**Excerpts from *Antiracism Critical Concepts and Tools—Toward a Comprehensive View***

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Confronting the Evil of Racism:

Indeed, we must begin to see racism not only as a matter of institutional structures and social power disparities, but as a profound evil. I am not simply making a moral judgment that racism is wrong, nor am I making an anthropological claim that human beings have the capacity to do horrible things and create oppressive institutions. …Instead, I am making an ontological and theological claim. Racism is an evil, a profound, structural evil embedded deeply within our culture and within ourselves. It is a “power” in a psychological (archetypal) sense. (Rasor 110)

Treating racism as an evil, a power that has us in its grasp, may help us realize more clearly what we are up against. …We are tempted to think it can be dismantled with the right motivation, proper analysis, and good programs. It will take all of these and more, but these, by themselves, are not enough. (Rasor 110)

Instead, racism, once unleashed onto the world and embedded within human structures and institutions, takes on a life of its own. Like all cultural and institutional structures, it eventually becomes self-perpetuating and, to some, self-justifying. Despite our best and most persistent efforts to dismantle it, it keeps coming back in newer and more subtle forms. (Rasor 110-111)

That *thing* that I want to call evil—racism, really *white racism* in the modern European sense—is a product of culture over time; it’s created, particularly with power and violence. It’s certainly a social creation that is handed down and that I believe takes on a life of its own. It becomes in the nature of a religious or archetypal power or something that perpetuates itself because it’s so deeply embedded that you don’t notice it or, if you do notice it, it’s considered normal. (Rasor 117) Racism as we understand it today, as a social construction—a product of society or way of life created in the context of European exploration, conquest, colonization, has a material basis and an ideological basis. The material basis is the violence, laws, social norms, and institutions (polices and procedures) that uphold it as a system of domination and control. The ideological basis is the assumptions, principles, worldview, beliefs, values, views, and expressed attitudes that embody the basic interests of the group upholding the racist system.

We not only need to give attention to the social construction of ideas that uphold racism but also to the social construction of our feelings and the social construction of our senses. In getting serious about racism, we must get serious about concepts as well as get serious about inquiring about what has led those who are not serious about racism to not be serious. I would suggest that perhaps the reason lies in the social construction of heartlessness or numbness of feeling. Heartlessness is also socially constructed. (Rebecca Parker 2003:123)

Our involvement with evil goes far beyond our conscious, volitional participation in evil. To a much greater extent than we are aware, we are possessed by the values and powers of our unjust order. It is not enough then simply to grieve over and repent of the ways we have consciously chosen to collude with evil; we must be freed from our unconscious enthrallment as well. (Walter Wink 1992:10 in Rasor 2003:111)

In other words, the evil of racism is not only structural and institutional; it is also spiritual. This means that all of our analysis no matter how sophisticated, and all of our programs, no matter how well designed, will never be sufficient by themselves to make us antiracist. We must also be “willing to do the difficult soul work necessary for spiritual transformation.” “…Only by confronting the spirituality of an institution and its concretions can the total entity be transformed, and that requires a kind of spiritual discernment and praxis that the materialist ethos in which we live knows nothing about.” (Rasor 111 and Walter Wink 1992:67-68 in Rasor 112)

Along with the conception of racism as evil, we also need to take seriously racism as arising out of a condition of estrangement and alienation. We need to see racism as estrangement from self, other, and the ground of being in order to provide an adequate explanation for the brokenness that we experience in the world. Along with a solid holistic analysis, antiracism requires of us a moral or spiritual transformation, a *metanoia*, a change of heart and mind. (Ken Olliff 2003:114)

Racism is particularly alive and well in America. It is America’s “original evil” and, as it is institutionalized at all levels of society, it is America’s most persistent and intractable evil. Though racism inflicts massive suffering, few American ethicists have even bothered to address white supremacy as a moral evil and as a radical contradiction of our humanity and religious identities. White theologians and philosophers write numerous articles and books on theodicy, asking why God permits massive suffering, but they hardly ever mention the horrendous crimes whites have committed against People of Color in the modern world. Why do spiritual leaders, in particular, white ministers and theologians, ignore racism? (James Cone 2003: 3-4) …This is a complex and difficult question because the reasons vary among individuals and groups in different parts of the country. …My reflections focus mainly on white religious leaders and white congregations. …My reflections focus mainly on white theologians, ministers, and the churches but this may be applied to U.S. whites in general. (6: modified.) Why is racism not talked about? James Cone offers some perspectives on this.

1) Most importantly, whites do not talk about racism because they do not have to talk about it. They have most of the power in the world—economic, political, social, cultural, intellectual, and religious. …All the powerless can do is disrupt—make life uncomfortable for the ruling elites. …The quality of white life is hardly ever affected by what blacks think or do. The reverse is not the case: Everything whites think and do has a profound impact on the lives of people of color on a daily basis. (6)

2) White theologians and ministers avoid racial dialogue because talk about white supremacy arouses deep feelings of guilt. Guilt is a heavy burden to bear. …The material wealth of Europe and North America was acquired and enhanced through the systematic exploitation of lands and Indigenous Peoples in North and South America, and peoples of Africa and Asia. A critical exploration of the theological meaning of slavery, colonialism, segregation, lynching, and genocide can create a terrible guilt. (7-8)

Whites do not like to think of themselves as evil people or to believe that their place in the world is due to the colonization and land thief of American Indigenous Peoples, the enslavement of blacks, and the exploitation of People of Color here and around the world. Whites like to think of themselves as honorable, decent, and fair-minded people. They resent being labeled racists. …But if you benefit from past and present injustices committed against blacks and other People of Color, you are partly and indirectly accountable as an American citizen and as a member of the institutions that perpetuate racism. We cannot just embrace what is good about America and ignore the bad. We must accept the responsibility to do everything we can to correct America’s past and present wrongs. (8) We are one people. What happens to one happens to all. So, even if we are not directly responsible for past injustices we are responsible for the present exploitation. It is our responsibility to create a new future for all. (11)

3) Another reason why whites avoid race topics with Indigenous Peoples and other People of Color is because they do not want to engage the rage of People of Color. Whites do not mind talking as long as People of Color don’t get too emotional, too carried away with their stories of hurt. I must admit that it is hard to talk about the legacies of white supremacy and not speak with passion and anger about the long history of Native American and black suffering—not to mention that of other People of Color. …—Angry about 246 years of slavery and 100 years of lynching and segregation; about incarceration of one million of your people in prisons—one-half of the penal population while you people represent only 12 percent of the U.S. census; about your group using 13 percent of the drugs but doing 74 percent of the prison time for simple possession. Would you caution the oppressed in *your* community to speak about their pain with calm and patience? …What would you say about ministers and theologians who preach and teach about justice and love but ignore the sociopolitical oppression of your people? The anger of People of Color *upsets only whites who choose not to identify with their suffering*. (8, 9)

4) Whites do not say much about racial justice because they are not prepared for a radical redistribution of wealth and power. No group gives up power freely; power must be taken against the will of those who have it. Fighting white supremacy means dismantling white privilege in the society, in the churches, and in theology. Progressive whites do not mind talking as long as it doesn’t cost much, as long as the structures of power remain intact. …It is immoral to see evil and not fight it. As Rabbi Prinz put it at the March on Washington, “Bigotry and hatred are not the most urgent problems. The most urgent, the most disgraceful, the most shameful and most tragic problem is ***silence***.” Theologians and ministers, churches, synagogues, and associations must not remain onlookers, “silent in the face of hate, in the face of brutality, and in the face of mass murder.” We must speak out loud and clear against the evil of racism…. (13)