

Please Reset Your Clock



A Response to the Not Guilty Zimmerman Verdict

Dr. Leonard Lovett

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On Saturday evening July 13, 2013 10:00 PM, when the Jury in Sanford, Florida announced the verdict of NOT GUILTY for George Zimmerman in the unfortunate decimation of the life of Trayvon Martin, the time clock of the wheels of justice for these United States of America, land of the free, was turned back fifty-eight years. Please remember we live in a moral universe that demands a verdict. God is not bound by any verdict that has evolved from a court of law. Unfortunately we appear to be trapped in a time warp when we critically look at the criminal justice system in our nation. It was precisely fifty-eight years ago (1955) that a young fifteen year old teen from Chicago went to a small country store in Money, Mississippi with his cousins (Wheeler Parker/Curtis Jones) to buy candy and ended up being lynched for having been accused of flirting with a white female Carolyn Bryant. Emmett Till's body was bludgeoned and disfigured almost beyond recognition by Roy Bryant and his half-brother J.W. Milam who were later acquitted by an all white jury who joked during the entire trial. Milam died of cancer in 1980 at age 61. Roy Bryant store was boycotted which later led to bankruptcy, and later divorce. He died of cancer as a broken man at age 63 in 2004. Decades later (2005) the United States Department of Justice re-opened the case and exhumed Till's remains to further investigate whether anyone else was involved in this heinous lynching. The unfortunate untimely death of Emmett Till was a pivotal turning point in the Civil Rights Movement and the high priority quest for justice for people of color.

Fifty-eight years later on the rainy evening of February 26, 2012, in the city of Sanford, Florida, Trayvon Martin goes to a neighborhood store for candy and is confronted by George Zimmerman a self-appointed neighborhood watchman. A struggle ensues and an unarmed sixteen year old black African-American youth dies in an incident perceived by many as preventable. Yes, Zimmerman is free based on the legal statutes under which he was tried, but he is not innocent. Clearly this is a case about racial profiling. Is law sacred? Not according to St Augustine. It was St. Augustine who succinctly stated that *'an unjust law is not law at all.'* In other words, *"an unjust law would be a law, that takes away ones freedom, or causes harm, or basically just causes chaos, which is the exact opposite of what a law is put in place to do."* When

Dr. Martin Luther King was arrested for challenging his right to demonstrate without a permit and asked where did he get the authority to break segregated



laws. Relying upon Augustinian reasoning, Dr. King contended that *“an unjust law is a code that is out of harmony with the moral law.”* He further argues that *“A just law is a man-made code that squares with the moral law or the law of God. Any law that uplifts human personality is just. Likewise, “Any law that degrades human personality is unjust. An unjust law is a code that a numerical or power majority group compels a minority group to obey but does not make binding on itself.”* If the *“stand your ground”* law is a pre-text for causing chaos and harm or to deprive unarmed teens of the gift of life simply because either party involved in a physical altercation feels threatened and fear for their life, then it is time for a national moratorium against such a law. We respectfully disagree with this verdict. Remember to reset your clock!

As people of color we too feel insecure and threatened in urban cities where Blacks/Latinas are being admonished to turn in their guns, while privileged Whites are awarding guns and automobiles to their children once they arrive at legal age. Shame on rabid gun lobbyist who are exploiting the fears of good people by their time warped interpretation of the Second Amendment. Please remind them to reset the clock! There is a fundamental difference between basic self-defense and the decimation of the life of another person created in the image of God. The former protects one’s self without destroying the aggressor by using limited force to restrain and subdue the other. Given the capacity and potential of semi-automatic weapons, there are no winners. The urgent message from the Faith Community is that we assign intrinsic value and worth to human life. In Genesis 9:6v. *“Whoso sheddeth man’s blood, by man shall his blood be shed, for in the image of God made he man.”* In this passage God assigns intrinsic value to humankind. *“Something is said to have intrinsic value when the ground of its value is perceived to lie within its own nature, that is, when it is valued for its effects.”* Whatever or whomever negates the gift of life has to be declared demonic.

Throughout the Zimmerman/ Martin trial from the prosecution, the defense and jurors, in an attempt to dodge the inevitable there was constant reference to the fact that this trial was not about race. The Judge refused to allow the term racial profiling to be used in argumentation. The Florida State Attorney Angela Corey is the same woman who supervised the case of Marissa Alexander who used a ‘Stand Your Ground’ defense against her abusive husband, and was convicted on three (3) counts of aggravated assault and a twenty (20) year sentence. We are insisting that this case be reviewed by the Department of Justice along with countless others in Florida, the state of my birth. It appears that *“something is rotten in Denmark”* to borrow a Shakespearean phrase. There was a smirk arrogant form of elitism that dominated the courtroom from the time the jurors were selected that implied that Zimmerman would walk free. We are insulted that five (5) white women and one Latina would constitute a jury of peers. We have seen justice aborted for several decades in the Rodney King, Amadou Diallo, Abner Louima, Deron Grimmit, Tyasha Miller and scores of cases. The



Zimmerman vs Martin case is a classic example of how blind we are to racial biases that lurk within each of us at a subconscious level. The primary admission of racial bias is in the form of denial. There is a tendency in human nature to condemn in others the very things we are most guilty of which includes racial bigotry. Juror B-37 in an Anderson Cooper CNN interview candidly states that *“this is not about race”* and proceeds to profile Rachel Jantel by stating *“this is the way those people talk and the way they live.”* This brave teen must be lauded and commended for taking all of us to school. She was derided, ridiculed and became the brunt of jokes during her initial questioning by the defense. In her CNN interview Rachel was relaxed as she elaborated on the cultural differences between “old school” players and her generation. Those who made fun did not know that even with a dental bite challenge Rachel is multi-lingual. I saw poetic justice piggy backing on the testimony of Rachel Jantel. It was her plain honesty that won her acclaim and a full scholarship by Tom Joyner.

Racial bias is interwoven into the very fabric and the warp and woof of our lives at a subconscious level. Dave Claerbaut, a Euro-American urban missionary and professor offers a penetrating and challenging analysis and description of racism and cautions that *“this is not intended to be an indictment.”* He says, *“ he is being white, honest and Christian.”* According to Claerbaut: *“To be white and somewhat racist is normal. For just as a person who regularly breathes polluted city air should not be the least defensive about having some pollution in his lungs, so a person who is regularly exposed to a racist and prejudice-laden society could hardly be expected not to be somewhat prejudiced....If white racism is defined as having notions of white supremacy, it becomes rather easy to see how these tendencies become subconsciously internalized at a very early age. Thus, these racist notions calcify. All agree that a person’s environment is a major influence on one’s attitudes, values, beliefs and behaviors. Thus a white person is by conditioning and environment at least partly racist.”* [see **Urban Ministry**, Zondervan, Grand Rapids Michigan, 1983} cited in my book **Kingdom Beyond Color: Re-Examining the Phenomenon of Racism** – Amazon/Kindle version] Re-setting the clock means that dialogue is not an option. We plead with our president to call for a meaningful national dialogue as a starting point. The Faith Community must lead the way in demonstrating love rather than violence as we radically follow our Lord. The time is now if we are to avoid the “fire next time.”

Concluding word:

As a nation we are attempting to identify with the loss of Trayvon Martin because in a sense, Trayvon is us. His parents have been stellar examples of how to cope during difficult losses. Zimmerman says *“it was God’s will.”* If so, this makes God a racist. We connect with ancient seers who strongly believed that we *“live in a moral universe.”* The ancient seers believed strongly what medical science confirms as they analyze the chemistry of the blood, namely, that there is *“life in the blood.”* If there is *“life in the blood”* one can conjecture that blood has a voice. In Genesis 4: 1-16 is the



narrative of Cain and Abel. Cain slays Abel for reasons of jealousy and buries him. In verse 10 Cain is reminded that *“the voice of thy brother’s blood crieth unto me from the ground.”* In reflection upon the Trayvon Martin travesty, my friend Dr. Earl Carter remarked that *“the blood of Trayvon Martin cries from the earth and the universe has heard the cry.”*

I too contend and believe that *“the universe has eyes as well as ears.”* In Genesis 5:20 –*“From the heavens the stars fought against Sisera...”* Stars in their courses fought against Sisera...” To the critics who are suffering from selective amnesia, remember that God does side with the poor and oppressed. We are even admonished by the ancient wisdom sage to *“Open your mouth on the side of justice and defend the rights of the poor and needy.”* Proverbs 31:3. If you are arrogant and guilty of having misused the criminal justice system to win this case, you have lost even with a NOT GUILTY VERDICT. If there was any chicanery or back room deals in your use or misuse of the law in this case, you will be held accountable by a moral universe that can reduce you to cosmic waste floating on the sea of nothingness. Galatian 6: 7 says *“Don’t be under any illusion, you cannot make a fool of God “* [JB Phillips tr] *“A man will always reap just the kind of seed he sows.”* [LAB tr]

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Disclaimer: the reflections above are personal and do not represent the official position of the Church of God in Christ with regards to this or any other related matter [1885 word count]

