

Evil and Tragedy in Charlottesville, Virginia on August 12, 2017

A Position Statement by The Social Concerns Committee of the Fellowship of Grace Brethren Churches (August 21, 2017)

The God-given dignity of persons and how it was violated

We affirm the essential equality and dignity of all human beings. All are made in the image and likeness of God (Genesis 1:26-27). God has made us morally responsible—ultimately to his commands and judgment, intermediately to the just laws and courts of human government (Acts 17:31 and Romans 13:1-7).

This inherent equality is not affected by race or nationality (Acts 17:24-26). Therefore, racism is repugnant to God and an insult to our humanity. Racism includes any words or attitude or conduct that supports racial superiority or inferiority or uses race as criterion for either inclusion or exclusion.

With these basics before us, and with humble confession of our own failures, we must pass moral judgment on the recent tragic, evil events in Charlottesville, Virginia. We must condemn the racism that was verbally advocated and violently demonstrated. We must condemn the lawlessness that occurred in all its forms.

We must pray for the reconciling power of the Gospel, demonstrated and advocated by all who embrace it, to have a powerful impact on the Charlottesville participants and on all of our country. We must also pray for law enforcement at all levels as it fulfills its difficult responsibilities.

– Social Concerns Committee of the Fellowship of Grace Brethren Churches

“Essential Civility”

By Donald Shoemaker

Chair, FGBC Social Concerns Committee

I encourage use of the “Essential Civility” resolution passed by the Fellowship of Grace Brethren Churches on July 27, 2017. Bear in mind it was written to address our current politically climate in a general way rather than focusing on a particular event. I do believe it is needed more now than when adopted.

This statement can be declared and/or posted by our churches, presented to city councils (which will happen), published in newspapers (which has already happened), sent to appropriate activist entities, and more.

I suggest that it be used with these modifications (slight changes, clarifying an aspect of “common grace” and not using the phrase, and dropping the closing reference to our own German Baptist heritage):

Civility: what it is and why it is important

Genuine civility moves past simple politeness or pragmatic concerns and sees those with whom we disagree as full equals before God. It does not allow the end to justify the means.

Civility enables us to hold the respectful dialogues without which democratic decision-making is impossible. Civil people approach their government institutions with awe and gratitude.

Civility is the negative duty not to do harm and the affirmative duty to do good.

Civility cares for one’s own identity, needs and beliefs without degrading others in the process. It is about disagreeing without disrespect, seeking common ground as a starting point for dialogue about differences, listening past one’s preconceptions, and asking others to do the same.

Civility is the hard work of stopping to listen even with those with whom we have deep-rooted and fierce disagreements.

A Call for Civility

First:

We call on our political leaders at all levels, from the White House to Congress to elected and appointed officials at all federal, state and local levels, to commit themselves to the practice of civility in what they say to others and how they treat others. We look with alarm at the deterioration of communication, especially good face-to-face communication, in today's political climate.

In our communications we must heed this scripture: "Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person..." With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God's likeness. Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be." (James 3:4-5b, 6a, 9-10 New International Version)

Second:

We call on political leaders, all of whom have the God-given capability to know and do what is right, to be honest and respectful in their political rhetoric, and to duly honor other political leaders in spite of political differences and flaws. We urge communication that truthfully focuses on issues and avoids harmful *ad hominem* characterizations of people.

Third:

We condemn all acts of incivility, including outright violence and destruction, and denying others their constitutional right to free speech and freedom of association and assembly.

Statement by the National Association of Evangelicals

AUGUST 16, 2017

The National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) mourns over the senseless violence that took place in Charlottesville, Virginia, last weekend. We join fellow Christians throughout the nation in praying for the families who lost loved ones and for healing in our country.

In times of national tragedy and crisis, evangelical Christians turn to the Word of God for direction. God created human beings in his image, and thus all people share in divine dignity (Genesis 1:26). No race or ethnicity is greater or more valuable than another. Evangelicals believe that the good news of Jesus Christ has the power to break down racial and ethnic barriers (Ephesians 2:14-18).

Evangelicalism within the United States is a diverse movement, with evangelical beliefs being held by 44 percent of African Americans, 30 percent of Hispanics, 29 percent of whites, and 17 percent of people from other ethnicities. [1] There are also millions of others around the world who hold evangelical beliefs. Evangelicals look forward to the day when believers from “every nation, tribe, people and language” will join as one and celebrate the redeeming work of Jesus Christ together (Revelation 7:9-10).

The NAE condemns white supremacy and all groups, such as the KKK and Neo-Nazis, that champion it. Racism should not only be addressed after tragic events, but regularly in our communities of faith. Churches in the United States can lead the way in combatting attitudes and systems that perpetuate racism.

All People of Faith Must Condemn White Supremacy

By Bishop Charles E. Blake

Presiding Bishop of the Church of God in Christ

The violence, hatred and white supremacy on display in Charlottesville, Virginia, must be condemned by all people of faith and goodwill. The injuries and death suffered by those supporting an end to the commemoration of the Confederacy are deeply saddening. We also regret any harm to their opponents. Our hearts go out to all who were hurt and we call for an end to the violence.

What transpired in Charlottesville, with a vehicle charging a group of protesters, leaving one dead and 19 injured, is an act of domestic terrorism. On this point, one must be perfectly clear. Had the driver been identified as an Arab or a Muslim, is there any question that such an act of violence would have been identified as a case of terrorism? Just as white supremacist Dylan Roof's assault on Mother Emmanuel AME Church was an act of domestic terrorism, so too is the incident in Charlottesville. The political goal in both instances was the intimidation of black people and the violent denial of their rights as citizens. But it is essential to note that the black community must oppose terrorism in all its forms, even when it is self-inflicted.

This brings to mind the Reverend Martin Luther King Jr.'s challenge to the nation during a period of even more intense racial unrest. Dr. King argued that we as a society must "learn to disagree without being disagreeable." In the Spirit of Jesus and of Dr. King, I call upon my Protestant and Roman Catholic brothers and sisters to come together to exemplify King's vision of the beloved community as a moral witness to the world. There is a particular need for black men to rise to this challenge. We in the church must provide moral leadership to show how we vigorously pursue justice while maintaining a compassionate tone in discourse with those with whom we disagree.

Charlottesville Through the Eyes of an Ex-White Supremacist

COMMENTARY: Catholic convert and former neo-Nazi Joseph Pearce considers the lessons we need to learn in the wake of the events of the Aug. 11-12 tragedy.

By Joseph Pearce, Senior Editor with the Augustine Institute

As I read reports of the violence in Charlottesville, Virginia, between white supremacists and their opponents, it brought back memories of my own battle-scarred past. As an angry young man in my native England, I had joined a white supremacist party and was involved in many bruising battles on the streets. I had rejoiced when a counterdemonstrator was killed at one of our meetings and mourned when a friend of mine, a neo-Nazi colleague, had died after being hit on the head at another riotous demonstration.

In those days, I relished the violence, hoping for a full-blown race war. As the editor of a white supremacist magazine, I sought to incite racial hatred and was sentenced to prison twice, spending my 21st and 25th birthdays in prison. It was, therefore, with an unsettling sense of *déjà vu* that I watched the events in Charlottesville unfold. I had seen it all before, not merely as a passive spectator watching it happen on television, but as an active participant, feeling the rage and the anger and experiencing the violence firsthand.

Having once been in the same place and the same psychological space as today's white supremacists, and having experienced their sense of outrage and alienated anger, I hope that I can offer some insights into why such people feel the way that they do and what we can do to heal the wounds of our broken culture. In order to do so, I will need to retrace my own steps, recalling how I ended up in a world of racism and bigotry — although, in all honesty, I learned much of my racism at my father's knee. It was nurtured in the culture of relativism at the public high school I attended. There was no suggestion that young men and women should be taught virtue; no suggestion that the real meaning of love was not self-gratification, but the laying down of one's life for another; no suggestion that there was a God or, if there was, that he was relevant to our lives.

Christianity, if it was mentioned at all in the classroom, was sneered at by the teachers, almost all of whom seemed to be agnostics or atheists, and several of whom were avowed Marxists. This secularized education is not that dissimilar to the education that many young people receive today in the United States. In public schools laboring under the demands of the dictatorship of relativism, there is no room for an education in virtue. Indeed, “virtue” as a word is effectively banished from the classroom, and specific virtues, such as chastity and humility, are actively frowned upon or ridiculed.

What is taught is a spirit of rebellion against traditional concepts of goodness, truth and beauty. In this vicious and vacuous environment, it is inevitable that vice will fill the virtue-free void. If we will not teach goodness, truth and beauty, we cannot avoid breeding viciousness, falsehood and ugliness, and this will include the rise of pride in all its ugly manifestations, including pride in one’s own perceived racial identity.

The problem is that relativism elevates feeling over reason. If it’s all about me and my feelings and not about my place in an objective reality of which I am only a small part, I am “free” to pick and choose the “self” that I selfishly desire. For some, a small minority, this might be rooted in something to do with “sexuality”; for others, and potentially a much larger number of people, this will be rooted in a sense of tribal or racial identity. It is in this atmosphere of relativism, in which reality is narcissistically self-defined, that pride runs rampant, not least of which is racial pride, the hateful, often violent type of which we saw in Charlottesville.

In my own case, the pride that was ruling and ruining my life was challenged by its engagement with objective reality, with authentic reason. Discovering the works of G.K. Chesterton, Hilaire Belloc, C.S. Lewis, Blessed John Henry Newman and, eventually, during my second prison sentence, the works of Thomas Aquinas, I began to perceive reality as something much bigger than the pathetic world of racist ideology that I had self-constructed.

It is for this reason that I believe strongly, with St. John Paul II and Benedict XVI, that the Church can only effectively evangelize a culture dominated by relativism with the power of *fides et ratio*, of a faith which is indissolubly wedded to reason. The narcissism of relativism imprisons the self within the prison of the self itself; reason liberates the self, enabling it to stretch into the glorious cosmos that exists beyond itself.

In short and in sum, racism and other manifestations of pride need to be countered by an encounter with reason. There is, however, one other force that helped me overcome my pride — and that is the power of love.

In my days of pride, I hated my enemies, and I expected my enemies to hate me. It was the old law of: an eye for an eye. You hurt me and I hurt you. You hate me and I hate you. Hate breeding hatred. Picture the scenes of demonstrators and counterdemonstrators at Charlottesville, venting their spleens against each other, screaming their hatred at each other, each feeding off the other's frenzy.

The way out of this deadly spiral is to go beyond the love of neighbor, as necessary as that is, and to begin to love our enemies. This is not simply good for us, freeing us from the bondage of hatred; it is good for our enemies also.

In my book *Race With the Devil: My Journey From Racial Hatred to Rational Love*, I recall three separate occasions when I confronted an enemy with hatred and enmity and received in return love and friendship. In each case, the receiving of love when I was expecting hatred sowed seeds of healing in my hate-battered heart.

Make no mistake about it, love is a powerful weapon against our enemies. Hatred hurts our enemies, but it doesn't stop them from being enemies; on the contrary, it enflames their hatred and increases their enmity. Love, on the other hand, does not hurt our enemies; it only hurts their hatred. And in hurting their hatred, it heals their hearts, turning the enemy into a friend.

This is the challenge we face in the wake of the horrors of Charlottesville. It is to love our enemies. We should not demonize the white supremacist or the abortionist, but should love them into submission. We should not prey on them but should pray for them, hoping that, in the future, by the grace of God, we can pray *with* them.

As for James Alex Fields, the angry and hate-filled young man who has been accused of driving his car into counterdemonstrators in Charlottesville, I know all too well that he is what I was. He is not beyond the love of God, nor should he be beyond the love of his neighbors or his enemies. We should pray for him as we pray for his victims.

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