

A Statement of Independent Presbyterian Church’s (IPC) Affirmations and Denials on the Gospel and Race

Over the past fifteen years, the Session of Independent Presbyterian Church, Memphis, TN, has adopted a number of papers and statements on how the Gospel relates to issues of race, racial injustice, and racial reconciliation.¹ We recognize that these issues are complex. In order to assist our congregation further, the Session simply, clearly, and transparently presents our position through the following Affirmation and Denials.

<i>Affirmations</i>	<i>Denials</i>
<i>Our Doctrinal Commitment</i>	
<p>We affirm the Holy Scriptures as the inspired, infallible, and inerrant Word of God, the rule of faith and life (2 Tim 3:16-17; WCF 1:2). We further affirm our ongoing adoption of the Westminster Standards as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures (BCO 21-4; 24-6).</p>	<p>We deny any system of philosophy or theology that subordinates the Holy Scripture as the supreme authority for faith and life, or that posits another source of supreme authority for theological formulation. As a result, we deny and reject philosophies and theologies that are derived from, related to, or are consistent with oppositional, human-centric philosophies. These include, but are not limited to, various forms of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marxism • Critical Theory • Liberation Theology² • Ethno-Nationalism (Kinism, Christian Identity)³
<i>Our View of Human Beings</i>	
<p>We affirm that all peoples and every racial and ethnic people are made in the image of God (Gen 1:27; Jas 3:9). We further affirm that the image of Christ is reflected in his body gathered, drawn from “every nation from all tribes and peoples and languages” (Rev 7:9). Hence, we affirm that individuals in their racial and ethnic particularity are valued, honored, and cherished.</p> <p>We affirm that, for the Christian, all human identities must be subordinate to their identity in Christ.</p>	<p>We deny that aspects of human identity—whether social, racial or ethnic, familial, or economic class—may ever take precedence over our identity as created by God and redeemed in Christ (Gal 3:27-28).</p> <p>We further deny that various aspects of our human identities—whether race, gender, or economic class—serve as vulnerabilities or opportunities for hegemonic oppression: hence, we necessarily reject oppositional frameworks, ideas, philosophies, and beliefs, such as “intersectionality,” as defined by Critical Theory.⁴</p>

<p>We affirm the vision of the redeemed in Revelation 7:9-11, where all nations and ethnicities are fulfilled in Christ upon his return.</p>	
<p><i>Our View of Sin and Racism</i></p>	
<p>We affirm that all peoples and every racial and ethnic people participated in original sin through our first parents, Adam and Eve (Rom 5:12). We further affirm that racism—“an explicit or implicit belief or practice that qualitatively distinguishes or values one race over other races”—is a sin and is the result of the fall.⁵</p>	<p>We deny that all relationships that human beings experience are typified by the misuse of power or characterized by any form of hierarchical oppression. We further deny that systemic racism alone can sufficiently or dispositively account for the fate of any individual person or any particular people in a any given place and time.</p>
<p><i>Our View of the Gospel and Racial Unity</i></p>	
<p>We affirm that Christ’s atoning sacrifice alone cleanses us from all sin, including the sin of racism (1 John 1:7).</p> <p>We affirm that the only hope for “every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages” to know genuine unity is the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This Gospel involves retribution in the act of Christ bearing God’s wrath and curse for our sin and restoration in that he alone restores us to right relationship with himself.</p>	<p>We deny that genuine unity across lines of diversity can ultimately be achieved through coercive means, whether through a legislative process or through economic means. We further deny that salvation is in any way related to or dependent upon economic or political parity or activism for these or other non-biblical purposes.</p>
<p><i>Our View of Racial Reconciliation</i></p>	
<p>We affirm that racial reconciliation is a fruit of the gospel that involves God creating in Christ “one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility” (Eph 2:15-16). It requires that we bring forth fruits of repentance (Luke 3:8), which include opportunities for listening to, learning from, and partnering with minority brothers and sisters in Christ. We</p>	<p>We deny that genuine, biblical reconciliation among races and ethnicities can occur apart from the Gospel of Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit. We further deny any belief, concept, or philosophy that holds racism as a sin beyond the sufficiency of Christ’s atonement or forgiveness.</p>

<p>affirm our commitment as a Session to pursue such on-going work freely (Matt 7:16-20).</p>	
<p><i>Our View of Justice</i></p>	
<p>We affirm that the Bible is our supreme authority for understanding what justice is. We affirm God is a God of justice (Isa 30:18) and established the governing authority to which everyone is subject: “Whoever rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted” (Rom 13:1-7).</p> <p>We also affirm that God exercises justice especially as he cares for the poor, widow, orphan, and sojourner (Psa 146:7-9), and that Christ calls on his followers to do the same (Matt 25:31-46).</p> <p>We affirm, as Christians, that we are to act justly and to love mercy (Micah 6:8). We recognize justice, as an essential element of our witness to Christ, requires our conduct to be just both in public (hence, “social”) and in private (Matt 5:15-16; Luke 10:27-37; 1 Pet 3:15).</p>	<p>We deny that the Church’s spiritual mission excuses us from teaching about what the Bible says about justice and from encouraging congregants to pursue justice in their various callings (Isa 58:1-14; Micah 6:8).⁶ We deny that justice will ever be accomplished perfectly before Christ returns, yet we also deny that Christians can ignore injustice when it is done by individuals, churches, organizations and/or the state.</p> <p>We reject qualified definitions and/or applications of justice, that distort biblical terms and truths while seeking an administration of justice that is neither impartial nor proportional. We reject affiliations, associations, and organizations, such as Black Lives Matters, that institute forms of qualified justice that contradict or seek to supplant the supreme authority of Holy Scripture.</p>

¹ See the documents collected here: <http://www.ipcmemphis.org/outreach/cross-cultural-ministry/hearts-and-mind/>, accessed 14 April 2021.

² For a critique of Black Liberation Theology, see Anthony B. Bradley, *Liberating Black Theology: The Bible and the Black Experience in America* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010).

³ Kinism is “based on the concept of living with one’s own kind or kin.” Typically, Kinists claim to believe standard Christian doctrine while also affirming white supremacy (see Anti-Defamation League, “Kinism: A Racist and Anti-Semitic Religious Movement” (2013): <https://www.adl.org/sites/default/files/documents/assets/pdf/combating-hate/Kinism-Racist-and-Anti-Semitic-Religionfinal2.pdf>, accessed 14 April 2021). Christian Identity, a white supremacist theology, was at the center of a major discipline case in Western Carolina Presbytery (PCA): <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/intelligence-report/2010/church-denomination-roots-out-racism>, accessed 14 April 2021.

⁴ Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction, 3rd edition* (New York: New York University Press, 2017), 10-11, 58-59.

⁵ “The Gospel and Race: A Pastoral Letter (2004),” in *The Pursuit of Gospel of Unity: The PCA Papers on Racism and Racial Reconciliation* (Lawrenceville, GA: Committee on Discipleship Ministries, 2019), 42. This letter was adopted by the 32nd PCA General Assembly; this same definition of racism was used in the PCA Report of the Ad Interim Committee on Racial and Ethnic Reconciliation in 2018, which was adopted by the 46th PCA General Assembly (see *The Pursuit of Gospel Unity*, 96). These documents are also on the IPC website; see fn. 1.

⁶ See Sean Michael Lucas, “Owning Our Past: The Spirituality of the Church in History, Failure, and Hope,” *Reformed Faith and Practice* 1 (May 2016): <https://journal.rts.edu/article/owning-our-past-the-spirituality-of-the-church-in-history-failure-and-hope/>, accessed 14 April 2021.