

*"A new commandment I give you: Love one another" (John 13.34)*

# RACISM

## A VIEW FROM THE HEART

A FORUM ON THE EXPERIENCES OF AND  
RESPONSES TO RACISM AS SEEN FROM THE  
HEARTS OF ORTHODOX CHRISTIANS.

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 1, 2020 | 6:30-8:30PM

### Forum presenters:

Father Paul Abernathy - CEO, Neighborhood Resilience Project  
Father Joseph Gardner - Retired Military Chaplain  
Vasilios Scoumis - CEO, Manchester Academic Charter School  
Ted Stewart - United States Navy Veteran  
Alexandra Abboud - LSW, City of Pgh. Victims Assistance Coordinator

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## RESOURCE PACKET

## FORUM SPEAKERS

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### Father Paul Abernathy

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Father Paul Abernathy is an Orthodox Christian priest and the founding CEO of the Neighborhood Resilience Project. Since 2011, Fr. Paul labored with the community to build this ministry to address Community Trauma with Trauma Informed Community Development (TICD) - A framework that transforms Trauma Affected Communities to Resilient, Healing and Healthy Communities so people can be healthy enough to sustain opportunities and realize their potential. Under Fr. Paul's leadership, millions of dollars in food, clothing, furniture, transportation assistance, identification, free health care and emergency relief has been distributed to the Greater Pittsburgh Community. The framework of TICD also includes a Trauma Response Team and Micro-Community Interventions. Community groups from all across the nation have worked with Fr. Paul to be trained in the TICD Framework. He has a B.A. in International Studies from Wheeling Jesuit University, and holds a Master in Public and International Affairs from the University of Pittsburgh as well as a Master of Divinity from St. Tikhon's Orthodox Theological Seminary. A former Non-Commissioned Officer in the U.S. Army, Father Paul is a combat veteran of the Iraq War. In addition to his work with the organization, Fr. Paul is and has been a member of multiple community boards and committees to include the Trauma-Informed PA Think Tank, PA State Parole Citizens Advisory Committee, Allegheny County Health Department's Violence Prevention Community Advisory Board, and is a Foundation of HOPE, Urban League of Greater Pittsburgh and Campaign for Trauma Informed Policy & Practice board member. He has received numerous community awards to include Eagle Scout, the New Pittsburgh Courier's Fab 40 Award, Larry Richert's Hometown Hero Award, Pittsburgh Magazine's 40 under 40, and Wheeling Jesuit University's Fr. Pedro Arrupe Distinguished Alumni Award. Fr. Paul is the pastor of St. Moses Orthodox Church, a husband and father of two children.

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### Father Joseph Gardner

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Fr Joseph Gardner is a recently retired Orthodox Priest and Senior Executive whose career spanned 35 years in the Armed Forces. As a United States Military Academy graduate in 1984, Fr Gardner served five years on active duty as an Anti-Aircraft Combat Arms Officer. He then entered the Army Reserve, attended seminary, and began ministerial work in the Mexican War Streets area of Pittsburgh's Northside. In addition to parish duties, Fr Gardner was very active in community conflict resolution, as well as societal reconciliation and social improvement efforts. He served on Mayor Thomas Murphy's Gang Intervention task force, on the advisory team for the Northside grassroots organization Parents Against Violence, the advisory committee for Pittsburgh's Gang Peace Summit and on the Board of Directors for the Neighborhood Centers Association, an umbrella non-profit organization for a variety of social service groups and programs. Fr Gardner returned to active duty in 1995 as an Air Force Chaplain. His Air Force career included warzone deployments to Albania, Afghanistan, Oman and assignments to several other areas in the Middle East, the United Kingdom, Greenland, Hawaii, Alaska, and a variety of locations in the Continental United States. Fr Gardner is a September 2001 Pentagon terrorist attack survivor who provided pastoral and logistic support to fellow survivors and victims' families at the Pentagon Family Assistance Center during that difficult time for our Nation. Fr Gardner spent most of his Executive level career as a Strategic Planner for the Air Force culminating as Air Combat Command's Senior Executive for Pastoral Services developing policies, plans, programs, readiness and contingency requirements, and religious support for more than 225 religious affairs team members serving 158,000 Airmen at 37 wings, 12 bases, and over 315 operating locations worldwide. Fr Gardner holds three Master Degrees in Theology, and three Master Degrees in Organizational and Strategic Leadership. In 2000 he was one of only 50 officers in the Air Force selected for a two-year Graduate Fellowship at The George Washington University. He is a Distinguished Graduate of Air University's Air Command and Staff College, and was decorated as a "Pentagon

Hero” by Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld for his work during the 9/11 terrorist attack. His published works include: Strategic Planning for an Orthodox Parish, respective pastoral care Strategic Plans for Air Combat Command, Air Force Space Command, and the Air Force Installation and Mission Support Center, as well as his 2011 work titled *The New Cold War: Radical Islam in Southeast Asia*.

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**Vasilios Scoumis**

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Vasilios Scoumis is the Chief Executive Officer of the Manchester Academic Charter School (MACS), which has operated as an independent charter school since 1998, with strong roots in the Manchester community reaching back over 50 years. He holds a Doctor of Education degree in School Leadership from the University of Pittsburgh. Additionally, he has received Superintendent Certification from the University of Pittsburgh, Principal Certification from the Indiana University of Pennsylvania, a Master of Education degree from the University of Pittsburgh, a Pennsylvania Instruction Certification from the University of Pittsburgh, and a B.A. in History & Philosophy of Science, also from the University of Pittsburgh. Vas is a Board Member of a Regional Council, “Schools That Can Pittsburgh” and of the Pennsylvania Coalition of Public Charter Schools. He serves on the Educational Advisory Board at Community College of Allegheny County and participates in charter school education conferences in both the state and national levels.

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**Alexandra Abboud**

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Alexandra is a Licensed Social Worker and Orthodox Christian currently serving as the Victim’s Assistance Coordinator for the City of Pittsburgh. Alexandra obtained her Bachelor’s Degree in Social Work from Miami University and her Master’s in Social Work from the University of Pittsburgh. Alexandra's work focuses on the cross section of law enforcement and social work. She has diverse working experience including residential treatment with juvenile sex offenders, early childhood mental health consultation, truancy prevention program implementation, and most recently served as a high school social worker in Indianapolis, IN. Alexandra has a passion for serving her community in an empathetic and trauma-informed fashion and is at the forefront of the using her skills and experience to reimagine our current public safety systems.

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**Ted Stewart**

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Ted Stewart was born and raised in the Stanton Heights neighborhood of Pittsburgh. He attended Pittsburgh Public Schools and graduated from Peabody High School. He graduated from Tuskegee Institute (now Tuskegee University), a historically black college or university (HBCU), with a B.S. in Business Administration and a minor in Banking and Finance. Ted also earned an MBA in Healthcare Administration from South University. He worked six years for Colgate-Palmolive as an Industrial Engineer/Production Supervisor. Ted is also a U.S. Navy veteran, having served as a Surface Warfare Officer (SWO) in the U.S. Navy for a little over 15 years, attaining the rank of Commander. He is also a veteran of the Persian Gulf War, Iraq (Post-Gulf War), and Somali Civil War. He has worked professionally in the BioTech/Pharmaceutical arena for over 23 years and currently working for Genentech, Inc. as a Federal Account Manager. Ted has received multiple awards and decorations in both civilian and military experiences.

## OFFICIAL CHURCH STATEMENTS

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### Assembly of Bishops responds to racist violence in Charlottesville, VA – Official Statement

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NEW YORK, NY [Assembly of Bishops Communications/OCA]

On Friday, August 18, 2017, the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the United States of America issued a response to the recent racist violence in Charlottesville, VA.

The members of the Holy Synod of Bishops of the Orthodox Church in America, who fully participate in the work of the Assembly, issued a similar statement, the complete text of which was made available on-line on Wednesday, August 16.

The text of the Assembly of Bishops' response appears below.

The Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the United States of America  
Response to Racist Violence in Charlottesville, VA  
Friday, August 18, 2017

The Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the United States of America stands with all people of good will in condemning the hateful violence and lamenting the loss of life that resulted from the shameful efforts to promote racial bigotry and white supremacist ideology in Charlottesville, Virginia.

The Orthodox Church emphatically declares that it does not promote, protect or sanction participation in such reprehensible acts of hatred, racism, and discrimination, and proclaims that such beliefs and behaviors have no place in any community based in respect for the law and faith in a loving God.

The essence of the Christian Gospel and the spirit of the Orthodox Tradition are entirely and self-evidently incompatible with ideologies that declare the superiority of any race over another. Our God shows no partiality or favoritism [Deuteronomy 10:17, Romans 2:11]. Our Lord Jesus Christ "broke down the dividing wall of hostility that had separated God from humans and humans from each other" [Ephesians 2:14]. In Christ Jesus, the Church proclaims, there can be "neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male or female, but all are one" [Galatians 3:28]. Furthermore, we call on one another "to have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather to expose them [Ephesians 5:11]. And what is darkness if not hatred? "The one who hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness" [1 John 2:11]!

Furthermore, in 1872, Hierarchs from around the world assembled in Constantinople and denounced all forms of xenophobia and chauvinism [phyletism]. They agreed that the promotion of racial or national supremacy and ethnic bias or dissension in the Church of Christ is to be censured as contrary to the sacred teachings of the Christian Gospel and the holy canons of the Church. It is formally condemned as heresy, the strongest category of false teaching.

Finally, such actions as we have witnessed in recent days, by self-proclaimed white supremacists, neo-Nazis, and various racists and fascists, betray the core human values of love and solidarity. In this, we pray wholeheartedly for the families of those who lost their lives or suffered in these tragic events. In like manner, we cannot condone any form of revenge or retaliation by any group or individual. Therefore, we fervently appeal to every

person of good will, and especially the leaders of our great nation, to consider and adopt ways of reconciling differences in order to rise above any and all discrimination in our history, our present, and our future.

<https://www.oca.org/news/headline-news/assembly-of-bishops-responds-to-racist-violence-in-charlottesville-va>

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**Assembly of Bishops' Executive Committee Calls All to Prayer for Justice and Peace during Nationwide Civil Unrest – Official Statement**

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Monday, June 01, 2020

We, the members of the Executive Committee of the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the U.S.A., express our strong concern and deep sorrow for the recent unrest throughout our beloved country.

We stand in unequivocal solidarity and peaceful protest with all those who condemn racism and inequality, which betray the spirit of democracy in our nation, i.e. "one Nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all". The unjust and unjustifiable murder of Mr. George Floyd, as well as so many before him, is deplorable as anti-Christian and immoral.

At the same time, we denounce all expressions of violence and revenge, including those despoiling and detracting from peaceful demonstrations. Peaceful marches of protest are a distinctive hallmark of American freedom and progress. "Repay no one evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all ... so far as it depends upon you, live peaceably with all" (Romans 12:17-18).

Violence is a horrible and tangible manifestation of the reign of sin in our world. It is expressed in many faces, all of which seek to deny the image and likeness of God in each human person, in whom God has placed an irreducible dignity and sacredness.

Thus, as Orthodox Hierarchs, we condemn all actions and words that promote hatred and racism, but also all acts of violence and destruction.

Moreover, in a gesture of collective appeal, on Wednesday, June 3, 2020 at 12:00 PM EDT, we invite all clergy, faithful, and people of good will – of all traditions, faiths, and walks of life – to participate in a moment of silence and solidarity for all victims of racial violence followed by prayer for peace and reconciliation in this country.

"The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control" (Galatians 5:22-23). Therefore, as we kneel, invoking the coming of the Holy Spirit as the Comforter, let us offer up our prayers to our loving God for the victims of hatred and racism, to safeguard us all from such prejudice, and also vengeance and destruction, as well as preserve unity and peace in our country, our common home.

<http://assemblyofbishops.org/news/2020/2020-civil-unrest-statement>



## WEBSITES, ARTICLES AND BLOG POSTS

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### Racism and Orthodox Christianity in America: A Modern Commentary – Blog post by Nicholas Anton

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In light of recent tragic acts of racism and brutality — including the heinous execution of George Floyd at the hands of police in Minneapolis, the murder of a black man simply for jogging in Georgia, and the weaponizing of the police against a black man in New York City, I humbly offer this blog entry, taken from a speech I presented in October 2019, which highlights racism and the Orthodox Christian Church in the USA today.

Allow me to open by quoting a 2017 statement of the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the United States of America on the topic of racism. I quote:

“The essence of the Christian Gospel and the spirit of the Orthodox Tradition are entirely and self-evidently incompatible with ideologies that declare the superiority of any race over another. Our God shows no partiality or favoritism (Deuteronomy 10:17, Romans 2:11). Our Lord Jesus Christ broke down the dividing wall of hostility that had separated God from humans and humans from each other (Ephesians 2:14). In Christ Jesus, the Church proclaims, there can be neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male or female, but all are one (Galatians 3:28). Furthermore, we call on one another to have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather to expose them (Ephesians 5:11). And what is darkness if not hatred? The one who hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness (1 John 2:11)!”

This brief passage lifts up the biblical notion of oneness and solidarity, while at the same time condemning acts of hatred and racism. In fact, however, the holy scriptures go beyond mere tolerance and outright condemnation of racism and discrimination. They also inform the Christian Tradition on the manner in which we ought to act, profoundly and personally, namely through the way of love. For he who does not love does not know God; for God is love (1 John 4:8). And, he who does not love abides in death. Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him (1 John 3:15-16). Therefore, hatred and bigotry, racism and discrimination, or indeed any other action or attitude that violates the “other,” who is our neighbor, our brother and sister, are the exact opposite of love and fail to embrace Christ’s command to love your neighbor as yourself (Mark 12:31). By contrast, any form or degree of racism embraces actions that are biblically condemnable, while simultaneously ignoring and contradicting the commandment to love. Ultimately, this is a rejection and denial of God, who is Love. Put plainly: one cannot be racist and Christian; the two are mutually exclusive.

At the same time, the Orthodox perspective is also informed by the communal experience of racism both historically and to this day. At various times and in every corner of the planet, Orthodox Christians have been persecuted either for their ethnicity or else for their faith. Even here in the United States of America, early immigrants were frequently denied vital work, fundamental freedoms, and equal rights. Today, many Orthodox Christians – particularly, though not exclusively, those coming from the Middle East or Africa – are able to commiserate with our Muslim cousins inasmuch as systemic racism targets them simply because their skin is a bit more brown or they sport a long beard and robe. Whether they experience extra screening at airports, have difficulties securing loans, or are literally beaten on the streets, it is for no other reason than their heritage, as assumed by their appearance. So, you see, the darkness of racism is known to the Orthodox family both theologically and experientially.

At this point, I would like to make a quick “parenthesis” in order to clarify that I do not wish to reduce this matter to an “us too” moment. While my account here among you today is indeed truthful, and while our

theological understanding or humiliating experiences might position us differently with regard to white guilt, I will not and cannot deny the fact that the majority of Orthodox Christians are of European decent. In this respect, our white complexions – whether or not these are perceived as “camouflage” – have played a key role in our community’s ability to overcome discrimination in this country. Unfortunately, because of the struggles of our ancestors – as well as for those Orthodox who are not white and continue to struggle – the concept of white privilege is neither readily acknowledged nor accepted. And by not recognizing this sense of privilege, some of our people have, over time, unfortunately embraced the ideals of racism and white supremacy. Some of these individuals even preach distorted and erroneous understandings of the Orthodox Christian tradition in the hope of recruiting others to their unhinged ways. For these individuals, I can only apologize sincerely and ask that we all pray fervently for their souls. For as we know those who do not abide in Christ, [who is love,] are cast forth as a branch and wither; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire and burned (John 15). After all, no individual or group is perfect; so we must continually practice metanoia, which involves a change in our disposition from hate toward love.

Now, to return to my argument: despite the actions of a few, the majority of Orthodox Christians lift up the aforementioned theology of solidarity, embracing the experiences of others and embodying the love of Christ. In this way, the corporate body stands committed to addressing racism and ending discrimination, while remaining firmly positioned to promote essential equity and eventual equality. In this spirit, Orthodox Christian leaders have stood up against racism and discrimination in the United States of America for many decades. For instance, in the 1800s, Russian missionaries in Alaska defended local natives from abuse and prejudice on the part of the established trading companies and, instead, advocated for their land rights. More recently, Archbishop Iakovos famously marched with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and worked tirelessly behind the scenes for the passage of Civil Rights Legislation in the 20th century. His actions were recognized in 1989, when he and Dr. King together received the Congressional Medal of Freedom. Today, an annual conference entitled “Moses the Black” focuses on missiological principles among African-American communities and addresses systemic racism from a biblical and Orthodox perspective. In May 2018, Archbishop Demetrios, the former head of the Greek Orthodox Church in America, hosted an event at St. Sophia’s Cathedral in Washington DC to launch the National Council of Churches’ ACT to End Racism Campaign, which we currently co-chair and are very eager to advance. And just this past Monday, 1 June 2020, the Assembly of Bishops released another statement on racism and violence.

Dear friends, by way of conclusion, I would like close in an unconventional manner and leave you with the final words of Archbishop Demetrios at the aforementioned event in our nation’s capital:

“Typically, a [blog] has a beginning, a middle, and an end. But not this [blog]. This [blog] will end when the story ends. This [blog] will end when we have obtained, finally, the desirable overcoming of any racially involved entities and vestiges in our world and our society. So now, an open ended [blog]!”

By Nicholas Anton

(<https://blogs.goarch.org/blog/-/blogs/orthodox-christianity-in-america-and-racism-a-modern-commentary>)

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## Reflections From a Token Black Friend - On structural racism, implicit bias, and what white people do (and don't) say - Article

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By Ramesh A Nagarajah -June 4, 2020



I am regularly the only black kid in the photo. I have mastered the well-timed black joke, fit to induce a guilty “you thought it but couldn’t say it” laugh from my white peers. I know all the words to “Mr. Brightside” by the Killers.

I am a token black friend. The black one in the group of white people. This title is not at all a comment on the depth of my relationships; I certainly am blessed to have the friends that I do. But by all definitions of the term, I am in many ways its poster child.

And given the many conversations occurring right now around systemic racism, it would feel wrong not to use my position as a respected friend within a multitude of different white communities to contribute to the current dialogue. I believe my story speaks directly to the covert nature of the new breed of racism — its structural side, along with implicit bias — and may prove helpful to many I know who seek a better understanding.

Growing up, I lived in the inner city of Boston, in Roxbury. I attended school in the suburbs through a program called METCO — the longest continuously running voluntary school desegregation program in the country, which began in the late 1960s. My two siblings and I attended school in Weston, Massachusetts, one of the nation’s wealthiest towns. The place quickly became our second home, and alongside Boston, I would count it equally as the place I was raised. All three of us did very well by all standards. We had all been co-presidents of the school, my brother and I were both football captains, and all three of us went on to top-end universities.

For those wondering about the structural side of systemic racism, I’d ask you to consider a few questions. First: Why does METCO still exist? Segregation ended more than 60 years ago, yet there is still a fully functioning integration program in our state. We haven’t come very far at all. Many of our schools remain nearly as segregated as they were in the 1960s.

Second: What is the point? Weston improves its diversity. Without us, most of Weston’s students would go through all those years seeing possibly three or four local black faces in their schools (and that’s the reality for many white people in this country). As for the Boston students, most of whom are black, they receive a much higher-quality education. Property taxes, a structural form of racism meant to allow segregation to endure, have ensured that while schools have grown increasingly better in our suburbs, the inner-city schools continue to struggle with resources, attendance, and graduation rates.

Lastly: Why was I able to be so successful? A major criticism of the METCO program is that it doesn’t produce better outcomes for its students than the city schools, so it just acts as a brain drain from the city. I am an exception. I held leadership roles in the school, was an accomplished athlete and student, and went on to what was, at the time, the best public university in the country. What’s easily overlooked, though, is how my circumstances differed from the average student of color coming from the city. I came from a two-parent household. My mother was able to work from home our entire life, so she could take us places when we needed. Compared to other black families, we were relatively well-off financially, which afforded me a car in high school and thus allowed me to be highly involved. I had a stable church and home life and food security. This combination is uncommon for a young black kid in America.



In a piece my brother wrote reflecting on the current situation, he considered whether black privilege was real. He and I have both considered how our differences from the common story of black people made us “privileged.” For instance, our immersion in the white community, our success in school and now in the workforce, and the fact that we grew up in a middle-class black household (highly uncommon in Boston) led us to believe we had somehow transcended the plight of the black man. Yet, what scared us both so much as we watched the videos of Ahmaud Arbery and George Floyd is that we clearly had not. In both cases, it could have been us. There is no escape. There is no level of success that will spare you. We are black men, and that is all that matters to some.

In the past, I’ve usually stayed quiet on these issues. Often, the pain of diving deep into them was too much to regularly confront. College changed many of my attitudes, but none more so than my full acceptance that racism is alive and well around me.

In college, I sought out more black friends, choosing to room with three people of color because I wanted to grow more connected to that side of my identity. The room afforded me a space to appreciate aspects of black culture and share stories of anger with people who looked like me. Many of my clearest interactions with racism occurred in college. It was there that I began to confront knowledge that roused more frustration within me, such as the war on drugs and its history as a weapon against black communities — although on every college visit, I watched people ingest more drugs and smoke with more impunity than I ever saw in the hood.

The length of my journey makes me inclined to be more patient with others in this process, as it’s taken me this much time to wake up. We should all be reasonably patient with one another, but I would encourage individuals to not be patient with themselves and to treat these issues with the urgency they deserve. The anger on display over the past week should exhibit the need for change.

So many of my experiences growing up speak to implicit biases against black people. I think of how quickly others in school assumed I had a single mother, simply because my father, much like many of theirs, didn’t visit school often. Or the number of times I’ve heard “you are so articulate” in a conversation where all I’ve shared is my name and other small personal details. Standing alone, each instance may seem insignificant or merely a compliment to my upbringing and education. However, the frequency with which I’ve received that comment tells otherwise. It reveals how a black kid speaking properly is surprising, and further, how it makes me appear worthy of sharing the person’s company.

I also realized that the token black friend is not spared the realities facing a black kid from the hood. One morning, while getting ready for school, I heard my mother scream outside, followed by my brother sprinting down our stairs. In our 150-year-old home, every quick step down the stairs resembled a drumbeat. I followed my brother to find my mom standing at her car, visibly shaken, telling us, “He’s running up the street. He took my phone.” My brother and I, both barefoot, sprinted up our street and two others until we caught the culprit. I jumped on his back to stop him until my brother caught up, at which point Raj chewed him out and we took our stuff back — both too young and inexperienced in the ways of the streets to know we probably should have beat him up. The point is, though, we still had to go to school that day. And I remember being too embarrassed to tell any of my friends about what occurred that morning, thinking it would change for the worse the way they thought about me or where I came from every day.

I started carrying a knife during my junior year of high school. It quickly became a running joke among my core group of friends — whenever someone would say something out of pocket or stupid, we’d say, “Get the knife,”

and I'd comedically lay it on the table. What those friends definitely didn't know is that I carried the knife because I was afraid I might get jumped making my daily walk from the train station to my house late most evenings. How could my white friends from suburbia ever understand that?

In the wake of the past week's events, I've reflected on my interactions with the police. These interactions lifted the veil of black privilege I thought existed, though it was likely only afforded to me because of my military affiliation.

I was once pulled over in a cemetery, less than one minute after getting back into my car after visiting a friend's grave, only to be asked, "What are you doing here?" The cop had been parked right by me the entire time, so he obviously just seen me out at a gravestone alone.

"Visiting my friend's grave before heading back to school tomorrow, sir," I said.

The officer's aggressive demeanor changed only after I told him I went to the Naval Academy, at which point we entered a friendly conversation about his days at Norwich. What stuck with me is what he could've done in those cemetery back roads without another living person in sight — no witnesses, no cameras.

Another time, when I'd walked back to my best friend's empty house after a party, I accidentally set off the alarm, bringing the cops buzzing to his door. I wonder if the only reason it went so smoothly is because I quickly identified myself as a member of the military, opening their ears to hear the full story of what was happening. I think of what might've happened if they'd mistaken me, holding my military ID in my hand as I walked out the door, for something else.

It's tough to realize how rarely these possibilities occurred to me when I was younger. When I was pulled over numerous times, often without cause, driving to a hockey game in Weston or parked talking to my white girlfriend, I didn't consider that the cops might have had it against me. When I did witness these biases, I quickly brushed them off as insignificant.

Early in middle school, I arrived to our high school's football game with a group of friends, all white, to find three or four policemen standing by the entrance. I greeted them with a "Good evening, officers," and then quietly said to my friends, "You gotta befriend them so they are on your side later." My buddies thought it was hilarious, and I had succeeded in making the boys laugh. Looking back, I realize they didn't understand that I was speaking to something legitimate. I was no older than 12 or 13, and I already understood that the police would not be inclined to help me. It was only funny to my friends because they'd never had those sorts of conversations.

I think back to when my friends never understood why I wasn't allowed to play with water guns — or any toy guns, for that matter — when I was a boy. I'd be so excited to visit a friend's house and use their airsoft gun in the backyard. I used to get so frustrated when my mom told us it was "too dangerous" for black boys to do that and that someone would mistake it for a real gun. When I was 16, 12-year-old Tamir Rice was shot and killed while playing with a replica toy airsoft gun. I realized my mom was right.

I think of the way the black girls were treated as second rate in high school. Guys rarely tried to talk to them romantically, and if they did, others discussed it with an undertone of comedy. I never felt this way, personally, but didn't realize until college that my silence was compliance. I was participating in denying dignity to the black women around me.

This attitude from my white friends didn't end in high school, either. This past year, I was at a bar in Narragansett, Rhode Island, where I'd quickly befriended one of the guys my friend had brought with him. At one point, I expressed my interest in a girl who had just entered the bar. He asked me to point her out, so I did, also noting that she was black. He responded, "Yeah bro, she's cute, but you could have one of the white girls here!" I questioned his statement, and he realized it didn't fly with me. We eventually moved on and continued the night, but I couldn't get it out of my head. He truly didn't think anything of it when he said it. And he assumed that I would agree with him. To him, the preference for white women was undisputed, so he suggested it unapologetically. It was especially hard for me because, outside of that statement, there was nothing to suggest he was racist. He had treated me with nothing but love and admiration and accepted me into his crew. It was simply ignorance, which had probably been reinforced countless times. That was difficult to wrestle with.

These attitudes directly contribute to and maintain systemic racism within our society. Our disparate relationships with the police, along with messages sent to the black males when they "speak properly," or to black girls about their inferiority (spoken or unspoken), paint an inaccurate picture of what a black person is supposed to be. These attitudes foster the ignorance and apathy that is so rightly being called out right now. They ensure the survival of this corrupt system.

I think of times when my own ignorance let me buy into the insensitivity shown toward the black struggle, often to induce laughs. During a visit to a Louisiana plantation during my sophomore year of high school, I shamefully recall posing for a picture with a noose around my neck. I remember walking around downtown New Orleans later that evening with it around my friend's neck, me jokingly walking him like a dog. Two black guys on the street, a bit older than us, said to me, "That's not fucking funny, bro." I immediately filled with guilt upon recognizing my stupidity, and I struggle even today to understand what made me think either were permissible at the time. Sharing that story relieves some of the guilt, yes, but it also speaks to how being wrapped up in white teen culture led me to buy into, and even spearhead, the insensitivity that is often exhibited toward issues of black struggle that are incorrectly categorized as "in the past."

If you don't agree, why did none of my white friends call me out for it? Yes, we were young at the time, but I'd ask: Why didn't we know any better? We assumed the pain of that type of racism was dead, but we all just witnessed a modern-day lynching on camera.

Then there are the instances most white people will recognize, though they probably never knew how damaging their words were. Every token black friend can recall the times when a white friend chooses to dub you "the whitest black kid I know." It's based on the way I speak or dress or the things I'm into, and it's a comment on me not fitting the image they have of a black person. When I resist accepting such a title, the white person claims it's a compliment — as if the inherent superiority of whiteness should leave me honored to be counted among their ranks.

More impactfully, it suggests that my blackness is something that can be taken from me. That my identity as a black man fades because I am into John Mayer or I've visited the Hamptons. And further, it assumes that my black identity is not something I am proud of. It ignores the fact that the acculturation and assimilation I experienced growing up with all white friends was not voluntary. It suggests that my blackness is a burden, when in fact, minimizing my blackness was most often my burden. Another example: when I am criticized by my white friends for code-switching when I am with my black friends, just because they don't understand the slang and how it connects black people to a common culture.

The biases are evident; you just need to pay attention. Believe me, because I wasn't spared from buying into them myself. It wasn't until I got to college that I began to realize how much subconscious effort I'd put into being as unsterotypically black as possible. Whether in my choices concerning the way I dress, speak, or even dance, I noticed that, without realizing it, I'd habitually quelled aspects of my black identity. And based on that ability, I consistently inflated my self-worth and considered myself superior to my fellow black brothers. I had unknowingly bought into the very biases set out against me.

I'd emphasize that most white people do not understand their level of ignorance — especially the good ones, who mean well, and that negligence is part of the problem.

Many of the white people I know have no concept of the role they've played, passively or actively, in perpetuating these conditions. They have no idea how much we long to hear them speak up for us and to embrace some of the discomfort around these issues with us. Furthermore, the good ones are oblivious to the level of overt racism still out there. I have been among my white friends each time I've been called "nigger" by a stranger. And every time, my white friends seemed shocked. They had been misled to believe that kind of overt racism only happened in the past (or in *To Kill a Mockingbird*). Comfortingly, they always verbally leaped to my defense, and the savior complex within them encouraged them to seek retribution.

In one vivid case, at a bar in Cape Cod, after I'd just finished a conversation with a friend, one guy, not realizing I was still in earshot or aware of my relationship with this friend, came over to him and asked, "You really talking to that nigger?" My friend was stunned but immediately came back at the guy, his anger for me visible. He then came to me, boasting that he has black friends as if that should warrant him a pass.

As much as each situation ruined my night, everything after went well, and I was embraced by a group of allies who wanted to fight for me when they heard that word. I had no further reason to be upset. Yet, probably only the friend who walked ahead of the group with me knows I cried my eyes out the entire walk home, unable to explain how that word garnered so much control over me.

The problematic result of these overtly racist situations is that good white people feel liberated from any responsibility concerning the privilege, structural racism, and implicit biases that do not make them racist themselves, but that they do benefit from. This moment is one of the first times I have felt it was not only okay but encouraged to share these things.

If there is one thing every token black friend knows, it is that we are not to provoke serious discussions of racial issues among our white crowd. We should only offer an opinion on such matters when invited to do so by our white peers. Further, we should ensure that the opinion is in line enough with the shared opinion of our white friends, as to not make it too awkward or ostracizing.

It doesn't need to be, and shouldn't be this way. Many of us are eager to share our stories, and we have been waiting for the invitation to do so.

I am comforted when I see white people call things out for what they are. When my friends and I rented a 16-passenger van for a New Year's Eve trip to Montreal, we found ourselves held up at the border coming back. The older agent, surveying the passengers, asked how we all knew each other, to which we answered, "We all went to high school together." The officer then followed up by singling me out, "And how do you fit in here?" What he was suggesting about my place in the group of all white guys was telling enough, and the guys I was with were

quick to support me and point it out to their parents when debriefing the trip once we arrived home. If only they knew how often I'd experienced situations like that one. White people should know that we need more conversations about little things like this. It's not our job to heal the world, but if we can start by getting people to question small interactions and beliefs, we can begin moving toward progress.

The white friends I grew up with have shared with me how thankful they are to have had me in their lives during their developmental years. They wonder what attitudes they might harbor if they hadn't had a black best friend their entire lives. They arrived at college to befriend kids who had never met a black person in their lives, and they encountered countless out of pocket statements from those individuals.

I am constantly thankful that I grew up with genuine white friends, unlike many of my extended family members. My cousin said to me once, "I don't like being around white people... I always feel like they hate me." I was able to learn that, more often than not, that isn't the case. Still, my cousin points to the overwhelming sentiment that black lives are not accepted or celebrated by white people.

Recent events present a unique opportunity to begin conversations that have been waiting to happen for far too long. To both black and white people, I'd write that understanding is a two-way street. To my white friends, I'd tell you that while that's true, white people have a longer journey to get to where we need to meet. It is time for white people to muster the courage to call out those comments you hear from your parents or uncles and aunts. The pass has been given for far too long, and every time you don't speak up, you enable far worse words and behaviors. For those of you who think an old dog can't learn new tricks, I'd point to the numerous white adults who have texted me this week noting that they have been in their bubble for too long, and asking me to keep sending them content. It's time to pop the bubble.

My experience as the token black friend has allowed me a unique lens into many of the gaps that currently prevent mutual understanding between white and black people. I have spent so much time in the white community and enjoyed the privileges that come with that, yet I am still affected by these issues. Despite my story's obvious differences from that of the average young black man, I believe it speaks to the immediate need for change. Additionally, it serves as an example of a genuinely meaningful relationship between a black person and white people and emphasizes the ability of white people to be either allies or enemies.

I will never turn my back on the black community. You'll bump our music and rep our athletes, but will you stand with us when it's not convenient? The pain is real. The stories are real. Our call for help is real. My uncle posted on Facebook yesterday, "When the dust settles, I wonder if anything will actually change?" To be honest, I'm not sure how quickly or how much things will change. But I know that one thing is directly within our individual control. You can celebrate black lives by making a choice to inquire about them, to educate yourself, and to question many of the norms around us. You no longer have the excuse of being unaware of your own ignorance. I'd reword my uncle's post to a question that we should all ask ourselves: "When the dust settles, I wonder if I will actually change?"

"No one is born hating another person because of the color of his skin, or his background, or his religion. People must learn to hate, and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love, for love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite." — Nelson Mandela, Long Walk to Freedom

<https://humanparts.medium.com/reflections-from-a-token-black-friend-2f1ea522d42d>



Children are never too young to learn about diversity. As young as 3 months old, they may look differently at people who look like or don't look like their primary caregivers. As parents and caregivers, we must have confidence in ourselves and in our children — that we, and they, can handle tough topics and tough situations. We must understand that our role is to be honest, specific, and trustworthy as we raise the next generation to confront racial injustice.

Here are tips and resources to help you have a meaningful conversation with young children about race, racism, and being anti-racist.

<https://www.pbs.org/parents/talking-about-racism>

## **HOMILIES**

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**Saint Moses the Ethiopian: Called to Be One – Homily by Father John Touloumes (Holy Trinity, Pittsburgh)**

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“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3.28).

In the Name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

He was a servant of a prominent civic official. He was a fierce man. And that tough nature often made itself known through violence. So much so, in fact, that the official got rid of him because of his violent behavior and thievery. He then joined a band of marauding robbers and became the leader of their pack. Their deeds are not documented, but I suspect they are no different that we might expect from a band of roving 4th century desert thieves.

Then things changed. In a moment of revelation, by some transformational work of the Holy Spirit in his heart, he turned away from his life of violence in a sudden conversion to faith. We also don't know the exact details of what he experienced, but it was so dramatic that in a short time he went from a violent criminal to a solemn monastic - he became a monk and joined a monastery. And from that day he left walked a very different path. He remains with us today as a model of repentance, conversion of life and peace. In fact, he is known as a patron saint of non-violence. A dramatic contract from where he started, and a lesson for us all of the power of repentance and the possibility of real change.

His name was Moses. And to differentiate him from THE Moses, he is known by two other titles. One is taken from his place of birth: Moses the Ethiopian. The other is inspired by the color of his skin: Moses the Black. And he is pictured in this beautiful icon of peace to my right.

Here are some of the recorded reflections of the inner spirit of that character. He felt he had much to repent of from his former unspiritual self, so in his monastic life he denied himself any physical comforts. He subsisted on a little bread and no cooked food. He subjected himself to severe labor. He prayed fifty times daily, and when he prayed he did so standing, without bending his knees or closing his eyes in sleep. In the monastery he

sometimes went during the night to the cells of the monks and secretly filled their pitchers with water, which was a huge labor of love, as the well was far away.

There is one particular story that demonstrates how, even as he advanced in his spiritual journey, it was a daily choice. Though he continued to choose Christ, his temptation to settle accounts “the old way” still needed to be fought in many ways. In his prior life, those who wronged him would have been in great peril. But now as a man of peace, he took a different tack. Once, while alone in his cell, four robbers attacked him. He captured them, tied them up, slung them over his shoulders (yes, he must have still be very strong for a monk) and took them to the church where he dumped them in front of the other monks. In his prior life he would have beaten the life out of them, but now he declared – in front of the robbers - that it was un-Christian to harm them and he sought the wise counsel of his brother monks as to what to do with them. When the attackers found out who he was, they themselves repented, inspired by his change of life and heart, and they, too, joined the community as monks. “If this enormously strong man could so fear God that he turned his back on his life of robbery,” they thought, “why should we delay in seeking our own salvation?” And so, peace and repentance became the cornerstones of his new reputation.

I’m not sure if, by now, the parallel has occurred to you, but it did to me. A patron of non-violence. And an icon and a man who, despite being identified by race, is far-famed in the history of Orthodoxy not by the color of his skin, but by the content of his character. Sixteen-hundred years later, those words famous words would be uttered on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, DC, by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., in his timeless “I Have a Dream” speech. What a beautiful prefiguring of that dream Saint Moses was. And his is not alone. The Orthodox Church’s historical presence in the Middle East, India, Africa and other non-European centers speaks clearly to its universal presence, racial diversity and rich tradition as an ethnic tapestry. In fact, despite the familiar look of many of the icons, most of the saints that adorn the walls of this Church and the history of our faith would, if appearing live and in person, be seen as ethnic or racial minorities in today’s America. And that, my dear Holy Trinity family, is the beauty, the peace, the faith and the respect for all people that we as Orthodox Christians are not only called to live, but must live. As today’s Epistle says, we are called to be “one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3.28).

But sometimes called and responded are far apart. With so many tragic and unacceptable shades of racism casting a pall on the people and the peace of our country right now, it is most appropriate that we take an opportunity today to not only hear about Saint Moses back then, but to ask what our Faith teaches us, where our Church stands and how that can guide our lives as Orthodox Christians today.

As is most things in the Orthodox Church, where we stand today is on where we have come from for the past two thousand years. Whether questions of how we view and how we should respond to racism were asked back then or today, the teaching remains the same.

Justin Martyr, a second century saint and church historian, reflected on racism’s destructive power before the Christian era and the changes that the Christian faith brought: “We used to hate and destroy one another and refused to associate with people of another race or country, or way of life. Now, because of Christ, we live together with such people and pray for those once cast aside like refuse.”

In the sixth century, Saint Dorotheos of Gaza, expressed where we need to be in relationship with one another like this: “Suppose a circle whose center is God and whose rays are different paths. Every person of the created world walks along one of the rays toward the center, where Christ God is (whether the person realizes it or not). He approaches his brother walking along a different ray toward God, the center itself. The more they distance

themselves from one another, the more they distance themselves from God.” Looking at racial divisions through the lens of that advice, the lesson is clear: racism separates us from one another and from God.

Let’s move on to some more explicit proclamations. 150 years ago, the 1872 Synod of Constantinople, declared the following: “We renounce, censure and condemn racism, that is racial discrimination, ethnic feuds, hatreds and dissensions within the Church of Christ and outside of it, as contrary to the teaching of the Gospel and the holy canons of our blessed fathers which ‘support the holy Church and the entire Christian world, embellish it and lead it to divine godliness.” It cannot be more clear than that.

In 2017, following the racist violence in Charlottesville, the Assembly of Orthodox Bishops in America responded thus: “The Orthodox Church emphatically declares that it does not promote, protect or sanction participation in such reprehensible acts of hatred, racism, and discrimination, and proclaims that such beliefs and behaviors have no place in any community based in respect for the law and faith in a loving God.” Again, if there is a more clear teaching of what your Church teaches, I’m not sure where to find it.

And in direct response to the protests and violence we are all seeing around our country today, the Synod of our Greek Orthodox Archdiocese released the following: “Peaceful marches of protest are a distinctive hallmark of American freedom and progress...Violence is a horrible and tangible manifestation of the reign of sin in our world. It is expressed in many faces, all of which seek to deny the image and likeness of God in each human person, in whom God has placed an irreducible dignity and sacredness.”

As you can see, these are not opinions, debates or interpretations. They are the foundational and structural positions of our Faith on the historical and continuing struggle against racism. It is unholy. It is unChristian. And it is unacceptable. So now that we are all of one understanding about the teachings and positions of your Church, the question remains, what is the condition of our heart? As in all things, official teachings set the model, but our individual responses and behaviors reveal the truth of our actual beliefs and are the living witness of the Church to others around us, some of whom have been wounded or excluded by our attitude or ignorance - intentional or unintentional - and have taken that to represent the Church.

I could move on to describe specific kinds of situations and have you challenge your own response, and I ask you to do that on a continual basis, but with the limited time we have, this is not that place. We are, however, preparing an opportunity for that to happen in forum being currently planned where we will all be able to hear and better understand the real struggles and potential solutions we can seek as a Church and as a society. Look for details in the weeks to come.

But today, let’s instead take a cue from the writings of Saint Moses, or “Abba Moses” as he became known after his ordination, as he describes the kind of life and heart each of should be minding when it comes to racism or any other sin that separates us from God and man.

Here are his “Seven Precepts of Salvation”, which he passed on to Abba Poemen. He said that these will lead to salvation for anybody, where a monk or layperson in the world. As he offers them to us today, let’s use them to examine and safeguard our own internal responses to the specter of racism around us. And to do so, as he mentions words like brother, neighbor or person, challenge yourself to picture the last person you saw, heard or met who was not of your own race, color, faith, nationality or other self-identifying characteristic:

1. In the first place, as it is written, love God with all your heart and with all your mind.
2. Love your neighbor as yourself.

3. Bring to death all evil in you.
4. Do not judge your brother in any dispute.
5. Do no evil to another person.
6. Before departing this life cleanse yourself of every fault of mind or body.
7. Always be of a humble and contrite heart.

As individuals, as clergy, as church leaders and simply as Orthodox Christians, I believe it is safe to say that all of us have failed to fulfill one or more of those precepts at times. That is not a personal judgement; it is a scriptural reality, for as Saint Paul says, “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom 3.23). But we must continue to strive. We must be models of love, reconciliation and peace. When the world around us turns hateful and violent, will we respond in kind, or will we follow in the steps and the advice of Saint Moses the Black, man of peace and patron saint of non-violence and be the ones others turn to who are looking for peace, hope and faith?

So today, the question that remains is not, “Where does my Church stand?” That is clear. What is within our own personal power is the answer to the questions, “Where do I stand?” “How do I respond?” and “What am I doing to bring the peace of Christ into my life and the lives of those around me?” That is where the answer to racism and every other sin starts.

Concluding with the hymn of Saint Moses the Ethiopian as a prayer, may we have in return his intercessions to bring about peace, reconciliation and the love of Christ to a hurting world around us. “You abandoned the Egypt of the passions, O Father, ascending the mount of the virtues with fervent faith, taking the Cross of Christ upon your shoulders; and being glorified in godly works, you proved to be a model for monastics, O summit of the fathers. Pray unceasingly with them that our souls may find mercy.” Amen.

<https://www.holytrinitypgh.org/sermons/sermon/361-2020-07-26-saint-moses-the-ethiopian>

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**Saint Moses the Ethiopian: Called to Be One – Homily by Father Dimitrios Antokas (St. George, Bethesda, MD)**

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On June 3, 2020, in Brooklyn, New York, His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros, Exarch of the Ecumenical Throne, joined countless others in the Black Lives Matter march. It was reminiscent of the day His Eminence Archbishop Iakovos marched next to Dr. Martin Luther King in Selma, Alabama, in 1965 – the only Orthodox Hierarch in all the jurisdictions to do so. Many of his fellow Hierarchs, priests, and Greek laity criticized Iakovos’ for, in their words, “fraternizing with Civil Rights agitators.” Sound familiar? It should! The egotistical Pharisees in the Gospel often criticized and judged Jesus for dining with sinners, cavorting with Samaritans, touching lepers, healing the sick on the Sabbath, showing mercy to prostitutes, challenging the wealthy -- in short – for siding with the marginalized and the “excluded.” Read the Gospel of St. Luke from start to finish, to see those with whom Jesus cast His lot.

We live today, not only with a serious public health crisis from COVID-19, but with a far more sinister reality – one that has pained our nation for some 431 years, since first the ships landed here from the African continent. It is the scourge of racism. Yet far earlier, the Christian Church dealt with racism’s ugly influence. St. Justin Martyr (100 – 165 AD), a Church historian, reflected on racism’s destructive power before the Christian era: “We used to hate and destroy one another and refused to associate with people of another race or country, or way of life. Now, because of Christ, we live together with such people and pray for those once cast aside like refuse.”

Every time we turn on the television, open a newspaper, or log onto social media, we are blasted with stories and opinions which highlight just how far we have fallen as human beings.

The Evil One has no doubt been working overtime to promote racism, division, and violence amongst the Body of Christ living in this society and in the world. Most Orthodox believers are content to have the Church remain silent, (as they were about Archbishop Iakovos) in such times, concerned, rather, about its own self-preservation. Yet such positions fly in the face both of Scriptural teaching and Church theology.

For example, the Synod of Constantinople of 1982 made a statement that was clear, unambiguous, and inescapable for Orthodox believers:

“We renounce, censure and condemn racism, that is racial discrimination, ethnic feuds, hatreds and dissensions within the Church of Christ and outside of it, as contrary to the teaching of the Gospel and the holy canons of our blessed fathers which ‘support the holy Church and the entire Christian world, embellish it and lead it to divine godliness.’” The statement, made some 150 years ago, lays bare the fact that racism is not, at its roots, a political, or social problem. It is fundamentally a moral problem, and centuries of teaching regarding the just and civil treatment of people of color and differing backgrounds and customs, is anchored in the life and preaching of the supremely rejected One – Jesus the Christ of God!

St. Dorotheos of Gaza (505-565 AD), monk and Abbot, describes the kind of harmonious living that can destroy racism’s hideous presence: “Suppose a circle whose center is God and whose rays are different paths. Every person of the created world walks along one of the rays toward the center, where Christ God is (whether the person realizes it or not). He approaches his brother walking along a different ray toward God, the center itself. The more they distance themselves from one another, the more they distance themselves from God.” In unambiguous terms that we can understand, racism is a serious sin, not just a political or social opinion. He who harbors racism in his heart, distances himself from God. He who distances himself from God, by his own free choice, must make answer for that estrangement.

His Eminence Metropolitan Ephraim, Archbishop of Tripoli, founder and Abbot of the Holy Monastery of the Archangel Michael, has, for years, been a spiritual adversary of racism and bigotry. He teaches: “Racist behavior has been rooted in the reality of sin since the beginning of humanity. This racism is rooted in our blood, us weak humans, but those who believe in Christ reject it and fight it with the words of Holy Scripture: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female: For ye are all one in Christ Jesus.” (Galatians 3:28) It is the fundamental identity of every human person to bear the living image of God in him/herself.

The late theologian, lawyer, and social ethics specialist, Fr. John Courtney Murray, wrote: “Regardless of background, ethnic identity, cultural upbringing, religion, or ideology – every person is a temple of the Living God and, thereby, derives their spiritual and civil dignity from the Just God – the one from whom the very power of governments themselves are derived.” No matter how any of us try to reason that away, to debate it, to dismiss it as “religious” rather than “civil” teaching, to insist that it is not practical politics – it is the Gospel’s message, it was the message of Jesus the Merciful, and it is the message He expects us to follow and to live. If we don’t, we risk walking into the darkness of serious sin, and, as St. Dorotheos of Gaza said, “distancing ourselves from God.” We are not called to mere toleration or to a hidden, dismissive attitude. Remember: “If anyone says, “I love God,” yet rejects his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother.”



The moral questions for each of us are: What is in our heart? Do we harbor racist thoughts? Do we dismiss people because they are of a different color, background, or origin? Do we ignore the social sins that put others in, so-called “rejected classes”, sins like poverty, discrimination, hunger, and the lack of basic human needs? Do we justify our hidden racism because of political ideology, the way we feel our society should function, or what “place” in which we think people ought to be? Do we use our upbringing or “how things were” in days gone by, to justify any discriminatory attitudes? As our streets are filled with protests and the social compact seems tenuous at best, these are the questions all of us need to ask ourselves if we hope to reverence the dignity of every person – black, brown, yellow, immigrant, and pauper.

This is true, also, of the Orthodox Church. No longer can its voice be silent. No longer can it hide behind closed doors, praying to God for our society, while our society outside the doors spins out of control. What Rev. Brian McLaren, a pastor in Spencerville, MD, said of his own church, might well be said of the Orthodox household: “We’ve done pretty well in the worship of Jesus -- we do not do so well following him. The first is easy and the second is hard. If Christianity is not revered and respected, we must look to ourselves and see how much of it is our fault.” In not actively fighting the sins of racism, bigotry, and the exclusion or marginalization of peoples, we become what St. James feared the most – just hearers of the Word, not DOERS. It means the radical demands of love in the Gospel, preached by Jesus, only go as far as the Church doors – not into the maelstrom of actual human oppression.

The German theologian, Fr. Karl Rahner, suggests a reason why the Gospel of love never makes it out the Church doors: “The number one cause of atheism is Christians. Those who proclaim him with their mouths and deny him with their actions is what an unbelieving world finds unbelievable.” The task belongs to each and every one of us. The time for excuses is ended. Orthodoxy’s voice must be raised with all Christian churches against racism, bigotry, discrimination, and exclusion – not for political or social reasons, but for moral ones.

As a recent article in The Orthodox Observer points out: “Archbishop Elpidophoros understands all this and that is why he has been compelled to stand and march against racial injustice. As a Christian raised in Turkey, Elpidophoros has experienced structural oppression in ways that most Americans can only imagine.” The problem is that too many Americans—too many Orthodox Americans—do not want to imagine it. We would rather deflect, deny, and ignore because we fear that genuine equality for black, brown, yellow, and immigrant men, women, and children. would only come at our own expense. “We have to support these people!” “We have to make sacrifices for them out of OUR hard-earned money!” “Most of them just hang around and don’t want to work!” “They just wait to start violence in our streets!” “Why should I sacrifice for them?”

That, after all, is the meaning and purpose of the Cross of Christ – isn’t it? May the Crucified God give you the courage and inspiration to help end any traces of the sin of racism and discrimination in your heart – and in our society – still the roaming ground of the Evil One.

Faithfully with those who suffer,  
Fr. Dimitrios Antokas

## PODCASTS

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### Race and Ethnicity Issues Explored on Ancient Faith Today - Podcast

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(Chesterton, IN) During the most recent podcast in the program "Ancient Faith Today," host Kevin Allen explored Orthodox Christian teachings on racism, ethnic separatism, and racial profiling. Kevin's guest was Fr. Michael Varlamos, Orthodox priest and historian. On the show, the two discussed why it was that His Eminence Iakovos, archbishop of North and South America for the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese from 1959-1996, chose to join the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in the historic 1965 march on Selma, Alabama. (Listen to the full program on Ancient Faith Radio) [1]

"Given the recent tragedy of the nine African-American Christians who were murdered during a Bible study at an African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, SC, as well as the rising of racial tensions across this country, I wanted to investigate what the Orthodox Church's positions and canonical teachings are, regarding racial and ethnic hatred," said Allen.

"One of the most public and heroic events in the history of the Orthodox Church in the United States," Allen continued, "was when His Eminence Iakovos of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese joined Dr. King to march nonviolently in Selma, Alabama, potentially risking his own safety. This event—the 50th anniversary of which we commemorate this year—set a new standard of civic activism for Orthodox Christians."

Father Michael, the senior priest at The Assumption of the Theotokos Greek Orthodox Church in St. Clair Shores, MI, recently published an insightful article on Archbishop Iakovos and his march with Dr. King. [2] In addition to his Masters of Divinity degree, Fr. Michael holds a Masters degree in Classics from Wayne State University in Detroit, MI, and has spoken in several venues on the topic of race and ethnicity.

[https://www.ancientfaith.com/podcasts/aftoday/march\\_with\\_martin\\_luther\\_king](https://www.ancientfaith.com/podcasts/aftoday/march_with_martin_luther_king)

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### Is Racism a Spiritual Problem? – OCN Podcast

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In 1998, Fr. Moses Berry moved with his family from St. Louis, MO to his family's farm in Ash Grove, about 17 miles from Springfield, MO. The farm is a Century Farm, having been in the Berry family since 1872, and on the property is a cemetery dedicated to "Slaves, Paupers, and Indians" by the Berry's, over a century ago. Fr. Moses felt that the cemetery needed to be maintained respectfully, and so he left a mission in the city to return to his boyhood home in rural Missouri.

A small group of faithful collected around the new mission, Theotokos "Unexpected Joy." The first services were held in a tiny cemetery chapel, which we quickly outgrew. We moved to a larger temporary building closer to the rectory, which also served as the church hall. In 2000 the mission was received into the Orthodox Church in America. Members come from all over the Ozarks to share their life in Christ. Springfield, MO is about a half hour's drive, but some come from localities as far as Harrisonville, Arkansas. Fr. Moses travels widely to give talks on mission and also on local Afro-American history; folks who have met him elsewhere often stop by to worship when they pass through the area. So, we are vitally connected with the larger Orthodox community while enjoying the quiet and beauty of the Missouri countryside.

<https://myocn.net/is-racism-a-spiritual-problem/>

## ONLINE VIDEOS

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### **How ought we deal with Racism and Xenophobia as Orthodox Christians? – YouTube Video**

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Today my beloved we take a look at a most devastating thing that has divided humanity against itself for the longest of times. It continues to plague us even today in the 21st century although we describe ourselves to be more “civilized” and “tolerant”. I am speaking of the human being’s capacity to be racist, intolerant, and xenophobic! To believe that another person of different race, nationality, and ethnicity can somehow render them inferior. For today’s purpose, let’s discuss two different, but equally dangerous ideologies: racism – the discrimination against another person of different race based on the premise that one’s own race is superior; and xenophobia: the dislike or intense disfavor of people from other countries.

Now it’s easy to make the claim that “obviously” this is wrong and immoral. But why? How do we as Christians make the claim that the belief in the Christian Trinitarian God obligates me to view all of humanity at equal footing? Why are racism and xenophobia sins against God and man in the understanding of the Orthodox Christian Church? Let’s take a closer look.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dXNgIMilyms>

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### **“How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love Discussing Race” – YouTube Video**

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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MbdxeFcQtaU>

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### **“Uncomfortable Conversations with a Black Man” – Video series**

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A series of videos with Emmanuel Acho where he breaks down how it looks to live as a black man. He uses simple terms and inserts humor.

<https://uncomfortableconvo.com/watch>