

STUDY GUIDE ON

Racism

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THE SALVATION ARMY INTERNATIONAL POSITIONAL STATEMENT ON RACISM

Racism is the belief that races have distinctive cultural characteristics determined by hereditary factors and that this endows some races with an intrinsic superiority over others. 'Racism' also refers to political or social programmes built on that belief. The use of the term 'race' itself is contested, but is generally used to refer to a distinct group sharing a common ethnicity, national origin, descent and/or skin colour. The Salvation Army denounces racism in all forms.

Racism is fundamentally incompatible with the Christian conviction that all people are made in the image of God and are equal in value. The Salvation Army believes that the world is enriched by a diversity of cultures and ethnicities.

The Salvation Army firmly believes that racism is contrary to God's intention for humankind, and yet we recognise that the tendency for racism is present in all people and all societies. Racial discrimination can take many expressions, including tribalism, casteism and ethnocentrism. Racism is not only the result of individual attitudes, but can also be perpetuated by social structures and systems. Sometimes racism is overt and intentional, but often it is not.

While many Salvationists have acted firmly and courageously against racism, The Salvation Army acknowledges with regret, that Salvationists have sometimes shared in the sins of racism and conformed to economic, organisational and social pressures that perpetuate racism. The Salvation Army is committed to fight against racism wherever it is experienced and will speak into societies around the world wherever we encounter it.

As we pray for God's will to be done on earth as in Heaven, The Salvation Army will work towards a world where all people are accepted, loved and valued.

INTRODUCTION

Racism, casteism and tribalism are global issues, and are a tragic part of the human story from the beginning of time.

In the USA in addition to the strife between the white and black communities there is also significant tension within the Hispanic community depending on countries of origin, between Chinese and Japanese Americans and between African Americans and Hispanics.



The problem of racism is pervasive and complex. It is described as prejudice plus power. Racial division may be hidden, yet embedded in institutional life. Racism can be present even though people avoid using direct racist terminology; racism can be invisible to the dominant ethnicity, yet plainly evident to the disempowered ethnicity. (Divided By Faith – Emerson)



Racism can be so entrenched in institutions and culture that people can unintentionally and unwittingly perpetuate racial division. For instance, devout Christians who naively use racial epithets or a well-intentioned Sunday School curriculum that only uses white photography and imagery.

In addition, however, racism can also be overt, systematic and cruel.



THE POPULATION OF
THE WORLD IS CURRENTLY

7.4B

WHICH
CONSTITUTES



9,800
ETHNIC PEOPLE
GROUPS LIVING
IN 200 COUNTRIES

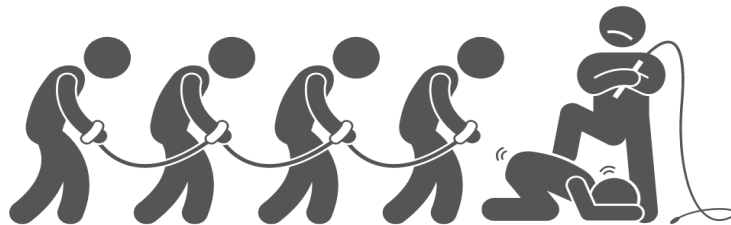
There are two main ways to define ethnicity. Ethno-linguistic groups are defined by language and/or dialect. Ethnic peoples are defined by religion, caste and culture.

The USA is the most ethnically diverse country in the world.

The most ethnically diverse city in the world is Toronto, Canada with over 200 ethnicities and 140 languages spoken.

There are an estimated 2.2 billion Christians in the world, or, approx. 1/3rd of the global population – a steady percentage for several decades.

While ethnic hostilities, rivalries and atrocities are too numerous to adequately list they are epitomized by the African slave trade, the Nazi supremacist movement, the Holocaust, South African apartheid, the Indian untouchable castes, the Japanese-Korean-Chinese conflicts, the Rwandan genocide, the treatment of indigenous people in North America and Australia and the abuse of trafficked workers in oil rich Saudi nations.



John Wesley said: "The world is my parish" and General Bramwell Booth said during WW1 'Every land is my fatherland, for all lands are my Father's.'

The Salvation Army serves in 128 countries around the world and preaches the gospel in 175 different languages.

In the aftermath of South African apartheid The Salvation Army made the following statement: 'All Salvation Army gatherings since our 1883 beginnings have been open to all races. Our failure has been in allowing the recognition of separate ethnic groupings, seen as normal at the time, but which fostered the idea of separate development.'



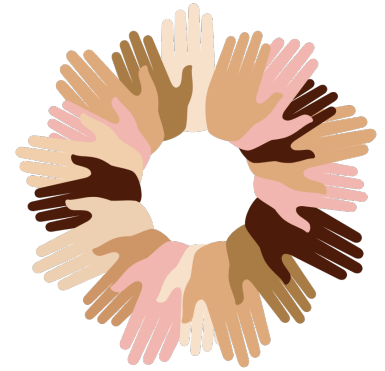
THEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

Introduction

It is important to note that the category of 'race' has no scientific basis. Genetically and biologically Anglo Saxons, Asians, Africans, Latinos etc. etc. are identical. The idea of different races is a social construction.

The Bible refers to people groups and nations. Ethnicity expressed through language, culture and geographic boundaries is the Biblical means of categorization.

The only race is the human one.



The Human Race

**WE ALL
BLEED
THE SAME
COLOUR**

The distinguishing characteristic of humans is that we are all created in the image and likeness of God. This divine likeness is unique amongst the created order and comes from the 'breath of God' in us. (GN 1:27)

The Bible emphasizes that all humans share one blood. (AC 17:26)

In the midst of the multi-ethnic city of Athens Paul asserts the unity of the human race, notes the validity of cultural diversity and points to the consummation of both in Jesus Christ. (Stott)

The power of Christ is well illustrated with the image of the destruction of the 'dividing wall of hostility.' (EPH 2:15). Here two become one. 'All forms of hatred, scorn and disrespect between Christians of different backgrounds are forbidden, being totally incompatible with Christ's reconciling work.' (Lausanne Movement – Pasadena Consultation)

At the heart of racism is the human tendency towards sin, our sheer human fallenness. It is an original sin, idolatry. Rather than seeing the spiritual image of God in each other we are drawn to a physical image. We easily focus on the physical differences between humans, rather than our shared humanity. It is short line from this racial idolatry to racial pride, the belief that the people with my physical features are inherently superior to people with different physical features.

This is exemplified in the erroneous 'curse of Ham,' (GN 9) constructed to justify the enslavement of black Africans by white Europeans and Americans.

Early in Scripture we read of tribal conflict, long-standing rivalries, cultural subjugation, indeed, ethnic cleansing. This is especially complex when intertwined the story of the people of Israel, the ethnicity central to the salvation story.

The People of Israel

Beginning with the ethnically identifiable people known as Hebrews, God's 'treasured possession', to the fact that Jesus was born and crucified as a Jew, scripture records the unique role embodied by the people of Israel.

God choosing to act in history includes the reality that Hebrew culture, history, names, literature, cuisine, indeed, the very soil and geographic boundaries of Israel, are forever synonymous with the salvation story.

We can see how readily this election could be interpreted as a divine affirmation of ethnic superiority. This includes a voice within Judaism as well as misappropriation by other people self-identifying as the 'new Israel' to sanction racist ideology – North American slave owners and Afrikaners in South Africa.

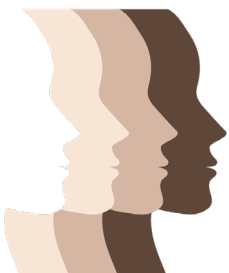
This is heinous misinterpretation.

Scripture records that the people of Israel were chosen because of their insignificance, (DT 7:7) that the people fleeing the Egyptians were in fact ethnically mixed (EX 12:38) and that covenant fidelity is to be the guiding principle of this special relationship. (EX 19:5) God says bluntly, 'Are not you Israelites the same to me as the Cushites?' (AM 9:7)

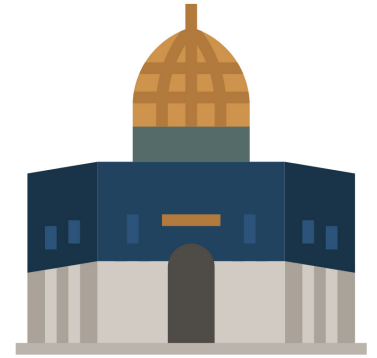
The distinction between Israelites and other people is not racial, but religious and moral. (EZ 9) Thus, the OT warnings concerning intermarriage and syncretism. (Stassen and Gushee – Kingdom Ethics)

The Jewish-Gentile relationship is present in the Abrahamic covenant where God says, 'all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.' (GN 12)

Jesus commissions his followers to 'go and make disciples of all nations' (MT 28) – panta ta ethne, all people groups. He also promises that the gift of the Holy Spirit will enable them to be 'my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.' (AC 1)



This is powerfully reinforced with the outpouring of Holy Spirit at Pentecost when 'God fearing Jews from every nation under heaven' each hear the wonders of God declared by the Galileans in their own native tongue – 15 distinct ethnicities and regions listed. (AC 2)



The People of Israel (cont.)

The issue is so real and earthy that the tension between Jews and Gentiles is a major theme in the NT. Jesus' gracious relationship with differing ethnicities is exemplified in his conversations with the Samaritan woman, the Roman centurion and the Canaanite woman. A central figure in his teaching is the 'good Samaritan,' described as a 'neighbor.' (MK 10)

As the NT church begins to mature and evolve it does so in a world where race relations between Jew and Gentile are a very real fact of life. A deep Biblical principle emerges: Jews do not cease to be Jews; Gentiles do not cease to be Gentiles. Ethnic differences, however, are to be no barrier to fellowship in Christ.

This is not easily realized. Paul confronts Peter for withdrawing from table fellowship with Gentiles, arguing that this is a denial of the truth of the gospel (GAL 2). Paul – a Jew and Roman citizen called to serve Gentiles – later has to convince the Jerusalem Council of the validity of his Gentile converts. (AC 15) He prevails, and this ethnic inclusiveness becomes formally sanctioned, one of the most significant decisions in all of scripture. Without it, Christianity will have undoubtedly remained an obscure Jewish sect.

The template is set for resolution – a multi ethnic vision of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Citizens of Heaven

The scattering of the nations (GN 10) and the Abrahamic promise (GN 12) represent a theme that permeates all of scripture – the global, multi-ethnic reconciliation plan of God. The church as the single new humanity or God's new society is central to the gospel. (Pasadena Consultation – Lausanne Movement)



It is quite certain that in a mysterious way we shall retain our ethnic identities in heaven. The Revelation image is one of John who sees a multitude 'from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne'. (REV 7)

This is the consummation of history and continues the same unity Paul exhorts in his epistles; as such it provides a model for us to strive toward now. In this way an ethnically homogeneous unit church is 'never complete in itself' and does not genuinely 'reflect the universality and diversity of the Body of Christ.' (Pasadena Consultation)

Citizens of Heaven (cont.)

Given our universal broken human tendency towards national mistrust and tribal conflict this Biblical view of ethnic unity stands sharply distinct. Followers of Jesus Christ now find essential unity in Him, rather than in culture and ethnicity.

Such a way of thinking and relating is a powerful force for good. It embodies the ministry of reconciliation.

Social Outcomes



Racist national policies can result in segregation, oppression and, ultimately, genocide. The social outcomes are incalculable in their human devastation – slavery, civil rights violations, apartheid, Arian supremacy, caste system, and more.

Racism negatively affects everyone.

- The recipients experience fundamental rejection, disempowerment and more.

- Perpetrators function from fear and ignorance and experience the natural self-loathing that comes from spreading hatred.
- Wider society experiences hostilities and reduced productivity.

The collective contribution of every citizen is compromised, thus reducing national development and productivity.

Oppressed people groups invariably experience poor health and housing services, reduced life expectancy, lower employment opportunities, lower high school graduation rates, increased homelessness and more incidents of violence.

The subtle nature of racism is such that people who are not consciously racist easily function with the privileges, empowerment and benefits of the dominant ethnicity, thus unintentionally perpetuating injustice.

It is important for the empowered generations, including those who inherited the cultures of their forbearers, to assess their present circumstances and work towards just and equal communities.



Discussion Points

1. Discuss the statement 'The only race is the human one.'
2. How might the idea of the Hebrew people as 'chosen' be misinterpreted to mean 'superior' – for both the original Jewish culture, and as a subsequent racist ideology?
3. A church that is ethnically homogeneous is described as 'never complete in itself.' How much do you agree or disagree with this statement?
4. What are your experiences or observations of racism, as recipient or perpetrator, unintentional or otherwise?
5. What are some specific ideas and initiatives your corps can embrace to combat racial inequality?

References

- Divided By Faith – Michael Emerson and Christian Smith, Oxford University Press, 2000
- From Every People and Nation – Daniel Hays, IVP, 2003
- The Pasadena Consultation: Homogeneous Unit Principle – Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, 1978
- The Salvation Army International Positional Statement on Racism – www.salvationarmy.org/ihq/positionalstatements
- United States Census Bureau – www.census.gov
- Joshua Project – www.joshuaproject.net
- Racism, National Association of Social Workers – www.naswdc.org

The Human Race

GN 1:26

God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." [27] So God created humankind in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. [28] God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it."

AMOS 9:7

"Are not you Israelites the same to me as the Cushites?"

MT 28:19

Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

MT 24: 14

This gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.

MK 12:31

'Love your neighbor as yourself.'

ACTS 1:8

You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."



ACTS 2:1

When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. [...] All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them. [5] Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. [6] When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard them speaking in his own language.



ACTS 17:26

From one man he made every nation of humans, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live.

1 COR 9:19

I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. [20] To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law.

SCRIPTURE REFERENCES

The Human Race (cont.)

GAL 2:11

When Peter came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he was clearly in the wrong. [12] Before certain men came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But when they arrived, he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles

The People of Israel

GN 12:1-3

The LORD had said to Abram, [...] I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.

EX 12:37

The Israelites journeyed from Rameses to Succoth. There were about six hundred thousand men on foot, besides women and children. [38] Many other people went up with them.

EX 19:5

Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, [6] you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.'

DT 7:7

The LORD did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples.

ZECH 8:23

This is what the LORD Almighty says: "In those days ten men from all languages and nations will take firm hold of one Jew by the hem of his robe and say, 'Let us go with you, because we have heard that God is with you.'"



Citizens of Heaven

IS 2:2

In the last days the mountain of the LORD's temple will be established as chief among the mountains; it will be raised above the hills, and all nations will stream to it.

MT 24:14

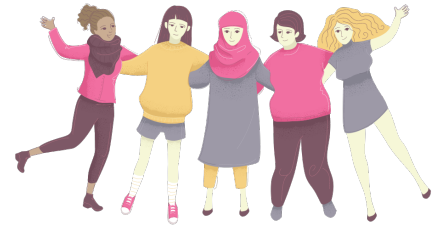
This gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.

GAL 3:28

There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

EPH 2:13

Remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise ... [13] But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ. [14] For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility ... [19] Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household.



REV 7:9

I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands.