



FROM THE MENNONITE

We have the power to be antiracist

IF THE STORIES we share shape us—and, thus, the church itself—then these very pages have power. With that power comes the ability to hurt. To heal. To spread racist ideas or antiracist ideas.

Many of us do not self-identify as racist. But that’s part of the problem. In fact, “denial is the heartbeat of racism,” says Ibram X. Kendi in his important new book, *How to Be an Antiracist*. Kendi won the 2016 National Book Award for Nonfiction for his book *Stamped from the Beginning*.

Kendi says the opposite of “racist” isn’t “not racist,” which is seemingly neutral. The opposite of racist is antiracist.

Definitions are important to Kendi. He defines racist as “one who is supporting a racist policy through their actions or inaction or expressing a racist idea.” An antiracist is “one who is supporting an antiracist policy through their actions or expressing an antiracist idea.”

I interviewed Kendi on Sept. 3. Here is an excerpt (the full interview is at themennonite.org):

What role should interrogation of ourselves—in addition to our laws and leaders—play in our journey toward being antiracist?

Interrogation of everything—ourselves, our laws, our leaders—is central to being an antiracist. As opposed to racists who are constantly denying their own racism and the racism in society, antiracists are confessing their own racism and the racism in society. But in order to confess, we must interrogate.

What role does the church, or do Christians, play?

Too many churches are based on what I call civilizer theology: the idea that the role of the church and the ministers and the congregants is to civilize individuals away from their sins. As James Cone told my father after my father asked him to define a Christian: “A Christian is one who is striving for liberation.”

Who might we become if we really wrestled with Kendi’s call to action?

At a time when it’s easy to feel helpless, how do we not become hopeless?

Every Christian should believe in miracles. We will defeat racism. And it will be a miracle.

We are called to live now as a sign of the miracle yet to come. Kendi’s book is not a guidebook for how to be an antiracist, but he does provide a way forward. Who might we become if we really wrestled with his call to action? We have the power to be racist or antiracist.

Sheldon C. Good,
Executive director of The Mennonite, Inc.

