

Imputing Racist Motives to White Evangelicals

By Ashby L. Camp

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I recently had brought to my attention an article by John Pavlovitz titled "[White Evangelicals, This is Why People Are Through With You](#)," which was published when President Trump had been in office one year. In the article, Pavlovitz asserts that "people" no longer want anything to do with white evangelicals because they revealed themselves to be racists through their differing treatment of the "black president" Obama and the "white Republican" Trump. He says that white evangelicals thereby exposed "their thinly veiled supremacy" and showed that "pigmentation and party are [their] sole deities." For good measure, he adds that they "lost any semblance of Christlikeness" and "lost [their] soul." Mr. Pavlovitz has mistaken his perception as fact and has served the Enemy's desire to divide the church along racial lines.

Pavlovitz asserts without evidence that "people" no longer want anything to do with white evangelicals. If by "people" he means those who share his jaundiced view of whites, that is no surprise. But if he means the public or believers generally, that calls for some careful research to determine whether that is in fact the case. I suspect most people are more circumspect and fairer in ascribing sinful motivations to others, especially to other believers in Christ. And why would the people to whom he refers focus only on whites and exclude from their contempt those black evangelicals who opposed Obama with a vigor second to none (e.g., [A Vote For Obama Is A Vote Against God](#), [Barack Obama: A Dangerous Cultural Marxist](#))? Would that not be treating the same conduct differently based on the race of the actors?

The article is replete with unsupported and false blanket accusations against all white evangelicals. He says of their treatment of Obama:

And through it all, White Evangelicals—you never once suggested that God placed *him* where *he* was,
you never publicly offered prayers for him and his family,
you never welcomed him to your Christian Universities,
you never gave him the benefit of the doubt in any instance,
you never spoke of offering him forgiveness or mercy,
your evangelists never publicly thanked God for his leadership,
your pastors never took to the pulpit to offer solidarity with him,
you never made any effort to affirm his humanity or show the love of Jesus to him in any quantifiable measure.
You violently opposed him at every single turn—without offering a single ounce of the grace you claim as the heart of your faith tradition. You jettisoned Jesus as you dispensed damnation on him.

I know from personal experience that this is not true. The white evangelical Dan Calabrese wrote in [response](#) to Pavlovitz's article when it first appeared:

Wow. Not a single white evangelical prayed publicly for Obama, ever. He never spoke at a Christian university? (What does Pavlovitz think Notre Dame and Georgetown are? And did Obama ask to speak at any others and get turned down?) Not a single white Christian ever gave Obama the benefit of the doubt? He asked all of us about every single instance? It's the job of pastors in the pulpit to "offer solidarity" with Obama? (What does that even mean?) He was never shown the love of Jesus "in any quantifiable measure"?

No, white evangelicals "violently opposed him at every single turn."

That about covers it. I had no idea we were that perfect in our application of our opposition to Obama.

None of this is true, of course. I remember many spirited discussions about the need to pray for President Obama simply because of the position he held, without agreement with him being a necessary condition. I remember giving Obama credit for everything from the firing of GM's Rick Wagoner to a surprisingly good speech on terrorism in the aftermath of San Bernardino. I criticized him a lot more than I credited him, because I disagree with him a lot more than I agree.

The claim that "with [Trump], sin has become unimportant, compassion no longer a requirement" is not true. Major evangelical leaders have stressed the fact of Trump's sin and the importance of not justifying it but after much wrestling concluded it was not disqualifying in the context of a choice between Hillary Clinton and then Joe Biden. See, e.g., Michael Brown ([Why I Will Vote for Donald Trump](#) and [Second Term: The Case Against Trump ... and Why He Still Gets My Vote](#)); Wayne Grudem ([Trump's Moral Character and the Election, If You Don't Like Either Candidate, Then Vote for Trump's Policies](#), and [Letter to an Anti-Trump Christian Friend](#)); and Albert Mohler ([Christians, Conscience, and the Looming 2020 Election](#)). No fair person could say they denied or trivialized Trump's sin.

To suggest that President Obama's marital faithfulness should insulate him from Christian criticism and then to conclude that the greater criticism he faced from Christians (white evangelicals in particular) must have been racially motivated is an insulting *non sequitur*. There are ample grounds for concluding that President Obama was the most biblically hostile president in U.S. history (see, e.g., [America's Most Biblically-Hostile U. S. President](#)), in stark contrast to President Trump (see, e.g., [The Trump Administration's Accomplishments on Religious Freedom](#)). This cannot be swept under the rug to justify laying a charge of racism at the feet of white evangelicals. Rather than seeing racism in the fact a larger percentage of white evangelicals opposed Obama than did black evangelicals, one could ask why more black evangelicals did not join their white brothers and sisters in that opposition. Could it be that black evangelicals were acting from racial affinity rather than white evangelicals acting from racial animosity?

Finally, the charge that white evangelicals denied Obama's personal faith convictions without cause or evidence is untrue. Whatever percentage of white evangelicals disbelieved Obama's faith claims, there was evidence, such as the actions documented above, suggesting his affirmation of faith was a political expedient. Indeed, the atheist and avid Obama supporter Bill Maher opined on [Real Time](#) in February 2011 that Obama was a secular humanist and said in a 2014 [interview](#) that Obama was absolutely "a drop-dead atheist" who joined a church in Chicago

for political reasons and did not attend. Maher may be wrong, but if he could reach that conclusion without a racist motivation simply by observing politicians generally and Obama in particular, it is most uncharitable to insist that white evangelicals could not do the same. The fact Obama's chief aide, David Axelrod, indicated in his 2015 [memoir](#) that Obama supported homosexual marriage from at least 1996 but lied about his view in the 2008 election for political purposes seems to ratify the impression of Obama as a Machiavellian.

If we are going to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, it does not help to suggest that white evangelicals are racists because they differ in their perceptions of which president is more supportive of the Christian faith's flourishing in America. It breeds contempt on the one hand and resentment on the other, which are works of the devil in the body of Christ.

Peace.