

Out Of Many, One

*AMERICA WAS CALLED TO BE A HAVEN OF LIBERTY FOR ALL RACES.
IT'S TIME TO TOPPLE EVERY STRONGHOLD OF RACISM.*

In the Library of Congress there hangs a painting called The Dawn of the Millennium. It is one of the most amazing paintings I have ever seen.

In the center of the work is an altar mounted on a hill representative of the lush landscape of America. Standing around the altar, which glows with the glory of God, are ministers from every Christian denomination.

Yet there is more. Looking beyond the altar to the distant hills, you can see symbols of the nations drawing near. There are turbaned Arabs and Native American Indians and discernibly Asian figures all drawing near to the altar of the Lord.

This was indeed the founding vision of America. Men dreamed a dream from the heart of God. America would be a land so permeated by biblical truth and righteousness that the glory of God would dwell here, unity would reign, the nations would come, and the world would see a model of Christian civilization as it had never seen before.

But not everyone who settled America shared this vision. Some came for wealth, power and their own glory.

It did not take long for these lesser motives to prevail. Early in our nation's history, the dream of a land in which the world's diverse races could live in a righteous, respectful harmony started to die.

Soon the Indians whom our Christian forebears yearned to befriend and convert were treated as enemies to conquer. Our forefathers began selling Africans in the marketplace to work

the land as the property of Christian owners. So began the legacy of racism in America—a contradiction to our glorious founding vision.

Today America has been changed by the Civil War, the civil rights movement and equal opportunity legislation. The cabinet of President George W. Bush is the most diverse in American history. Yet I am forced to report that racism is alive and well in America.

We have not arisen to our destiny as a nation—as God has defined our purpose—and we never will until we see the forces of hatred and the walls of division destroyed by the crush of righteousness and love. Although the churches will have to lead the way, it is a vision for the nation as a whole.

GOD'S DREAM DEFERRED

Jesus died for every “tribe and tongue and people and nation” (Rev. 5:9, NKJV). His church was meant to represent this redemptive activity (see Matt. 28:19-20).

Racism angers God. If we could allow this reality to sink into our souls, it would transform our culture.

In the Gospel of Mark, chapter 11, we have the story of Jesus clearing the temple of men who were exchanging money and selling sacrificial animals. Some have concluded that Jesus was upset with merchants for doing business in a holy place, but allow me to suggest that this is not the whole story.

The business that was taking place was allowed if it was conducted honestly. But I think Jesus also may have been grieved because the merchants had set up business in the courts—the only places that the Gentiles had to pray.

We often remember that Jesus said, “‘My house shall be called a house of prayer.’” He actually said, “‘My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations’” (emphasis added), and He assumed that the Jews who knew their Old Testament very

well would know the context of the passage (see Mark 11:17; Is. 56:7).

Jesus was not only upset about dishonest business being conducted around the temple; He was also upset about the racism of the merchants who kept the foreigners they so despised from approaching the courts of the Lord.

We need a restoration of this kind of holy fire in our churches. By this I'm talking about a passion that reflects the passion of Jesus.

America will not fulfill her destiny unless she heals the racial breach and becomes the light to the nations she was made to be. This means not only removing racial hatred from our hearts but also refusing to be satisfied until there is not one race in this country that is without equality of opportunity and equality of support from a caring society.

BLACKS IN AMERICA

Slavery ended a century and a half ago, and the battles for civil rights were decided 50 years ago, yet there is still a disparity between blacks and whites in America. In 2004, the Chicago Sun Times reported that an African American baby is twice as likely to die at birth as a white baby. An African American male is six times more likely to be murdered.

Even successful blacks do not fare as well as successful whites. The median income of a white college graduate in America is \$59,914. The median income of a black college graduate in America is \$45,079.

These are not the only issues that concern me, however. I'm also concerned about a kind of religious racism that is allowing cults to carry away African Americans at an astonishing rate.

Traditional Islam is growing among blacks. And the Nation of Islam, led by Louis Farrakhan, is having a huge impact.

What appeals to so many blacks about the Nation of Islam are some of the good things it encourages blacks to believe about themselves. It teaches that being black is nothing to be ashamed of, that blacks are a noble race, that the path to power is moral purity, that the black soul has been tortured by racism in America but the damage isn't permanent and that blacks have a glorious destiny as a people. These are truths the Christian church ought to be teaching.

Though Europeans extended the evil trade, the truth is that Muslim slave traders introduced slavery into Africa. When a young black man takes on an Arab-sounding name, he is trying to make a genuine connection with his African heritage rather than the history of abuse and hate his people have known in America. Because the Christian church has not told the whole story, this young man believes that Islam is his heritage and his destiny.

I want my young black friends to know Islam is not their historic faith, though I can understand why they believe it is. The church has not given them a sense of heritage in the way it teaches the Bible or relates the history of Christianity.

The Bible tells us it was a black man who helped Jesus carry the cross (see Luke 23:26). The Ethiopian eunuch took the gospel to his country and sparked a movement that changed that nation forever—in Africa (see Acts 8:27).

The brilliant theologian Origen was an African. Augustine was an African born into the home of a Nubian mother and a Carthaginian father.

It grieves me deeply when a young black man in America finds no sense of connection to a “white gospel” and turns to Islam. He is being denied his true heritage, denied the path to liberation and deceived into believing that he should take the true religion of slavery as his own. This is the worst kind of

religious racism, and the time has come for the truth to set a generation and a race free—once and for all.

POSSESSING THE FOUNDING DREAM

There is a view of the founding of America that leaves a bitter taste in the mouths of nonwhites and, indeed, in the mouths of many in our present society. It goes something like this: The Founding Fathers of America were rich, white racists who compromised the soul of America.

They fought a revolution not to launch a righteous nation but to preserve their social class, and they traded on the souls of Africans to do it. The good things about America arose despite them, and we owe them little by way of respect.

This view is uninformed and creates a class of people who despise their national fathers and thus distance themselves from the founding faith. Such thinking has made many in America bitter, immune to the wisdom of the Founding Fathers and susceptible to manipulation and radicalism.

Let me admit that our Founding Fathers compromised on race. They did not apply the lofty promises of the Declaration of Independence to blacks, and they left our nation exposed to the threat of civil war.

Some of them owned slaves. These things cannot be denied. Yet they are not the whole truth.

The founding generation formed the foundation for the freedoms we all enjoy today. Remember that when our Declaration of Independence was penned, most of the world practiced slavery in some form. America was no exception.

Still, many of our Founding Fathers realized that a great nation could not embrace such a practice forever. The founding generation of America was a transitional generation. They understood that the old ways of the nations could not create a free society.

The Founders dreamed of a righteous republic modeling liberty for the world. They were far ahead of their time.

Our generation has an opportunity to fulfill the glorious dream of its founding. But it will never happen if a huge portion of our society views that founding dream as a bondage to escape rather than a legacy to extend.

To my black, Asian, Arab and Hispanic friends, I say, please, have done with bitterness. You live in a great land founded by flawed people who nevertheless framed the liberties you now enjoy. Don't hate them.

Embrace their legacy and build a nation even better than the one they envisioned. Now is the time to hold tightly to the wisdom of our fathers and dream of a righteous America, in which every citizen enjoys the freedoms that are our divine inheritance.

Read a companion devotional.

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