



*Press statement
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DIAKONIA RESPONDS TO BIBLICALLY JUSTIFIED RACISM

In the last week there have been two accounts of people who have justified their racist views by invoking the scriptures, and believing that God would endorse their views. This takes us back into the apartheid era where the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) used the scriptures to justify their racist policies. It is our opinion as Diakonia Council of Churches that these views must be challenged, and balanced with an alternative view which we believe to be closer to the intention of God as disclosed in the scriptures of the New Testament.

Andre Olivier of Rivers Church claimed, in a sermon preached to a multi-racial congregation, that Whites are superior to Blacks because their work ethic is better. A statement of this nature in a sermon is a misuse of the pulpit, as there is no opportunity for constructive engagement in response to what is being preached. The statement reveals an underlying racism in the preacher.

Andre Slade of the Sodwana Bay Guest House has bluntly refused to admit black people to his guest house based on what he claims is God's law. He asked that those who wish to engage with his view first read his book. It has been read prior to this response. He engages in a wide ranging study of human history, science, astrology, numerology, and the full range of conspiracy theories regarding world financial control, medicine and pharmaceuticals, religion etc.

Whilst criticism of religiosity, and the institutional church and its shortcomings is welcomed, we cannot accept his views on the sub-human nature of black people. His prejudice extends to the difference between blue eyed and brown eyed people, in which blue eyed people are purer and smarter and more acceptable to God. And when he moves on to his identity as a god ordained to be King, then his whole treatise must be regarded with suspicion as from one who has delusions of grandeur.

Both Andres have claimed, from vastly different perspectives, that white people are superior and that is the way God has made us. They would like us to just accept that fact. But we can't.

After the policy of apartheid was developed by the National Party government, the Dutch Reformed Church set about developing a theological justification for apartheid,

based on the scriptures. The culmination of this work was in a publication called "*Ras, Volk en Nasie en die Volkeverhouding in die Lig van die Skrif*", translated as "Human Relations and the South African in the light of Scripture" published in 1976 by the DRC Synod. In it they manipulated the scriptures to support their point of view, and relied chiefly on scriptures from the Old Testament, which were then selectively used. They omitted to take their historic context into account, nor to look at a New Testament counterpoint.

If we were to start in the Old Testament, it would be to highlight the particular point from the creation narratives in which we are told that human beings, male and female, were created in the image of God. This was before race, nationality and religion separated us. The prophets, particularly Isaiah, point us to a time where every nation will come to the mountain of God.

The New Testament directs us toward a time when "a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language stand before the throne of God and in front of the Lamb." This speaks of inclusion among the people of God, not exclusion. We witness a breaking down of the barriers between Jew and Gentile, an expansion of the concept of the People of God, and a greater inclusion. This was a challenge to people of that time, as multi racialism is a challenge, it appears, to people of our time. But it is an inescapable reality that this is the direction to which the scriptures point us. The concept of rebirth, which is found in John 3, provides an opportunity to be reborn into a new humanity in which race, nationality, gender, and social standing are no longer relevant as dividers of people, but simply provide a richness of the tapestry of God's creation.

So, while we understand the need (inherent or learned) among people to identify with "their own", which even extends to sports teams and political affiliation, we need to guard against suggesting that God will endorse our view and reject that of another.

The prejudices that are held by individuals, such as the two Andres, need to be owned by them, and not justified as part of God's ordained separation of people. That is an untrue portrayal of the intention of God as disclosed in the scriptures of the New Testament. God is about inclusion, not exclusion.

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