



vineyardjustice

NURTURING RECONCILIATION:

DEFINING KEY TERMS FOR TALKING ABOUT ETHNIC DIVERSITY, RACE, AND POWER

We see that Jesus was a word worker, so we wanted to provide you with some helpful working definitions used in our webinar on “Practicing Diversity in your Local Vineyard Church.” These are simply working definitions that several Vineyard pastors and leaders collaborated on to create a baseline for the conversation. These terms are not definitive Vineyard Justice Network, Multiply Vineyard or VineyardUSA definitions.

KINGDOM VIEW OF RECONCILIATION & MULTI-ETHNICITY | Diversity of ethnicity, culture, and language is the natural result of Genesis 1:28, the cultural mandate to fill the earth and bring it under the reign of God. “When God commanded the first human beings to ‘fill the earth,’ it was a decree to create cultures, because no one culture, people, or language can adequately reflect the splendor of God.”¹ Babel was an example of God’s people refusing to migrate any further, refusing to fill the earth, choosing instead to hold fast to their homogeneity. God scattered them! Pentecost was the opposite, God used the diversity of languages to bring people together, bring glory to His name and begin His church. This is the picture of the fully realized Kingdom of every nation, tribe, and tongue (Revelation 7:9).

COLOR-BLIND | Many of us know one line of one speech from Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and we’ve developed an entire (false) theology around it. “I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character.” We’ve said “Yes! That’s it! We should see people as individuals, divorced from any race or ethnicity!” And we’ve tried really hard to not see race. Of course this doesn’t work, and “I don’t see color” can come across as “I don’t see YOU” or as if ethnicity is something bad that we should kindly overlook. It can come across as “I don’t see you as a whole person, including the context of your ethnicity, I magnanimously see you as an honorary white person.”

RACE | Race is defined as a category or group of people having hereditary traits that set them apart. While race revolves around the idea of biological traits, ethnicity is based on a shared cultural heritage. Sociologists and other social scientists believe that race is a socially constructed concept. It is an idea that was created in society to justify inequality. Race is a modern concept. In ancient times, people were more likely to be divided according to religion, language, lineage, and nationality. In ancient Greece, for instance, people were divided by language and culture rather than physical differences. Africans, who may have looked different physically, were accepted into their society as long as they adopted the customs and language of Greek culture. So where does the idea of race originate? In the 16th century, Europeans used three different categories to racially classify the people they encountered through continental exploration: Mongoloid (Asians), Caucasoid (European) and Negroid (African). Throughout the ensuing centuries, the concept of race was used as a means of justifying superiority and colonization.

ETHNICITY | Ethnicity, while related to race, refers not to physical characteristics but to social traits that are shared by a human population. Some of the social traits often used for ethnic classification include:
Nationality • Tribe • Religious faith • Shared language • Shared culture • Shared traditions²

CULTURE | Culture is the social aspect of human life; anything that is learned by humans is part of culture.³

¹ From *Roadmap to Reconciliation*, Brenda Salter McNeil.

² “Culture, Ethnicity, and Race,” in *Boundless Communications*, Boundless, 26 May. 2016. Retrieved 16 Feb. 2017 from [https://www.boundless.com/communications/textbooks/boundless-](https://www.boundless.com/communications/textbooks/boundless-communications-textbook/analyzing-the-audience-7/demographicfactors-to-consider-38/culture-ethnicity-and-race-169-8389/)

³ “Culture, Ethnicity, and Race,” in *Boundless Communications*, Boundless, 26 May. 2016. Retrieved 16 Feb. 2017 from [https://www.boundless.com/communications/textbooks/boundless-](https://www.boundless.com/communications/textbooks/boundless-communications-textbook/analyzing-the-audience-7/demographicfactors-to-consider-38/culture-ethnicity-and-race-169-8389/)

ETHNIC DIVERSITY or MULTI-ETHNIC | When no race makes up more than 80% of the total (In 2012, 20% of congregations were considered multiethnic/multiracial.⁴ A good definition of a multi-ethnic church is offered by missiologist Paul Hiebert: “a church in which there is 1) an attitude and practice of accepting people of all ethnic, class and national origins as equal and fully participating members and ministers in the fellowship of the church; and 2) the manifestation of this attitude and practice by the involvement of people from different ethnic, social and national communities as members in the church.” This definition does not establish a percentage criteria, nor does it establish any particular model or format that must characterize a multi-ethnic church. This is a healthy and realistic definition, since the reality is that multi-ethnic churches come in all shapes, sizes, and makeups.⁵

POWER | The ability to make decisions that impact the lives of others, the ability to control the behavior of others without their agreement.

RACISM | “Racism is discrimination and prejudice towards people based on their race or ethnicity....The ideology underlying racist practices often includes the idea that humans can be subdivided into distinct groups that are different in their social behavior and innate capacities and that can be ranked as inferior or superior. The Holocaust is the classic example of institutionalized racism which led to the death of millions of people based on their race....Racism and racial discrimination are often used to describe discrimination on an ethnic or cultural basis, independent of whether these differences are described as racial. According to a United Nations convention on racial discrimination, there is no distinction between the terms "racial" and "ethnic" discrimination. The UN Convention further concludes that superiority based on racial differentiation is scientifically false, morally condemnable, socially unjust and dangerous, and there is no justification for racial discrimination, anywhere, in theory or in practice.”⁶

SYSTEMIC RACISM | "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." (Romans 3:23) We sin as individuals when we break or violate God's commands. When we sin, we literally “miss the mark” for what God intended for how we live, which was demonstrated through Jesus' life. Corporate sin is defined as any sin committed on a larger scale, from a community or society. Thus it is also referred to as group sin, communal, systemic, or social sin. These corporate sins are characteristic sins of a group, and can also be committed as a whole. God judges us, not just as *individuals* but He judges groups – He judges the nations, Jesus refers to an evil generation, churches are judged in the first part of Revelation. We can confess the sins of our people – identificational repentance – as so many leaders in the Bible did.

PRIVILEGE | A special right, advantage, or immunity granted or available only to a particular person or group of people.

WHITE PRIVILEGE | "Being white means never having to think about it." (James Baldwin) White privilege is a set of advantages and/or immunities that white people benefit from on a daily basis beyond those common to all others. White privilege can exist without white people's conscious knowledge of its presence and it helps to maintain the racial hierarchy in this country. The biggest problem with white privilege is the invisibility it maintains to those who benefit from it most. The inability to recognize that many of the advantages whites hold are a direct result of the disadvantages of other people, contributes to the unwillingness of white people, even those who are not overtly racist, to recognize their part in maintaining and benefiting from white supremacy. White privilege is about not having to worry about being followed in a department store while shopping. It's about thinking that your clothes, manner of speech, and behavior in general, are racially neutral, when, in fact, they are white. It's seeing your image on television daily and knowing that you're being represented. It's people assuming that you lead a constructive life free from crime and off welfare. It's about not having to assume your daily interactions with people have racial overtones. White privilege is having the freedom and luxury to fight racism one day and ignore it the next. White privilege exists on an individual, cultural, and institutional level.

RECONCILIATION | Somewhat of a misnomer in the sense that re-conciliation implies that we're restoring something that used to exist in our country.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Following Wave III: Religious Congregations in 21st Century America*, Mark Chaves and Alison Eagle. Durham, NC: Department of Sociology, Duke University. November 2015.

⁵ From blog by Gary McIntosh, Talbot School of Theology.

⁶ Retrieved 16 Feb. 2017 from <https://www.wikipedia.com/racism>