

NO

HOW THE BIBLE DESTROYS

FLESH

THE FOUNDATIONS OF RACISM

SHALL

C. HERBERT OLIVER

Also Includes "The Church and Social Change"

GLORY

What a privilege to sit under the teaching of this civil rights icon through the pages of *No Flesh Shall Glory*. With the heart of a pastor and the careful exegesis of a scholar, Pastor Oliver pushes against historic presuppositions for interpreting race and offers sound scriptural argument, exposing the heart of God and inviting the reader to see with new eyes. This will be the resource on race and culture you will return to over and over again. I can't recommend this book enough!

—**Vanessa K. Hawkins**, Director of Women's Ministry, First Presbyterian Church, Augusta, Georgia; Diversity Advisor, PCA Women's Ministry

Reflecting on the difference between the changes in the law during the civil rights era and the rigidity of the church, Rev. C. Herbert Oliver bemoaned, "Christians seem to learn more slowly than the children of darkness, for the world seems to be leading the way in the battle against the dogmas of racism." For Rev. Oliver, remaining separate and segregated in the church is anti-Christian. In *No Flesh Shall Glory*, he calls us to embrace the truth that our God is a God of variety and to rejoice in the limitless display of God's creative genius in that variety. "If God loves variety, it is perverse for men to hate it," he writes. I am grateful to P&R Publishing for bringing this book and this man of God before a new generation. What he writes here is not just a blessing and benefit for a time gone by, but it is needful for us today. This work is part of the necessary antidote to our ongoing fractures and polarization within the body of Christ. He points us to the heart of God for humanity.

—**Irwyn L. Ince**, Director, GraceDC Institute for Cross-Cultural Mission; Author, *The Beautiful Community: Unity, Diversity, and the Church at Its Best*

C. Herbert Oliver's classic study is well entitled *No Flesh Shall Glory*. It is perhaps needed more now than when it first appeared in 1959. Oliver leads readers to Scripture and demonstrates that prevailing

concepts of race and practices of segregation are deeply inconsistent with God's creation of all mankind in His image. *No Flesh Shall Glory* is a biblical antidote to contemporary critical race theories that foment racial tensions and diminish commitment to the Lordship of Christ and the reconciling power of His kingdom. I am grateful that Oliver's prophetic ministry speaks again in these troubled times.

—**Peter A. Lillback**, President, Westminster Theological Seminary

C. Herbert Oliver's book *No Flesh Shall Glory* is as riveting and relevant today as when it was first published in 1959. Writing with theological precision, Oliver delivers a passionate plea for Christians to embrace the biblical doctrines of race that align with both God's character and His plan for the church. Specifically, he connects the wisdom of God in creating diverse ethnicities to the power of God in unifying all peoples in one family. This good news is as timeless as it is timely!

—**Doug Logan Jr.**, President, Grimké Seminary; Associate Director, Acts 29 Global Network; Author, *On the Block: Developing a Biblical Picture for Missional Engagement*

When this biblically based, theologically informed, anti-racist book was first published, it was ahead of its time. Written by C. Herbert Oliver—a principled pastor who was educated at Wheaton College and Westminster Theological Seminary—*No Flesh Shall Glory* makes a clear biblical case for the beauty of kingdom diversity and the absolute unity of the human race created in the image of God. As an outspoken critic of police brutality in Bull Connor's Birmingham and an advocate for just public education in Brooklyn, New York, Oliver has lived by these principles ever since. Both the man and this book are anti-racist for the simple reason that racism is anti-Christian.

—**Philip Ryken**, President, Wheaton College

**NO FLESH
SHALL GLORY**

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HOW THE BIBLE DESTROYS
THE FOUNDATIONS OF RACISM

C. HERBERT OLIVER



P U B L I S H I N G

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Italics within Scripture quotations indicate emphasis added.

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To my wife and my father

1959

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EDITOR'S NOTE

YOU ARE HOLDING a piece of history—a book written more than sixty years ago by a man who had a passion to see justice done in the world, and particularly in the United States of America. At that time, many white Christians promoted the separation of the races and tried to defend it as compatible with Christian ethics. Interracial marriage was viewed as a sin. For some, even the casual or friendly association of Black and white people was suspect. A grievous embrace of worldly racial ideology made this book necessary, and Rev. C. Herbert Oliver, with bold commitment to biblical truth, rose to meet that need. He did more than write. In 1959, the year this book was originally published, he moved from Maine back to his hometown of Birmingham, Alabama, to participate as an activist in the civil rights movement.

Is there need for this book today? We believe that there is. Rev. Oliver's reliance on the Word of God fills his writing with enduring wisdom as he speaks of the complex nature of humankind. He writes as one of God's champions of truth, graciously and firmly, and so we can learn from both his message and the way in which he conveys it.

The need for this book, however, goes deeper than this. When truths about human beings are exchanged for lies, the damage is profound. Worldly racial ideologies remain with us

to this day, often in new forms. As the world and the church continue to grapple with racism and related issues, we would do well to listen to the insights of a man who took up the fight in decades past. We are grateful to Rev. Oliver for his bold commitment to this cause.

We are also grateful to Mr. Charles H. Craig, who in the 1950s helped to promote a message so controversial in its day. Mr. Craig had headed Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company for only two years when he published *No Flesh Shall Glory*. He had an interest in social causes—having formerly been involved with Big Brothers of New York City—and a desire to promote biblical understanding on a wide range of issues.

Rev. Oliver writes as a graduate of Wheaton College and Westminster Theological Seminary and as a pastor in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church—in a style both pastoral and academic. Thus, although *No Flesh Shall Glory* has some technical elements, it is broadly accessible. We have made very few changes to the text. His 1964 paper “The Church and Social Change” has immediate application for discussions today and is a good starting point for those getting acquainted with his work. We are delighted to be able to include it in this volume as well.

PREFACE

THE SUBJECT OF the present discourse has engaged my most serious study for thirteen years. At one time my notions about race differed little from the popular notions that surrounded me, even “interracial marriage” being considered a great sin. Without question I imbibed the prevailing sentiments about the “races.” In 1943, however, a series of circumstances combined to confront me with the task of reevaluating my position with the purpose of arriving at a position that I could intelligently call my own. I had expected that a little investigation would suffice to give me the desired understanding. But the subject was broader than I had expected it to be; and after years of study and contemplation, I would be the last to say that I have delivered the last word on “race.” My teachers have been books and human nature. There is a Higher Teacher, however, whose Word, the Bible, has been my most basic source of information and inspiration. That Word, which liveth and abideth forever, is a most sufficient guide in matters of faith and conduct, and the eternal truths of its pages are wonderfully applicable today to a problem that confronts not only this nation but also the world.

It is my most sincere prayer to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that He may use this book to correct, reprove

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and instruct in that righteousness that is unto eternal life and unto good human relations.

Various friends have given valuable criticisms of the manuscript for which I am grateful. Among them are Mr. Murray F. Thompson, who was particularly helpful in the early stages of its preparation; Professor Paul Wooley and Dr. Ned Stonehouse of Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia; the Rev. Messrs. G. T. Williamson, Theodore J. Georgian, and Eugene W. Allen; and Mr. Fred Stone and my brother Logwood Oliver. Mr. and Mrs. Charles H. Craig were of invaluable assistance. Their suggestions have brought a number of crucial thoughts into sharper focus. My beloved wife [Ruby] deserves special mention not only for her labor in typing and retyping the manuscript, but also for her many helpful suggestions in its preparation and for patiently bearing with me during the many long hours at night and early morning spent in writing.

For any errors of judgment the writer bears the blame. Whatever praise this book may earn, the author shares with the many who have labored with him.

C. Herbert Oliver
Houlton, Maine

INTRODUCTION

JUST AS FREEDOM of thought sounds the death warrant for all tyrants and dictators, so freedom of thought is breaking the bonds of racial tyranny that is so characteristic of "race relations" in the modern world. The power of free thought is clearly seen in the pages of history. The most outstanding example of this may be seen in the colossal efforts of Luther and Calvin to free the minds and souls of men from a tyranny of human inventions and unscriptural dogmas. It is to these giants of faith and action that modern democratic institutions owe their origin. The days of the tyrannies of kings and prelates were numbered when Luther nailed up the Ninety-Five Theses and when Calvin published his *Institutes*.

Genuine freedom of thought must not be thought of as the rejection of all authority save the human mind. Such a concept would mistakenly ignore divine revelation. Contrary to the profession of "free thinkers" that they represent the noblest ideals of freedom, they actually only succeed in *binding* the minds of men to purely human notions. The Christian is too often represented as being bound in his thinking, and those divorced from Christian dogmas and religion in general as being free in their thinking. But he who is bound to God is truly free, whereas he who is bound by sin is not only the most abject slave, but is ignorant of his bonds. Apart

from Christian faith, freedom in this world is only illusory, as it is merely the repeated exchange of one form of bondage that fails to satisfy for another form of bondage that it vainly hopes will satisfy.

Bondage to human inventions, whether they be religious or secular, cannot calm the deepest surging of man's soul. He is indeed free who is securely bound to God the Creator, through God the Son, by God the Holy Spirit. To perceive the unfathomable love of God in redeeming sinners is the absolute ultimate of spiritual happiness, and only he who humbly receives God's grace may perceive God's love. Just as the child is most free when he is most obedient to the wise counsels of a guardian, so men are most free when they most joyfully submit themselves to the sovereign will of Him whose divine counsels are so gloriously revealed to us in the Scriptures.

I am aware that in this book there is a somewhat ambiguous use of the word *race*, due in part to the inaccurate meaning this term has popularly assumed. In an effort to avoid this unfortunate connotation, I have at times used the word *groups*, as it is not fraught with so many psychological connotations. However, at other times in a concession to popular usage I have used the term *race*.

I have also used the term *Negro*. Throughout the world this word excites a variety of emotions. Some peoples of Africa whom the West has desired to describe as "Negroes" vigorously reject the term. This attitude is normal, for what the West has historically meant by "Negro" is anything but complimentary. It is not surprising that the term is Western in origin. However, a new meaning has crept into that word. Those who have been thus historically identified have also rejected the old meaning of the word and have placed an entirely new meaning upon it. It is now a term of dignity, of manliness, of courage. It stands today as a symbol of the

age old struggle for life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. It has not enjoyed a painless development. Nor is the title always acceptable. But history is full of examples of terms of reproach being taken by the reproached and built by their efforts into a term of dignity and irreproachableness. It is in this manner that I intend it here.

My procedure in *No Flesh Shall Glory* is as follows. First, in chapter 1 I state the basic truths of the unity of the human race. Many will take serious exception to this concept. However, I hope that instead of laying the book aside they will bear with me at least through chapters 2, 3, and 4 in which I attempt to document this position further by an appeal to and an exegesis of the Scriptures. In chapter 2 I deal expressly with biblical references to "color," and in chapters 3 and 4 discuss the significance of Shem, Ham, and Japheth. In chapter 5 I seek to show that Christian ethics and segregation are incompatible. I seek to demonstrate in chapter 6 that freedom to associate is a basic element of good human relations, and finally in chapter 7 point out that the fear of the oft-alleged consequences of non-segregation is unjustified.

It is not my intention to advocate or bolster racism of any kind, but to curtail all types of racism by destroying the ground on which they stand and by pointing men to nobler ends than race competition. Such competition has been with us for a long time and is now threatening to erupt on a worldwide scale. As a Christian my deepest sympathies lie with the claims of God and His Kingdom, which Kingdom will ever prevail over all opposition, Jew or Gentile, black or white. It is my fervent prayer that those who claim allegiance to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will share my conclusions as to the implications of His divine revelation in this connection.

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THE UNITY OF THE HUMAN RACE

A MARVELOUS FACT stares each Bible reader in the face. That fact is that the human race is one. In Genesis 1:27 we read that “God created man in His own image, in the image of God created He him, male and female created he them.” Throughout the Bible this great fact stands as one of the great foundational truths of revealed religion. Many have been the writers who have claimed that God created their own particular race and have assumed that other races have come from some less significant or unknown origin. But the Bible rises above such narrowness and declares in no uncertain terms that God is the Creator of all men.

But some will ask why are there such differences among people? Why are they not all alike so they could get along with each other better? Anyone who opens his eyes to see the beauties of nature will readily see that God is a God of variety. It has not pleased God to make *any* two things alike. God has created a world in which varieties are endless, and the more men increase in heavenly wisdom the more they are able to see the limitless display of God’s creative genius. The God of the Bible obviously hates sin, and it is also clear that he loves variety. He has declared His hatred of sin in the Bible and by

judgments upon men. He has displayed His love of variety by refusing to create any two things exactly identical. And if God loves variety, it is perverse for men to hate it.

The differences among men only reflect the love of God for variety among His creatures. God created Adam and Eve with the inherent capacity to procreate endless varieties, and as long as the world lasts these varieties will continue to appear. All the races are only crystallized varieties of men. New varieties are ever being formed as differing racial groups mingle together. In the process of time some varieties will crystallize to form new races with marked characteristics, but it should never be forgotten that they will only be varieties within the human family with the same capacity as their ancestors to contribute to the formation of new varieties.

In an age when certain men are desperately reasserting the worn-out dogmas of race superiority, the above truths are especially pertinent. It can hardly be emphasized enough that it was God who created man with the capacity to vary. Surely His purpose was not to encourage discord in diversity. To argue that God made men different in order to keep them separate is anti-Christian. The capacity to vary is a God-given capacity, inherent in the reproductive process. This should convince all men that varieties were intended by God to take place and to continue. Is it not therefore naive and perverse for one variety to consider itself a choice variety that must never change or contribute to other varieties? The symphony orchestra produces pleasing harmony not *in spite of*, but *because of* differing instruments. The *different* instruments make the symphony.

As you read this sentence, pause a moment and observe the many colors that surround you, in pictures, rugs, curtains, chairs, tablecloths; in trees, grass, earth, or sky. Think now of the beautiful rainbow or the most picturesque sunset you

have ever seen. Do not these scenes fill the heart with sweet wonder? Does not the painful beauty of a sunset ravish the heart? The consistent Christian in head and heart also rejoices in the rich varieties of skin colors, for they too reveal the glory of God's handiwork.

One afternoon as I sat leisurely observing the splendor of God's creation, I was completely charmed by the intensely beautiful vestures of God's footstool. The sturdy hills, the stately trees, the clear skies, the gentle wind and the happy birds were all praising Him with their music and declaring His great glory. I saw at one glance so many varieties of vegetation that I was forced to conclude that God loves variety. Their manifold numbers were only a small reflection of the greatness of God the Creator and Redeemer. No less does He love variety among men, for from every tribe and tongue He calls His people to be a praise unto His everlasting name.

The human race is one, and all attempts to prove otherwise can only end in failure. There are many who profess to believe in the unity of the human race; however, totally unaware that to divide the indivisible is a glaring contradiction, they feel justified in maintaining that the "races" must be kept separate. Many of these are afflicted with a profound hatred, based on profound ignorance and nourished by a profound prejudice. Others are more enlightened and, desiring to be rational, point out how birds of a feather flock together. But the paucity of their defense shows the weakness of their position, for new feathers appear when birds do not fear.

Those who think in terms of separateness are guided by what we call "racial solidarity." Racial solidarity is the cohesion of a group around a few physical characteristics such as skin color, hair texture, and facial features. It seems that color ranks highest in importance, though Darwin truly called it the most fleeting of all characteristics.

The racist has one aim in view: viz., to bring about, promote, and enhance the dominant position of the "race" of which he is a member. His greatest fear is what he terms "intermarriage," because it breaks the racial solidarity of his group and threatens its dissolution. In his book *The Direction of Human Evolution*, E. G. Conklin says, "Every consideration should lead those who believe in the superiority of the white race to strive to preserve its purity and to establish and maintain the segregation of the races, for the longer this is maintained the greater the preponderance of the white race will be" (p. 53). Such is the philosophy of the racist.

As I shall seek to demonstrate, this view has had its day. It is now in the balance and is found wanting. Its chief faults are that it is anti-Christian and inhuman. It is anti-Christian in that it makes impossible genuine Christian love. It is inhuman in that it works untold harm to the so-called inferior races. It is contrary to nature, for its very life depends upon false biological distinctions that nature does not recognize. And being contrary to nature it cannot be permanent, but only a passing phase in man's history. Indeed it is dead already, for God has not promised to sustain a racist society, and what God has not promised to sustain is dead.

How does the doctrine of race solidarity fare in the light of Christian teachings? True Christianity cannot fit into the narrow mold of racial solidarity. It is too broad, too universal, too worldwide in its scope. At one time Peter held a view somewhat akin to that of the race solidarist (though his was not in the least racial, but religious), but God in a vision broke the narrow mold of Peter's outlook and gave him a worldwide view that embraced all men as one human family under God and in need of redeeming grace (Acts 10).

The promises of God have absolutely no relation to racial solidarity. Nowhere does the Bible foster the spirit of racial

solidarity. True, God called Abraham and promised to make of him a great nation, but God did not have reference merely to his natural seed, but also and especially to his spiritual seed, which all believers are. "If ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Gal. 3:29). The seed of Abraham are those about whom Peter speaks when he says, "Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should show forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into His marvelous light" (1 Peter 2:9). The idea of racial solidarity is alien to the Bible and should be thoroughly rejected in all Christian circles. To the extent that Christians advocate, or acquiesce in, a view of racial solidarity, to that extent they fall short of the genius of Christianity. There are many Christians who strive for better race relations, but when their views of race solidarity are undisturbed, their task is necessarily frustrating.

The notion of race solidarity itself must go, for not until this notion is abandoned and Christian solidarity encouraged in its stead will genuine Christianity once again come to the fore. As racial solidarity in one group creates a reactionary racial solidarity among excluded "races," and as it requires a double system of ethics (one for the solidaric group, and one for the excluded groups) it should be easy for Christians to see the shortcomings of such a philosophy.

But alas, Christians seem to learn more slowly than the children of darkness, for the world seems to be leading the way in the battle against the dogmas of racism. The Supreme Court decision of May 17, 1954 outlawing enforced segregation in our public schools should have reflected the crystallized sentiment of the churches. But the churches have but slowly chimed their agreement with the decision, and an "integrated" church is still a novelty. Perhaps too many church members

have convinced their consciences that segregation is right, and a convinced conscience is more rigid than a convinced mind. A convinced mind can be changed, but a convinced conscience is almost unmovable.

Racial solidarists do emphasize a unity. But such unity is narrow and racial and falls far short of the biblical doctrine of the unity of the whole human race. The Christianity of those, therefore, who are conditioned primarily by ideas of race falls far short of the essence of true Christianity. Such ideas are a burden to Christianity, and only as they are discarded may there arise a powerful and vigorous Christianity, before which no force in the world can stand.

Racial strife in the world today is basically due to our sinful natures. More specifically, it may be traced to the dogma of racial solidarity that prevails so widely in our time. It would be a sad mistake to think that the darker peoples of the world hate white people simply because they are white. The fury of mobs in Algeria or Hong Kong is not directed against Europeans because they are white, but because as whites they have engaged in extending their solidaric relationship and dominance to the hurt of peoples excluded from that relationship. When all the false claims to racial superiority are repudiated by all who entertain them, better human relations will be the inevitable result. True, problems will arise, but they can be solved when the basic truth of the unity of the human race is made foundational in our thought and actions.

The problems involved in "interracial marriage" are deeply involved in all that has been said about the unity of the human race. As restrictions on such unions are the last outpost of the race solidarist, and also a means by which race solidarity is protected, this question requires separate attention. We shall return to it in the sequel.

Has the doctrine of evolution succeeded in bringing

about better social relationships among human beings? One would expect that a doctrine that links organically man and the beast would have played a major role in enhancing better human relations by presenting a broad basis for better understanding between *human beings*. But no doctrine has been more successful in dividing mankind into racial camps than this doctrine of evolution. The fuel of racism is the theory of evolution. And though many racists oppose evolution, they are more under its influence than they realize.

Evolution professes to emphasize the true nobility and dignity of *man*, but in the practical outworking, it does not stress the dignity of man as such, but of a particular race of men. It labors under the psychological necessity of erecting horizontal divisions among “races” so as to demonstrate a gradual rise from lower forms to higher forms. The chief proponents of this doctrine quite naturally place themselves at the top of the process of man’s development, and the “savage” at the stage next above the primates. But this view not only strikes at the very heart of the unity of the whole human race, it closes its eyes to the savagery of the “civilized.” The beastly deeds of “civilized” mobs are legion. And as evolution has failed to discover the true dignity of *all* of mankind, it has failed to discover the true dignity of any *part* of mankind.

Man’s true dignity lies in the fact that he was created immediately by God in His own Image in knowledge, righteousness, and holiness. All men are men by virtue of God’s direct creative act, not by virtue of a development from a lower form of existence to a higher. And any view that robs man of this glory destroys the only true basis for a truly harmonious society. Evolution may provide a basis for a homogeneous society, but such a society is necessarily narrow and brittle, and far from suitable for life in a shrinking world where diverse peoples are minutes rather than months away.

The sincere Bible reader will discover a twofold solidaric relationship among men: that of all men in Adam, and of all believers in Christ. These relationships have their source in God and are unchangeable. And what God has joined together, let not man put asunder. By virtue of the former solidaric relationship all men are sinners and under the divine sentence of death. By virtue of the latter solidaric relationship all who have been ordained to eternal life shall obtain that blessedness through Christ. The racist ignores these relationships and goes about to establish the solidarity of one phase of the human family. That such solidarity is divisive, unchristian, and destructive of any genuine harmony in society should be beyond doubt. The Christian must therefore be quick to repudiate all attempts to justify a segregated society, for segregation puts asunder what God has put together.