

THE NATIONAL BLACK EVANGELICAL ASSOCIATION

The National Black Evangelical Association (NBEA) is an umbrella organization composed of individuals and organizations across denominational and racial lines that have been united behind two major purposes. These are: (1) To increase fellowship among others with the same goals, and (2) To minister to the Black community, reaching Blacks (though not to the exclusion of other races) with the message of Jesus Christ so that they might affirm our Lord in the totality of their beings in every aspect of their lives. The result will be that the abundant life we have through Christ may be experienced by our people in the totality of our communities.

We see our particular calling as one aspect of the universal call to preach the Gospel to all creatures. Our particularity in emphasis grows out of our awareness of the abiding racial, social and politico-economic realities of life in America as experienced by Black people, both individually and collectively. We view this emphasis as one aspect of ministry to the whole human race, to whom we are debtors to serve. We believe that Blacks as members of the human race must recognize their unity with all members of the human race. In the affirmation of our own humanity, however, we take care not to deny the humanity of others nor allow others to deny ours. We encourage a fuller awareness of Black personhood and humanity as God's gift to America and to the rest of the world.

NBEA, therefore, seeks to present the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the total person in a way that both influences and affirms the creation and development of Christian personality on personal, social, and institutional levels. This purpose encompasses both our original goals stated at the time of our formation in 1963 and the additional insights and applications gained in our walk with God.

This vision is seen as the indispensable guiding principle for all areas of our work. The current agencies for the implementation of our work are our local chapters, our commissions, and a national convention at which all activities come to focus within an atmosphere of fellowship and ministry. A vital part of our active ministry has been as a motivator and facilitator for others to develop and expand their own ministries to the Black community - ministries for which we rejoice. Additionally, we have engaged in direct ministry through such means as Christian Education conferences, students' conferences, college lectureships, pastors' seminars and theological forums, youth outreach ministries, etc.

Chapters exist in such diverse cities as Chicago, New York, and Dallas. Commissions, as specific areas of ministry, presently include the following areas: Black Family, Children, Christian Education, Communications, Evangelism, Missions, Social Action, Theology, Women, and Youth. Commissions are composed of persons with expertise and interest in these areas and who work to develop ideas and resources for dissemination to the larger Black community. It is in these areas where we are endeavoring to flesh out our vision, both nationally and locally.

The basis for our belief in the necessity and viability of this ministry is the Word of God. (See NBEA's doctrinal statement).

If you are challenged by our vision for ministry, we invite you to complete the membership-partnership form and join us in this divine activity.

Consultation On Racism

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THE NATIONAL BLACK EVANGELICAL ASSOCIATION (NBEA) and
THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF EVANGELICALS (NAE)

STATEMENT ON PREJUDICE AND RACISM

We have gathered as a group of Christians to address the resurgence of racism in the United States. Because of the historical and current context in which we meet, we are addressing primarily the white-black expression of racism; we recognize that other ethnic groups have also experienced oppression based on race.

We affirm the core conviction of our Judeo-Christian heritage: Human life is created in God's image. This imago Dei is expressed in one human race (Acts 17:26), but that one humanity fully expressed God's image in a wealth of diversity. A few obvious examples of diversity are maleness and femaleness, and colors of skin, eyes and hair. There are more subtle diversities as well. These diversities are not intended to divide humans from one another; rather, they are to add to the wonder of life's wholeness as a gift from God.

We affirm another conviction of our Judeo-Christian roots: As a consequence of a fall from the original created state, humanity shares a sin nature. One of the marks of this sin nature, prejudice, is distributed among the diverse parts of the whole humanity. This prejudice, rather than allowing celebration of the diversity of our one humanity, causes the holders of prejudice to view those who are different as inferior. When one ethnic group is in a majority or power position, its group prejudices against those who are minorities or out of power are often manifested in racism. Racism is prejudice plus power. Racism is, therefore, an institutionalized expression of a controlling group's prejudices.

There was diversity of motivation in the establishment of the United States as a nation, but woven throughout its history was a pattern of racism by the white-dominated society that involved the displacement and destruction of one race, the Native Americans, and the enslavement of yet another, the Africans. The historical record of how white Europeans conquered North America by destroying the native population and building their new nation's economy on the backs of kidnapped Africans who had been turned into chattel are facts which must be acknowledged and confessed.

Racism is a foundational sin of the United States, fueled by economic greed and the exploitation of human and natural resources. It has corrupted the foundations, institutions, and cultural mores of this country. It has prevented formation of a true cultural democracy. Racism has enslaved, impoverished and oppressed people of color in the United States.

The concept of race must be seen as the sum total of what is known as the physical, psychological characteristics that set one group apart from another. These distinctions are not seen as absolutes since it can be readily observed that some basic characteristics thought to be unique to one group are often observed as part of the make-up of another. This leads us to conclude that no racial group in its make-up can be absolutely separated from another. These points on race must lead us to the repudiate any and all myths concerning the inferiority of African-Americans, such as: They are by nature childlike; that they came from the poorer stock of Africa; and that they gladly gave up their own history and traditions to embrace the superior culture of their masters. To appreciate the scope of sin against African-Americans, it is essential to understand the following points of history:

1. The European slave trade began in 1444 A.D. and continued infamously into the late 1800s. However, through the early 1600s, there were many blacks who came to America as indentured servants and who, after their service, were instrumental in building many early settlements. They lost their freedom when slave traders and businessmen had colonial laws changed to accommodate economic considerations.
2. The recurrent history of the United States' sin of racism is the sting of continual promises, modest gains, followed by a reversal of those gains, which has resulted in entrenched prejudicial attitudes and continued economic disenfranchisement for African-Americans. The political gains of the 1960s and '70s were instantaneously halted because of white fear, resulting in the enactment of Jim Crow laws that dehumanized African people in poverty and ignorance. Even today, just twenty-five years after the civil rights movement of the 1960s, white American racism is flexing its economic muscle against the African-American community and rolling back the positive effects of Affirmative Action.

It must be acknowledged that large segments of Christianity in the United States have historically been allied with racist institutions and attitudes. Racism attacks the core of the Gospel message. It negates the reason for which Christ died. It also denies the purpose of the church: To bring together, in Christ, those who have been divided from one another. Racism has caused many Christians in the United States to use the Bible to defend segregation and abandon justice.

Racism is a severe and current sin. It is an idolatry which makes God in the image of the controlling group and uses God to justify willful and/or unintended evil against minority interests. The soul of the nation is under judgment for the talent drain of potential leaders and for the psychological scarring of young blacks who are born in the ghetto but rarely have the opportunity to develop. Racism has historically hindered us from benefiting from the fullness of God's gift to the nation, which is embodied in what is gained from all the people.

The Psalmist asks, "When the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?" The righteous can fill the leadership vacuum by repenting individually and corporately. It will be necessary to re-educate white evangelicalism into understanding that the pioneer black church has held one of the few authentic expressions of the Gospel in America by holding fast to the conviction that God, through His Word, was the authority in all matters of life; that all humanity was created in God's image; and that humanity had eternal value, evidenced by Christ's inclusive death on the cross.

Although prejudice is a universal sin infecting all peoples, racism in the United States is basically a white problem. Whites established practices, systems and laws which entrenched racism and, in some instances, still perpetuate it. Confession and repentance are essential starting points for the correction of any sinful past--these are needed now in the United States if the rising tide of racism is to be turned back.

The black evangelical church, for its part, must commit itself to constructive protest of racism. This should be combined with a readiness to forgive past wrongs. The black church must help blacks to regain a healthy sense of pride in their identity. The Lordship of Christ must be brought to bear on the life of the black community as well as that of the white community. Economic discipline and investment in the black community, inspired by a spiritual rebirth of the black masses, will be the salvific hope of black America. We affirm that salvation is in and by Jesus Christ alone. The Gospel of love is transmitted through an inseparable package of faith AND action. In and through Christ, we have hope for the life that now is and that which is to come.

The white evangelical church must first repent of its sin of racism. It must examine its doctrine, policies, institutions, boards, agencies and para-church entities and remove any vestiges of prejudice and racism. It

must also enter into a meaningful dialogue with black evangelical leaders by means of establishing cultural exchanges on racism in the white community. Most importantly, it must exert pressure for economic justice by witnessing within its own power structures. It must remove the institutional barriers which hinder progress for blacks and other people of color. It must work to make restitution and repair as soon as possible.

As persons redeemed by the atoning work of Christ, we commit ourselves to renewed efforts toward reconciliation and harmony between people of diverse races. Together, the entire evangelical community must and can reaffirm the wonderful ethnic diversity among the body of Christ, while at the same time strengthening its unity. The Church's credible witness, and perhaps the deliverance of the nation as a whole, depends upon the joint evangelical effort to dismantle the structures of racism and prejudice. Together, we can create a community that will be a monumental witness for Christ in modern times.

We go from this consultation determined to translate these intentions into actions which will exemplify among humankind Christ's reconciling work.

Note: This joint statement was accepted in principle by the NAE Board of Administration as a working document at its annual meeting in Phoenix, Arizona, on March 7, 1990. It was then distributed to the NAE Convention as information and background. The statement was accepted in full by NBEA's Board and members at NBEA's annual Convention in Chicago, Illinois, on April 21, 1990. These actions serve as first steps in dealing with prejudice and racism in our churches and society. Additional steps have been taken to ensure that appropriate strategies will be devised to implement this statement.

THE THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR THE STATEMENT ON RACISM

by William H. Bentley

In the statement drafted by members of the Consultation on Racism, we have given the rationale and God's remedy for the perpetual presence of one of the most pressing problems in the sphere of racial/human relations. Less this statement be seen merely as the enunciation of principles identified with the "social gospel" alone, it should be clear that the statement is based on the Word of God in its entirety. It is shown as a part of an earlier process that afflicts mankind in general. We have chosen to address the American aspect of this problem.

What the Bible has to say about human relations in general affects our discussion. Race relations is seen as a problem in human relations, a much wider field. Our identification of the problem and our approach to it, therefore, is theological rather than merely sociological and psychological. In this paper, it will be evident that we are making full use of the Word God so that we can understand much clearer the message that God wants to get across to us. God's universal love for all men, the unity of the human race, our oneness in Christ and man's obligation to love his neighbor as himself, and ultimately Christ's supreme sacrifice which exemplifies God's love for mankind are illustrative of the divine intent. A solution, therefore, cannot be achieved without recognition of this foundational truth.

As we enter into the discussion of this paper, let us seek God's guidance as we wrestle with plans of action and strategies. This will assure some measure of unity with all who are concerned.

EXCERPTS FROM A LETTER ABOUT THE IMPACT OF THIS STATEMENT

I am writing to congratulate the executive committees of the National Black Evangelical Association and the National Association of Evangelicals for the "Statement on Prejudice and Racism" which appeared in a recent college newsletter. It is a very powerful and provocative statement which is long overdue. It is probably one of the most intelligent, honest, sensitive and action-oriented statements on American racism and Christianity that I have ever read. I was deeply moved by the statement. It encouraged and challenged me regarding my particular role as an African-American Christian to not only perpetually confront the racism issue, but to also "forgive past wrongs." The latter has often been very difficult for me, especially in light of my negative college experiences. The call expressed in the statement for mutual commitment and action from both African-American and white evangelicals regarding racism issues is both timely and prophetic. Personally, it came at a time of both apathy about, and "tiredness" of, dealing with the issue.

I have written to the ... alumni association to request that the statement be reprinted in a future issue of their quarterly magazine. I believe firmly it needs to be read by ALL past, present and future alumni and associates, as a potential starting point for individual and corporate confession and repentance; among whites, for racism, prejudice and their silence in the face of it; among African-Americans, for unforgiveness associated with these. I also hope it can serve as a source of healing among the many alumni of color who have been hurt through their college experiences.

Once again, thanks for NBEA's bold stand in the Lord through the Statement. I believe it will be a source of strength and courage to all who read it, even as it was to me. May the Lord continue to bless the efforts of NBEA.