

Montesinos challenged the people with the question ***By what right?*** And we ask today - By what right do we still discriminate and disenfranchise persons and groups in our world? Prejudice, which leads to discrimination, is a fact of life. Prejudice is socialized into every person. We don't just wake up one day and think that we will be prejudiced.

Prejudice about race becomes racism when there is a system that uses its power to support one group over another. That is the definition of Racism – it is prejudice plus the power to enforce that prejudice.

Thus we speak of racism as being systemic. It is reinforced and maintained by the laws and accepted practices of nations, through institutions common to society such as financial, educational, governmental, cultural and religious. Institutions create, manage, and distribute the resources of society – a very good thing. The harmful part is the inequality inherent in doing so.

Racism is not about intentionality. It exists whether we mean it or not, because it is part of the system. How I treat others is very important, but ultimately my treating people kindly will not dismantle racism.

Thus racism has great power. As a white person I can speak about the power of racism to preserve and maintain power and privilege for the white society. If we are willing to look at racism's power to maintain privilege, then we have more of a chance of making systemic changes. We don't want to hurt people of color but we also don't want to necessarily give up our power and privilege. As long as only certain persons have access to rights, they are not truly rights but rather they are privileges.

Certainly racism has power over people of color, to oppress people of color. To know more about that, we need to have conversations with our brothers and sisters of color. It would be inauthentic for me to speak to that. Yet I can say that if whites believe that the problem of racism is only in the oppression, we tend to try to fix people of color and stop with food pantries, shelters, etc. In this scenario, white persons are not called upon to change.

Racism is an identity-shaping power so its ultimate power is to control and destroy everyone. It's really a misuse of power. Our church names racism

as a sin. And isn't that what sin does – it misshapes who we are and whose we are. What we really want is power that will help us to be all that God created us to be.

The other question from Montesinos - **Are they not human?**

If people are defined as less than human, then we could take their belongings and ignore their rights. We could force them to work in inhumane situations and acquire their land.

So another part of the analysis of racism is to keep the development of race connected to economics. In US history we had the 1 drop rule for being Black - this increased the number of Blacks and created a larger pool of slave labor. By the same token, to be Indian one had to be ½ from 1 tribe. This decreased the number of Indians which was the plan since the Indians had land that was desired and there would be fewer persons to claim the land.

We connect this to the colonizing efforts of past centuries where military conquest, slavery and colonization resulted in the seizure of land as well as other natural resources and forced labor.

And now we move forward to the current colonization practice of using capitalism, globalization, and cultural forces to control a country in lieu of direct military or political control. Unfair debt, trade agreements, and tax policies of the wealthy countries exploit the weaknesses of poor, developing countries. We have the situation whereby 20% of the world population uses 80% of the resources. We in the US are 5% of the world's population and use 25% of the resources.

As we continue to ask the questions **By what right? Are they not human?** and we work to dismantle racism, it is important to remember that the enemy is racism, not each other.

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