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RACISM & SOCIAL JUSTICE

In light of the recent societal upheaval and cultural milieu, it was deemed necessary to release a statement about current issues related to racism and social justice.

We have attempted to be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to anger (James 1:19). As an Evangelical institution called to equip students to proclaim the Gospel, engage the culture, and defend the truth (including the inspiration and inerrancy of the Bible), Southern Evangelical Seminary and Bible College (SES) stands *for* the inherent value of *all* human life (Gen. 1:27) and *against* racism in *all* its insidious forms (Zech. 7:10; Prov. 28:16; Acts 10:34-35; Gal. 3:28) while also acknowledging that some professing Christians throughout the church's history have attempted to hijack the Gospel message for racist causes.

SES certainly affirms the belief that "black lives matter." The truth is, that statement is woefully inadequate. As Dr. Corey Miller, President of SES ministry partner Ratio Christi, observed, "All black lives are sacred."¹ In fact, *all human lives are sacred*, whatever their ethnicity. Why? The fact that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, died on the cross to purchase eternal salvation for every human being who will accept Him as their Lord and Savior makes every human being sacred. As Dr. W. A. Criswell famously put it, "God never created a nobody. Everybody is a somebody to God!"

However, in the midst of the very emotion-laden debate currently rending the social fabric of our society as we seek once again to deal with the racism that has always been the serpent in America's Eden, it is critically important to take extraordinary measures to do everything within our power not to be misunderstood, as well as seek to bring greater understanding to the discussion.

Consequently, while SES affirms that "black lives matter" as a subset of "all human lives are sacred," SES must separate itself emphatically from the Black Lives Matter (BLM) *movement* which espouses beliefs that are antithetical to basic foundational tenets of the Christian faith (see BlackLivesMatter.com).

SES, along with fellow Evangelical ministries such as the Billy Graham Evangelical Association and the American Family Association, have grave, fundamental disagreements with their moral, cultural, and political agenda (Meek Addison, "The Stated Goals of Black Lives Matter Are Anti-Christian," *Decision*, vol. 61 [July-August 2020]: 10-11.) Consequently, SES cannot mouth the mantra "black lives matter" lest we be misinterpreted as supporting their godless agenda.

Having stated this position, it is important to acknowledge that the cancer of racism still exists in America. Racism exists in every nation because this disgusting form of sinful human pride is common to the fallen human condition (Jer. 17:9; Rom. 3:23). SES is committed to fighting the corruption and darkness of racism with the salt of the law and the light of the Gospel (Matt. 5:13-16), understanding that all of us are part of the one human race (Gen. 1:26-28; Acts 17:26).

While there are many well-intentioned people who protest peacefully while holding signs that proclaim "Black

Lives Matter,” and have no intention of supporting the BLM organization’s goals, many observers will understandably be confused or misled into believing that such protesters do support such an anti-Christian agenda. Thus, it seems prudent for Christians to seek to avoid even the appearance of evil and find other ways to express their justifiable outrage at racial injustice.

For this reason, as stated above, SES embraces the more inclusive and less misunderstood phrase that “*all human lives are sacred*” while emphasizing the need to pursue truth, goodness, and justice for all ethnicities.

Prudence and fairness, however, call all of us to not rush to a judgment of racism (pervasive, systemic, or otherwise) in every interaction or situation where differing levels of melanin are present, whether that involves police officers (most of whom do their best to serve and protect) or civilians (John 7:24). Not every confrontation, offense, or unequal outcome is necessarily because of racism (though racism certainly may be an issue in many instances). There is much debate beyond the scope of this short statement as to the modern usage of the term “racism” in some contexts and the extent of pervasive and/or systemic racism in the United States today. In addition to individual personal experiences, there is an abundance of general data that must be considered in order for anyone to make informed judgments regarding the causes of modern racial tensions and problems. Only then will real solutions to those problems be found, enabling us to effectively fight modern racism wherever it exists.

Racism is an affront to the Gospel and completely contrary to the good all human beings are called to pursue. The Gospel alone provides complete forgiveness, healing, reconciliation, and victory over the sin of racism and every other manifestation of sin (John 3:16; 1 Cor. 12:13; Gal. 6:1). Our Christian convictions undergirded by classical natural law reasoning compel us to fight real racism wherever it is found and to stand for truth, justice, natural rights, and the freedoms they secure. That is why SES is committed to equipping students with the philosophical and theological tools necessary to engage these cultural issues head-on.

Please explore the information below to learn more.

Why Won’t SES Say ‘Black Lives Matter’?

As stated above, *all black lives are sacred* as a subset of all human lives are sacred, including victims of police brutality, victims of senseless murders, the 230,000 black abortion victims each year, and every other black life past, present, and future. SES does not, however, promote the mantra “black lives matter,” understanding that this decision is a matter of conscience for each Christian. As already noted, the BLM organization, and many of its related positions, are explicitly anti-Christian. Holding to mis-defined notions of love, freedom, and justice, BLM stands against the nuclear family, promotes homosexual and transgender ideologies, and is an admittedly Marxist organization.²

Imagine that a group of people were demonstrating while holding signs that read “Make America Great Again.” Understandably, passersby would assume these people are Trump supporters. When asked by a passerby why the group supports President Trump, one of the demonstrators responds, “What? We don’t support President Trump at all. We don’t like his rhetoric or his demeanor. We simply want to make America great again.” The

passerby would likely respond, “What do you mean you don’t support President Trump? You’re using his campaign slogan. You can’t say ‘Make America Great Again’ and not expect people to assume you’re a Trump supporter.” (Note, this example is not meant to imply that anyone should or should not endorse President Trump.)

In the current context, there are many well-intentioned people who protest peacefully while holding signs that read “Black Lives Matter.” Certainly, black lives do matter, and the protesters may have no intention of supporting the BLM organization’s goals. Nevertheless, the “black lives matter” mantra has been so tied to the BLM organization that one is hard pressed to recite the words “black lives matter” without providing implicit endorsement for the organization (whether intentional or not). For this reason, as stated above, SES adopts the stronger, more inclusive, and less confusing phrase that “*all human lives are sacred*” while emphasizing the need to pursue truth and goodness for all ethnicities, understanding that we are all part of one human race (Gen. 1:28; Acts 17:26).

Please see the info below for the specifics of why BLM’s platform does not promote truth and goodness.

Does BLM’s Platform Promote Truth and Goodness?

1. Neither an individual human being nor a society can become *better* without some end/purpose towards which each is directed to pursue. If there is no directed end/purpose, individuals and societies may change and become *different*, but they cannot actually become *better*. To become better implies that people or societies are becoming more *perfect*, and are therefore more closely approaching what it means to be *good*. Hence, without this goal directedness (i.e., teleology) there can be no objective way to argue that one person or society is good and any other person or society is bad/evil.
2. Something is *good* to the extent that it is *perfect*, and something is perfect to the extent that it fulfills the end/purpose towards which it is directed according to its nature (i.e., *what* it is). A simple way to understand this is to consider that a *good* eye is one that manifests the perfection of seeing well (sight being the end/purpose towards which an eye is directed given its nature; see 1 Cor. 12:15-20). This is arguably the only means by which to have an objective standard of goodness that is discovered (i.e., not invented) and that is objectively true (i.e., corresponds to reality) for everyone.
3. The good for us as humans is determined by our shared nature as human beings (i.e., *what* we are) rather than any subjective thought, desire, or feeling a particular individual may have. Human beings have an intellect directed towards pursuing truth (which is the good for the intellect) and a will directed towards obtaining what the intellect perceives as good. To deny the claim that your intellect is directed to truth (i.e. to say the claim is false) is in practice to validate it as you would be demonstrating the fact that, by nature, your intellect is directed towards knowing true things (John 8:32).
4. From these principles one is able to derive natural law morality (the good we as humans ought to pursue according to what is perfective of the various ends towards which our common human nature is directed) that provides an objective basis for human moral actions and human law.³ As Thomas Aquinas notes, “Hence this is the first precept of law, that ‘good is to be done and pursued, and evil is to be avoided.’ All other precepts of the natural law are based upon this: so that whatever the practical reason naturally

apprehends as man's good (or evil) belongs to the precepts of the natural law as something to be done or avoided.”⁴ Much like the law of noncontradiction is discovered to be an indemonstrable first principle of theoretical reasoning that cannot be avoided, Paul DeHart observes, “No natural lawyer has ever proposed inferring oughts from oughtless facts. . . . Natural lawyers of varying backgrounds begin moral reasoning from indemonstrable first principles of practical or moral reason that prescribe and therefore stipulate an ought right at the outset—namely, that good is to be done and evil avoided.”⁵

5. A modified form of natural law was the foundational statement of this nation's Declaration of Independence, “When in the course of human events it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth the separate and equal station to which the *laws of nature and of nature's God* entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.” Martin Luther King, Jr. also referenced natural law in his famous *Letter from the Birmingham Jail*: “I would agree with St. Augustine that ‘an unjust law is no law at all.’ . . . To put it in the terms of St. Thomas Aquinas, an unjust law is a human law that is not rooted in eternal and natural law.”⁶ We also see this notion referenced throughout the Bible, perhaps most specifically in Rom. 2:14-15.
6. Furthermore, human beings are social creatures (but not *socialist* creatures) who naturally depend on one another to fulfill some of our various ends/purposes while expecting others to not interfere with our pursuing of the good (Mark 12:31). Societies are simply collections of human beings living in proximity, striving for the common good. The nuclear family is the natural and most fundamental structure from which societies are built. Given these truths, it follows that all human beings have certain natural rights. To again quote our Declaration of Independence, “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.” Happiness here is not to be understood as a fleeting emotion dictated by circumstances. Rather, true happiness lies in the fulfillment of our good as human beings (Prov. 28:12).
7. Natural law is the best foundation upon which to build an objective and robust basis for human rights, freedom/liberty, and justice. As Edward Feser notes, “While the very concept of a right entails a certain measure of liberty, that liberty cannot be absolute; for since the point of natural rights is to enable us to realize the ends set for us by nature, there cannot, even in principle, be a natural right to do what is contrary to the realization of those ends. In short, there cannot be a natural right to do wrong” (Gal. 5:13).⁷ True liberty, or freedom, is not the ability to do whatever one *desires*. It is the ability to do what one *ought*, that is, to do what is objectively *good*. Justice, in turn, is the good of giving someone their due and not withholding what is owed. Without a robust understanding of objective goodness and natural law, we cannot have a proper understanding of liberty or justice (Prov. 21:15; Is. 1:17; Gal. 5:13). Properly understood, justice is based on *truth, goodness, and equal treatment and/or opportunity*. This stands in contrast to the *popular* understanding of social justice that is concerned with *status* and equal *outcomes* (Prov. 28:16).
8. From the above, it follows that all forms of racism are morally wrong and should be condemned and combated. Treating anyone as less than human (or as a lesser human) is objectively evil. It also follows, how-

ever, that homosexual and transgender *behavior* are contrary to the good of human sexuality and should not be promoted or affirmed. In addition, it follows that dismantling the nuclear (i.e., natural) family and intentionally depriving children of life (i.e., abortion) or a natural family structure are necessarily evil.⁸ Something like the natural law reasoning above must be true in order for there to be an objective basis to say “black lives matter” or that *any* lives actually matter.

9. Each human being also has a natural right to private property, to engage in commerce, and to not be coerced by the government or fellow citizens to violate his or her own natural rights or the rights of others. Hence, free-market capitalism is the best economic system by which imperfect humans can best work together for the common good (Ex. 20:15; 1 Tim. 5:18).⁹
10. Government is for the people, not people for the government, and the goal of government is the common good of its citizens. As Aquinas says, “Since then every man is a part of the state, it is impossible that a man be good, unless he be well proportionate to the common good: nor can the whole be well consistent unless its parts be proportionate to it. Consequently the common good of the state cannot flourish, unless the citizens be virtuous, at least those whose business it is to govern.”¹⁰ Both totalitarianism and egalitarianism should be rejected. Even with our sins and imperfections as a nation, this federal constitutional republic has always strived to be better (Rom. 13:4). Without the foundational principles of natural law, however, we will never be able to form a “more perfect union,” “establish justice,” or “secure the blessings of liberty” as promised in the preamble of the United States Constitution.
11. Classically understood, to love others is to will their good. Hence, based on the above, we truly love others when we graciously point them to truth and help them fulfill their good according to their nature as human beings. To encourage anyone to pursue anything contrary to the good is nothing less than hate. First Corinthians 13:4-7 describes love as follows: “Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.”
12. As stated above, it is true that *all black lives are sacred* and that the BLM organization along with its related positions violate the natural law and cannot be classified as good. Granted that to love is to will the good of another, promoting the BLM agenda cannot be considered loving. Therefore, individuals or societies that promote things contrary to the *good* by adopting the BLM platform cannot become *better* or become “more perfect.” While our *ultimate* good is only found in knowing God through salvation in Jesus Christ (i.e., the Gospel), we can strive to promote the *common* good (i.e., love our neighbors as ourselves) by working with our fellow citizens to argue for natural law, to defend natural rights, to help the oppressed, and to share the Gospel as often as possible (2 Cor. 10:3-5; Eph. 4:25-32; 2 Tim. 2:24-26; Titus 3:1-11; 2 Peter 1:5-9).

What About ‘White Fragility’ and Other ‘Wokeness’ Ideologies?

Classical natural law thinking gives us an objective basis, common to all human beings and consistent with God’s revealed Word, from which we can fight the evils of racism and bigotry. The same natural intellectual power that enables us to discover and pursue the common good of society should lead everyone to summarily

reject the major notions of “wokeness” ideology, critical race theory, “white guilt,” and “white fragility” that are currently promoted in many churches, schools, and mass media outlets as the solutions to our racial issues.

Many of these ideas are built upon the bankrupt philosophy of standpoint epistemology that essentially rejects the ability of humans to know objective truth about reality.¹¹ This is a completely self-defeating proposition as it itself claims to be an objective truth about reality that all humans are somehow capable of knowing. In addition, several of these notions are built on the logically fallacious *kafka* trap that sets up a false dilemma (ex., “Yes or no, does your mother know you’re stupid?”) thus making accusations of racism completely unfalsifiable. Any reasons one provides to prove he is *not* a racist is used as evidence for his alleged racism. Moreover, these lines of thinking are often anti-Gospel, making little to no room for repentance, forgiveness, or reconciliation. They remove any personal responsibility and choice from individuals and place guilt on a collective group of people simply because of their skin color. *This is the epitome of collectivist and racist thinking.* While individuals are certainly impacted and influenced by the societal structure which they have experienced, ultimately individuals are responsible for their own behavior.

We must do better and call upon our fellow citizens to do better. Good philosophy and theology give us the needed tools to work for real change. Edward Feser ironically observes,

“The currency of the term ‘social justice’ originated in Thomistic natural law social theory. ... It has to do with the just or right ordering of society as defined by strong families and cooperation between husband and wife in carrying out their respective roles for the sake of children and elders, solidarity and cooperation between economic classes and other social groups, and scrupulous attention to subsidiarity in the state’s relationship to the ‘little platoons’ of society.”¹²

The current popular understanding of “social justice” is the opposite of the good all humans should pursue and is anything but just. We cannot love our neighbors well and lead them to the Gospel if we sacrifice truth and goodness on the false altar of “wokeness” ideology.

The following words from former President Obama’s 2013 inaugural address summarize nicely our personal responsibility going forward,

“For history tells us that while these truths may be self-evident, they’ve never been self-executing; that while freedom is a gift from God, it must be secured by His people here on Earth. The patriots of 1776 did not fight to replace the tyranny of a king with the privileges of a few or the rule of a mob. They gave to us a republic, a government of, and by, and for the people, entrusting each generation to keep safe our founding creed.”¹³

The great leaders of the mid-twentieth century Civil Rights revolution that did so much to liberate Americans

of all ethnicities from our Babylonian Captivity of institutional *de jure* racism and segregation in which we were imprisoned, understood this truth about our nation. Like Dr. King, many of them were ordained ministers, and their movement was founded on, and immersed in, Christian theology, not Cultural Marxism.

Dr. King, the descendent of slaves, called on America to live up to the promises of its founding documents, which would produce the society to which he inspired, challenged, and dared all Americans to aspire:

“I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: ‘We hold these truths to be self-evident; that all men are created equal.’ I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood.” (Martin Luther King Jr., Washington, DC, August 28, 1963).

Thank God these men showed America the path forward from a history tainted by the sin of racism, challenging us to continue to strive to truly become a more perfect union. The brave men and women of the Civil Rights Revolution showed us that with enough faith and love, we could all be liberated from racism’s dehumanizing and crippling impact, white and black alike.

Will you courageously and graciously stand with SES in the face of the contempt, misguided love, hatred, fear, and evil we are currently seeing throughout our society? *We must* embrace the reality that pursuing anything other than truth and goodness only leads to destruction, for the individual, for the church, and for a nation (Prov. 25:26; Prov. 29:8).

Endnotes

1. Credit to Dr. Corey Miller, President of SES ministry partner Ratio Christi, for this particular phrase: <https://midwestoutreach.org/2020/06/30/black-lives-are-sacred/>
2. <https://blacklivesmatter.com/what-we-believe/> ; <https://nypost.com/2020/06/25/blm-co-founder-describes-herself-as-trained-marxist/>
3. It should be noted that natural law provides a common ground for human moral behavior without the need to appeal to divine commands or the Bible. Natural law is biblical in that it lines up with biblical principles, but one can discover natural law precepts without appealing to God or the Bible. To be sure, however, humans only exist with the natures they have because of God’s creation and His sustaining in existence everything that exists at every moment it exists. As Klubertanz and Holloway note, “A natural being is ordered to its proper end both by its nature [essence] and by an intellect. Immediately and intrinsically, it is ordered by its nature, but ultimately and extrinsically, it is so ordered by the divine intellect who has established the end and created the nature” (*Being and God*, Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1963).
4. Thomas Aquinas (2010-06-19). *Summa Theologica* (Complete & Unabridged) . Coyote Canyon Press. Kindle Edition. Kindle location 37699.

5. <https://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2020/07/64302/>
6. http://okra.stanford.edu/transcription/document_images/undecided/630416-019.pdf (p.7)
7. <https://lawliberty.org/forum/natural-law-natural-rights-and-private-property/>
8. We understand that single-parent families or other circumstances are sometimes the unfortunate result of this fallen world, and we thank God that He is able to work through our broken circumstances for His good.
9. “Best” here does not imply perfection. Due to each human’s propensity to be led astray by the passions and not be led perfectly by reason and prudence, every human system will inevitably have issues.
10. I-II q.92 a.1 ad 3. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (London: Burns Oates & Washbourne, n.d.).
11. “First, CRT scholars ‘reject the prevailing orthodoxy that scholarship should be or could be “neutral” and “objective.”’ They believe ‘legal scholarship about race in America can never be written from a distance of detachment or with an attitude of objectivity.’ Human beings are perspectival knowers. We learn about, see, and treat things from tradition-bound perspectives. Our scholarship, then, never arises from a neutral, objective view from nowhere.” – <https://faithfullymagazine.com/critical-race-theory-christians/>
12. <https://edwardfeser.blogspot.com/2017/10/liberty-equality-fraternity.html>
13. <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2013/01/21/inaugural-address-president-barack-obama>



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