

## Christianity and Racism

The news media has been full of the topic of racism over the last decades, as, for example, about *apartheid* (separate development) in South Africa. Our country's white-Australia's policy is no longer politically correct. Some racism has an economic basis. Once people of any nationality begin to take the jobs of the people of the country, there is bound to be resentment. It can be argued that resentment of the Chinese in Australia in the nineteenth century intensified only after the generally industrious Chinese began to compete with white people for employment.

Self-interest often exaggerates racial ill feeling. This is evident in what is perceived as unequal preference for Aboriginals in the distribution of government aid, when people see themselves as denied similar access to it. There used to be people who were anti-Communists, not because they disagreed with dialectical materialism, but because they feared losing their own wealth if Communists took over. When white people perceive that land claims by Aborigines are likely to affect their use of the land, we can expect similar ill feeling. People have to be clear about the motives that drive them.

No matter how generous many people try to be, there is often a feeling of discomfort, antipathy, or aversion connected with differences in body odour, diet, and culture, which cannot easily be rationalised away. Some people find it hard to overcome feelings of antipathy towards people whom they perceive to be different. There was a New Guinean boy in a boarding school, whose classmates accused him of not showering himself properly. He did shower himself. They did not understand that his body-odour was different from their own, or that he also perceived theirs to be different. However, antipathy should never be the last word. If you meet an unwashed hobo of your own race who has wrecked his life with drink, you must still respect him because he bears the humanity the God created in the beginning to bear His image.

There are many components to attitudes about race. Heredity is not something we can do anything about. There is nothing wrong with being patriotic, taking a pride in one's own country, and being loyal to it. There is a natural affinity between people who are bound together by the same culture and language. This is not a bad thing. However, love of one's own nation is often exaggerated by sinful tendencies. The trouble with nationalism is that selfishness and bigotry often mark it. The news media are now taking up feelings of white Australians against Aborigines in the wake of Mabo and Wik. To be realistic, people who are against all differentiation on the basis of race must face the greatest hurdle, marriage between people of different races. In itself there should be nothing wrong with that, but the harsh reality is that the half-caste children of inter-racial marriages are sometimes ostracised by bigoted people on both sides. The brutality of slavery was intensified by a foolish conviction in many people that Negro people did not have human feelings like themselves. Even after the civil war about slavery in the USA there were frequent lynchings of Negro people in the South, when the suppression of black people followed economic lines.

When Jesus told the story about the man who fell among thieves on the road from Jerusalem to Jericho, His point was that every person whom we meet in our everyday life is our neighbour, and claims our love, as to ourselves. The Samaritan overcame the prejudice of race to help the needy man.

Some racism has a cultural component. Most of us prefer not to sit around in the open and not to sleep around fires at night like Aborigines. However, we should not despise Aborigines for not developing our kind of culture. The land provided few grasses that could be cultivated, no cattle that could be milked, and so on. Nevertheless, our neighbours, who are different from us, have a claim on our love, consideration, and concern. People who doubt this should ask how they would feel, and how they would long to be treated, if they were forced to live as a minority group in another country. If Jesus has commanded us to love our enemies, that commandment of love also applies to people of different race whose country we share.

Some racism has a religious component. Noah gave a different blessing to each of his sons. It is a moot point whether his statement that Japheth would "dwell in the tents of Shem" still applies today. God wanted the Israelites of the Old Testament to avoid intermarriage with their heathen neighbours because of the ever-present temptation to worship other gods. Ezra dismissed from the priesthood men who had taken foreign wives. God favoured Jacob over his elder brother Esau, and this had consequences for the Israelites and the Edomites. Differences in language also usually accentuate racial differences, and they go back to God's way of negating human ambition at the time of the tower of Babel. Racial differences will remain as long as this world does.

Jewish people in Jesus' time based their attitude to the Gentiles on the principles of Old Testament ceremonial defilement. The separatistic Pharisees washed when they came in from the market chiefly because they might have been contaminated even by touching a wicked person of their own Jewish race. It took a great

deal for the first Jewish Christians to overcome attitudes that they had grown up with. Paul's opponents in his letter to the Galatians linked race with religious themes.

They took pride in being Jews, who were descended from Abraham. The only way, in their thinking, for a Gentile to receive God's grace was to become a Jew, be circumcised, receive proselyte baptism, and keep the Law of Moses, which set Jews off from all other peoples.

Part of the current problem in racism is religious, and this includes warped religion. Some Australian people who trumpet multi-culturalism often want to make an easy path for every other culture and religion except their own. It is the reverse of patriotism and of loyalty to the Christian faith.

You don't find this in other religions. In fact, if you ask any Moslem whether Islam is the same as Christianity, he will deny it point blank. There is a kind of death wish operating for many who go by the name of Christians.

Both the Law and the Gospel have a great deal to say about the selfishness and exploitation that is at the bottom of racism in the world today. When a person harbours hatred in his heart towards anybody, he is opening himself up to the control of the devil. Christians should ask themselves whether they are loving their neighbours as themselves if they make unkind remarks and insensitive jokes about people of another race. Insensitivity and thinly veiled hatred, discord, jealousy, and factions belong among the sins of the flesh that Christians are warned to avoid (Gal 5:20-21).

Paul did not have a program to abolish slavery or radically alter the structures of society, including social differences for gender, custom, race, and language. The Gospel respects the principle that God keeps a degree of peace in this sinful world through ordered structures, and the Gospel does not abolish these. God's order of creation will remain as long as this world does.

The most noticeable differences between people are the ones that Paul mentions in Galatians 3:28, race (which often includes colour), economic status or station, and gender. Christianity does not abolish them. There are still different races\_ and there are still people who are enslaved, not like the slaves of years ago, but through economic circumstances. A person who has no property cannot decide for himself. Paul's point is that for Christians these differences do not affect their standing in Christ, or their oneness in Christ. When God looks at any believer, he sees the obedience of Christ there, which He reckons to him through faith.

Consider the powerful forces in the Gospel, which a Christian may not ignore. Paul wrote in Colossians: "Here there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, no barbarian, Scythian, slave and free, but Christ is all things, and is in all." He wrote in Galatians, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus." He wrote in I Corinthians "By one Spirit we have all been baptised into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free." The implications are that, despite any feelings of antipathy or resentment, Christians may not discriminate in the church and before the altar between black and white, yellow and brown. Through baptism they have been brought together into the one body of Christ, their common Lord.

Each Christian person should accept the gender, race, and position in society that God has assigned. The important thing is being God's child and heir, through baptism. The point is not what we have inherited from our fathers or what we have made of ourselves. Spiritually, hoping to stand before God on the basis of who we are, where we belong, and what we have done brings His curse. The important thing is what God has done for us, and our putting on Christ as a garment. As sinners all human beings are equally in God's condemnation in Adam, and through Christ all have free access to His obedience, which covers human sin.