

Pardon me for writing to you in this manner. After receiving the recent copy of *Dialog*, the various articles on racism have fascinated me in a manner that has never been the case in the past. As a brief introduction, I am an Ibo man who years ago became a Naturalized American Citizen. Nigeria, the biggest Country in Africa has three major tribes, the *Hausas (Moslems)* the *Ibos (Christians)* and the *Yorubas (Mixture of Moslems and Christians)* Each of these three groups have more population than most Countries. The Ibos are estimated to be between 45 to 55 million people.

In the late 1970s the Government of Nigeria gave me an academic scholarship to study Engineering here in America. I stayed after my education and raised my family here. From my Nigerian Ibo upbringing, the concept of racism, in my mind seems not to be as defined as it could be for a person who was born and raised here in America without the benefit of the other ethnic and/or demographic influences that I was exposed to, growing up. I will perhaps not be able to fully explain this point of view but I will make an attempt, based on personal perspectives.

Since these discussions are being done under Christian settings, every time I contemplate on the term "racism" I often ask myself, "*how would Jesus Christ have talked of racism?*" In my understanding of the Bible or Church history, I am not quite clear if there was any definitive allusion to the concept of racism by Christ. Perhaps, he may have but I am just not quite sure.

First, in my mind, there appears to be lots of contradictions in terms each time the subject is discussed. For example, when I hear the term "*people of color*" everything that I learned in kindergarten compel me to think that there may be people that are "*colorless*". Honestly, I have problems believing that some people may be colorless ... there may be shades of colors but definitely everyone has color. Citing the same logic, I have never actually seen a "*white person*" because in kindergarten, I learned to associate the word "white" with paper or a white shirt. In my experience in Africa, certain people can actually be described as "*black*". In fact, the closer one gets to the Sahara desert, the darker the people appear to become. Therefore, in our part of Southern Nigeria, we can easily differentiate people from say Sudan by their much darker complexions.

On reflections, I do think that there are terms and conclusions we always try to avoid when we use the term "*racism*" and/or people of color. I could be wrong but when I really think deeply about these terms, what comes to my mind is the unspoken term "*superiority*" that may be implied when most of the people think in these terms. From a personal experience, I remember in my freshman year at the Texas A&M University here in Texas. My class completed a test in Calculus and when the Professor returned our papers the next class day, a Caucasian classmate that was sitting next to me saw my score on the test and his face displayed a great degree of surprise. Then he asked me "*you are not really black, are you?*" it took me a while to realize that in his mind, a black person could not possibly score more than him or score well in a Calculus test.

On balance, I did not consider his reaction racism but ignorance. He did not realize or know the level of my academic preparation prior to coming to Texas. Growing up as an Ibo person, the concept of another human being superior to me did not exist because I did not have the exposure that could even suggest such a thought process. Christianity came to my part of the World from England in 1857 but prior to that, my ancestors had varied history of their existence and ways of life, some of which persist even today. I will argue that the scourge of *slavery* contributed a lot in shaping the psyche of many in the Western World. Thus, some people based on their collective experiences accept in their minds the idea of being inferior, while some conclude that they must be superior by the virtue of their skin colors.

Thus, in the Western World, anytime the word poverty is mentioned, the first thing that comes to mind is "*black people*" or people of "*color*" as if there are no poor Caucasians. The discussion never pauses to ask .... "*poor as compared to what?*"... Growing up as an Ibo boy, I never knew that we were poor because we always had food and the necessities of life that were applicable to where we were born. I never had scrambled eggs and bacon for breakfast until I came here to attend College but I never missed breakfast while at home in Nigeria. We were always happy because we were always able to provide for ourselves and for me there lies the beauty of God our creator. If God wanted "*plain vanilla*" in this World, he would not have had any problems making all of us one color.

If God in His infinite wisdom created diversity, will it not be proper to boldly recognize the essence and need for that diversity? As I write, I am looking at your picture published on the Editor's page. I see a picture of a good-natured lady with a smile but the fact remains that we are different and I am not referring to gender. So, as we examine how racism exists in our daily lives, we must thank the Almighty that we are different as His grand design wanted this World to be. You cannot for example differentiate me from an atom therefore I do not think it could be realistic for you or me to easily meet each other and fail to realize and acknowledge the fact that we are different. As God's children, I do not think that we could ignore or deny our differences but when we dare to assume that a certain skin color could make some people superior to others we are seriously missing the point .... God's point!

From my study of the early Church history, it took St. Paul time to convince the early Church in Jerusalem of the need to include the gentiles amongst the people worthy of receiving the Ministry of Christ. Remember that then, St. Paul was not exactly talking about "*black people*" because such was not exactly his major experience. He was talking of non-Jews such as Greeks and others who perhaps the early Church believed were not good enough to receive the teachings of Christ, regardless of their faith and beliefs.

I have always wondered whether skin color will matter when we all stand before Christ in judgement. Will He judge us on the basis of our skin color? I really do not

believe so. I have always taught my kids to always be proud of who they are and never defer to anyone because of physical appearances. I also urge them to realize that people are different. That when people interact with them on the basis of ignorance, they must recognize ignorance for what it is. I take them to Nigeria (Ibo land) for a different perspective on things at every opportunity we get and they grew up proud of themselves. My daughter is a Board certified Cardiologist in Houston and my son is an Engineer.

In conclusion, I honestly think that the Church could really make a difference in taking the lead on this subject matter. Hopefully our leaders in the Church will focus more on this subject matter. I will hope to learn more as this subject gets discussed in more details. Thanks for reading my lengthy write-up.

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