

The PURSUIT OF GOSPEL UNITY

*The PCA Papers on Racism
and Racial Reconciliation*

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DISCIPLESHIP
MINISTRIES

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THERE IS NEITHER JEW
NOR GREEK, THERE IS NEITHER
SLAVE NOR FREE, THERE IS
NO MALE AND FEMALE, FOR YOU
ARE ALL ONE IN CHRIST JESUS.

– *Galatians 3:28* –



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Contents

Preface	7
1. “On the Constitutional Status of Study Committee Reports” by <i>L. Roy Taylor</i>	11
2. Report on Racial Questions (44th General Synod of the RPCES, 1966).	13
3. Racial Reconciliation (30th General Assembly, 2002)	21
4. The Gospel and Race: A Pastoral Letter (32nd General Assembly, 2004)	31
5. Pursuing Racial Reconciliation and the Advance of the Gospel (44th General Assembly, 2016)	63
• Amended Overture 43 from Potomac Presbytery	67
• Overture 44: Unity Fund.	69
• A Pastoral Letter on Racism and the Gospel (from Overture 55 from the Presbytery of the Mississippi Valley)	70
6. Covenant Seminary Statement on Biblical Social Justice (2017).	89
7. Racial and Ethnic Reconciliation Report (46th General Assembly, 2018).	95
8. PCA Racial Reconciliation Study	137

Preface

“Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one.” — JOHN 17:11B ESV

In his book on the history of the Presbyterian Church in America, Sean Michael Lucas records how the members and leaders of the PCA have in various ways acted contrary to this prayer of Jesus. Yet Dr. Lucas also observes, “As the PCA has continued its ministry over the past forty years, it has worked at local and national levels to correct its past commitments to injustice and racial segregation.”¹ This compilation of the actions of the PCA General Assembly gives snapshots of that work to overcome prejudice and pursue the unity for which the Savior prayed.

The Westminster Standards teach that sanctification is a work of God’s grace, imperfect in this life, whereby the Holy Spirit applies the death and resurrection of Christ unto those whom God has chosen to be holy. The Sovereign God is faithful to stir up, increase, and strengthen saving grace in a believer’s life so the redeemed sinner is renewed in the whole man after the image of God. Yet, progress can be painfully slow, as spiritual blindness and the chains of long-held bias are hard to overcome. Praise the Lord he never gives up on His people.

As elders in the PCA have sought to grow in faithfulness to God’s Word, the General Assembly has appointed committees to study and report on the ways believers can live faithfully with regard to errors of the past and the challenges of the present. Before

¹ Lucas, Sean Michael., *For a Continuing Church: The Roots of the Presbyterian Church in America* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2015), p. 324

the PCA was formed in 1973, the General Synod of the Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod (RPCES) adopted a paper in 1966 that examined biblical texts to better understand how the saving message of Christ should be proclaimed to all nations in an era of change regarding relationships between the races in the United States. When the RPCES joined with the PCA in 1982, this paper became part of the history of the PCA.

In 2002, the PCA General Assembly adopted a statement repenting of the sins of pride, complacency, and complicity that created barriers between brothers and sisters of different races and/or economic status. In 2004, the Assembly adopted a pastoral letter designed to help elders better lead their members and enable them to understand the position of the PCA on issues relating to racism in the past, present, and future.

God used these efforts to bring change in the minds and hearts of leaders in the PCA. As more avenues of communication developed between different ethnic groups, elders in various presbyteries and the Assembly realized there was more work to do to acknowledge the errors of the past and pursue greater unity in the future. In response to a number of overtures in 2016, the General Assembly repented of corporate and historical sins, particularly in the Civil Rights era, as well as continuing racial sins. Further, the Assembly appointed an *ad interim* study committee on racial and ethnic reconciliation. During the next year, the President and Faculty of Covenant Theological Seminary (an agency of the PCA General Assembly) published a statement detailing their views on the topic of social justice, particularly as it relates to matters of racial reconciliation and racial justice. In 2018, the Assembly received the report of the *ad interim* committee and adopted a recommendation directing CDM to publish the report, along with other actions of the Assembly related to racial reconciliation.

By faith, we know the prayer of Jesus, the Lamb of God, is not in vain. The unity sought by the Redeemer is seen and described by the Apostle John:

After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and

peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!"
(Rev. 7:9-10 ESV).

As you read these papers, which are the work of fallible men, may God continue the work of sanctification in your mind and heart to keep you in His name. May you in some measure make progress in realizing the unity secured by the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

As we have worked to fulfill the mandate of the General Assembly, CDM is grateful for the cooperation and assistance of the staff at Doulos Publishing. This new resource is an expansion of a 2015 booklet published jointly by Doulos and CDM entitled *Neither Jew Nor Greek: The PCA Papers on Racism & Racial Reconciliation*.

Stephen T. Estock,

Coordinator

PCA Committee on Discipleship Ministries (CDM)

January 2019

1

On the Constitutional Status of Study Committee Reports

The *Book of Church Order* states:

14-7 *Actions of the General Assembly pursuant to the provision of BCO 14-6 such as deliverances, resolutions, overtures, and judicial decisions are to be given due and serious consideration by the Church and its lower courts when deliberating matters related to such action....”*

A Study Committee report is a “deliverance” of an Assembly (BCO 14-7), i.e., the opinion of the majority of the commissioners on a specific subject (*in these*) at a particular point in time. Study Committee Reports are *not* amendments to the constitution. According to BCO 14-7, church courts are to give deliverances of the General Assembly “due and serious consideration when deliberating matters related to such action.”

The PCA does not have the “authoritative-interpretation-of-the-constitution” process of other denominations that is tantamount to changing the constitution. Binding changes to the PCA constitution (*The Book of Church Order* and the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, *Larger Catechism*, or *Shorter Catechism*) may only be made by following the process for amending the constitution specified in BCO 26-2; 26-3 requiring the action of a General Assembly, the Presbyteries, and a subsequent General Assembly by the required majorities.

It is also helpful to bear in mind that the General Assembly, consistent with the advice of *Robert’s Rules of Order*, does not adopt an entire study committee report. That is, the General Assembly

does not adopt every word of a study committee report; it only adopts the recommendations of a report as finally acted upon by the Assembly.

An ordained PCA officer (Teaching Elder, Ruling Elder, or Deacon) may be held to account for views that are “out of accord” with, “hostile to the system” of doctrine set forth the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, *Larger Catechism*, or *Shorter Catechism*, or “striking at the vitals of religion” (see BCO 29-1). One may disagree with portions of a study committee report and not necessarily be properly subject to judicial process, however.

From time to time the General Assembly forms study committees of specially qualified persons whose reports are for the information, study, guidance, and advice of Presbyteries, Sessions, ordained officers, church members, or other interested persons.

Dr. L. Roy Taylor

Stated Clerk

General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA)

2

Report on Racial Questions (RPCES, 1966)

The following statement was drafted and adopted in 1966 by the General Synod of the Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod (RPCES), and later amended in 1968. Some of the terms used by the authors in the report may have been acceptable in previous decades but are no longer commonly used and may even seem offensive to the contemporary reader. For historical accuracy, the statement is presented as it appears in the documents of the RPCES with no editorial revision.

As part of the process of receiving the RPCES denomination into the PCA, the PCA General Assembly recognized the history of the RPCES to be part of the total history of the PCA. Moreover, the PCA received the historical documents of the RPCES as historical documents of the PCA. The PCA General Assembly acknowledged these documents are “valuable and significant material which will be used in the perfecting of the Church” (Minutes from 9th General Assembly, 1981, pp. 97, 305).

*Roy Taylor,
Stated Clerk of the General Assembly of
the Presbyterian Church in America*

Rev. Paul Alexander presented the report of the Committee on Racial Questions. Synod was led in prayer by Dr. Elmer Smick for patience and wisdom during the discussion of this report. It was moved, seconded, and carried that Synod go into a committee of the whole. The Moderator relinquished the chair and asked Mr. Noé to serve as chairman of the committee of the whole. The committee spent the next two or more hours in a very thorough

study and discussion of the report, and made several amendments. It was moved, seconded, and carried that the committee adopt the statement, as amended, and arise and report.

Report on Racial Questions

God commands all men everywhere to repent of their sin, trusting in Jesus Christ, the only name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved. The church is entrusted with the proclamation of this saving message to all nations, for God is not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. This thesis lies on the face of the New Testament, in fulfillment of the promises of the Old. This is what the New Covenant is all about.

The question is, are we acting in consistency with the universality of God's offer and the demand laid upon the church to be faithful in making God's saving grace known to all? Does not the church have the responsibility to make the Gospel known to all within her reach regardless of educational, vocational, economical, cultural, national, or racial distinction, in accord with the parting command of our Saviour and Lord: "Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:19–20a, ASV)? This command, not only to preach the Gospel, but to make full disciples of all nations, compels us to give due consideration to the following passages of Scripture with regard to the racial question.

ACTS 17:22–34. This passage has been used to support both segregation and integration. Verse 26 is used on the one hand to support the unity of the human race ("of one blood all nations") and on the other hand to support a division of the human race ("hath determined . . . the bounds of their habitation"). The word "blood" does not actually appear in the Greek text, so the phrase is better translated "hath made of one (stock, or forefather) the whole race of men," or "every nation of mankind." The expression about the bounds of habitation is parallel to

God's determining of "the times before appointed" and thus is expressing God's sovereign governance of geography as well as history. Whatever happens in human affairs, the turning points that divide epochs and the fluctuations of territory, are all determined by the living and true God. Paul, in speaking to the Athenians, who believed themselves superior to other peoples, is here emphasizing the unity of mankind, all of whom are called to repent because all will be judged by one, even Christ. There is a single Creator and Lord (24) and thus we are all in the same situation (27–29) and there is one redemption for all (30–31).

GENESIS 9:18–27. The so-called Hamitic curse is often applied to the modern race problem. It has not been demonstrated exegetically, linguistically, or historically that Negroes are descended from Ham; even if they were, the curse applies specifically to Canaan, father of those who later lived in the Promised Land. Whatever we take the "Hamitic curse" to mean, if it is relevant at all to the modern race situation, it is as a curse to be counteracted by the Gospel and Christian love. The curse the Jews pronounced on themselves at Calvary did not prevent Paul from wishing himself accursed for them. This is the Christian attitude. Jesus became a curse for us, who were under the Edenic curse.

GENESIS 10:32–11:9. It has been argued from the Tower of Babel account that God opposes unification of mankind, including world government and the ecumenical movement, with which racial integration is often associated. It should be pointed out that the division of Genesis 11 was not at first racial, but linguistic. The descendants of Shem, Ham, and Japheth were actually intermixed geographically. More important, the Lord's apparent reason for dividing the people was because of their evil motives in developing a concentrated civilization (4, 6). Pentecost is an example of God's overcoming this very language barrier when the motive for association and unity was honoring to God. One of the biggest tasks of the missionary effort is to get over this obstacle of language; so again the Gospel overcomes such divisions.

LUKE 10:25–37. The parable of the Good Samaritan is an

illustration by Christ of the summary of the second table of the law, the Old Testament verse most quoted in the New Testament, “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.” The Samaritan occupied in Jewish society somewhat the position that the Negro and other minority racial groups have had in American society, and for good reasons—as given in the account of their origin and religious practice in 2 Kings 17:24–41 and Ezra 4:1–3. The continued mutual distrust and enmity between Jew and Samaritan is reflected in the New Testament in the account of the woman at the well in John 4. Yet to illustrate the meaning of “love thy neighbor,” Jesus uses the Samaritan here, pictured as neighbor to the wounded Jew. Samaria is also specifically included in the Great Commission (Acts 1:8), and in Acts 8 Phillip the Evangelist, who also testified of Jesus to the Ethiopian eunuch, started the work there. Since the commandment to “love thy neighbor as thyself” is the very essence of the Christian life at the level of our relations with our fellow man, it is of particular significance that Jesus uses the most despised of peoples as an example of this command. To the Jew of the Old Testament the application was specifically made to the “stranger” (Lev. 19:34, Deut. 10:19), to whom the Negro and other minority racial groups in America might be said to be analogous.

JAMES 2:1–9. This passage quotes the command, “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself,” calling it the royal law, and applies it to the area of church attendance. Respect of persons in this area is regarded as inconsistent with the Christian faith and as actual sin. The first verse indicates that respect of persons cannot be held in combination with faith in the Lord of glory, before whom all human distinctions pale into insignificance. (Compare 1 Cor. 1:27–29: “. . . that no flesh should glory in his presence.”) James accuses the Christians of despising those whom God has chosen (5–6a). Verses 2 and 3 give a practical example of what respect of persons is: a distinction on the basis of race would seem to be no different from the distinction here made on the basis of wealth with regard to the main point of respect of persons. Verse 4 shows there is something wrong in the heart of the one who so discriminates. Deuteronomy 1:16–17 shows that God

operated without respecting persons or, literally, “acknowledging faces,” and in Deuteronomy 10:17–19, the concept of regarding not persons is directly connected with the command to love the stranger. God’s way of dealing with man is not according to any racial or social distinction (Rom. 2:6–11, Eph. 6:5–9, Col. 3:23–25). But not only is respect of persons inconsistent with the Christian faith, it is also actual sin, as James says in verse 9. Peter, like many Jews of his time, had such a prejudice to overcome (Acts 10:34–35); but even though he recognized the principle, he still found it difficult to apply in practice, and Paul had to rebuke him publicly at Antioch, as indicated in Galatians 2:11–14. Although it takes time for human blind spots to be recognized and changed, it is important here in the basic equality of all sinners before God (Rom. 3:23) and of all believers in Christ (Col. 3:11, Gal. 3:28). The guiding principle for Christians in such matters is the mind of Christ, which includes each esteeming others better than himself (Phil. 2:3–5).

I CORINTHIANS 6:15-16; 7:16, 39. These verses relate to the subject of marriage, especially the last verse, and the last clause: “only in the Lord.” It is striking that in all of Paul’s discussion of marriage this is the one principle that is stressed in regard to whom one should marry. This is not to say that marriage to any Christian is necessarily expedient, but the only marriage in this sphere clearly prohibited is that of a believer to an unbeliever. The Bible does not teach that interracial marriage of believers as such is morally wrong. We do recognize that children of a mixed marriage born into a prejudiced society face a serious problem of identity. This problem of identity is largely overcome, however, where the commitment to Christ is uppermost and where the church welcomes all who are in covenant relationship to the Lord into its fellowship. Although marriage between the races should be approached with caution because of the serious nature of the difficulties involved, nevertheless, we are persuaded that God’s blessing is available to all who marry “in the Lord.”

I JOHN 4:20–21, 3:16–19. These verses are included for the sake of application of the principles which have been set forth above. The basis of the love of our neighbor is the knowledge

that he bears the image of God, his Creator (Gen. 9:6). For that very reason John argues that if a man does not love his brother he cannot claim to love God. The passage in the third chapter shows that this love for our brother must be manifest not in words only, but in action. We believe that this means that we must offer the right hand of fellowship in a genuine sense to brothers in Christ of other ethnic groups. If we know that it is the Lord's will that in heaven believers from every nation shall worship Him together (Rev. 6:9–10, 7:9–10), then let us sincerely mean it when we pray the petition: "Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven."

In summary, then—the Bible maintains the unity of the human race before the one redeemer and judge, Jesus Christ; if the "Hamitic curse" applies at all to the Negro, it is as something to be counteracted by the Gospel; the confusing of tongues at the Tower of Babel was because of sin and in no way prevents unity for the glory of God—in fact, Pentecost indicates the opposite; the Good Samaritan points us to "love thy neighbor" as the essence of the Christian life and shows that this includes the most despised member of the human race; James' admonition against respect of persons rules out any discrimination in the matter of church attendance as contrary to the faith and as sin; and genuine love for God (and genuine salvation) is revealed in a genuine love for all the brethren.

We look upon our approach to the Negro, whether Christian or unbeliever, in a spirit of repentance, and we exhort one another to greater obedience to the Great Commission to make disciples and to Christ's commandment to His disciples of whatever race, "That ye love one another, as I have loved you, that ye also love one another" (John 13:34).

We move that this statement be adopted by Synod and sent to our church sessions for study.

The Committee and Synod heartily invite the comments and suggestions of our members and friends who may study this Report. . . .

Action:

Upon motion, the Synod adopted the amended Report on Racial Questions. Upon motion, the Synod recessed at 12:30 a.m. and was led in prayer by Rev. Lynden Stewart.

[*Documents of Synod: Study Papers of the Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod (1965 to 1982). Minutes of the 144th General Synod, 4 May 1966, pp. 51–54 (Documents of Synod, pp. 385–387).*]