

Essay reviewing the current human drama  
to raise hope for complete change:

# **Digging into the Roots of Racism for *New* Justice to Emerge**

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## Digging into the Roots of Racism for *New Justice* to Emerge

This essay extends the discussion of last month's essay on *Diagnosing the Underlying Pandemic in Our Human Condition*. Almost as if following a predesigned script, the narrative unfolding in the human drama this past month has amplified the breadth of our human condition and intensified the depth of its infection in this underlying pandemic. Yet, how evident our condition really has become to us is an open question.

The current protests spreading not only through the U.S. but globally make a statement that needs to be both clarified and corrected—not politically but by the roots of the intractable human condition of the human race. As we dig into those roots it will become evident immediately: It is insufficient to say, shout and protest that “black lives matter.” We cannot assume how they matter and what they matter for. BLM notwithstanding, it is insufficient because black lives more than *matter* but are unequivocally *important*.

Black lives are important, however, not because they are black but rather for their **innate integrity** as *human beings*. African Americans have a black color, but who and what they *are* is not black. Black is only a secondary distinction, which does not define their status in the human race; and using the capitalized *Black* just highlights that distinction and the secondary status ascribed to it. Unfortunately, the cry of “black lives matter” also highlights just the same, which will not bring the change necessary to respond to *who* and *what* are underneath the cry. In other words, no one using distinctions for themselves can expect or hope to be treated beyond the limits of such distinctions.

Since the beginning of time, the human race has been inherent exclusively in the genes of human beings. This exclusive human body (species), therefore, must be inclusive of all human beings in order to justify its integrity as the human race. Even more important than this innate integrity is the **intrinsic nature** that distinguishes any and all human beings irreplaceably, irreducibly and nonnegotiable only as *persons*, not merely human beings. Sadly but not surprisingly, human beings are replaced and persons are reduced by the secondary distinctions negotiated throughout the history of the human race.

Underlying the events of today, the condition facing those of the human race cries out for our attention focused on the whole person over the nearsighted focus on color. Nothing less than the person can distinguish the integral nature of being human. No matter how far reaching current protests extend for racial justice and equality, until the person takes center stage in this human drama and emerges as the heart of our underlying problem of pandemic conditions, we never get to the roots of racism.

Any and all distinctions in place of the person—notably such as race, class, gender, age, etc.—in actual and virtual daily life routinely reduce the intrinsic nature and innate integrity of being a person belonging to the human race. The consequences of such distinctions through human history have been encompassing and entrenching, and thus unavoidably enslaving. In spite of the political fact that the U.S. abolished slavery in 1863, the reality of human inequality has continued to enslave not only blacks but all participants in the systemic process of distinction making.

The reality of further enslavement exists, because such distinctions work effectively to (1) reduce the person's integrity by replacing it, and then (2) renegotiate that person's nature to a comparative value of anything less than the person—a value enslaving those even deemed as more or better since it still constrains their person from their full nature and whole integrity. It is the consequence of this comparative value ascribed to those belonging to the human race that needs to resound for justice and resonate for equality. And Christians and churches, in particular, need to lead the way in this integral fight.

## **The Recurring Cycle of Human Life**

It's encouraging to see more white persons joining the protest against racial inequality; whether they recognize a pattern of recurring injustice, and how they themselves may be held captive by it, remains to be seen. Moreover, it is imperative to understand that the deeper recurring cycle of human inequality challenges even persons of color to recognize, address and change beyond just the limits of racial inequality.

The reduction of persons to any comparative value of *less* (being less than a person or even human) has been and continues to be definitive of the human condition, our human condition today played out in the current human drama. The sum of this comparative process in reductionism has evolved (devolved) into **human racism**—not just racism based on the distinction of color. The evolution of human racism is composed by the “survival of the fittest,” whose comparative value in the human race is deemed to be “more,” thus assumed to be “good,” while rendering the value of all other human beings as “less” and thus as “bad.” This biased value further renders the underlying person as insignificant and thereby no longer of primary importance, though human theory may espouse the person's value as ideal.

Most of the history of the human race has been recorded with the bias of this evolution. From its biological beginning, human evolution assumes the basic progression of human life, with modern science and technology as the shining evidence of the advancement of the human race. With this mindset, it has always been expected that the “fittest” would emerge to determine the course of the human race; yet, those in charge were either ignoring or simply self-justifying the consequences on those assessed as “unfit.” For example, advancing the human race was the overt rationalization of the fittest to implement the modern science of eugenics, which imposed forced sterilization primarily on persons of color and other distinct minorities. Why—with the so-called advanced reasoning, in order to “purify” the human race, which continues to recur today in the development of genetic engineering, modification and manipulation.

The basic assumption of human life progressing for advancing the human race is not only flawed but false. Those explicitly or implicitly making this assumption fail to recognize or acknowledge the underlying dynamic in human life that is not progressing but in fact has been recycling—perhaps better described as a cycle of regression for the human race. The most significant variable in human history is not progress but the invariable reality of its history repeating itself, with the human race circulating rather than advancing.

The recurring injustice of racial inequality demonstrated throughout U.S. history reflects this undiminished cycle of human life, which appears intractable to fundamental change in the assumed progression of democracy. Yet, this recurring injustice predates U.S. history and just extends in our life today, because racial injustice will continue to recycle until the recurring cycle of human life is broken down and changed at the roots of our human condition enslaved in human racism. Only human racism gets to the breadth and depth of these roots.

When the concern for anti-color racism today sincerely gets to the question of what needs to be done about it, there cannot be any true hope for change until we address human racism—addressing it first within ourselves (including those of color) before addressing others. Whether we recognize it or not, whenever any of our identity and function are based on distinctions secondary to our person, we fall into the survival process of going from being less to becoming the fittest. The evolution of this comparative dynamic, however, always comes at the cost of devaluing others, which inevitably includes the cost of losing one’s own importance as a person—no matter how much our own distinction matters.

The dynamic of devaluing others is our default mode that has become normalized in human relations, and thus is often subtle in human interaction. Formally or informally, **deficit models** of minorities are constructed, from which stereotypes are formed that bias our relations. Black stereotypes, for example, have emerged from a deficit model, and that stereotype won’t change until the model is changed. What is at the heart of this

dynamic is the unavoidable process of **discrimination**. Racial discrimination is only one aspect of the multi-faceted discrimination process necessary to devalue others in order to survive as fit over unfit, as better over less, as good over bad. Discrimination is unavoidable in all contexts of human distinction-making because discrimination of any kind is inherent in any system of human distinctions, including human evolution. Any conversation about anti-color racial discrimination will always fall short without understanding and addressing its roots in the critical process of discrimination composing our existing system of human distinctions.

When we make distinctions about ourselves and others—notably centered on and quantified by what we have and do—that explicit or implicit, formal or informal process is inevitably governed by a comparative system. The systemic comparisons are made (overtly or covertly) on a hierarchical structure that stratifies people, the measurements of which inescapably generates systems of inequality that form the roots of human racism. As long as distinctions about what we have and do define our identity and determine our function, discrimination will operate to place self and others on the human scale of more-to-less, good-to-bad, with those in the former category benefitting at the expense of equality transposed to the inequality of those relegated to the latter category and lower human position. Deficit models are constructed and stereotypes are formed to reinforce and sustain this condition systematically; and its recurring cycle is symptomatic of its systemic progress.

The reality facing all persons today is that discrimination and inequality are the systemic workings of human racism; and from systemic human racism all discrimination and inequality evolve and ongoingly cycle throughout human life in any and all of its human distinctions. Systemic anti-color/minority racism exists as a fact of life today because of the existing reality of systemic human racism; accordingly, such racism will not go away today until human racism is changed. This is the encompassing reality that both white persons and persons of color critically need to address for change to be complete, rendering anything less a false hope. For example, one of the lessons hopefully learned by the early black Civil Rights Movement was this: Even though the early leaders strongly addressed anti-black racism, they failed to address their human racism, whereby they still made gender distinctions that relegated women to positions of less than men. Whether the distinction is race or gender, inequality also has been instituted in the church because human racism has recycled throughout church history. The apostle Paul fought against such distinction-making even in the earliest church, because it created inequality (Gal 2:11-13; 3:27-28; 5:6; 1 Cor 4:6-7; 2 Cor 10:12).

When not revised or skewed by our biases, the reality of human history teaches us: Systems of inequality will not go away today until systemic human inequality is changed.

The nagging question for us today is not merely about “what are we learning about present human conditions?” but more deeply “what can and will we learn about the recurring human condition from the past?” The answer emerges only from digging further into the roots of racism occupying the minds of more and more people today.

## **Illusions of Equality**

In the present demand for equality, the past limits what we can expect. Of course, many in the current conversation will be more hopeful, and this is understandable in order to counter hopelessness and despair. Yet, any invalid hope for equality lends itself to misguided thinking and action, even their falsehood, all of which is rendered to illusions of equality. This misguided false hope includes the multiple efforts for diversity, which serves as a new normal that mainly promotes, reinforces or sustains the illusion of equality.

As long as any conversation on anti-black/color/minority racism doesn't get to human racism, this human narrative will continue to be repeated in the future. History will not legitimate any false hope for racial justice. Inequality is the ceaseless reality encompassing the human race. Countering inequality is not a hope-filled venture, and changing it is less hopeful, because the human scope of inequality is governed by the fittest using power relations (overt or covert, violent or coercive)—exerted along the full spectrum of human life from the personal to the institutional to the structural, enacted interpersonally and locally, nationally and globally. Furthermore, the enforcement of inequality by power relations may even be sanctioned by laws (such as political, socioeconomic, religious) shaped by human distinctions, the legitimacy of which can only be discredited as injustice by exposing its roots in human racism. The implication of this at best makes the rule of law conditional for justice, and more likely to serve injustice. Because these roots are rarely exposed much less addressed—digging must go well below the surface—power relations by those of fitter distinction have perpetuated human inequality and have recycled its unjust consequences in human life again and again.

Perhaps the human condition may appear better today because the evolution of its shape seems more refined or, at least, more humane than the past. Here again, the assumption of human progress has subtle influence on how we see our human condition. Nevertheless, when we get past any biases, the reality keeps emerging that inequality prevails; and it will persist until all persons and their relationships are equalized. Yet, the fact is that not only have any illusions of equality clouded our view of what truly exists, but we are also often misguided and thus misled by simulations of change.

## Simulations of Change

In the present call and demand for change, much discussion has unfolded about what changes should take place; and little discussion has emerged on what constitutes change. Yet, all of this discussion is constrained by the past, because the kind of change required to change our human condition has not taken place with the significance needed to break the cycle of repeating itself. Where does that leave us in our hope for tomorrow and what we can expect in the future?

Consider some of the scenarios playing out today. Some have acknowledged being racist in one way or another, and having now become nonracist. Many have claimed to be nonracist and now are challenged to back that up by being anti-racist. What we need to understand is that changing from racist to nonracist to anti-racist is not a progression—in spite of the fact that those seeking change the most are sociopolitical progressives. That is to say, even though change may involve increments, the change necessary here and now does not develop in linear stages. Any linear appearance of change in this consuming problem is in actuality what amounts to a *simulation of change*. The simulation of change characterizes much of the action addressing racial inequality, which have promoted reforms composing illusions of equality—changes enacted perhaps as a virtual reality to appease the masses.

The church has not been immune to simulations of change and illusions of equality in both its theology and practice. Despite the change instituted by the earliest church council in the 1<sup>st</sup> century—which made unequivocally definitive “God makes no distinctions between persons” (Acts 15:9)—the significance of this change rarely became no more than a simulation, with illusions of equality clouding the existing inequality recycling in the church. Such simulations and illusions were further instituted structurally and systemically by Christendom in the 5<sup>th</sup> century. Moreover, even though the 16<sup>th</sup> century Reformation made some critical turn-around changes for the church, most of its reforms made secondary distinctions that have embedded the church in systemic inequality to this day. Given how it sustains human inequality and fails to address human racism, the prevailing condition of the church is currently not a viable source for change that can turn around racial inequality and injustice.

*Re-forms* at whatever level of the problem (from personal to systemic) do not bring change, in spite of apparent progress in reforms. The change necessary to address inequality at its roots is pivotal change, not linear; that is, change that involves the **turnaround** needed to transform (not merely reform) the existing condition recycled from the past.

Simulations of change can be convincing for those not digging in the roots, and also can be seducing of those strained or pained for change. It certainly is helpful that more and more persons are asking about what really happened in recent tragic cases,

along with why they happen. However, all these persons can't stop at this juncture. The hard reality facing us is unavoidable:

As long as the dialogue on change doesn't dig below the manifestations (both overt and covert, macro and micro) of anti-color/minority racism in order to address its causal underlying human condition of human racism, our explicit and implicit racist conditions will not be fully turned around; rather than transforming the depth of our condition, racism will merely keep evolving, likely modified by reforms and perhaps with less blatant manifestations yet still incurring the same consequences.

We cannot afford to stop, whatever it will cost to continue.

### **Clarification and Correction from Digging**

Whatever role we may occupy in the current human drama, we would all benefit from knowing how that role will play out. In the globalization of the modern world, race relations have amplified in unavoidable contacts (not connections) made directly or indirectly as never before in human history. How much racism has intensified in all this is not always apparent as it evolves, but inequality is increasing. Colonialism, as a clear example, has evolved into less blatant forms of neocolonialism—notably with economic colonialism—yet still incurring the same consequences of racism. Do we play a role in this human drama?

In spite of recent violent expressions of racism, a racist is not often easy to identify, nor is being a racist a simple label or charge to make against someone. The role of a racist is ambiguous for the most part, and thus racists are not readily distinguished. Likewise, the role of a nonracist cannot be played merely by a script of nonracism. If, for example, a nonracist honestly claims never to engage in specific acts of racism as recently manifested, but their nonracist role doesn't play out specifically against racism in general, what their nonracist role implies is complicity at the very least with racism as it operates in their surrounding context. In other words, no one can truthfully claim to be a nonracist unless the role they have plays out as an anti-racist. In the human condition, our default mode always falls into complicity with any and all manifestations of human racism, unless our role is to turn it around.

Moreover, taking on and/or having the role of an anti-racist is not a simple transition that plays out actively against racism. Claiming to be 'anti' cannot have limits to what one is against, or else what is not actively opposed plays out in the same complicity as a nonracist. While the nonracist's complicity centers on other manifestations of anti-color/minority racism, the anti-racist's complicity revolves around the human racism manifestations of the human condition—the roots underlying racism as experienced past and present.

In further clarification and correction, systemic racism is a distinct condition that goes beyond racial prejudice. Those claiming not to be racist because of lacking racial prejudice need to understand further that they are still likely to be complicit with systemic racism and its institutional and structural manifestations. Yet, at the same time, those currently opposing systemic racism need to understand also that they are very likely to be complicit with human racism—that is, assuming their identity and function are based on secondary distinctions of what they have and do. How so?

Distinction making automatically involves discriminating between distinctions, which inescapably generates human inequality and sustains that inequality with an ongoing comparative system. These roots clarify for us that the human condition, our current human condition, encompasses all persons in the human race; further correcting us, that until we address the all-encompassing, inescapable condition of human racism and inequality, we will unequivocally be complicit with systemic roots underlying racism at the very least, and, at worst, sustain the human condition that keeps racism in a recurring cycle.

This digging critically clarifies and corrects: Where we are today and how the role we have in the current human drama must be played out in the full context of human life, or else our human condition will not be turned around for its transformation. Therefore, we cannot rightfully disavow being a racist or claim to be nonracist and anti-racist without integrally working on changing human racism by the turnaround of human persons from their innermost to outermost—first, of course, within our own persons, and then in other persons, institutions, systems and structures. The turnaround requires a decisive pivotal turn from our current position on the human hierarchy and active state in human distinction-making. Without turnaround of our overt or covert position and our explicit or implicit state, we are rendered at best to simulations of change and illusions of equality.

Digging also clarifies and corrects apparent progress in the formation of legal rights. Civil rights laws enacted in the U.S. since the '60s have not produced significant change; mainly they make evident the simulations of change and the illusions of equality they've projected onto this human drama—despite their good intentions. The younger generation of current protestors demonstrate a frustration with how previous generations have played out. Yet, their assertion for racial justice and equality raises questions of how this will play out with any significant difference.

Young or old, colored or white, we all need to address and answer this question: What kind of justice emerges when legal rights are inconsistent or even in contradiction with the inherent rights of all human beings?

Turn-around change goes against the grain of our common human condition, thus it will cost whatever we depend on, gain or benefit from to define the status of our identity and determine the state of our function in the existing system manipulating the

human race. Christians notably are challenged, if not confronted, to undergo turn-around change of our human condition pervasive in the church, and thereby to then fight for the turnaround of human racism.

In biblical theology (not ideological theology) this turn-around change involves the fruit of repentance, in which redemption is essential to constitute the turnaround distinguished only by **redemptive change**:

The *old* first needs to die (or be freed from its condition) in order for the *new* to be raised up, not merely to *re*-form or even replace the old, but so that the old is transformed by the new.

In other words, redemptive change digs up the roots of the existing condition in order for the old not to recycle, and then transforms what emerges to grow the new—namely, the emergence of justice for the human race and the growth of human equality for all its human beings. Therefore, the new unfolds truly as new (not as *re*forms of the old) as it encompasses the human condition and frees all persons enslaved by comparative distinctions of human racism, whereby their reduced persons are constituted now in wholeness for their equality in human life together—essentially the new creation of the human race as family together.

## **Emerging Light in the Darkness**

In the current human drama, many are looking for, pursuing, or at least hoping for a light at the end of this tunnel entrenching our life personally and/or collectively. Any light in this tunnel can also be an illusion, and has been a false hope, because the tunnel is only a limited dimension of the total human picture—merely a partial scene of the full human drama. Thus, any illumination in this tunnel can only emerge from the light shining in the darkness of the total human picture and the full human drama.

The darkness enveloping human life is the intractable human condition, which has reduced both the significance of human being and the value of persons to a fragmentary condition having lost their inherent significance and intrinsic value of being whole persons equalized in relationships together of wholeness (the complete meaning of peace rooted in *shalom* of the Old Testament and not of Jewish culture). The light distinguishes the source of restoration for what human being and persons have lost, which illuminates the redemptive change essential to restoring what all of us have lost with human racism. Light signifies the **restorative justice** of equalizing persons without distinctions in whole relationships together without stratification. Until restorative justice emerges, light does not shine in the darkness of the human condition; and unless restorative justice is enacted on human racism, light will never shine at the end of the tunnel.

The emergence of light, however, is not constituted by just any justice. Since the darkness of the human condition is not only enveloping but consuming, just any justice has not, will not and cannot bring light to the darkness. Witness the recent movie *Just Mercy* about lawyer Bryan Anderson and his organization, Equal Justice Initiative, and render a verdict on the justice system and its existing condition today. The problem with light in the darkness has yet to be solved, because the issue with just any justice has not been resolved. Restorative justice is problematic since it requires the turnaround of redemptive change, which most persons, institutions and systems are either unwilling to undergo or at a loss of how to undertake.

For Christians and their churches, this pivotal point in the human drama is a wake-up call. Even white evangelicals and other conservative Christians cannot discount Jesus making definitive—thus irreducible and nonnegotiable—our identity and function as “the light of the world” (Mt 5:14), who have “the light of life” (Jn 8:12). The darkness, however, has eclipsed our identity and compromised our function, such that our true identity and function in wholeness are not distinguished in our surrounding contexts of human life. In other words, in its subtle workings of reductionism the consuming darkness of the human condition has pervaded and thus prevailed in our condition to reduce our *new* integrity of wholeness back to the *old*, whereby we sustain human racism rather than be the light for turn-around change of human inequality and injustice.

This prevailing condition of Christians and churches will remain until we wake up to the reality existing in, among and between us. We need to wake up before we can be light in the darkness as a viable source for changing the current cycle of racial inequality and injustice. In spite of our faith and the gospel we claim, the reality of our everyday identity and daily function has been composed by secondary outer-in distinctions, which has compromised the *new* integrity of our persons transformed from our innermost to outermost. The shift from inner out to outer in for distinction-making keeps us cycling in the discrimination that produces and sustains inequality. Our faith and gospel notwithstanding as a belief system, this exposes the reality of our existing condition as Christians and the church:

We have for too long in actuality either been complicit with human racism or sustain it with our theology and practice, which are subtly composed with what amounts to fake news of a revised gospel; this condition has skewed or biased how we see and/or address racial inequality and injustice.

For example, because of the latest racial tragedies more church leaders today are starting to talk about racism; yet there are others who don’t want to because they think racism is too political—according to a Barna Church Pulse Poll just released. Our God, however, when not reduced by our skewed and biased terms, does not make political, economic, social, cultural or personal distinctions of us. On the other hand, God’s critical

hand, our God distinguishes the *new* (only from redemptive change) in its essential difference from the *old* still not transformed. Underlying the old, of course, is the human condition, which infects the human race in all its political, economic, social, cultural and personal dimensions to spread human racism throughout all levels of human life—the underlying pandemic notably infecting Christians and churches.

What this current conversation by church leaders omits, and has lacked historically, is our underlying condition of human racism, which has rendered the *new* in us inactive in the wake of the *old* in us recurring in subtler cycles. Christians can't assume that the old about us has been transformed or that the new in us shines light in the darkness—an assumption we can't make simply because this truth composes our theology. God distinguishes the *new* from the *old* less so as a propositional truth in our theology and mostly as the functional reality of our practice. Accordingly, the current human drama confronts our theology and practice and challenges the role we play in it, as well as to wake up to how our role is playing out.

The roles played by church leaders and those in Christian colleges, seminaries and organizations only precede the roles that all Christians play in the current drama of darkness. The question for all of us, then, is rightfully raised:

Where is the light of God's people (from individuals to groups) and the church clearly visible, and thus unmistakably distinguished in the *new* from the *old*, such that their light leads (not merely affirms, supports or follows other activists) the way for the turn-around change of the racist manifestations of human inequality and injustice?

The church can't blame, for example, the COVID-19 pandemic for dimming the church's light, and simply assume their light will illuminate again as they resume their physical gatherings. For our role to play out as light, we need to forgo black lives merely mattering, because such sympathy without the importance of the whole person—whose intrinsic significance being innately created in God's image—ironically only dims our light and constrains our witness in a theological fog. We are engulfed notably by a reduced theological anthropology that fragments persons and relationships from their wholeness. This fog clouds the *new* for persons to be distinguished from the *old*. Accordingly, this relegates our practice to malfunction, unable to have empathy as a person transformed to be openly involved with other persons lacking hope for their transformation from human racism.

In other words that clarify our theology and correct our practice, we cannot be “the light for the world” and “the salt for the earth” (as the embodied Word also constituted those transformed, Mt 5:13-16) as long as our condition—the condition of our persons and relationships, and churches systemically—remains reduced in the subtle workings of human racism. The critical consequence of our existing condition (explicit or

implicit, overt or covert) prevents or, at the least, minimizes our transformation to the wholeness of our persons and relationships, our churches and mission. This consequence has been, is and will continue to be our human inequality, composing our identity and function without the equalized inherent state of being human and the equalized innate status as persons without human distinctions.

The underlying roots of racial inequality is human inequality, and light emerges in the darkness as it serves the justice necessary that brings equality. Human inequality, however, cannot be changed without first addressing human inequity. History teaches us that we will not achieve human equity with just any justice. The underlying roots of human inequity clarify that justice has been constrained to the limits of human distinctions, and thereby biased in its function to rule for human equity. This skewed judicial role has played out in the U.S. Supreme Court through much of its history.

Inequality of any kind at any level will only be turned around when equalized by the redemptive change of transformation to the *new*—which is constituted not by human justice and its shaping of equity but by God’s equity. This equalization indeed has been elusive, even for people of faith. Nevertheless, on the basis of the unmerited grace of God’s equity, the only hope for equalization to emerge unmistakably and to unfold unequivocally is for Christians to vulnerably become intimately equalized together as the church to take on their true identity and full function (not taking up a mere role) as *the equalizer*. The equalizer plays out with an identity and function of nothing less and no substitutes, in order to fight against the reductionism of the human condition manifested in human racism, and to restore the integrity of the human race to the wholeness of all its persons and relationships. When the equalizer rises, the light emerges in the darkness.

## **The Justice Bringing Peace**

When digging up the roots of racism brings out the human condition, the condition that emerges is highlighted unmistakably as a relational condition. It is the human relational condition that scripts the human drama past and present, which also is at the heart of our existing condition evident in the U.S. and witnessed globally.

A rallying cry heard along with “black lives matter” is “no justice, no peace,” which has become a call to arms. Its validity, however, cannot be based on just any justice that at best only results in peace as the mere absence of conflict—a temporary peace lasting just until the next recycle. We must not confuse human equity with such justice. Justice is reduced to **premature justice** when it results from efforts lacking the turn-around change that integrally transforms persons and relationships to their primary integrity. This is the change necessary for justice to be whole, and not just premature, in order to address all persons equally and to deal with their relationships with the equity essential for equality. Premature justice results merely in **immature peace**: the common view of peace composed without wholeness, which results from conventional common

change that lacks the significance of transforming persons together in the primacy of relationships in the equity of wholeness.

Equality never becomes a reality unless it is the relational reality of turning around the human relational condition, our relational condition. Therefore, inequality prevails in human life and recycles until it is *equalized* with the equity from God.

Our relational condition as the church has often been neglected, ignored or simply not recognized because of not understanding what is primary to God. This has relegated the church to premature justice, revolved around immature peace rather than turned around. Certainly, if the church hasn't addressed its own relational condition, it is in no condition to be able to address the human relational condition manifested as human racism cycling in racism. Inequality is the root system of the human relational condition, and the presence of any inequality indicates infection by the human relational condition pandemic, which underlies the current COVID-19 pandemic. The church has been infected by the underlying pandemic, whether or not by the coronavirus, and can only be freed from this infection as its relational condition is equalized—a freedom that merely resuming physical gatherings will not constitute.

In the primordial garden, the persons created in God's qualitative image and relational likeness made a consequential shift from their primary integrity constituted inner out, in the primacy of relationship together in wholeness (Gen 2:18,25). They shifted to a reduced integrity composed by secondary distinctions from outer in (Gen 3:7). Since this beginning of *reductionism* (defining what sin is), persons have quantified their identity and function by these distinctions ascribed on the basis of what they have and do from outer in. That requires implementing discrimination, knowingly or unknowingly, in order to form such identity and function. In addition, intentionally or inadvertently the discrimination of distinctions is always done in a comparative system, which generates the inescapable condition of inequality within persons and between persons in unavoidable inequity in relationships. It is with this consequence that the script for the human drama is finalized and not revised: making distinctions cycle with discrimination, which recycles in inequality for the recurring condition of human racism.

Unless persons and their relationships are turned around from this reduced condition, inequality prevails even among Christians and in their churches. This inequality is witnessed in the beginning also of the early church. When distinctions were made in the early church, persons were left out (Acts 6:1), and were disparaged (1 Cor 1:12; 3:21; 4:6), and were considered dispensable (Col 2:16-19), thus necessitating Paul's clarification (1 Cor 12:21-22). This explicit or implicit discrimination was consequential for the church not growing in wholeness just as Jesus promised (his uncommon peace, Jn 14:27) and prayed for to be in likeness of the Trinity (Jn 17:20-26). Through the course of church history, churches have labored in immature peace contrary to the peace Jesus gives, and thus have relegated their constituents to the inequity of premature justice in contrast to being freed in the grace of God's equity.

When Paul made definitive the theology and practice for the church, they were neither ideals in theory nor mere information for reference in our belief system. Paul established the church's theology and practice as irreducible and nonnegotiable, namely for the integrity of the persons and relationships making up the church. Even though each person may have a different role in the church, their function must not be reduced to this outer-in distinction and thereby reduce the person constituted in God's qualitative image. That reduction would create inequality among persons and renegotiate their relationships constituted in God's relational likeness, relegating them to the relational condition fragmenting the wholeness of their relationships together in the integrity of equality (1 Cor 12:12-26). As evident in church history and the church's theology and practice today, contrary to what Paul made definitive as irreducible and nonnegotiable for the church to be the family of Christ, reduction and renegotiation have been pervasive in the church's identity and function. We need to wake up to the reality of our existing relational condition, and our persons and relationships need to be turned around.

## **The Equalized Church as Equalizer**

Given the subtle reduction of persons and renegotiation of relationships evolving from the primordial garden, it should not be surprising that churches reflect the human relational condition. Most churches function in effect as a sacred institution, limited to the constraints of systemic inequality that essentially enslaves its participants. It is surprising that more turnaround to wholeness from a fragmented condition does not take place, surprising since redemptive change is readily available to free us from these constraints reducing the quality of life (cf. the critique of the church in Rev 3:1-2).

As long as our persons are basically defined in the church by our role or title, as well as by other distinctions such as our gifts, and the church's relationships are mainly determined on this outer-in basis, that church reinforces human discrimination and sustains human inequality. The reality of this existing condition in churches, in fact, renders them to be *disablers* of justice and *enablers* of injustice. Yet, the critical need to be turned around does not apply just to white-based churches. Race- and ethnic-based churches also need to be turned around—in spite of historical roots in segregation—because the human distinctions used to compose these churches also equally (perhaps naively) reinforces human discrimination and sustains human inequality as much as their white counterparts. Thus, these minority churches cannot validly either plead innocence of discrimination or appeal as victims of inequality.

The turnaround of our human relational condition, however, comes only after relinquishing the outer-in distinctions covering up our persons from inner out. These distinctions serve as the masks commonly worn in human relations to keep relational distance (underlying social distancing in the current pandemic) in order to “survive” in our comparative identity and function. For some of us, to relinquish our comparative

distinctions requires giving up any benefits and privileges gained from this comparative system of inequality; for others of us, this includes letting go of any disappointment, dissatisfaction and rejection from a reduced comparative value. Relinquishing, giving up and letting go will all leave our person vulnerable but “naked without shame,” as persons were constituted from inner out before they shifted to outer in during the primordial garden (Gen 2:25). Thus, this pivotal turnaround involves returning our persons to their primary integrity, which integrates the person’s innermost and outermost to constitute the person’s wholeness.

Therefore, to return to our primary integrity unavoidably involves making our whole person vulnerable at the innermost—that is, vulnerably turning from the distinctions masking our person—in order for the redemptive change to the *new* to unfold (2 Cor 3:16-18; 5:17). The process of transformation unfolds when our vulnerable hearts make intimate relational connection with God—in contrast and conflict with relational distance—who equalizes our persons and reconciles us together in his church family on the integral basis of *intimate and equalized relationships*, no longer reduced to and constrained by human inequality (Eph 2:14,19; Gal 3:26-28; Col 3:10-13).

In only this transformed relational condition, the church is equalized within its persons and among its relationships. When the church is ongoingly transformed to be more and more deeply equalized, the relational reality of the church family together constitutes the church’s function as **the equalizer**: the irreducible and nonnegotiable function that ongoingly both fights against inequality in other persons, peoples, tribes and nations, and fights for their equality—not with a premature justice for an immature peace but with the wholeness necessary to reconcile all persons, peoples, tribes and nations in human equality as constituted by the unmerited grace of God’s equity.

Nothing less and no substitutes can equalize the church and raise up the church as the equalizer—the source of light in the darkness that brings the real hope of redemptive change to human racism.

**New justice, whole peace!**

### **My studies listed below will help to dig deeper and to further change human inequality:**

- *Jesus’ Gospel of Essential Justice: The Human Order from Creation through Complete Salvation* (Justice Study, 2018). Online at <http://www.4X12.org>.

- *The Person in Complete Context: The Whole of Theological Anthropology Distinguished* (Theological Anthropology Study, 2014). Online at <http://www.4X12.org>.
- *The Global Church Engaging the Nature of Sin & the Human Condition: Reflecting, Reinforcing, Sustaining or Transforming* (Global Church Study, 2016). Online at <http://www.4X12.org>.
- *The Gospel of Transformation: Distinguishing the Discipleship and Ecclesiology Integral to Salvation* (Transformation Study, 2015). Online at <http://www.4X12.org>.