

Christian principles

All human beings are created by God. In God's eyes no group of people is inferior or subservient to another group of people, and no group is superior. All are equal, regardless of ethnic and cultural differences.

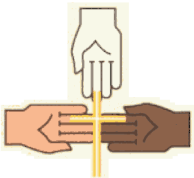
God's plan of salvation, which reached its climax in Christ's death and resurrection, is for all people.

Jesus broke through the divisions of his day by associating with Samaritans, showing mercy to non-Jews, and showing acceptance of a Syrophenician woman.

For us Christians, differences of race and culture are no longer divisive, and believers are brought together in a new unity and harmony in fellowship with Christ.

Christians are to follow Christ's example in showing acceptance and love to other people, regardless of their racial origin.

As followers of Christ, all members of the church are called to be peacemakers, working for harmony in society. As Christ accepts and forgives us, we are able to accept and forgive others.



For reflection for discussion

- 1 The Lutheran Church of Australia's statement on Apartheid (1988) says: 'Racism involves not only prejudicial judgment on other people; it also constitutes an affront to the Creator'. What do you understand this statement to mean?
- 2 Look up the following Bible passages: 1 Timothy 2:4; Ephesians 2:14,15; Galatians 3:27-29; Acts 10:34. What light do they shed on the subject of racism?
- 3 What can you do to oppose racist behaviour and to promote racial harmony in your community?
4. What can your congregation do to be more welcoming of people of other races? Are there specific attitudes that need to be changed?

Suggested further reading

'Statement on Apartheid', Lutheran Church of Australia (1988)
Frontier, Henry Reynolds, Allen and Unwin, 1987, 1996
Race and Racism in Australia (Second Edition), David Hollinsworth, Social Science Press, 1998

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197 Archer Street SA 5006 Ph (08) 8267 7300

Racism

'You know, you go to church whether the white people there look down on you or not, it doesn't matter.'

Gladys Miller, Ceduna congregation, SA

'I especially ask each member to speak out strongly against racism and to affirm the equal nature of all people in God's eyes.'

Dr Lance Steicke, LCA president

'I often wonder to myself how many more years I, and the rest of the Aboriginal race, will have to prove to white society that we are ordinary human beings.'

Connie Nungalla McDonald, Broome, WA

'The continuing existence of the blight of racism is an affront to the ministry of Jesus Christ, which was accomplished to reconcile all people to God and to each other.'

Lutheran World Federation



What is racism?

'Racism' refers to negative attitudes and discriminatory behaviour towards other people because of their race. These negative attitudes include such things as prejudice, hatred, resentment, stereotyping and looking down on other people. Racism involves the belief that people of particular races are inferior to people of one's own race.

Racism in Australia

Until relatively recently it was common among people of European ancestry in Australia to regard Indigenous Australians as a particularly low and inferior form of human life. The following descriptions were common in the nineteenth century:

'the most degenerate, despicable and brutal race of beings in existence'
(Sydney Herald, 1838)

'the earlier they are exterminated from the face of the earth the better' (Australian, 1838)

'one degree above brute creation'
(colonist G Arden, 1841)

'the most degraded and lowest race in the world' (missionary William Ridley, 1856)

'Being a useless race what does it matter what they suffer?' (Queensland settler, 1914)

The theory of evolution led to the idea that Aboriginal people had not evolved as far as others and that they were at the lowest level of human development.

Effects of racism

The belief that Aboriginal people were inferior, even sub-human, led to open discrimination. They were often treated brutally. Such beliefs also were used to justify acts of cruelty towards them and even their attempted extermination. *'All inferior races must disappear before the superior nation'* (SA politician J H Barron, 1866).

Australian colonisation represented *'a distinct step in human progress, involving the sacrifice of a few thousand of an inferior race'* (historian A G Sutherland, 1888).



Racism today

Discrimination against Aboriginal people and disrespect for them and their culture have continued through the 20th century.

Racist attitudes still exist today, even though there is greater acceptance of Indigenous Australians by other Australians than in the past. There is now more understanding and respect.

Racism in the church

Racist beliefs and attitudes exist also within our church. Some Aboriginal Lutherans have said that they do not always feel that they are welcome in the church. They sometimes feel that they are looked down on by other church members and are not always seen as fully human. They do not always feel that they are accepted and respected as equals.

Racist attitudes are often due to ignorance, hearsay, negative experiences or lack of personal contact with Aboriginal people.

We need to face up to our own racist attitudes and ask God's forgiveness. We should try to become better informed about Aboriginal people, be prepared to speak out against racism and work for harmony and good race relations in our community.