

**Committee on Mission to North America**  
**PASTORAL LETTER ON RACISM**  
**Approved at the March 2004 MNA Committee Meeting**  
**as the Committee's Recommendation to the Thirty-Second General Assembly**

This paper is presented by the MNA Committee as its recommendation to the 32<sup>nd</sup> General Assembly. The Pastoral Letter is finally perfected and approved by the 32<sup>nd</sup> General Assembly. *Nothing is in any way official or final until action is taken by the 32<sup>nd</sup> or a subsequent General Assembly. Nothing that is contained in this draft may be properly quoted as the official position of the PCA General Assembly. It is strictly the recommendation of the MNA Committee.*

To: Teaching and Ruling Elders of the PCA  
From: the 32<sup>nd</sup> General Assembly

"The Gospel and Race: A Pastoral Letter" was adopted by the 32<sup>nd</sup> General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America. This letter is commended to our churches to clarify the position of our denomination on very important issues relating to racism in the past, present, and future. It is also intended to provide guidance in examining our own hearts with respect to this issue and lead the flock the Lord has entrusted to our care.

The letter seeks to provide a definition of racism, a theological perspective on racism, pastoral responses to racism and discussion of pastoral issues relating to racism. Racism is an explicit or implicit belief or practice that qualitatively distinguishes or values one race over other races. From a biblical perspective, it is the position of the General Assembly that racism, as it is defined in the letter, is sin, and that repentance must follow both individually and corporately.

James reminds us that "faith without works is dead" (James 2:26b). We call on each elder, session, presbytery, committee, and agency of our denomination to study this letter and seek to turn from the sin of racism even in its most subtle of forms. You are strongly encouraged to engage the leadership of your church in examining this issue with the objective of developing specific actions you will follow to lead your congregation in conviction and repentance of this sin, whether in its most subtle or most overt form.

It is the prayer of the General Assembly that our Lord Christ will be glorified and that His grace will be poured out upon each of us as individuals as we struggle daily with sin and as we rest in the promise of reconciliation found in His Gospel.

## THE GOSPEL AND RACE: A PASTORAL LETTER

### INTRODUCTION: WHY A PASTORAL LETTER?

The 31<sup>st</sup> General Assembly (2003) of the Presbyterian Church in America took the following action in response to Overture 17 from Nashville Presbytery (a copy of the entire text of the overture, as amended by the Assembly, is included in the Attachments section of this paper, p. 653):

We therefore request the Thirty-first General Assembly of the PCA to assign to MNA the task of drafting a proposed Pastoral Letter designed to set forth the truth of our position on the issue of the Gospel and race. This letter would be in a manner consistent with the Gospel imperatives for the encouragement of racial reconciliation and Gospel outreach to people of every "tribe and tongue and people and nation" (Rev 5.9 NKJV), and the enhancement of existing ministries of mercy, across all social, racial, and economic boundaries, to the glory of God.

We further request that MNA (Mission to North America) take full responsibility for the funding of this project and that MNA include representatives from a breadth of racial and regional backgrounds in the task in order to ensure that it is ultimately a product of grassroots leadership.

This overture followed Overture 20 to the 30<sup>th</sup> General Assembly (2002), also from Nashville Presbytery, which read in part (the full text of overture 20 is included in the Attachments section of this paper, p. 652):

We therefore confess our covenantal involvement in these national sins. As a people, both we and our fathers have failed to keep the commandments, the statutes, and the laws our God has commanded. We therefore publicly repent of our pride, our complacency, and our complicity. Furthermore, we seek the forgiveness of our brothers and sisters for the reticence of our hearts, which has constrained us from acting swiftly in this matter.

As a people, we pledge to work hard, in a manner consistent with the Gospel imperatives, for the encouragement of racial reconciliation, the establishment of urban and minority congregations, and the enhancement of existing ministries of mercy in our cities, among the poor, and across all social, racial, and economic boundaries, to the glory of God. Amen.

Overture 20 of the 30<sup>th</sup> General Assembly established the position of the Presbyterian Church in America with regard to Racial Reconciliation. The 32<sup>nd</sup> General Assembly, in response to Overture 17 of the 31<sup>st</sup> General Assembly, provides and commends to the churches of the PCA this Pastoral Letter, *for guidance as to the Gospel imperatives for the encouragement of racial reconciliation and Gospel outreach to people of every "tribe and tongue and people and nation" (Rev 5.9 NKJV), and the enhancement of existing*

*ministries of mercy, across all social, racial, and economic boundaries, to the glory of God.*

The title of this Pastoral Letter is *The Gospel and Race*. The challenge before us is that of living according to the Gospel we have received. As we seek the mind and heart of the Lord for our lives as God's people, it is good for us to be reminded directly from God's Word of Christ's love, a love so great that Christ gave His very life for us, so that we might be reconciled to Him. It is His love that compels us to proclaim the Gospel and live in its light, so that we not only become sons of God, but in Him we even become the righteousness of God:

<sup>2Co 5:14</sup> For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. <sup>2Co 5:15</sup> And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again. <sup>2Co 5:16</sup> So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. <sup>2Co 5:17</sup> Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! <sup>2Co 5:18</sup> All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: <sup>2Co 5:19</sup> that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. <sup>2Co 5:20</sup> We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. <sup>2Co 5:21</sup> God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

We begin with a reminder of the atoning work of Christ because that is the foundation for all that we do. As we address the issue of race, we do so not because it is politically correct, or out of any pressure from outward society, but simply because it is our desire that the convicting and restoring power of God's grace in the Gospel be applied to the manifestations of racial sin of which we ourselves are guilty, and that those who experience the negative effects of these sins might know the healing power of God's grace – that we who have been reconciled to God through Christ might become together a holy temple in the Lord, reconciled to one another by His Spirit (Ephesians 2:20-22). God's grace provides the only means to conquer our fears, remove our guilt, resolve our anger and give us the strength to persevere as one family where Jesus Christ is Lord. We declare that the Holy Spirit is our only source of power for true unity in the Body, and that He strengthens us through daily repentance, prayer and the cleansing power of the Word.

The desire of the General Assembly is that this letter will be widely read and will provide helpful guidance to the members and churches of the PCA. Our desire, further, is

- that we as God's people will step out of our cultural comfort zone with the Gospel, to minister among our neighbors, especially among those who are different from ourselves;
- that all of us will search our hearts and recognize our sin, open ourselves to the examination of the Holy Spirit, and having received the grace of the Gospel, turn from it with full purpose of, and endeavor after, new obedience (WCF-SC 87).
- that we will spur one another on to love and good deeds.

We begin with theological and textual foundations and move from there into practical implications for ministry. For further study, we commend the *Report on Racial Questions* approved in 1966 by the Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod, which can be found in pp. 385-387 in *Documents of Synod, Study Papers and Actions of the RPCES – 1965-1982*. We commend also the *Report of the Committee on Problems of Race* of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (*Minutes of the Forty-first General Assembly, 1974*, pp. 101-118), which can be found at <http://opc.org/GA/race.html>.

For further practical ministry application, we commend the answer to Overture 19 to the 30<sup>th</sup> General Assembly, addressing the call to ministry among the people groups of North America, a copy of which is included in the Attachments (p. 654); we commend also the MNA Paper: *Ministering Among the People Groups of North America*, approved along with the overture, and available upon request from MNA.

While this Pastoral Letter primarily addresses the church in the North American cultural context, it is also important to keep in mind that the biblical perspective presented applies to all cultural contexts.

## **FOUNDATIONS IN BIBLICAL TEXT AND THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE**

Let us start with the end of the story. The Gospel unites all of God's people, bringing them together into one Body, despite the divisions with which we live in a fallen world. The Scriptures give us a rich picture of our final state. The implication is that in heaven we will recognize these distinctions, while at the same time we are wholly united as one people:

Rev 5:9 And they sang a new song: "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation.

Rev 7:9 After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands.

The Scriptures are clear about where God's people are headed and what it will look like once we are there. What relationship does the present age have to our eternal state? In this present age, the future eternal state breaks into this world. In many ways, this in-breaking is the beginning of the end. For this reason, the end of the age is marked by the preaching of the Gospel to all nations:

Mt 24:14 And this Gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.

Acts 1:8b ...and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

Acts 15 further shows this Kingdom in-breaking by identifying the taking of the Gospel to the Gentiles as the fulfillment of this mission of uniting under Christ one people gathered from all peoples:

Ac 15:14 Simon has described to us how God at first showed his concern by taking from the Gentiles (plural) a people (singular) for himself. Ac 15:15 The words of the

prophets are in agreement with this, as it is written: <sup>Ac 15:16</sup> “After this I will return and rebuild David’s fallen tent. Its ruins I will rebuild, and I will restore it, <sup>Ac 15:17</sup> that the remnant of men may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who bear my name,” says the Lord, who does these things <sup>Ac 15:18</sup> that have been known for ages.

The *Report of the Committee on Problems of Race*, which was approved in 1974 by the General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, summarizes how Acts 15 demonstrates God’s mission to bring diverse peoples together under Christ:

1. Jews and Gentiles ministered to each other and worshipped together because Acts 15:1 says, Jews “came down from Judea and taught the brethren.”
2. The apostolic council agreed to admit Gentiles to full fellowship without putting them in bondage to Mosaic ceremonial law. Yet there were certain practices common to Gentile culture to which the Jewish believers could not as yet adjust (15:20). At these tension points the Gentiles were asked to conform to Jewish practice. Yet on the other hand the apostles and elders gave the Gentiles freedom in all other matters (eating pork, etc...). This represented a tremendous adjustment for the Jewish church. Both groups were therefore asked to make major compromises out of a desire to maintain the unity of the church in love.
3. In connection with I Corinthians 6 and Romans 15:1-9, this passage shows that these special apostolic ordinances were practical only when and where the need arose. In both Corinth and Rome, Paul makes eating meat offered to idols a matter of Christian liberty. Thus as maturity grew or as the cultural situation allowed, the restrictions were lifted and both groups offered the other one complete freedom in cultural matters. This passage has much to say to us about the “cultural patterns” that separate Christians of different races. Our cultural patterns must come second to our desire to serve God and build the church together. (*Minutes of the Forty-first General Assembly, 1974*, Orthodox Presbyterian Church, p. 103).

Paul’s letter to the Ephesians gives further elaboration and proof that this is the age in which we should expect to see diverse and even hostile peoples being brought together:

<sup>Eph 2:11</sup> Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called “uncircumcised” by those who call themselves “the circumcision” (that done in the body by the hands of men)— <sup>Eph 2:12</sup> remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. <sup>Eph 2:13</sup> But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ. <sup>Eph 2:14</sup> For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, <sup>Eph 2:15</sup> by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, <sup>Eph 2:16</sup> and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. <sup>Eph 2:17</sup> He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. <sup>Eph 2:18</sup> For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit. <sup>Eph 2:19</sup> Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God’s

people and members of God's household, <sup>Eph 2:20</sup> built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. <sup>Eph 2:21</sup> In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. <sup>Eph 2:22</sup> And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

It is this stunning truth that Paul declares, a truth which he calls the "mystery of Christ" and the "mystery of the Gospel." In Ephesians 3:6 he states, "This mystery is that through the Gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promises in Christ." It is of no small significance that Paul ends his letter to the Ephesians with the request that they pray for him in this way: "Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the Gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should." Notice that Paul does not say he is in chains for declaring the Gospel. He says he is in chains for declaring the "mystery" of the Gospel. The mystery of the Gospel upsets the status quo of race and resistance has never been far away.

In Colossians 3.12-15 Paul exhorts believers with these words: "Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience, Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace." These exhortations have particularly great significance to the issue of the Gospel and race, since they are the application of the truth declared in the immediately preceding verse 11: "Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all." It is because of our unity across the lines of race that we are exhorted ("therefore") to live out the unity laid out in the words that follow. Clearly, this is no general admonition to unity but a specific admonition to unity where the natural barriers of race so clearly manifest themselves. Read in this way, this text brings home a powerful message to a church divided along the lines of race.

This unity of the human race existed in its original creation (Genesis 1:28), and the Gospel restores the unity that has been lost. John Stott, in *Decisive Issues Facing Christians Today* (1995), provides an excellent theological perspective on racism in light of God's redemption, in his exposition of Acts 17:22-31.

"What then was Paul's attitude to this multi-racial, multi-cultural and multi-religious situation? He made four affirmations.

"First, he proclaimed *the unity of the human race*, or, *the God of Creation*. God is the Creator and Lord of the world and everything in it, he said. He gives to all human beings their life and breath and everything else. From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth, so that human beings would seek and find him, though he is not far from any of us. For 'in him we live and move and have our being' and 'we are his offspring.' From this portrayal of the living God as Creator, Sustainer and father of all humankind, the apostle deduces the folly and evil of idolatry. But he

could well have deduced from it the folly and evil of racism. For if he is the God of all human beings, this will affect our attitude to them as well as to him.” ...

“Secondly, Paul proclaimed *the diversity of ethnic cultures*, or, *the God of History*. The living God not only made every nation from one man, that they should inhabit the earth, but also ‘determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live’ (Acts 17:26; cf. Deuteronomy 32:8). Thus the times and the places of the nations are in the hand of God.” ...

“Thirdly, Paul proclaimed *the finality of Jesus Christ*, or *the God of Revelation*. He concluded his sermon with God’s call to universal repentance because of the coming universal judgment, for which God has both fixed the day and appointed the judge (verses 30-31). Paul refuses to acquiesce in the religious pluralism of Athens or applaud it as a living museum of religious faiths. Instead, the city’s idolatry provoked him (verse 16) – probably to jealousy for the honour of the living and true God. So he called on the city’s people to turn in repentance from their idols to God.”

“We learn, then, that a respectful acceptance of the diversity of *cultures* does not imply an equal acceptance of the diversity of *religions*. The richness of each particular culture should be appreciated, but not the idolatry which may lie at its heart. For we cannot tolerate any rivals to Jesus Christ, believing as we do that God has spoken fully and finally through him, and that he is the only Saviour, who died, and rose again, and will one day come to be the world’s Judge.”

“Fourthly, Paul proclaimed *the glory of the Christian church*, or, *the God of Redemption*. ...the New Testament is the story of the divine ingathering of nations into a single international society. ... Since God has made every nation and determines their times and places, it is clearly right for each of us to be conscious of our nationality and grateful for it. ... ..while our racial, national, social and sexual distinctions remain, they no longer divide us. They have been transcended in the unity of the family of God (Galatians 3:28).” ...

“The church must therefore exhibit its multi-racial, multi-national and multi-cultural nature.”

“Only a true theology, the biblical revelation of God, can deliver us from racial pride and prejudice. Because He is the God of Creation, we affirm the unity of the human race. Because He is the God of History, we affirm the diversity of ethnic cultures. Because he is the God of Revelation, we affirm the finality of Jesus Christ. And because He is the God of Redemption, we affirm the glory of the Christian church.” (pp. 222-225, quoted by permission of Revell, division of Baker Publishing Group).

**In summary, racial distinctives are:**

- **Distinguishable categories; they are not irrelevant.** *In the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul. (Acts 13:1)*
- But they are not defining categories that prohibit unity in the worship, fellowship and mission of the Body of Christ. *There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. (Galatians 5:28)*

- And they are categories included in the distinctive and eternal celebration of God's work through the ages. *After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. (Revelation 7:9)*

## **RACISM IN GENERAL TERMS**

Racism is an explicit or implicit belief or practice that qualitatively distinguishes or values one race over other races. Racism includes the social exclusion or judgment, or the segregating, of an individual or group of individuals based on racial differences, which always include physical appearance and its underlying genetic structure that are hereditary and unalterable.

To further develop the manifestations of racism, it may be helpful to distinguish among at least three forms of racism. Although they are not exhaustive or completely distinguishable, the following categories are helpful: racial dogma, racial prejudice, and racial dominance.

1. Racism in the sense of racial dogma: "... doctrine or teaching ... that asserts the superiority of one race over another or others, and that seeks to maintain the supposed purity of a race or the races" (*Webster's New World Dictionary*).
2. Racism in the sense of racial prejudice: "Prejudice implies a preconceived and unreasonable judgment or opinion ... marked by suspicion, fear, or hatred" (*Webster's New World Dictionary*). Racial prejudice is judging people by the color of their skin, rather than by their character.
3. Racism in the sense of racial dominance: "Any activity by individuals or institutions that treats human beings in an inequitable manner because of color" (Gordon DeBlaey and Peter DeJong, "Resource Manual for Race Relations in the Christian School," 1976, p. 8).

Note that racism in the form of racial prejudice and racial dominance can exist independently of racism in the form of racial dogma. In all three forms of racism, racial identity becomes a value having priority over other assessments of social judgment, and racial solidarity is practiced as an ethical principle.

## **RACE AND RACISM IN THIS PASTORAL LETTER**

Race and Racism are loaded words. They are mostly used in the spheres of sociology and popular media. Since there are tomes written on the subject with a wide range of definitions, it is important that we define them for our purposes. The word "race," as used in this pastoral letter, is not a scientific classification; rather, in the language of one author, the term "race" is used to denote "a social phenomenon with a biological component" (Sowell, *Race and Culture*). That is, the term "race" not only pertains to the color of skin and other biological factors, but also may include the cultural factors, associations, and assumptions that we attach to certain races as well. We derive this view of race from the Scriptures that reveal cultural distinctions and attitudes about those distinctions.

Let us consider the Jerusalem Council as an example. As the OPC paper that was previously mentioned indicates, the Bible provides categories for the biological factors (Gentiles), cultural associations (what the OPC paper calls a “cultural pattern”), as well as attitudes about both (the Council rose out of how to wisely apply the Kingdom principles to our attitudes about biological factors and cultural associations). In summary, the word “race” in this paper refers to the nuances of our being created distinctly, in distinct times, places, and communities, along with our individual and corporate views of those distinctions.

With that definition in hand, we can work on defining racism for this paper. Racism is any want of conformity to or transgression of the Bible’s approach to race; it is any belief or act that is contrary to God’s bringing His redeeming *shalom* to the races. More specifically, racism is the sinful action or attitude of elevating (idolizing) the superiority of one’s race over another in such a way as to cause a lack of love for one another as Christ loved, to hate others in our hearts and actions, and/or to act toward a race in an oppressive, unjust or indifferent manner. Racism, like any other sin, is expressed in thoughts and actions by an individual. But as individuals act together, racism can be expressed by a group or institution.

Because we are bombarded by views of race and racism from places other than the Bible, it is often difficult to ascertain what is God’s view of racism and why it is sin. The following section addresses how and why racism is sin. The purpose of this section is to free us from unnecessary guilt, expose us to our past and present sin, and guide us in new obedience.

## **RACISM IS SIN.**

As stated above, racism is sinful. It involves a failure to love as Christ has loved. The additional biblical and theological principles that follow may be cited to further highlight the sinfulness of racism.

### **Racism Denies the Gospel.**

In his letter to the Galatians, Paul describes his rebuke to Peter for acting on the basis of cultural custom, which the Gospel had transcended. By responding on the basis of cultural custom, Peter’s conduct communicated that he found his justification in the law, rather than in the Gospel:

<sup>Gal 2:11</sup> When Peter came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he was clearly in the wrong. <sup>Gal 2:12</sup> Before certain men came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But when they arrived, he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group.

<sup>Gal 2:13</sup> The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy, so that by their hypocrisy even Barnabas was led astray.

<sup>Gal 2:14</sup> When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the Gospel, I said to Peter in front of them all, “You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs?”

<sup>Gal 2:15</sup> “We who are Jews by birth and not ‘Gentile sinners’

Gal 2:16 know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified.

### **Racism is Idolatry.**

*The first commandment—You shall have no other gods before me.* Racism grounds the identity and security of human life not in the God who alone is our Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier, but in self – a creature – and therefore an idol.

### **Racism is Murder.**

*The sixth commandment—You shall not kill.* Hating your brother is a violation of the commandment, as is vile mockery of another and unexpressed hateful heart attitudes. The sixth commandment requires “charitable thoughts, love, compassion, meekness, gentleness, kindness; peaceable, mild and courteous speeches and behavior; forbearance, readiness to be reconciled, patient bearing and forgiving of injuries, and requiting good for evil;” the sixth commandment forbids “sinful anger, hatred, envy, desire of revenge . . . provoking words, oppression . . . striking, wounding, and whatsoever else tends to the destruction of the life of any.” *WLC* (Q. 135 & 136). The sixth commandment is not only violated in the extremes of anger, hatred, or desire for revenge, but also violated in the omission of charitable thoughts, love, compassion, the unwillingness to be reconciled and the failure to forgive injuries—to any or all of which we may easily succumb to based on how we view persons of another race.

“We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love remains in death. Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life in him.” (I John 3:14-15).

“You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.’ But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, ‘Raca,’ is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, ‘You fool!’ will be in danger of the fire of hell.” (Matthew 5:21-22).

### **Racism is Lying.**

*The ninth commandment—You shall not bear false witness.* The ninth commandment requires the maintaining and promoting of truth between man and man, and of our own and our neighbor’s good name, especially in witness bearing. The ninth commandment forbids whatsoever is prejudicial to truth, or injurious to our own or our neighbor’s good name. (*WSC* Q. 77 & 78)

Lev 19:16 “ ‘Do not go about spreading slander among your people. Do not do anything that endangers your neighbor’s life. I am the LORD.

Zec 8:16 These are the things you are to do: Speak the truth to each other, and render true and sound judgment in your courts;

## **THEOLOGICAL PROBLEMS OF RACISM**

**Racism reflects a corrupt view of the doctrines of Creation and Providence.** “So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. God blessed them and said to them, ‘Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground’” (Gen. 1:27ff). God “made from one, every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed times, and the boundaries of their habitation” (Acts 17:26). Since all human beings are descendants of Adam and Noah, there is only one human race; thus when one race is considered superior to another, it denies the doctrine of creation, in which all races have a common origin. Further, God’s providential care does not distinguish among people based on race.

**Racism minimizes the doctrine of the Fall.** “There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom 3:22-3).

**Racism is a rejection of the doctrine of Redemption.** “But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility” (Ephesians 2:13-16). Since all races originated from the first Adam, but despite that common origin became alienated from one another because of sin, the redeemed of all races are reunited in the Second Adam.

**Racism corrupts the doctrine of Consummation.** “And they sang a new song: ‘You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth’” (Revelation 5:9-10). Every race is present at the consummation of human history.

## **RACISM DISTINGUISHED FROM LEGITIMATE ASSOCIATION BASED ON NATURAL AFFINITIES**

There are natural associations of people, along homogeneous lines, which are not necessarily wrong. The test of such an association’s biblical propriety comes as Christians honestly and rigorously question its purpose, its consequences, and the attitude with which it is pursued. Is my association in any way out of conformity to God’s desire? For instance, is there overt, or even subtle, enforcement of racial segregation; i.e., is there a choice in whether one is associated with a group or segregated from it? Associating with your own ethnicity is not wrong. As John Franklin remarks, “There is nothing inherently wrong with being aware of color as long as it is seen as making distinctions in a pleasant, superficial, and unimportant manner. It is only when character is attached to color, when ability is measured by color, when privilege is tied to color, and a whole galaxy of factors that spell the difference between success and failure in our society are tied to color—it is only when such considerations are attached to color that it becomes a deadly, dreadful, denigrating factor among us all” (John Hope Franklin, *The Color Line*, 72-73).

Natural affinities of background, culture, and language are often powerful vehicles for the transfer of the Gospel and for unity in worship. These affinities are not inherently evil and may legitimately create much congregational homogeneity in locales where there is little racial or social diversity. However, such affinities become barriers to the Gospel mission and testimony of the church when the desire to associate only with like persons becomes justification for the active or passive exclusion or segregation of persons from different backgrounds or for the devaluing of their contribution to the body of Christ. Formally or informally segregating persons from position or membership in any gathered body of Christ on the basis of race, national origin, color, or social status is contrary to the Gospel (Eph. 2:13-16; James 2:1-9). In contrast, when the gathered people of God reflect the power of the Gospel to transform all cultures and unite all peoples in the worship of their Creator and Savior, then the Gospel is powerfully represented and the Lord is greatly glorified. Those who find themselves placed in contexts of little racial or social diversity are called to discern ways to respond to this cross-cultural Gospel calling as are those who find themselves in contexts of diversity.

While establishing groups based on natural affinities is not always wrong, it should be undertaken with great care. This approach is the basis of the homogeneous principle of church growth, which has been a significant principle in the church growth literature of recent decades. But could it be that planning for the growth of the church along natural affinity lines has become an obstacle to the supernatural work of the Spirit that would show a watching world the power of the Gospel? Francis Schaeffer argued that the final and conclusive argument for the truthfulness of the Christian faith is “observable oneness among true Christians” (*The Great Evangelical Disaster*, 170-171). Surely there is no greater or more conclusive argument for the truthfulness and power of the Christian faith than observable oneness among true Christians across the lines of race. This is a oneness that is not natural and it is for this very reason a powerful demonstration of the truth of the Gospel. *Such an approach might not seem efficient but it would be effective in attaining the goal of demonstrating a Gospel that unites people across the dividing lines of race.*

### **AS GOD’S PEOPLE, HOW SHOULD WE RESPOND?**

How should God’s grace, given to us by the power of the Spirit through the Gospel, be evidenced in our lives by addressing the sins of racism? Through the Spirit, Peter provides a framework within which to address these issues practically, in speaking of the people of God as a new people, priesthood and nation, called out of darkness by His mercy. Since we are one people of God, we should not allow racial differences to divide us. While this is a spiritual reality and will be seen in its complete manifestation only in heaven, we are called to seek as full a unity of God’s people as possible in this age:

<sup>1Pe 2:9</sup> But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. <sup>1Pe 2:10</sup> Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

### **God calls us to prayer.**

We respond first with prayer because the challenges we face in living as God’s people are spiritual challenges. The power of Christ – alone – will bring triumph over sin and will bring holy living. In particular, unity in the church is brought about by the Holy Spirit. God calls us

to pray that the Holy Spirit will break down barriers that separate us from one another and create the unity that ought to be exhibited within the body of Christ, that Christ will defeat the kingdom of Satan, that progress in reconciliation among Christians may be achieved in our generation as never before.

**God calls us to self-examination.**

God's Word brings conviction to all of us:

Mt 7:1 "Do not judge, or you too will be judged.

Mt 7:2 For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.

Mt 7:3 "Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye?

Mt 7:4 How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye?

Mt 7:5 You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.

All of us, by virtue of our fallen nature, have some elements of racism in our heart. Whether or not we judge people based on race as such, each of us is guilty of judging particular individuals or groups of people based on characteristics that are natural and which they are not able to change, or based on preconceived notions of the behavior of their particular group. What is more superficial than skin? The Lord calls us to judge only by righteous judgment, to examine our attitudes, our prejudices, our stereotypes. The Lord calls us to repent of such sin; to turn from it and to treat all persons with justice, mercy, and love.

The doctrine of grace is great because it enables us to be honest with ourselves before the Lord and to seek His loving correction so that, motivated by forgiveness rather than guilt, we may be more like Christ. Right motivation comes from knowing Christ as our Savior and seeking to do His will out of love for Him. God calls us to confess to Him our sins of commission and omission, even the thoughtless jest and the unchallenged racial slur.

**God calls us to repent of the sins of our history.**

Both the Northern and Southern Presbyterian traditions, out of which most of the founding congregations of the PCA came, allowed extensive propagation of error and confusion on the matter of race. Through both verbal and written statements these errors were freely presented not only as pragmatic realities, but also as sanctioned by Scripture: that certain races are inherently inferior to others; that slavery is justified; and that segregation based on race is justified, even if forced by law or institutionalized. The Southern Presbyterian tradition, in particular, publicly promulgated views of this nature to such an extent that they are inseparably identified with the teaching of the Presbyterian Church in the minds of many. Thus the Presbyterian Church failed to stand for biblical truth in these matters. Even where the official positions of the church did not reflect racist views, the silence of many in the church allowed the free expression of racist sentiments that were then perceived as the official position of the church.

One of the express motivations for the founding of the PCA was a desire to be the continuing Presbyterian Church. The founders of the PCA sought to establish a church in continuity with past biblical Presbyterianism, the distinctives of which were being eroded by non-

biblical and even anti-biblical liberal theology. PCA founding leaders articulated the entirely positive and biblical motivations of preserving the inerrancy of Scripture, reaffirming the reformed system of doctrine and moving ahead boldly to fulfill the Great Commission. Since we are a product of this expressed intention to be the continuing Presbyterian Church, it is crucial that we repent of those teachings and actions in our history that are sinful, make a clear break from them and establish a new beginning in obedience, by God's grace. A number of biblical texts present examples of such repentance.

Daniel addressed not only his own sins and those of his people, but also the sins of his fathers in prayer to God:

<sup>Da 9:4</sup> I prayed to the LORD my God and confessed: "O Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with all who love him and obey his commands,  
<sup>Da 9:5</sup> we have sinned and done wrong. We have been wicked and have rebelled; we have turned away from your commands and laws. <sup>Da 9:6</sup> We have not listened to your servants the prophets, who spoke in your name to our kings, our princes and our fathers, and to all the people of the land. <sup>Da 9:7</sup> "Lord, you are righteous, but this day we are covered with shame—the men of Judah and people of Jerusalem and all Israel, both near and far, in all the countries where you have scattered us because of our unfaithfulness to you.

<sup>Da 9:8</sup> O LORD, we and our kings, our princes and our fathers are covered with shame because we have sinned against you. <sup>Da 9:9</sup> The Lord our God is merciful and forgiving, even though we have rebelled against him; <sup>Da 9:10</sup> we have not obeyed the LORD our God or kept the laws he gave us through his servants the prophets. <sup>Da 9:11</sup> All Israel has transgressed your law and turned away, refusing to obey you. "Therefore the curses and sworn judgments written in the Law of Moses, the servant of God, have been poured out on us, because we have sinned against you. <sup>Da 9:12</sup> You have fulfilled the words spoken against us and against our rulers by bringing upon us great disaster. Under the whole heaven nothing has ever been done like what has been done to Jerusalem. <sup>Da 9:13</sup> Just as it is written in the Law of Moses, all this disaster has come upon us, yet we have not sought the favor of the LORD our God by turning from our sins and giving attention to your truth. <sup>Da 9:14</sup> The LORD did not hesitate to bring the disaster upon us, for the LORD our God is righteous in everything he does; yet we have not obeyed him. <sup>Da 9:15</sup> "Now, O Lord our God, who brought your people out of Egypt with a mighty hand and who made for yourself a name that endures to this day, we have sinned, we have done wrong.

<sup>Da 9:16</sup> O Lord, in keeping with all your righteous acts, turn away your anger and your wrath from Jerusalem, your city, your holy hill. Our sins and the iniquities of our fathers have made Jerusalem and your people an object of scorn to all those around us. <sup>Da 9:17</sup> "Now, our God, hear the prayers and petitions of your servant. For your sake, O Lord, look with favor on your desolate sanctuary. <sup>Da 9:18</sup> Give ear, O God, and hear; open your eyes and see the desolation of the city that bears your Name. We do not make requests of you because we are righteous, but because of your great mercy. <sup>Da 9:19</sup> O Lord, listen! O Lord, forgive! O Lord, hear and act! For your sake, O my God, do not delay, because your city and your people bear your Name."

Similarly, Ezra confessed past and present national sins:

<sup>Ezr 9:5</sup> Then, at the evening sacrifice, I rose from my self-abasement, with my tunic and cloak torn, and fell on my knees with my hands spread out to the LORD my God <sup>Ezr 9:6</sup> and prayed: “O my God, I am too ashamed and disgraced to lift up my face to you, my God, because our sins are higher than our heads and our guilt has reached to the heavens.

<sup>Ezr 9:7</sup> From the days of our forefathers until now, our guilt has been great. Because of our sins, we and our kings and our priests have been subjected to the sword and captivity, to pillage and humiliation at the hand of foreign kings, as it is today. <sup>Ezr 9:8</sup> “But now, for a brief moment, the LORD our God has been gracious in leaving us a remnant and giving us a firm place in his sanctuary, and so our God gives light to our eyes and a little relief in our bondage.

Nehemiah, in the same manner, confessed the past national sins:

<sup>Ne 9:5</sup> And the Levites—Jeshua, Kadmiel, Bani, Hashabneiah, Sherebiah, Hodiah, Shebaniah and Pethahiah—said: “Stand up and praise the LORD your God, who is from everlasting to everlasting. Blessed be your glorious name, and may it be exalted above all blessing and praise.

<sup>Ne 9:33</sup> In all that has happened to us, you have been just; you have acted faithfully, while we did wrong. <sup>Ne 9:34</sup> Our kings, our leaders, our priests and our fathers did not follow your law; they did not pay attention to your commands or the warnings you gave them. <sup>Ne 9:35</sup> Even while they were in their kingdom, enjoying your great goodness to them in the spacious and fertile land you gave them, they did not serve you or turn from their evil ways.

Furthermore, the words of our Lord with regard to the sins of our fathers are particularly sobering and convicting:

<sup>Lk 11:46</sup> Jesus replied, “And you experts in the law, woe to you, because you load people down with burdens they can hardly carry, and you yourselves will not lift one finger to help them. <sup>Lk 11:47</sup> “Woe to you, because you build tombs for the prophets, and it was your forefathers who killed them. <sup>Lk 11:48</sup> So you testify that you approve of what your forefathers did; they killed the prophets, and you build their tombs. <sup>Lk 11:49</sup> Because of this, God in his wisdom said, ‘I will send them prophets and apostles, some of whom they will kill and others they will persecute.’ <sup>Lk 11:50</sup> Therefore this generation will be held responsible for the blood of all the prophets that has been shed since the beginning of the world, <sup>Lk 11:51</sup> from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who was killed between the altar and the sanctuary. Yes, I tell you, this generation will be held responsible for it all.

Just as we celebrate those aspects of our history of which we are proud, we must also acknowledge with sadness and turn from those practices in our history that do not reflect biblical standards. We must profess, acknowledge and confess before God, before one another, and before the watching world, that the tolerance of chattel slavery, forced or institutional segregation based on race, and declarations of the inferiority of certain races, such as were practiced and supported by many voices in the Presbyterian tradition, were wrong and cannot be accepted within our ranks today.

For years we have left unattended in our midst the vestiges of racism, and the reality of its raw presence within corners of our denomination. We have been comfortable to let our brothers and sisters of races other than Caucasian quietly acquiesce to our unwillingness to make changes on their behalf, in contrast to Christ's laying down His life for us. We repent of our offenses against our brothers and sisters in Christ. Both as individuals and together as a church, we are compelled by the Gospel to repent of racism in our own hearts and in our actions, and we are compelled to commit ourselves to wrestle against it personally and publicly. We repent of our sins of omission and commission in this area. We confess that we do not have the strength to overcome the power of racism and that we need Christ to be our Rock in this struggle. We confess that we do not know how to be the New Community of God's People, and we confess our inadequacy to reflect the Gospel as it will be expressed in its fullness in Heaven. Yet, notwithstanding our inadequacies, we commit to seeking the leading and empowering of the Holy Spirit, believing in the sufficiency of His sanctifying power to transform us, and we commit ourselves to follow that leading as we, in cooperation with other branches of Christ's universal Church, pledge ourselves to ministry among every nation, tribe, people and language, both in North America, and in all other regions of the world. (For further discussion of practical ministry among the people groups of North America, see the resources listed in the Introduction.)

**God calls us to repent of current racial attitudes and practices that are sinful, and calls us to deeds in keeping with repentance.**

Racism is deeply entrenched in North America. Today, in the United States, there are many proponents, and even entire organizations, devoted to the acceptance of slavery, segregation, and the belief that one race is superior to another. Such views have an impact even within our own church community. We affirm that such practices are abhorrent to the Holy Word of God, are contrary to the proclamation and living out of the Gospel, and cannot be allowed in the church of Jesus Christ. Where segregation is no longer forced by law but has become institutionalized in our society, we are called to live out and apply the Gospel, so that people are treated as equals without regard to their race. This means not only addressing wrong doing, but also seeking racial reconciliation, acting justly and loving mercy as we walk humbly with our God and with one another (Micah 6:8). In North America today, there is a great influx of new immigrants from other regions of the world. The call to biblical witness among all peoples without prejudice or favoritism applies to our treatment of new immigrants. In our fallen human condition, it is difficult to avoid generalizations about people of a different race, whether based on our firsthand experience or the reported experience of others. God calls us to minister among the strangers within our gates; God calls us to minister among our neighbors without regard to their racial background.

**God calls us to seek racial reconciliation, loving our neighbor as ourselves.**

Racism can prompt sins of omission, that is, the failure to stand for what is just and merciful in the treatment of others. Racism can also be manifested in active and passive forms. Some examples:

- Failure to evangelize people of other cultures and races within our communities and within the areas covered by our regional church, the presbytery.
- Exclusion or discouragement on the basis of race of any person from membership, privilege or responsibility, including leadership, in any church, or in the presbytery or General Assembly.

- Discrimination, based on race, against a Christian participant in worship services or other services or functions of the church.
- Disassociation with other branches of Christ's Church due to differences in racial composition.
- Hiring based on matching particular races with particular jobs.
- Failure to apply God's Word to racial issues, allowing the perpetuation of racist attitudes and practices within the church.

Some examples of positive actions that contribute to racial reconciliation:

- Seasons of prayer and repentance.
- Examination of the patterns, language, and culture within our churches that erect barriers to other races.
- Teaching in our services and classes concerning racism and callings for repentance in this regard.
- Reading publications by authors of other races.
- Development of individual friendships across racial lines.
- Ministry among new residents who are settling into a community and learning the American culture and language, including studying the cultures and languages of those living among us.
- Intentional efforts to raise up church leaders and share leadership in the church across racial and cultural lines.
- Cross-cultural ministries that include a variety of forms, including heterogeneous congregations.
- A return to ministry and church planting in our cities and other communities in which racial division and conflict is often most evident, bringing the healing power of the Gospel in Word and deed.

God calls us not to overlook these practices, but rather conscientiously to call one another to greater faithfulness to His Word.

**God calls us to a practical ministry that is consistent with our understanding of the Gospel and our ecclesiology.**

In the Presbyterian tradition, we seek properly to represent Christ's Body by seeking rightly to administer the Word, sacraments and discipline. In the PCA, we believe that we have a biblical formulation of the Gospel and sound methods of evangelism and discipleship, and are therefore equipped to carry out the Great Commission, which is a call to make disciples of all people groups. Sometimes it is asserted that PCA distinctives will hinder progress in ministry among certain ethnic or socio-economic groups; however, if our distinctives are biblical, then we are well equipped and called to minister among all people groups.

The 31<sup>st</sup> General Assembly included in response to Overture 17 (p. 654) a call to “. . . the enhancement of existing ministries of mercy, across all social, racial, and economic boundaries, to the glory of God.” We reaffirm that call in this Pastoral Letter, and for guidance in practical ministry, we again refer to the resources listed in the Introduction.

**God calls us to minister among the poor.**

Ministry among the poor is closely related to the issue of racism, because of the frequent association of poverty with certain racial groups. Both Old and New Testament passages

present God's call to minister among the poor within the church and outside the church (Leviticus 19:10; Galatians 6:10). At the same time, great care should be taken – even in our motivation to show God's mercy and help those in need – that we avoid stereotyping people of any race, automatically associating certain races and poverty in our own hearts and actions.

**God calls us to develop cross-cultural relationships and ministries and to plant churches among the people groups of North America as well as the other regions of the world.**

Cross-cultural ministry is a foundational commitment of the PCA, most often expressed in the call to missions in other regions outside of North America. God calls us to cooperate with others in His Church as well as to minister directly among all the races and cultures of North America as well. Often the need of the rest of the world is emphasized more than the need in North America because of the perceived relative absence of the Gospel in other regions of the world. In truth, however, geographical location is not the only, or even the primary, consideration in determining where cross-cultural ministry is to occur. In the case of peoples in North America, while there might be disparities of historical Gospel presence among different cultures, there is the ongoing need for cross-cultural Gospel ministry among all peoples, irrespective of ethnicity, language, culture or race.

**CONCLUSION**

Ps 139:23 Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts.  
Ps 139:24 See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

1Jn 3:11 This is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another.  
1Jn 3:18 Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.

As we conclude, let us be reminded again of the title of this Pastoral Letter, *The Gospel and Race*. And let us also be reminded of the finished work of Jesus Christ Himself on our behalf, through the words of the Apostle Paul:

Ro 3:21 But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify.  
Ro 3:22 This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference,  
Ro 3:23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,  
Ro 3:24 and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.  
Ro 3:25 God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood.

This pastoral letter has addressed the issues of biblical and theological foundations; calls to prayer, self-examination and repentance; and practical outworkings of ministry. May it be our prayer that the Lord will graciously work in our hearts and lives by His Spirit, bringing us to self-examination, repentance and full commitment to His leading through His Holy Word, so that our lives will increasingly reflect these biblical truths: that all

persons are created in His image, and that all who belong to the Body of Christ are His sons and daughters and members of one family, with no room for racial discrimination. May it be our prayer that the Spirit will work in great power through the Gospel, so that we who have been reconciled to God through Christ will be reconciled to one another through Christ, and built up into one holy household for His praise.

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With the exception of published works, sources used in this Pastoral Letter are not noted. The draft of the Pastoral Letter presented to the 32<sup>nd</sup> General Assembly was approved by the Committee on Mission to North America at its March 2004 stated meeting. Those contributing to MNA Committee process include not only the formally elected Committee members, but also Co-opted and Advisory members, as listed below.

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## ATTACHMENTS TO PASTORAL LETTER ON RACISM

### From the 30<sup>th</sup> General Assembly Minutes:

30-53 Committee of Commissioners on Bills and Overtures (continued)

The Chairman led the Assembly in prayer and returned to the report. [See also 30-50, p. 212.]

The Assembly paused for prayer for a commissioner in need of medical care. Recommendations 7-11, 13 (in accordance with *RAO* 18), and 14-21 were adopted.

14. That Overture 20 from Nashville Presbytery (“Racial Reconciliation”) be answered by the adoption of the following statement. *Adopted*

Whereas, the heinous sins attendant with unbiblical forms of servitude—including oppression, racism, exploitation, manstealing, and chattel slavery—stand in opposition to the Gospel; and,

Whereas, the effects of these sins have created and continue to create barriers between brothers and sisters of different races and/or economic spheres; and

Whereas, the aftereffects of these sins continue to be felt in the economic, cultural, and social affairs of the communities in which we live and minister;

We therefore confess our involvement in these sins. As a people, both we and our fathers, have failed to keep the commandments, the statutes, and the laws God has commanded. We therefore publicly repent of our pride, our complacency, and our complicity. Furthermore, we seek the forgiveness of our brothers and sisters for the reticence of our hearts that have constrained us from acting swiftly in this matter.

We will strive, in a manner consistent with the Gospel imperatives, for the encouragement of racial reconciliation, the establishment of urban and minority congregations, and the enhancement of existing ministries of mercy in our cities, among the poor, and across all social, racial, and economic boundaries, to the glory of God. Amen.

Note:

The Presbyterian Church in America participated in addressing the question of racial reconciliation as early as 1977, through her delegation to the NAPARC conference on race relations, and the resulting statement adopted.

That statement achieved a “consensus on a number of crucial issues” and it began by confessing serious inadequacies with respect to NAPARC member churches concerning race relations in the church:

We are convinced that we, as Reformed Christians, have failed to speak and act boldly in the area of race relations. Our denominational profiles reveal patterns of ethnic and racial homogeneity. We believe that this situation fails to give adequate expression to the saving purposes of our sovereign God, whose covenant extends to all peoples and races.

We are convinced that our record in this crucial area is one of racial brokenness and disobedience. In such a situation the credibility of our Reformed witness, piety and doctrinal confession is at stake. We have not lived out the implications of that biblical and confessional heritage which we hold in common with each other, with its emphasis on

the sovereignty and freedom of grace, on the absence of human merit in gaining salvation, and on the responsibility to subject all of life to the Lordship of Christ.

The statement continued with a summary of faithful biblical teaching adapted to address the defects confessed above:

Although there are marked distinctions and even divisions among men, including those of race, mankind, according to the teaching of the Bible, has a single origin. Later distinctions and divisions are indeed significant and may not simply be pushed aside; nevertheless, the Bible clearly teaches that the Gospel is universal in its offer and its call. All men are created in the image of God and have fallen into sin, and are in need of redemption. All those who are in Christ are united together with Him as their Head in a new humanity, in which the distinctions and divisions that otherwise separate men are transcended in a new unity. True, the distinctions mentioned in the Bible as having been overcome in Christ are not primarily those of race, nor does the Bible think along lines that correspond with the distinctions of race as we understand them today; nevertheless, racial distinctions and divisions as we know and understand them today certainly fall under those things that have been transcended in Christ. How, then, is the new unity in Christ to be expressed in the communion of the church today as it bears on the question of race?

The description of God's people in I Peter 2:9, 10, as a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, reveals the church's visible oneness as the community of those separated into the Lord. It is a oneness on the order of the racial, cultic, and national unity of Israel (Exodus 19:6), and it has as its purpose the declaration of the wonderful works of God. Therefore, the church's identity transcends and makes of secondary importance the racial, national and cultic identities of the world.

We see in Revelation 7:9, 10, the chosen race worshiping the Lamb in heaven. They come from different backgrounds, yet worship with one voice. Is not the unity of our worship here on earth to be a copy of that which takes place within the heavenly sanctuary? Should not all those washed in the blood of the Lamb joyously worship together?

In the light of such scriptural teaching, the statement continued in the acknowledgement of sin on the part of the member churches:

In repentance we acknowledge and confess that we have failed effectively to recognize the full humanity of other races and the similarity of their needs, desires, and hopes to ours; and thus we have failed to love our neighbor as ourselves... Within the church, our members have exhibited such attitudes and actions as discourage membership or participation by minority groups... Our churches have not been free from such formal actions as discourage membership or participation by minority groups. They have been guilty of a lack of positive action concerning mission to ethnic groups in their own neighborhoods and to ethnic groups at large. They have practiced a kind of cultural exclusivism, thinking of the church as "our church" rather than Christ's. This involves the sins of pride and idolatry.

Yet the statement was able to acknowledge the work of grace evident in this matter, particularly in the seminaries that serve the PCA:

We commend...Westminster Theological Seminary for its ministerial institute, which intends to assist inner-city pastors in their continued training in ministry and Covenant Theological Seminary for its Urban Ministers' Institute....

The statement concluded with a number of exhortations, among which are included:

We encourage congregations to reach out to the entire community around them.

We encourage congregations to rise to meet the challenge of racial diversity in changing neighborhoods.

We encourage members of our congregations to remain in those communities where there are racially changing patterns.

We acknowledge that in order to change our unbiblical profile, we should urge churches in NAPARC to give priority to a vigorous pursuit of evangelism and church planting in racially, economically, and ethnically diverse communities....

In reaffirming the great commission, we recommend ...that cross-cultural evangelism be encouraged in our churches through preaching, modeling, and discipling, through the elders and pastors, beginning with the use of our covenant families and homes, and house-to-house neighborhood outreach.

OVERTURE 20 from Nashville Presbytery  
"Racial Reconciliation"

(to B&O)

Whereas, the Scriptures portray a covenantal pattern of both celebration of our rich heritage and repentance for the sins of our fathers; and, Whereas, our nation has been blessed even as we have repeatedly addressed iniquity, redressed injustice, and assessed restitution for our inconsistent application of the ideals of truth and freedom; and,

Whereas, the heinous sins attendant with unbiblical forms of servitude—including oppression, racism, exploitation, manstealing, and chattel slavery—remain among the defining features of our national history; and,

Whereas, the issues surrounding that part of our history continue to shape our national life, even creating barriers between brothers and sisters of different races and/or economic spheres from enjoying unencumbered Christian fellowship with one another; and,

Whereas, the aftereffects of that part of our history continue to be felt in the economic, cultural, and social affairs of the communities in which we live and minister;

We therefore confess our covenantal involvement in these national sins. As a people, both we and our fathers have failed to keep the commandments, the statutes, and the laws our God has commanded. We therefore publicly repent of our pride, our complacency, and our complicity. Furthermore, we seek the forgiveness of our brothers and sisters for the reticence of our hearts, which has constrained us from acting swiftly in this matter.

As a people, we pledge to work hard, in a manner consistent with the Gospel imperatives, for the encouragement of racial reconciliation, the establishment of urban and minority congregations, and the enhancement of existing ministries of mercy in our cities, among the poor, and across all social, racial, and economic boundaries, to the glory of God. Amen.

From the 31<sup>st</sup> General Assembly Minutes:

31-53 Partial Report of the Committee of Commissioners on Bills and Overtures [continued from 31-18]

TE Don Clements, Chairman, read 2 Timothy 2:14, led the Assembly in prayer and presented the report [See also 31-18, p. 67 and text and action at 31-57, p. 168.] ... A minority report for Recommendation 8 was heard and defeated. Recommendation 8 was adopted. The Chairman closed in prayer.

8. That Overture 17 from the Nashville Presbytery (“Appoint Ad Interim Committee on Racism” be answered in the affirmative as amended.

*Adopted*  
[See 31-53, p. 157.]

OVERTURE 17 from Nashville Presbytery  
“Appoint Ad Interim Committee on Racism”

(to B&O, AC)

Whereas, the Thirtieth General Assembly overwhelmingly adopted a statement on racism; and,

Whereas, the adoption of this statement has exposed some divisions within the PCA regarding the issue of racism; and,

Whereas, those issues, apart from the brief statement adopted by the Thirtieth General Assembly (and earlier statements adopted by the Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod prior to its being received by the PCA) have never been directly addressed by the PCA; and,

Whereas, the *Book of Church Order (BCO)* Preface under Preliminary Principles 4 states that Godliness is founded on truth and a test of truth is its power to promote holiness according to our Savior’s rule, “By their fruits ye shall know them” (Matthew 7:20); and,

Whereas, there is an inseparable connection between faith and practice, truth and duty; otherwise, it would be of no consequence either to discover truth or to embrace it; and,

Whereas, the connections of faith and practice, truth and duty have been historically and currently severely compromised; and,

Whereas, the confusion over that compromise continues even to the degree that the Gospel is in jeopardy, understanding that racism is a clear contradiction to the Gospel in that it stakes our identity as the Church on something other than the truth of Scripture (Gal. 3.26-29; Eph. 2.14-18; Col. 3.11); and,

Whereas, we believe sin has brought division between the races and that God’s goal is the healing of these divisions, in anticipation of that great day when there will be a multitude that no one can count, from every nation, tribe, people, and language standing before the throne in front of the Lamb crying out “Salvation belongs to our God, Who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb” (Rev. 7.9-10); and

Whereas, we give thanks for the growing ethnic and racial diversity in our midst and desire to see it increase to the glory of God; and,

Whereas, a pastoral letter can be a helpful way of addressing an issue of complexity and emotion; and

Whereas, it would also provide practical advice and instruction to sessions and presbyteries for recognizing and redressing issues related to the Gospel and race;

~~Therefore be it resolved, that the Thirty First General Assembly of the PCA appoint an ad interim committee to write a Pastoral Letter designed to set forth the truth of our position on the issue of the Gospel and race (“RAO” 8 1). This letter would be in a manner consistent with the Gospel imperatives, for the encouragement of racial reconciliation, the establishment of urban and minority congregations, and the enhancement of existing ministries of mercy in our cities, among the poor, and across all social, racial, and economic boundaries, to the glory of God.~~

~~Be it further resolved, that the moderator appoint seven members who would represent a breadth of racial and regional backgrounds in the task in order to ensure that it is ultimately a product of grassroots leadership (“RAO” 8 3).~~

~~The Ad Interim Committee on the Gospel and Race would be funded by designated gifts sent to the Administrative Committee of the General Assembly (“RAO” 8 2).~~

We therefore request the Thirty-First General Assembly of the PCA to assign to MNA the task of drafting a proposed Pastoral Letter designed to set forth the truth of our position on the issue of the Gospel and race. This letter would be in a manner consistent with the Gospel imperatives for the encouragement of racial reconciliation and Gospel outreach to people of every “tribe and tongue and people and nation” (Rev 5.9 NKJV), and the enhancement of existing ministries of mercy, across all social, racial, and economic boundaries, to the glory of God.

We further request that MNA take full responsibility for the funding of this project and that MNA include representatives from a breadth of racial and regional backgrounds in the task in order to ensure that it is ultimately a product of grassroots leadership.

**Mission to North America Response to Overture 19 (approved by the 31<sup>st</sup> General Assembly–2003):**

Recommended Answer to the Overture:

Whereas, God promised that all nations (Hebrew: gowy) of the earth will be blessed through His covenant with His people Israel (Genesis 17:1-7; 18:18; Psalm 2:6-8; Isaiah 2:2-5; 49:6);

Whereas the Great Commission commands that it is the responsibility of the covenant community to disciple, baptize and, teach all nations, with the result of their following the Lord (Mathew 28:18-20);

Whereas the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost confirmed that the promises of God are for every people group (Greek: ethnos), the early church addressed the challenges resulting from the Church including people of various races and ethnic backgrounds, and the Revelation of the Sprit to the Apostle John points us forward to an assembly in heaven composed of every nation, tribe, people and language (Acts 2:1-6; 6:1-7; 13:46-49; 13:46-49; 15:12-19; Revelation 5:6-10; 7:9-10);

Whereas, the United States and Canada, historically composed of many people groups, are experiencing ever greater immigration from an increasing diversity of people groups;

Whereas, Chesapeake Presbytery overtured the 30<sup>th</sup> General Assembly, through Overture 19, to erect a special study committee to:

- 1) Explore the challenges presented to our ministry by the increasing ethnic diversity of our nation,
- 2) Suggest ways our General Assembly Committees, Presbyteries, and churches might meet these challenges,
- 3) Offer a statement of biblical values and commitments declaring to God, to the world, and to ourselves our convictions in these matters;

Whereas, the Presbyterian Church in America at the 30<sup>th</sup> General Assembly has expressed our repentance for the barriers created by racism, and its commitment to strive to remove them;

Whereas the 30<sup>th</sup> General Assembly instructed the MNA-GA staff to respond to Overture 19;

Therefore, the 31<sup>st</sup> General Assembly answers Overture 19 of the 30<sup>th</sup> General Assembly as follows:

That the General Assembly reaffirms that obedience to the Scriptures and the Great Commission includes proclaiming the Gospel in Word and deed among many people groups (gowy/ethnos) of North America, as well as to the uttermost parts of the earth.

That the General Assembly reaffirms our calling to be the fragrance of Christ, extending everywhere and among all people groups in our communities our evidence/witness in word and deed that Jesus Christ is Lord and the Kingdom of heaven has come.

That the General Assembly urges presbyteries and churches to give intentionally high priority to developing churches and ministries that are culturally sensitive, ministering among all people groups (gowy/ethnos) within our communities and spheres of influence in North America.

That the General Assembly calls the presbyteries, churches and members of the PCA to special focused prayer, vision and strategic steps for the fulfillment of the Great Commission among all people groups (gowy/ethnos) in North America.

That the General Assembly instructs the committees and agencies of the PCA to seek specific ways in which to increase their leadership and coordination of resources for a greater equipping of presbyteries and churches for ministry among all people groups (gowy/ethnos) of North America.

Further, that the MNA Working Paper, *Ministering Among the People Groups of North America*, be received as information and commended to the churches of the PCA for guidance in their ministries among the people groups of their respective communities. Additional resources on this subject are available on the MNA website or from the MNA office and are commended to elders, deacons, other church leaders and members.

**The MNA Paper, *Ministering Among the People Groups of North America***, is available upon request from Mission to North America.

**REFERENCES CITED IN  
THE GOSPEL AND RACE: A PASTORAL LETTER**

Note: Permission has been obtained from the publishers to include quotations and references in the Pastoral Letter.

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