

Can I Call You Gringo?

What's the latest politi-cally correct term for white people? Is it white man, Caucasian, Anglo, Euro-American, Paleface, Yankee, Gringo, Honky? It changes so often, I find it hard to remember.

I'm often asked what Native people prefer to be called. Is it Native American, Indian, American Indian or what? You'll likely get a different answer from everyone you ask. Probably the safest answer is Native American—or in Canada, Aboriginal or First Nations.

This ever-changing glossary of labels poses quite a dilemma both for white people and Native people who are trying to be culturally sensitive to one another. We Christians need a worldview that mirrors the kingdom of God. Our core beliefs about people need to respond comprehensively to the growing diversity and related social and spiritual challenges the body of Christ faces.

Biblically and scientifically speaking, there are not different evolutionary gene pools from which "colored races" stem. According to Scripture, there is only one race in humanity—the Adamic race.

"And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings" (Acts 17:26, NKJV).

This verse reveals critically important truths about identity. It says God created all the nations—the ethnos, or the ethnic people groups—of the world. It says He sovereignly predetermines the periods of history that people groups exist in, as well as the specific geographic locations where they live.

I believe this significant sense of purpose is inherent in the term “First Nations.” Today, I and many others strongly embrace the concept that it conveys. We’d like to suggest that the North American church use the term.

Here are a few reasons why:

First Nations communicates a sense of original habitation, God’s sovereignty and corporate identity. “American Indian” and “Native American” both denote a political or colonial identity imposed on us through conquest and treaty.

An older Native man once asked a group of people if they knew why America is called a free country. “Because they never paid us for it,” he answered them. Before the flood of boat people first hit our shores at Plymouth Rock, there were nations already flourishing throughout the Americas.

In fact, long before we discovered and rescued Christopher Columbus—the first wayward European to visit our land—the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob already was revealing Himself and working among the First Nations in this land. We know this because Romans 1:19-20 tells us how God has revealed His invisible attributes to the people of the world through His creation. The strength of this natural revelation of creation

is so compelling, the Bible says, that it leaves all men without excuse before God.

First Nations captures the essence of biblical identity for us as a people created in God's image, not in the image of European culture and Manifest Destiny. It puts us as nations in North America first, before all other nations began migrating here, because God wanted us here first, as Acts 17:26 says.

This fact includes a degree of divine assignment that is related to stewardship and authority. It comes with being the host people of the land.

First Nations acknowledges the Father's sovereignty in making us co-equal partners in the cause of Christ. He has made us co-equals with all Christians in divine purpose, worth and value. He has not made us dependents who find their identity or fulfillment in the approval or patronage of others.

So, when you speak of us as First Nations people I hope you will go much further than simply being politically sensitive. Please consider us in light of God's sovereignty and eternal purposes for our nation.

The church is just now awakening to this reality. How about you? What term will you use the next time you talk about people of color, whatever color they are?

you call me an Indian, I promise I won't get offended, Paleface.

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