

Rachel Continues to Weep for Her Children

Leonard Lovett, Ph. D

Jeremiah 31: 15 *“The Lord spoke to me saying; In Ramah there is bitter weeping. Rachel is weeping for her children and she cannot be comforted for they are gone.”*

Bruce Jenner, a male announces that he is a woman, makes the cover of **Vanity Magazine**, and is applauded from the Whitehouse and throughout the global village for his courage in self-disclosure. Rachel Dolezal, a white female announces that she is black, and sets off a debate about race that rivals the beginning of a World War. The underlying myth fueling the debate is that we have a choice about changing our gender, but not our race. Jenner has been hailed as a hero, while Dolezal has been labeled by certain media pundits as a fake imposter for attempting to announce who she claims to be. What drives the debate is American hypocrisy and denial about race. Deep within our psyche most of us are racially prejudiced until proven otherwise. One real incident will trigger our racial xenophobia and before there is resolution we will have chosen sides. If you have chosen sides in this debate it is an indicator that you are more than likely prejudiced. Prejudice means to pre-judge another without having the facts. Prejudice linked with power becomes racism. We tend to confuse bigoted behavior as being racist, but it is not. When such behavior is linked with the power to subjugate others, it becomes racism. The facts about Rachel Dolezal come to us in media bytes and constitute only a partial picture of her life. The late Dr. James Tinney, Pentecostal scholar and activist, holder of a doctorate in political science from Howard University, was genetically white and reared by a black woman he claimed as his grandmother. As a personal friend I noted that he claimed to be black and never connected with his whiteness. Anyone who knew James can attest to the fact that he was candid about being black.

In my pilgrimage I have met many ebony black skinned people who acted as though they were white and rejected anyone they encountered who was black. They were clearly labeled negro-peans by blacks who could not handle their rejection. If blackness is simply skin color then Dr. James Cone, Charles A Briggs professor of systematic theology at Union Theological Seminary in New York, was wrong. Cone the “Father of Black Theology” emerged in the late sixties and early seventies as a proponent of what was considered a highly controversial theological posture. In his primer, **Black Theology and Black Power**, he contended that God was on the side of the oppressed and Jesus was indeed black. For Cone blackness was a condition of oppression rather than skin color. For Cone the black experience was the entry point for “*ontological*

blackness." Ontology is a metaphysical term that deals with "*the nature of being.*" Within Cone's theological analysis of Black Theology it is possible for whites to become black if they meet the criteria of oppression. Rachal Dolezal could enter the purview of the black experience if she comes not as an imposter to pimp blackness as a way of "*getting over*" but with a deep sense of genuine commitment. To enter the black experience any other way would be an insult to black womanhood everywhere and an uneventful troubled existence.

The Dolezal incident may open the door to making a choice about Jesus Christ. The announcement that indeed Jesus is black set off a firestorm in theological circles during the seventies that continues to burn. To say Jesus is Asian produces a yellow cultural Christ and was never as threatening to the existence of religious empire. But to say Jesus is black sets off a precipitous dynamic that is hard to control. As a lad in Sunday School class I was on edge about the Jesus depicted on the fans donated to churches by Mortuaries to advertise their business. Jesus was always depicted as a bearded blue eyed blonde with little white kids within his warm loving embrace. I often wondered with child-like imagination why were there no black children sitting at his feet? In spite of the songs such as "*Yes, Jesus Loves Me, for the Bible tells me so,*" there was something unfair about the depiction of Jesus. Decades later in the debates about Black Theology we discovered that my boyhood view of Jesus was the product of Euro-centric theology. It was a feminized view of Jesus. The view was not that of a strong six foot one virile Jesus dragging logs from the woods assisting his father Joseph in making huge doors, so that one day he would say, "*I am the Door.*" Assembling wood in order to make yokes for oxen, so he would eventually state. "*my yoke is easy and my burdens are light.*" Through the prism of oppression we view a different kind of Jesus. The Sunday School view was indeed a misrepresentation and fraudulent perspective of Jesus Christ. I am a debtor for any modicum of achievement to praying women such as the now deceased Mother Ella McClendon, Delia Edmonds, Lula Hunter, Inez Black who pulled us aside from the fray of routine life and told us that we had seeds of greatness and worth as they anointed us with oil and prayed for us.

In Jeremiah 31:15, we find Rachel, the symbolic wife of the Northern tribes of Israel who were taken as slaves into Assyrian captivity. Rachel is at Ramah, the staging point for the deportation of slaves. This same passage is referred to in Matthew 2: 18ff, describing the sadness of the mothers of Bethlehem as their sons were slaughtered by King Herod in an attempt to prevent the birth of Jesus because he was viewed as a rival to his throne. Joseph and Mary were protected by the providential hand of God as they were instructed to go into Egypt for a brief period to evade the evil of Herod. Jesus was born in Bethlehem. In the Jeremiah passage, God promised that the enslaved would return.

The Rachel Dolezal event is really incidental and is linked to a larger problem, the devaluation of blackness. Black men continue to die weekly in epic proportions at the hands of out of control law enforcement officers who have taken a sworn oath to protect and serve. The brothers I am in dialogue with concerning the future plight of black males are developing an unhealthy paranoia toward law enforcement officers. Many of them now believe that if they call for help they may end up being the victim. There is strong resistance to white cops swooping in like an unlawful posse throwing men to the ground and kicking them in the head, often generating life-threatening injuries. Rachel weeps for her children when there are no convictions for officers turn criminal. Rachel weeps for her children when we trivialize the future of black male seed as though we are good for sports only. I pray that we will not become the slaves of apathy and indifference. In a Fourth of July address, the late Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall stated: *"We must dissent from the indifference. We must dissent from the apathy. We must dissent from the fear, the hatred, and the mistrust...We must dissent because America can do better, because America has no choice but to do better."*

Our prayers are extended to the Emanuel A.M.E church family in Charleston, S.C. victims of a senseless shooting. Let this be a warning to those honestly believe that racism, America's sickness is dead to awake from slumber. Let this be an admonition to parents that you do not give a firearm as a birthday gift to your mentally deranged, hateful sick child. If the shooter whose philosophy of life is built on the lie of white supremacy is right, then the Bible is a lie. We are compelled as Christians to *"be not overcome with evil but overcome evil with good"* **Romans 12: 21** (KJV), as we become more vigilant and watchful. William Cowper was profoundly right in his hymn, **God Moves in a Mysterious Way** that: *"God's purposes will ripen fast, Unfolding every hour, The bud may have a bitter taste, But sweet will be the flower"*

Dr. Leonard Lovett, Ecumenical Officer, COGIC
Chief Editor, **The Agora Blog**

www.the-agera.net *"Where truth is spoken to power and never compromised."*

Information from this blog should not be reprinted for sale without the expression of the editor