

### Racism, Sexism, Marxism

On secular university and college campuses, one would guess that there is only one ethical problem worth discussing: the oppression of various groups by other groups. Racism is the oppression of people based on race, sexism oppression based on sex, and so on. Similarly, discussion focuses on oppression based on nationality, culture, disability, sexual preference, height, weight, looks, age, and so on. This preoccupation is based on Marxist concepts of class warfare. Marx taught that the history of mankind is the history of the oppression of one group by another, and that the oppressed group must (and in time will) rebel against its oppressor.

The worst oppressors in this scenario are usually white American Christian heterosexual males. In this particular discussion, all sorts of mean and slanderous accusations may be hurled against such "oppressors," but the oppressors are not permitted to say anything against their critics, lest they incur the greater guilt of being "insensitive."

The whole situation, of course, is preposterous, and all the more so since it occurs on campuses where in the past great emphasis has been placed upon "freedom of speech," upon hearing all sides of every question. Today, however, the incipiently totalitarian nature of campus liberalism has been fully unveiled, and we can scarcely visit a college or university without being face to face with the campus thought police.

Certainly the view of history underlying this movement is highly skewed. Some groups have through the years been oppressed by others, to be sure. I have no qualms about saying that African Americans have been oppressed by whites through kidnapping, enslavement, and later segregation from white society. I do object to the view that the traditional family order is the result of "sexist oppression." See my essays on "The Biblical View of the Family" and "Women in Church Office." The subordination of wives to husbands and of women to church elders, together with the traditional division of labor between female homemaker and male breadwinner, is not the result of oppression; it is God's order, and it has been beneficial for both sexes.

And oppression is a far more complicated reality than the neo-Marxists present. When an older white couple lives in an inner city, unable to sell their house, terrorized daily by black gang members, who is being oppressed? When the handicapped demand that the government provide facilities for them in every business, forcing many businesses to close and workers to lose their jobs, who is being oppressed? (See my essay on "Living With Ourselves," the second section.) When homosexuals demand that government force churches to hire them contrary to the church's confession, and set on fire those churches that resist their influence, who is being oppressed?

I do not doubt that some groups have endured more suffering than others. I do believe however that there is, on the whole, enough blame to go around, especially in view of the considerations I presented in "Living With Ourselves." All of us have been, at one time or another, both oppressor and oppressed.

Neo-Marxists tend to affix blame<sup>1</sup> based on large historical relations among groups. But when we focus on individuals it is much more difficult to say that anyone is "oppressor" or "oppressed," pure and simple. To do that is to make the same mistake that racists make: an over-generalized negative characterization of a group of people.

The rest of this paper will focus on racism, since I have addressed sexism and disabilities in other essays. Racism is a genuine evil: harming people simply because of their race, and therefore unjustly. Here we must use great caution, for the neo-Marxist "political correctness" rhetoric tends to obscure allsorts of important distinctions, tarring people with labels like "racist" with little basis. Is it racist, for example, to say that African Americans sprint faster and jump higher, on the whole, than whites? Far from being racist, this statement seems to me obviously true, and I can't imagine why anyone would take offense at it. But Mike Royko recently complained in a newspaper column that an educator was denied a position at the University of Chicago for making that very statement.

The idea that all races are absolutely equal in every possible aptitude is ludicrous on the face of it; but in the present climate of thought, one has to agree with that idea, in effect, if one is to avoid charges of insensitivity. This climate makes serious research into the distribution (both genetic and environmental) of human aptitudes impossible. And that is a great loss for modern science. Let it be known that not all obscurantists are not Christian fundamentalists.

For all that, there is a genuine problem of race relations in the world today. Not only is there a conflict between blacks and whites in the United States and South Africa, but also between Muslims and Serbians in Bosnia, Jews and Arabs in Israel, and many other places. It is difficult to prescribe remedies for racial, religious and cultural conflict. Hatreds and resentments can become so deeply ingrown that reconciliation becomes a hollow dream.

In the United States, slavery was ended in 1865 and legal segregation of various forms from 1954 to 1964. In the late 1960s, Lyndon Johnson's "Great Society" program sought to lift blacks and others out of poverty through greater welfare assistance, public housing, educational assistance and so on. Affirmative action in hiring has become the rule since the 1970s. And yet the tensions, the riots, the anger remain. Much of what the government has done has been counter-productive: Public housing has often degenerated into slums. The welfare system has done terrible damage to the black family, encouraging illegitimacy, single parenthood, permanent dependence (=slavery), a hopelessness that contributes to drug addiction and anti-social behavior. Affirmative action has sometimes placed blacks in positions for which they have not been adequately qualified, arousing the resentment of whites and a new round of racial stereotyping. Businesses have taken risks to enter inner-city neighborhoods and have been burned or terrorized for their trouble.

Only the grace of God in Christ can take away the hatreds and bring lasting reconciliation. But are there things we can do that will improve these relationships?

I must say I have become sceptical about Martin Luther King's "dream" of a society where race makes no difference. Over the long term, if the Lord tarries,

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<sup>1</sup> in itself remarkable, considering Marx's relativistic ethic.

that could happen, and surely it would be desirable. We can read in Scott's *Ivanhoe* about the hatreds which once existed between the Saxons and their Norman French conquerors. But those conflicts no longer exist. The Norman French and Saxons have intermarried and merged into one larger culture. That tends to happen in history over the long term. But difference in skin color and basic culture creates barriers larger than those between Norman and Saxon.

In all the recent discussion of Malcolm X, it has escaped the notice of many people that Malcolm had a very different dream from Martin Luther King. Malcolm, like Marcus Garvey, was fundamentally a black separatist. He did not want to be dependent on the handouts of white society. He wanted his people to become more self-sufficient, disciplined, principled, strong, as he himself had become in prison. Scripture, as I read it, does not require societies, or even churches, to be integrated racially. Jews and Gentiles were brought together by God's grace into one body. They were expected to love one another and to accept one another as brothers in the faith. But the Jewish Christians continued to maintain a distinct culture, and house churches were not required to include members of both groups.

It is evident that sometimes separation is necessary, at least temporarily, to achieve peace. Clearly Serbs, Croats and Bosnian Muslims, for the foreseeable future, cannot live together in peace. The same for Northern Irish Catholics and Protestants.

I have often felt that if there are groups in this country (blacks, Indians, or whoever) who simply do not trust the majority government and dominant culture of the US and cannot stand to live in that environment, they should be given some land and accorded self-government. No, I don't mean "reservations," nor South Africa-style "homelands;" those are horrendous. I mean great tracts of land with plenty of natural resources and genuine independence. Has the concept of "integration," at best a very long-range dream, blinded our minds to other possibilities?

I have in the past thought also in terms of restitution, similar to the restitution given to Japanese Americans unjustly interned during World War II. Certainly that should have been offered when slavery was ended. But today it is hard to assess blame for the continuing animosities, and "restitution" would doubtless be perceived as just another government handout.

John Perkins, the founder of Voice of Calvary Ministries, urges Christians of all races to form communities among urban and rural blacks and there to set examples of Christian family life and economic achievement, making themselves available as resource persons for the neighborhoods. I have seen wonderful fruits from such community involvement, and if great numbers of Christians were to accept the challenge this could make a great difference. But this kind of ministry is not for every Christian. And when one looks at the size of the problem today, these ministries seem like a drop in the bucket.

As for the role of government and business, I can only suggest two general rules: the first is "do no harm." The second is to revert to truly color-blind policies.

There is no obvious way out of these difficulties save divine intervention. The ideologization of the issue in Marxist terms can only bring greater resentments and further divisions. We must reject that movement in no uncertain terms. But we must also pray to God to bring reconciliation through the blood of his Son.