



The Flag Must Never be Raised Above the Cross

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TAKE IT DOWN! Mississippi **GOP** House speaker Philip Gunn said *“it was time for his state to change its flag, which includes the Confederate insignia...a sign of the slave-holding South.”* *“We must always remember our past, but that does not mean we must let it define us,”* Gunn said Monday in a **Facebook Post**. *“As a Christian I believe our state’s flag has become a point of offense that needs to be removed.”* This is the rallying cry across the South regarding the controversy about the Confederate Flag, a symbol of a past era regarded by many as sacred memory. Supporters of the Confederate Flag are quick to point out that they are respecting their ancestors who fought for what they perceived to be the right cause in American history. Some things, one may do as a politician, but the game changer that shifted the playing field occurred when the **GOP** speaker invoked the notion, *“as a Christian.”* **TAKE IT DOWN!** This is revolutionary coming from a politician and native of Mississippi, the Magnolia State. I arrived in the State of Mississippi two years after the lynching death of Emmett Till. The State has progressed since those dark days of human terror inflicted upon people of color.

The death of the nine victims at the Emanuel A.M.E. in Charleston, S.C. has generated a debate about the Confederate Flag that is unparalleled. The depth of veneration of the Confederate Flag rooted in the tradition of Southern culture and folklore is astonishing. I was born in the State of Florida, with family roots in the State of Georgia. I grew up during an era when the Flag which symbolizes political and national loyalties was the status quo. Our first experience in Kindergarten was to pledge allegiance to the USA Flag. It was a way of demonstrating patriotism to our Country. Slavery not only divided the nation, but served as the foundation for racial discrimination a century past the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation by President Abraham. Because the Flag was raised above the Cross during the post- Civil War South, an alternate form of slavery in the form of share-cropping became dominant for nearly eighty years past Emancipation. My parents were share-croppers after transitioning from Georgia to Florida during the late twenties. The system was designed to keep tenant share-croppers in debt the entire year by forcing them to depend upon white farmers who also housed them. The Flag was raised above the Cross by the maintenance of segregation and racial discriminatory

practices throughout the South. How many times we saw signs that read “segregation forever.” We fought and resisted such practices and lived to see segregation take its dying gasp through the vigilance of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr who raised the Cross above the Flag. Our hope is that Southerners who are joining in the “*drop the flag*” sentiment are not simply doing the right things for the “*wrong reasons.*” If it is a movement of the heart and not for political reasons, the outcome will be lasting and fruitful.

As the city of Charleston and the Emanuel A.M.E. family mourned the untimely death of nine people caused by a young domestic terrorist obsessed by the flawed myth of white supremacy, our hearts as a nation is indeed heavy. It is ironic that I was scheduled to speak in Lincolnville, a small suburb of Charleston, two months prior to this nightmare. I was the guest of **New Vision Church** led by its servant leader Dr. Edward Johnson. It was a tense experience from the time of the breaking news story to the time of preaching in a challenging situation. There was no fear, just grief. In the midst of collective grief I saw a glistening ray of hope in the spirit of the people of all races that more appeared more compelling than the horrific event. The deranged plan of the shooter has taken a beating. No race war is eminent and people are coming together across racial divides with the power of a potent love that has baffled the pundits and skeptics. The death of the nine in the church massacre was not in vain.

Like segregation, white racism may soon be on life support. On my return trip from Charleston I discerned a gleam of hope with regards to white racism in a conversation with a young Anglo brother named Pete. After talking about sports and other trivia, we began reflecting on the implications of the tragic incident in Charleston. Pete was college educated with a spouse residing in Charleston. The moment of truth emerged when Pete indicated that “*as a Christian*” he could never support white supremacy and condemned the actions of the shooter. Pete confirmed what I have been reflecting and dialoguing about for decades. The belief that white racism will begin to gasp its final breathe when white Christians like Pete move to the forefront and begin to pull down the walls of this enemy. White racism is not a black problem. Black people have been the victims but not the perpetrators. It is not impossible for blacks to be racist, but highly improbable given the context of American society. Those who exalt the Flag above the Cross are victims of a misreading of history. Adolph Hitler placed the Flag above the Cross and exterminated several million Jewish citizens. We must struggle with what it means to be radically Christian. Hans Kung, the Swiss Catholic theologian stated that “*a Christian is one for whom in life or in death, Jesus Christ is ultimately decisive.*”

There are some behaviors, theories and ideologies I cannot embrace or support when guided and informed by my faith.

There is a liberating word that thunders from Mt. Sinai that challenges us at the core of our being: *“Thou shall have no other gods before me.”* **Exodus 20:3 (KJV)** The Flag has become a fetish for many persons.. The intent was never to worship the flag. The purpose is to demonstrate respect for country only. The Cross is symbolic of the victory of Jesus Christ over principalities, power and even death. The Cross is symbolic of the death of death.” In **Galatians 6:14 (KJV)** *“But God forbid that I should glory save in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.”* As a Christian we are to *“render therefore unto Caesar the things which be Caesar’s, and unto God the things which be God’s.”* However, if the things of Caesar are in conflict with the mandates of our Lord, then we are to do what the Apostles did in a difficult situation: *“Then Peter and the other Apostles said, we ought to obey God rather than man.”* **Acts 5:29 (KJV)** Given the political and social ethos of our nation, do not be surprised if the Supreme Court eventually rules that it is now legal to marry your pets. Stay Tuned!

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Matthew 18:20 “For where two or three are gathered together in my name there am I in the midst of them”