



An Important Conversation on Race Relations

Key leaders with relationships to CMBA, the South Carolina Baptist Convention, the Southern Baptist Convention and Duke Divinity School led a conversation on issues related to racial reconciliation on March 18 at Spring Valley Baptist Church in Columbia. Rev. Andre Rogers, pastor of Concord Fellowship Baptist Church and seminary faculty member at Columbia International University, invited panel guests to share thoughts and convictions on Critical Race Theory, Black Lives Matter and ways believers can grow through stronger discipleship on race issues. The conversation included personal stories, thought-provoking challenges, laughter and tears.

“Conversation is good, but commitment to continual work is better. This is the best possible reconciliation because it’s the right thing. In our context of CMBA, we are majority minority context so cross-cultural conversations are critical with related actions and strategies to continue to lift each other up,” said CMBA Executive Director George Bullard.

In addition to Bullard, panel guests included: Dr. David Emmanuel Goatley, Duke Divinity School academic dean; Rev. Philip Pinckney, pastor of Radiant Church in Charleston; Rev. Alex Sands, pastor of Kingdom Life Church in Simpsonville; and, Rev. Ken Weathersby, former vice president of the SBC Executive Committee. Rogers set expectations for the conversation by saying its intent was that no one, regardless of ethnicity, would be made to feel attacked but rather to “spark conversations that build the Kingdom” and promote meaningful trust-building relationships.

The full conversation can be viewed online [HERE](#), but in summary the panel addressed issues with their combined lenses of faith, study and personal experience. Regarding Critical Race Theory – collectively defined by the panel as a tool to be resourced for understanding a person’s reality with regard to the intersection of race, society and law – most responded that it is neither compatible nor incompatible with the gospel.

“It is not compatible as a solution to the country’s problems, as it’s sometimes packaged to be. There are opportunities to build from the pillars, but to build from the position that [CRT] can save our country? Only the gospel can do that,” Sands says.

Goatley further emphasized CRT as an analytical tool and that fair analyses must include factors that contribute to people’s realities. “This is an academic tool to explain how people are impacted by systems. There is not a single axis, but a multiplication of things we are dealing with,” he says.

Panel members processed the term “woke” – which refers to an awareness to racial prejudice and discrimination - in different ways. Weathersby’s take is that believers should be “addressing the issue of ‘deadness.’ We have discussed the history of systemic racism and created a sociological tool to highlight and reflect issues experienced. We are never going to be able to solve the issue of sin with a sociological tool. The only way we can address these issues is to come from a place of reconciliation with God.”

“We need to have words and definitions, but allow for individuality within that,” Bullard adds. “We are distinguishing between systemic and personal issues. CRT points out our brokenness but doesn’t save us. ‘Woke’ can’t minimize diversity of people just as people. When there is an offense regarding racism, we must acknowledge the offense and try to view it from that perspective, choosing to honor and respect that feeling and emotion of offense and hurt.”

Our Family Stories is a series of stories provided by the Columbia Metro Baptist Association about the people and congregations of the family of Baptist congregations in the Midlands of South Carolina.

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When the conversation turned to Black Lives Matter (BLM), the panel acknowledged the struggle pastors face in separating the literal meaning of the words with the provocative image of the movement. Pinckney cites tribalism as a key division point, saying group identification and language often force the real issues at hand to be marginalized. “Many pastors were waiting for acceptable language to be approved by those in power or influence. We want to be accepted by our tribe. We say the gospel is the answer as if everyone that became a believer stopped being racist. We can’t have a real conversation because we keep exchanging tribal markers. We need to represent our God, not our tribe. We can say true things, but our tribes get in the way of that,” he says.

Many panel members voiced real hurts encountered through racism and within a justice system that they say is still not equal. Weathersby asked “when will God’s people stand up? When will there be justice dealing with problems facing people who are killed or discriminated against?” Goatley explains the importance of understanding the “why” to meet the “what” of BLM which says “people shouldn’t be able to use power in a way that results in the death of unarmed people with no accountability. The ‘what’ addresses the disproportionateness of the reality. When you unpack the message behind the slogan, it explains the truth that exists. Christians should be a part of the discussion with a solution.”

“It’s important to follow up when someone uses a term to be sure they are fully informed. Where they get their information matters,” adds Sands. “Listen to them, counter using terms based in love and that show restraint. We must follow up with discipleship. Racism should be elevated to other sins within the church. It should have the same visibility.”

Weathersby says he is “concerned we have a culture of Christianity, but we want this without Christ. When we are born again, we are reconciled as Jesus intended for us to be from the beginning spirit, soul and flesh. Yet we are seeing people live their entire life as if this behavior is appropriate, and we need men and women to stand up for Christ and call this out.”

Rogers agrees, adding “when you only engage with one people group or ethnic group you can’t get the full benefit of God’s best.” According to Goatley, this conversation is difficult but necessary. “If we’re trying to be family and follow Jesus together, families need to have hard conversations with each other. People have different recollections and experiences, sometimes painful sometimes wonderful. When people love the lord and love each other, sometimes the conversations we need to have are hard,” he says.

Pinckney took a step further, challenging the individual’s responsibility to racial reconciliation within the Body of Christ saying, “I want to see Jesus Christ get what He paid for. This means more than personal devotions. On the Church level – I have to ask, is this what Jesus paid for or is this just what we settled on giving? God asked for 100 percent, but the best I can do it 20, 50 or 99? Have we gotten comfortable short-changing Jesus as if everything we give Him is more than He deserves?”

In conclusion, Bullard says racial reconciliation discipleship must play a larger role for more people to become “all-in” and foster a greater sense of trust. “We all, through sin, may take unintentional actions but it’s hard to grow and mature as a disciple and not have a racial reconciliation mindset, motivation and action.”

“Trust is a profound question – without it you don’t get very far, even in trusting Jesus. It’s necessary to any meaningful work, especially in this area,” Pinckney says.