

How Can We Exorcise Racism Ghosts of the Past?

Southern Evangelical Seminary President Dr. Richard Land lived through the civil rights movements of the 1950s and '60s—in the South, no less. But what the country is witnessing today, nearly six decades later, begs the question, “How We Can Exorcise the Ghosts of the Past.”

In a recent column, “Racial Reconciliation and the Gospel,” he declares that America still confronts a great racial divide, and there is an urgent need to close that tragic gap as quickly as possible.

“It grieves me to witness the extent to which racial mistrust and animosity still beset and bedevil America,” Land wrote. “However, given the visceral response generated by the tragic events in Ferguson, Missouri, and Staten Island, New York, it is clear that we still have a long way to go in our national life before we achieve Dr. King’s dream of a nation where people are not judged ‘by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.’”

Land added that it’s evident that there still exists a serious rift in the nation’s social fabric when black Americans and white Americans view incidents and headlines through such contrasting lenses—and it’s a rift that must be healed quickly before further alienation and damage are done.

The church, adds Land, will be key to achieving true racial reconciliation and justice.

“It would seem that the ‘salt’ of the law has done most of the heavy lifting it can do to relieve racial injustice,” he said. “The salt of the law can change actions, behaviors and habits. However, it is only the light of the gospel that can change attitudes, beliefs and hearts.”

In the wake of Ferguson and Staten Island, people default to their past experiences, Land wrote. He adds that he has never had a negative experience with a police officer of any color, but he knows few African-Americans who have not had truly bad experiences with the police or know someone who has.

“The only way to truly bridge this divide, heal this rift and move forward is for Christians, twice-born men and women, to come forward and take the lead in the immediate formation of ethnically diverse coalitions where people can tell each other their stories and begin to exorcise the ghosts of the past together,” he said. “Ultimately, we must seek to get out of our comfort zones and strive with intentionality to form truly multi-ethnic, multi-class churches where people of differing ethnicities and socio-economic backgrounds worship together and minister to one another as equal members of the local body of Christ. Then we will hear and know each other’s stories, and we will put faces we know on racial and economic injustice. Such churches will truly transform our culture.”