



WORD & WORLD
RACE AND JUSTICE
ISSUE 9 · JUNE 2021

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EDITOR'S NOTE

"The world is watching us. If the church is not willing to engage deeply and honestly on these pressing questions, we risk slipping further into irrelevance." – Paula Fuller

A year ago, George Floyd lost his life at the hands of an unjust system, sparking a worldwide outcry for change. As the church in the United States continues to grapple with the consequences, the basic questions of justice raised by Floyd's murder find local echoes in every context of IFES ministry worldwide, as Christians everywhere face other deeply rooted structures of racial injustice.

In this issue of World & World, **Paula Fuller**, the Executive Vice President of People and Culture at InterVarsity USA, reflects on persistent racial divides in the American church and how students should be shaped to be agents of reconciliation. **N.T. Wright**, author and theologian, also shares his perspective on the church as God's worldwide family, and how "racism is a failure of vocation." We also look back at our series of Conexión articles from the past year, with stories of students across IFES regions who are choosing to confront and address injustice in their own contexts.

This issue features illustrations from Vancouver-based artist **Brian Liu**. Brian was born and raised in Hong Kong, and focused his time on creative pursuits as a means to understand and to be understood after moving to Canada in 1993. He currently works as a brand and communication designer and painter, and hopes to use creativity and empathy to live life helping those who are often unheard and misunderstood. Regarding his work for this issue, he says,

Racism is not an easy subject to talk about. At times it may seem easier to stay away from people who are different than us and label them as dangerous or to view their ways as wrong. But this will only lead us to fear and anger. As the body of Christ, we must lead the charge to break these barriers and take down the walls we build within our hearts and our churches.

We are also pleased to announce the appointment of our new editor and Theological Advisory Group chair, **Femi Adeleye**. Femi currently serves as Executive Director for the Institute of Christian Impact, an organization that exists to mentor and equip leaders to meet the needs and challenges of the growing church in Africa, but he will be well-known to many of you thanks to his previous leadership roles within IFES. We are delighted to have him working with IFES again as our editor, and we trust that we will all be enriched in future issues by his deep wisdom and experience.

Join us as we present an issue in which we explore the role of the church—and of students—in addressing these painful and urgent challenges.



Tim Adams, IFES General Secretary
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LEFT BEHIND? JUSTICE AND THE CHURCH AFTER GEORGE FLOYD

Paula Fuller

In August 2014, the shooting death of Michael Brown, a young, unarmed Black man, by a White police officer in Ferguson, Missouri, sparked a new level of national discourse in the United States on race, civil rights, and systemic injustice.

So began a [Lausanne Global Analysis](#) that I wrote five years ago. In it I highlighted some of the American church's response—and non-response—to a wave of high-profile killings of unarmed Black men and women. I explored the significance of systemic injustice to global mission and concluded with a call for Christians, individually and corporately, to pursue practical acts of restorative justice. The article was published a few months after a massacre by a white nationalist at a Black church in Charleston SC. This was a moment in which the church could have called for a reckoning on the issue of race and the need for justice on the road to reconciliation. Instead its racial divisions and differences were brought into sharper focus.

2020 was punctuated by another series of high-profile killings. There was a nightmarishly familiar feel to the events of last year: another death, another media wave, and another round of protests. Looking back at that Lausanne piece, it is tempting to think that little has changed, that we are just going in circles, enduring another iteration of atrocity, outcry, attention, and inaction.

SUCH A TIME AS THIS

George Floyd's killing by Officer Derek Chauvin in May 2020 catalyzed the fury, collective pain, and pressures of Black life in the United States. His death came on the heels of two other national stories: the horrific killings of Breonna Taylor and Ahmaud Arberry. The world witnessed massive demonstrations of primarily young adults, in all 50 states, in major cities, suburbs, and rural communities.

Protest amidst the Covid-19 pandemic was noteworthy for two reasons. First, the willingness of protestors to risk catching and spreading Covid-19 reflected the dire need to take a stand against racial injustice. Second, the pandemic further exposed the impact of systemic injustice affecting Black and Brown people: the prevalence of pre-existing medical conditions and lack of access to health care tied to racism and poverty, coupled with higher representation in "essential worker" roles, which carried greater risks of infection and death from Covid-19.

The cumulative impact of these killings, along with the disproportionate deaths of Black and Brown people from Covid-19, pushed me and many other Black folks beyond the customary feelings of racial fatigue into new spaces of racial trauma. At the same time, new segments of the American population awakened to the realities of systemic injustice and white supremacy. As the video of George Floyd's killing went viral, millions were transfixed and horrified by the 8 minutes and 46 seconds that Officer Chauvin knelt on George Floyd's neck.

The response internationally to the Floyd video mirrored what was happening in the streets of Minneapolis and other US cities. People all over the world, already connected in a unique way because of the global battle against Covid-19, joined in affirming the value and dignity of Black lives, demanding policing reform and justice for George Floyd, Ahmaud Arberry and Breonna Taylor. Crowds turned out during a global pandemic, literally risking their lives, to protest events happening in another country.

Historically, the United States has played the role of calling out injustices in other countries and affirming human rights for those living under oppressive conditions. In this instance, the tables turned. America was being challenged to live up to its ideals of life, liberty, and justice for all. These world-wide protests could not have been scripted or orchestrated by an individual or single group. They were a powerful symbol of solidarity signaling that the time for change had come.

Unlike other nationally profiled killings, George Floyd's death has resulted in police reform in cities and states across the country. By June 2020, at least 23 cities completely or partially banned the use of chokeholds, carotid restraints, or both by police.¹ Other policing reforms include duty to intervene when fellow police officers exert excessive force, reductions in police funding with reallocation for youth programs or other community services, increasing transparency, and better training and education.

There is once again a generation in American society that has grown tired of racial injustice. Sustained protests in 2020 have increased awareness of long-standing racial disparities in American society. The government, corporations, universities, and other public institutions have responded, committing funding, creating policies, and developing economic initiatives to address racial injustices. The church has primarily interpreted these events through political and cultural lenses, failing to acknowledge the spiritual significance of systemic injustice or engage in biblical responses. While holding, at best, to familiar historical patterns of response – lament, apologies, and symbolic repentance—the church has been left behind. Its racial divisions have hardened.

¹ "Cities and states across the US announce police reform following demands for change", Karina Zaiets, Janie Haseman, and Jennifer Borresen, USA Today, June 19, 2020.

RECONCILIATION, EXHAUSTION, AND LIBERATION

Prior to 2015, racial reconciliation was a prominent theme at evangelical conferences. Multi-racial congregations, particularly mega-churches, were seeing more Black congregants in their churches. “In 2012, according to a report from the National Congregation Study, more than two-thirds of those attending white-majority churches were worshipping alongside at least some black congregants, a notable increase since a similar survey in 1998. This was more likely to be the case in evangelical churches than in mainline Protestant churches, and more likely in larger ones than in smaller ones.”²

Within American evangelicalism in the last few years, racial reconciliation has become “a road less travelled.” The Trump presidency stoked racial division and white nationalism. For many Black Christians in white evangelical spaces, the endorsement of Donald Trump in 2016 by 81% of white Evangelical voters created a painful breach of trust, which contributed to an exodus of Black members from white evangelical ministries. Michael Emerson, one of the co-authors of *Divided by Faith*, noted, “The election itself was the single most harmful event to the whole movement of reconciliation in at least the past 30 years.”³

That election was one of the starkest visible expressions of the deep differences in understanding between white and Black Christians on matters of race. Subsequent research further elucidated the disconnect between Black and white Christians about race in America. The Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI) in 2018 examined the perspectives among white Christians (including evangelicals, mainline Protestants and Catholics) compared to whites who are religiously unaffiliated. These trends generally persist even in the wake of the recent protests for racial justice.⁴ The survey revealed:

- White Christians are more likely than whites who are religiously unaffiliated to deny the existence of structural racism.
- White Christians are nearly twice as likely as religiously unaffiliated whites to say the killings of Black men by police are isolated incidents rather than part of a pattern of how police treat African Americans.
- White Christians are about 30 percentage points more likely to say monuments to Confederate soldiers are symbols of Southern pride rather than symbols of racism.
- White Christians are also about 20 percentage points more likely to disagree with this statement: “Generations of slavery and discrimination have created conditions that make it difficult for Blacks to work their way out of the lower class.”

Similarly, in mid-2019, Barna undertook a study with the Racial Justice and Unity Center which highlighted “stark racial contrasts” in perspectives between Black and white American Christians:

- Only two in five white practicing Christians (38%) believe the U.S. has a race problem. This percentage more than doubles, however, among Black practicing Christians (78%).
- Three-quarters of Black practicing Christians (75%) at least somewhat agree that the U.S. has a history of oppressing minorities, while white practicing Christians are less likely to do so (42%).
- Three in five white practicing Christians (61%) take an individualized approach to matters of race, saying these issues largely stem from one’s own beliefs and prejudices causing them to treat people of other races poorly. Meanwhile, two-thirds of Black practicing

² “A Quiet Exodus: Why Black Worshipers Are Leaving White Evangelical Churches”, [Campbell Robertson](#), New York Times, March 9, 2018.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Racism among white Christians is higher than among the nonreligious. That’s no coincidence. Robert P. Jones, THINK, July 27, 2020.

Christians (66%) agree that racial discrimination is historically built into our society and institutions.

- Seven in 10 Black practicing Christians (70%) report being motivated to address racial injustice. Only about one-third of white practicing Christians (35%) says the same.

The disparity in perspectives underscores why there would be frustration in multiracial settings in which Black Christians want a higher level of engagement around issues of systemic racism, while white leaders and congregants would be less likely to acknowledge a problem with racial injustice or have the motivation to address it.⁵ The result has been dissonance and pain, which has taken a toll on the Black Christian community.

The exodus of Black churchgoers from white ministries was described in a 2018 New York Times article as “mostly quiet, more in fatigue and heartbreak than outrage.” For those who have stayed, Christian counsellors have spoken about the psychological toll of remaining in multiracial churches. Others have spoken about the necessity of spending dedicated time with those who have shared experiences, for the purpose of renewal, so Black members can return to multiracial spaces energized and ready to engage across racial differences.⁶

In the post-George Floyd era, the focus has shifted from dialogue on racial reconciliation and efforts to bring together congregations from different racial groups to action that acknowledges systemic injustice and meaningfully increases the equity and inclusion of Black people and other communities of color impacted by racism. For veteran leaders who continue to pursue the ministry of reconciliation, the journey must begin with engaging racial injustice. Brenda Salter-McNeil, an African American woman preacher, author, and professor who has taught, studied, and practiced the work of racial reconciliation for decades, writes,

*“Now more than ever, those who care about the reconciliation command of the cross must speak up and out about injustice and must go about the work of dismantling the structures of this injustice and combating the harmful, even deadly result of this country’s unchecked legacy of systemic inequality and discrimination. The church must talk about justice. I **must** talk about justice. The time is now.”⁷*

Similarly, Chris Rice, Director of the Mennonite Central Committee United Nations Office in New York City and former cofounding Director of the Duke Divinity School Center for Reconciliation, writes,

“Like the comfortable religious leaders in Jesus’ Good Samaritan story, we dare not pass quickly by the murdered body of George Floyd on the other side of the Jericho road. As I wrote elsewhere, you cannot reconcile with someone who has a foot on your neck. We dare not talk about reconciliation without getting feet off necks. For everything there

⁵ Black Practicing Christians are Twice as Likely as Their White Peers to See a Race Problem, Barna Research, Articles in Culture and Media in Faith & Christianity, June 17, 2020.

⁶ The Downside of Integration for Black Christians, Jemar Tisby, The Witness, August 21, 2017.

⁷ *Becoming Brave: Finding The Courage to Pursue Racial Justice Now*, Brenda Salter-McNeil, Brazos Press, 2020, p. 20.

*is a season. In the spirit of Luke 4 and of Amos, this is the season to take down racial disparities. This is the season of liberation.*⁸

CREDIBILITY, COURAGE, AND CHANGE

In that Lausanne piece five years ago, I asked: will the church address systemic injustice on the road to reconciliation? Despite the rich Biblical language commissioning the church as an agent and embodiment of racial justice, the hard truth is that throughout history religion has more often been used to justify division and oppression.

Nonetheless, the call remains. And given the powerful role that students have often had in driving social change in both American and broader global history, we who are engaged in student ministry face a particular responsibility. The students to whom we minister, and the students whom we hope to reach, have tremendous potential as agents of transformation, and the world needs that now. Furthermore, what they learn as students will inevitably shape how they live out their vocations long after they leave campus. How we shape their understanding of the gospel's approach to equity, inclusion, and attention to the marginalized will have lifelong impact on whose voices they hear, whose problems they see, and who they welcome to every dinner table and conference table as they continue in their adult discipleship.

In addition, the world is watching us. If the church is not willing to engage deeply and honestly on these pressing questions, we risk slipping further into irrelevance. We have already lost so much credibility. The church continues to hemorrhage young people, and on matters of racial justice, few are looking to the church or to older generations to lead.

As we enter 2021, we are not merely going in circles on questions of racial justice in the United States. In multiple sectors of society—government, education, philanthropy, the arts—we are seeing efforts by individuals and institutions to understand and address long-standing systemic discrimination. The American church's failure to grapple with a heritage of racism and the consequent inherited inequalities hurts us spiritually, and it destroys our credibility as witnesses before a student generation aching for real change.

As our global society continues to navigate a Covid-19 pandemic, we as individuals, families, institutions, and countries are being forced to embrace change. We've survived major disruptions to life as we know it and finding our "next normal" will require courage, innovation, creativity, and resourcefulness. Within InterVarsity USA, we have embraced a longing for revival and are looking to God to perceive the "new thing" that is unfolding in faculty and student ministry. As I look to the future, one of my greatest sources of hope is this generation of young adults who have already demonstrated a willingness to stand up against systemic injustice, demonstrating courage, resilience, and a commitment to change. As we develop disciples, groom leaders, and plant new student movements, we have the privilege and opportunity to invest in those individuals who will build equitable new systems and structures that render our old ones irrelevant.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Paula Fuller is InterVarsity's Executive Vice President of People and Culture. She joined the staff of InterVarsity Christian Fellowship in 2005, after serving as a volunteer for seven years. Paula has served in full-time vocational ministry since 1996, first as the Director of Outreach and Community Development at Abundant Life Christian Fellowship in Menlo Park, CA and also as an Associate Pastor. Prior to joining the ministry of Abundant Life Fellowship, Paula worked in the banking and telecommunications industries in the areas of risk management, business development, marketing and strategy. Paula and her husband Philip live in California.

⁸ Racism in America, Post-George Floyd, RECONCILERS with Chris Rice, August 4, 2020.



UNDERMINING RACISM

N.T. Wright

RACISM AND THE VOCATION OF THE CHURCH

As I contemplate the horror both of George Floyd's callous murder and of the rage of angry mobs in America and elsewhere, I am reminded of the day when Martin Luther King was assassinated in April 1968. I was in Toronto at the time, and the day after the killing I stood with tens of thousands of people in a big downtown square singing, '*We shall overcome*'. This had become the anthem of those who, like King, desperately wanted to end racial discrimination peacefully. We all really believed that King's death would stir consciences and that lasting change would come. Half a century later, it seems we were wrong. Unfortunately, grand resolutions don't always lead to deep change.

So how do we read the Bible at this time, and how do we put it into practice? Let me be blunt: it is not enough merely to say that "racism is sinful and we must get rid of it". What we call 'racism' is not simply a failure to obey a moral standard, like loving our neighbours as ourselves. Racism is a failure of vocation.

The church of the anointed Jesus was designed from the start to be a worldwide family: God's new model of humanity. In our own generation, the church has struggled to reimagine something

that was always in the Christian DNA but which we have all but forgotten. The point of being part of Jesus' people was never that we as individuals could get to heaven; the point was that we are supposed to be – in our personal and corporate lives – small working models of the ultimate new creation which God has promised and has launched decisively in raising Jesus from the dead. That has always been our glorious vocation.

Rejecting racism and embracing the diversity of Jesus' family ought to be as obvious as praying the Lord's prayer, celebrating the Eucharist or reading the four gospels. It isn't just an extra rule that we're supposed to keep. It is fundamental to who we are. The irony of the present situation is this: the churches have to a great extent forgotten that this was their vocation and that racism was a denial of it. The phrase 'Christian racist' ought to be heard as a devastating oxymoron.

THE ORIGINAL VISION OF THE UNITED CHURCH: SMALL WORKING MODELS OF THE NEW CREATION

In Colossians 3:11, the apostle Paul insists that in the Jesus-following family there is neither Jew nor Greek, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free. That's what it means to put on the new humanity which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of the Creator.

This dream was regularly ignored in Western churches in the Modern period. But it was then picked up on in the secular enlightenment. Today's secular vision of a multicultural global society is at its best a Christian ideal detached from its Christian foundation. When Pope Benedict addressed the General Assembly of the United Nations in April 2008¹, he suggested that the human rights discourse has become a way of trying to get the fruits of the Judeo-Christian tradition while detaching itself from the roots. If you do that, your discourse will collapse into a shrill shouting match of competing special interests. This is where we find ourselves now, with one side of the church saying the others are racists and the other side saying the others are communists. We need to dig down deeper, below the shrill moralism, to our foundational vocation to be the new model of human life.

So what is this 'new humanity' vocation, and how have we drifted so far away from it that we now see it only as a detached ethical imperative? Paul's vision of the church shines out in every letter he writes, perhaps particularly in Ephesians. Actually, his famous doctrine of 'Justification by faith' is expounded only in two letters – Romans and Galatians – and mentioned briefly in the odd verse here and there elsewhere, but his vision of the united church across all the traditional boundary lines, particularly the ethnic ones (with 'Jew and Greek' as the central paradigm) is laid out emphatically in every single letter. Even in little Philemon, where the 'slave or free' point is pushed home with powerful pastoral gentleness. The theological and practical climax of Romans 14 and 15 is precisely what we might call fellowship by faith, 'koinonia'. It is the fleshing out of justification by faith.

Paul insists on the radical mutual welcome that must take place between Jesus' followers of different ethnic backgrounds and the different cultural practices that go with those backgrounds. The whole point of Romans 15:6 is that you may *'with one heart and voice glorify the God and father of our Lord Jesus, the anointed One'*. This is the large-scale application of the point Paul makes sharply in Galatians 2. Paul insists to Peter that uncircumcised Gentiles who have come to faith in Jesus are equal members of Jesus' people along with believing Jews. They don't need to be circumcised since their previous status as Gentile sinners has been erased by Jesus' death, which rescues all his people from the present evil age.

But it's in Ephesians where the picture is spelt out most fully. In chapter 1, Paul declares that God's purpose was to sum up all things in heaven and on earth in the Messiah. This stands solidly over against the normal Western Christian assumption that God's purpose is to snatch believers away from earth so that they can live with him in heaven – something the New Testament never says. The last scene in the Bible (Rev. 21-22) is not about saved souls going up to heaven, it's the new

Jerusalem coming down from heaven to earth. God's plan was always to renew the whole creation (Romans 8; 1 Cor. 15), and for God himself to come and dwell with humans in that new world.

So the church is not simply a loose association of people who have had similar spiritual experiences and get together from time to time to encourage one another as they escape the world and look forward to going off somewhere else. The church is the new family of Jesus-followers: those who have died to their old spiritual allegiances and discovered their new identity as Messiah people. Their present flesh-and-blood existence as this extraordinary, even miraculous single family is a sign and foretaste of God's purpose for the whole world. This family in fact is called to be a worship-based, spiritually renewed, multi-ethnic, gender-blind in leadership, polychrome, mutually supportive, outward facing, culturally creative, socially responsible, fictive kinship group. A good brief definition of the church!

So, living in this way is not an optional extra for the followers of Jesus, a kind of added hobby for those who want something different on top of their regular Bible studies or prayer meetings. It is part of the deal.

Now all this is obvious in the New Testament and in early Christianity as a whole, and it chimes completely with Jesus' own emphasis, particularly his high priestly prayer in John 17, that all might be one so that the world might believe. Jesus is implying that if we fail here, we are handing to unbelievers good grounds for denying that he had been sent by God.

The beauty of Pentecost is not the collapse of all languages into one hegemonic tongue, but rather the multiple flowings of the Spirit into all the world creating a single polychrome, polyglot family. Of course, the outworking of this would not always be straightforward: ethnic and linguistic distinctions were already a point of tension in the early church. We must address these with wise and decisive action to preserve continued unity to be the advanced guard of God's new creation.

WHY DID WE GET IT SO WRONG?

So how did we get it so wrong? Why have some of the best educated Christian groups in the world flouted this vision for a polychrome unity, and regard anyone who argues for it as a dangerous subversive? How did we slide into this without even noticing?

No doubt there are many reasons, but I want to highlight two. Firstly, there is the matter of the unintended consequences of right and proper actions. One of the great achievements of the Protestant Reformation was to translate the Scriptures into people's own language so that ordinary Christians could read the Bible for themselves. Along the way, however, it led to ethnically based churches and communities who are no longer worshipping God together across linguistic and ethnic boundaries. When this acceptance of division became the new norm, we even gave it a fancy name: denomination, which sounds quite respectable, like '*justification*' or '*sanctification*', and so it was easy for visibly ethnic divisions to fit into this pattern. Now the whole Protestant project has split into so many fragments that we can't keep track of them all. Nobody seems to have noticed that despite their regular appeal to Scripture, they were ignoring one of Scripture's central injunctions. The racism that is both casual and institutional that we so deplore today is but one outworking of the much deeper failure of Western Protestantism. At the very point where the church should have been a shining light of polychrome unity, the churches themselves were every bit as compromised as the surrounding culture.

This splitting into different ethnic groups was an accidental and unintended consequence of something good that was going on, namely the communication of Scripture and liturgy in local languages. But the second factor we have to note is deeper and I think more disastrous: the almost universal assumption in Western churches that the whole point of Christianity was to go to heaven when we die, so that how things are organised in church life becomes essentially secondary. This is the almost total victory of Platonism, and a denial of the full biblical vision of the church. The trouble is that the great Pauline emphasis on grace and faith rather than works of the law has been heard, over and over again, within a Platonic echo-chamber. Many Protestants, including many

evangelicals, have come to believe implicitly that God is more interested in the non-material world, and the invisible inner life of the individual, than in the material world and the actual and visible life of the church and that has left the door open for the poison of racism to creep in unnoticed. In our present day, many scholars (myself included) have been insisting that Paul's doctrine of justification by faith apart from works of the Jewish law, was both about '*ultimate salvation in the new creation*' (not a 'going to heaven' salvation) and about the '*coming together of Jews and Gentiles into the single family of Abraham*', and that these two belonged tightly together.

Paul would have been horrified by our modern distortions. If you read Romans 14 and 15, you will notice that the mutual welcome across ethnic and cultural boundaries is not a mere distant implication of the gospel; it is the physical, tangible, visible sign of justification by faith itself. In today's increasingly polychrome world, it simply won't do to shelter inside look-alike fellowships. Read Ephesians 3 or Colossians 3 again – how impoverished we have become in our self-enclosed enclaves.

It is important for us to understand why racism has emerged in the forms it has, and how the biblical gospel of Jesus, when allowed free rein, radically undermines it. As well as the two reasons highlighted above, it's important to be aware of the influence of modernism and postmodernism on this phenomenon. Enlightenment modernism has wanted to eliminate racism because of its standpoint that all people should be identical, like a homogeneous 'solidarity'. Postmodernism has wanted to eliminate racism because all people are seen to be different and should be valued and respected as such. Therefore, both modernity and postmodernity have wanted to eliminate racism for opposite reasons, but the ideological confusion seems to fuel the anger rather than checking it, and those who get hurt are often the most vulnerable. The Enlightenment secular project has tried to attain this but without the means to do so, like a moth trying to fly to the moon. Christians ought to have seen racism coming and denounced it at an early stage.

HOW DO WE RESPOND?

In conclusion, I would like to offer three urgent words for this difficult time. Firstly, we need to recognise that the Pauline vision of the church offers what no earthly institution can achieve: the differentiated unity in which multiple human differences, refracted through the prism of new life in the anointed Jesus, form the coherent unity of the body of Christ with its many members. This vision of the church is both a gift and a calling for us to live up to.

Secondly, the present crisis ought to drive a new wave of genuine and urgent ecumenical effort, especially where ethnic difference is visible and obvious. I know how hard this is, but the gospel and Scripture leave us no choice. Church leaders and ministers need to get together across traditional boundaries, get to know one another, pray together, read Scripture together, swap pulpits and so on.

Thirdly, what we need right now, following the necessary recognition of, and repentance for, past, evil, is a glorious amnesty of mutual forgiveness. As I said earlier, it won't do simply to wring our hands over racism and say how wicked it is. We need to understand why it has emerged in the form it has, and how the biblical gospel of Jesus in the construction of the family of Jesus-followers radically undermines it. We have failed to live out our calling in the gospel by not living in this differentiated unity, and for this we must repent. This will involve a clear-eyed recognition of the evil that is happening, and a tear-filled repentance both for that evil and for the resentment which it has caused, followed by forgiveness: wiping the slate clean. The gospel of Jesus can pave the way to a fresh start, beginning with the crucified and risen Jesus.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

N.T. Wright has held a variety of both academic and chaplaincy posts at Oxford, Cambridge, and McGill University, Montreal. He was Canon of Westminster in 2000, before serving as Bishop of Durham between 2003-2010. He is currently Research Professor Emeritus of New Testament and Early Christianity at St Mary's College in the University of St Andrews and Senior Research Fellow at Wycliffe Hall, Oxford.



LET JUSTICE ROLL

Building bridges, pursuing justice

Bethany Peevy

Listening. It is a vital skill, but frustratingly difficult to maintain when the world seems to shout. Right now young Christians worldwide face fracturing social systems, deeply embedded wounds, calls for justice and vastly differing opinions on how to handle it. It is nothing new and it is inescapable – everywhere you turn there are mounting issues that feel overwhelming. In 2020 in the USA, it became impossible to disregard a system of racism when the death of George Floyd rocked the world. Not long after that time we [launched](#) a series of articles diving into the topic of injustice. We wanted to explore the issues students are facing in multiple contexts, recognizing that injustice comes in many ugly shapes and forms. We also acknowledged the fact that many of these issues are nuanced or involve multiple perspectives, making it crucial for Christians to be slow to speak and quick to listen.

As we engaged in these issues, we did not claim to have all the answers, but encouraged students to be bridges in their societies, not staying silent, but becoming agents of understanding, fostering healthy dialogues and inviting their peers into redemptive action. We take a look here at this journey through social issues in society and ministry and invite you to revisit these articles which remain relevant a year later.

MAKING SPACE

“We want to be seen completely for who we are, and our culture and heritage and skin tone are all part of that.”

As Christians, we have so much to learn from each other. That is what Bandile discovered when he moved from South Africa to the United Kingdom for university. Sadly, he drew this conclusion after joining a predominantly white church that showed him love and care but made little effort to understand or appreciate his cultural expression of Christianity. Bandile learned firsthand the value of making space for those who are different in your church or student group. He saw the impact of his student group, which welcomed a diverse group of participants and celebrated each one's unique perspective on the gospel. [In this article](#), we challenge churches and student groups to consider listening to others from different backgrounds in order to gain a richer view of the gospel.

AGRICULTURE IN ACTION

“When you are an orphan, it is more likely that you will be deprived from enjoying certain things in life. Being an uneducated orphan doubles this problem. So, I push to help other orphans to receive education because I want to show them that [...] they can still do great things in life.”

How can we see those who have been forgotten? The only glimmer of hope keeping orphaned children in Zimbabwe from becoming forgotten is education. Still, many do not have the funds to continue their schooling. This did not sit right with Godfrey, a FOCUS staff member, who was inspired to begin a project raising and selling chickens in order to support orphaned students through their education. [Read](#) this prime example of a person paying attention to the needs around them and using their giftings to redeem broken parts of society.

BECAUSE HE IS MY BROTHER

“This is what you do for family. You protect them.”

Arjun and Veer will never forget the day they were beaten up on their way home from class. As Indian international students on a central Asian campus, they were targets for discrimination from classmates, professors, and locals. After months of bearing the prejudice and abuse alone, they finally found allies. Members of the local IFES movement embraced them and stood up for them, demanding justice on their behalf. Though their peers did not understand why they would be kind to “outsiders” these Christians stood up against prejudice and discrimination, setting an example that glorifies God's heart for all nations. The [article](#) asks, how can you stand up for those who are mistreated in your society?

HOW TO QUESTION GOD

“Students don't need to be taught how to incorporate lament into their lives. They need to be told simply to be honest with God, with themselves and with others. What stifles their honesty are misconceptions about what it means to be ‘spiritual.’”

Sometimes it feels like our journey to justice is pointless. How do we react when evil seems to always win? As Christians, finding the right response to injustice can be challenging. Vinoth Ramachandra, IFES Secretary for Dialogue and Engagement, wants Christians to embrace the attitude of lament. Instead of running away from our questions, he encourages us to be honest with God. In a short interview, we asked Vinoth to share some of his wisdom about the topic of lament. We hope it will [inspire](#) readers to look at grief and injustice from a different angle in order to inspire a more intimate walk with Jesus.

ON A JOURNEY OF WONDER

“We don’t try to save the world, but we have hope for Christ and the new creation. That is our hope. It brings comfort. Because the things of this world will decay.”

Sometimes we may not think about caring for the earth as a justice issue. But in such an interconnected world, environmental issues can have both human and nonhuman impacts near and far. Though the issue feels overwhelming, there are simple ways to honor God’s creation in your everyday life. The key is to pursue a sense of wonder at creation. [In this article](#), members of the movement in Singapore outline three ways to begin your own journey with creation care.

NOT ALONE

Though injustice reigns upon the earth, we know the One who is making all things new. As students wrestle with the issues of our time, we pray that they will own their redemptive role as Christ-followers, seeking to listen, engage, reconcile, and stand up for justice. May these articles encourage you to remember that you are not alone, but surrounded by brothers and sisters in Christ who also wish to glorify his gospel through the pursuit of justice.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Bethany Peevy is the Writer and Content Producer for IFES. She has lived, studied, and worked in three different countries, but she calls the United States her home. Her particular passion is to help others bridge and thrive in intercultural spaces. Over her career she has worked for a translation company in Beijing, China, coordinated international student exchange programs in the United States, and now has the privilege of sharing stories of God’s work around the world through IFES.

