah 1:17; Amos 2:6-7) calls us to oppose racial hierarchies.

Jesus Christ came to save people of every language, tribe, and culture (Genesis 12:3; John 4:42; Galatians 3:14; 1 Timothy 2:3-6). Just as God's glory was translated in Jesus in his first century language and culture (John 1:14), so Pentecost translated the glory of God into different languages (Acts 2:11) and is embodied and expressed through different cultures. As a result, when the Church is at its best, we recognize

how the glory of God is uniquely translated in our own culture as well as learn from how the glory of God is translated into other cultures. As we learn from one another in our diversity, we will deepen our unity in Christ. Such unity in our diversity allows us to express the glory of God together (Romans 15:5-6). No one culture fully expresses all facets of the glory of Christ.

As the gospel was translated into different cultures and languages, the early Church struggled to reconcile unity with diversity (Galatians 2:11-16; Acts 6:1-2). Assimilation was confronted to allow for diversity while maintaining a deeper unity (e.g., Acts 15:1-2, 19-21). Division and the wall of hostility between ethnic groups was demolished in Christ (Ephesians 2:14). Instead of assimilation and division, diverse languages and cultures can *"live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, that together [we] may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ"* (Romans 15:5-6, ESV).

As the light of the world (Matthew 5:14), we are called to lead in matters of justice and race. The image of God in all humanity compels us to embrace and promote racial equality and advocate for justice for those whose voices might otherwise be ignored (Proverbs 31:8-9; Isaiah 58:6-14; Micah 6:8; Luke 4:18).

Consummation

"After this I looked, and behold a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and the Lamb" (Revelation 7:9). Each tribe and culture uniquely express the glory of Christ in heaven together. All nations are gathered in perfect unity (cf. Isaiah 2:2-4; 11:6-11).

Similarly, *"the nations of the earth will bring their glory into"* the new Jerusalem, even as *"the glory of God gives its light, and its lamp is the Lamb"* (Revelation 21:23-24, 26). Even as the light of Christ shines in consummate glory, the peoples of the earth from their respective languages and cultures will bring their glory into that city. Just as different jewels refract the beauty of light in different ways, so diverse cultures will refract the glory of Jesus Christ in diverse ways in the new heavens and the new earth.

