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## SHOULD CHRISTIANS ADMIRE RONALD REAGAN?

by  
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Can Christians admire Ronald Reagan? Students at The King's College, a Christian liberal arts school in New York City, live in ten residential houses named after Ronald Reagan, C. S. Lewis, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Corrie ten Boom, Queen Elizabeth I, Margaret Thatcher, Sojourner Truth, Susan B. Anthony, Winston Churchill, and Clara Barton. According to the college, these figures were selected by students fifteen years ago "because they embodied certain ideals that students wanted to manifest." But recently unearthed audio of a conversation between Reagan and President Richard Nixon has led some students to call for the Reagan House to be renamed.

In a taped phone conversation from October 1971, then-Governor Reagan told President Nixon, "Last night, I tell you, to watch that thing on television as I did. . . To see those, those monkeys from those African countries—damn them, they're still uncomfortable wearing shoes!" Reagan was incensed that the United Nations General Assembly had voted to admit the People's Republic of China to the Assembly and to expel the Republic of China, the fledgling democracy in Taiwan.

We should be wary of a selective moral perfectionism. Should the standards now being applied to Reagan also be applied to John F. Kennedy (sexual assault), Lyndon B. Johnson (blatant racism), or Martin Luther King Jr. (plagiarism, infidelity, and possibly sexual assault)? In a word, no. The King's College should not rename the Reagan House, just as we should not rename every MLK boulevard.

On August 14, The King's College published a statement addressing the controversy. It makes no effort to grapple with the decontextualized and in some cases factually inaccurate information presented by student activists. It instead states that Reagan's comments were "patently racist," and that the college grieves "any angst this may cause for minority students in the King's community." It states that the names of all undergraduate houses are now being reviewed.

"We recognize, grieve, and repent of the myriad ways our words and actions—both intentional and unintentional—have served to denigrate, dehumanize, and marginalize members of our community," the statement says. This line is from a *Theological Commitment to Diversity* the college adopted in spring 2019. (Remember when evangelical Christians talked about their commitment to Christ?) The statement concludes by affirming the college's commitment to building a Christ-centered community that "celebrates ethnic and cultural differences."

What is missing from this official response is any reference to the gospel, the *evangel*. A properly *evangelical* response would start with what Jesus said about forgiveness ("Then Peter came up and said to him, 'Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?' Jesus said to him, 'I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven'"). It would end with the New Testament view of Christian unity ("There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus").

Unfortunately, The King's College seems to be following the same pattern as secular colleges across America. Disgruntled minority students complain about "diversity and inclusion," and administrators spring into action with solutions that satisfy no one. Christian colleges and universities should be better equipped than secular institutions to respond to the challenges of race. Christians should counter the demands of identity politics and its celebration of division. But the college's adoption of *The Theological Commitment to Diversity* has placed it in an untenable situation where there is only one solution: Cave to the voices of the loudest and most strident activists.

The King's College needs a "come to Jesus" moment—needs to abandon social justice for the gospel of Jesus Christ. The gospel should strengthen and unite. The King's College should not capitulate to political correctness that divides and destroys.

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