



RECONCILIATION: IS THERE ANYTHING TO REPENT OF?

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“Bear Fruits in Keeping with Repentance”

- Luke 3:7-14 English Standard Version (ESV)
- ⁷ He said therefore to the crowds that came out to be baptized by him, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? ⁸ **Bear fruits in keeping with repentance.** And do not begin to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ For I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. ⁹ Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.”
- ¹⁰ And the crowds asked him, **“What then shall we do?”** ¹¹ And he answered them, “Whoever has two tunics^[b] is to share with him who has none, and whoever has food is to do likewise.” ¹² Tax collectors also came to be baptized and said to him, **“Teacher, what shall we do?”** ¹³ And he said to them, “Collect no more than you are authorized to do.” ¹⁴ Soldiers also asked him, **“And we, what shall we do?”** And he said to them, “Do not extort money from anyone by threats or by false accusation, and be content with your wages.”



What did we do?

The PCA and the Civil Rights Movement

- L Nelson Bell, the mentor and father in law to Billy Graham
- B.W. Crouch, a Presbyterian elder from South Carolina
- J. David Simpson, a Mississippian
- W. A. Plecker of Virginia, In charge of the Vital Records of Virginia
- William H. Frazer
- J.E. Flow
- G. T. Gillespie, pastor and President of Belhaven College
- Morton H Smith, Belhaven, and Southern Presbyterian Review
- All is these men above prior to the formation of the PCA in 1973 wrote articles or news columns in defense of segregation using some form of the “distinction and dispersal” interpretation of Genesis 9-11:
 - In essence, the curse of Noah upon Ham (actually on Canaan) meant the God had ordained distinct roles for the races of Noah’s three sons, with Canaan taking the subservient roles to both Shem and Japheth
 - The attempt of the postdiluvian people to unite under one civilization and one tongue was a rebellious act against God’s plan to kept the races distinct. To keep the races “pure”. Thus God dispersed the peoples at the Tower of Babel. Segregation maintains God’s expressed will. Integration is an attempt to thwart this divine plan, and is probably a plot of communism.



1940s and 50s

- Post WWII, the PCUS supported equal treatment of all veterans regardless of race and ethnicity
- 1946: The Synod of Missouri proposed to dissolve its black sector, the Snedecor Memorial Synod "and its constituent presbyteries to eliminate racial discrimination and injustice within our church".
- The PC US General Assembly of 1954 also affirmed the first Brown versus the Board of Education decision.
- Further, eventually the denomination approved the use of civil disobedience to resist unjust laws in 1966.
- In the late 50s a sufficient number of PC US pastors supported integration of Central High School, Little Rock Arkansas. And the Synod of Georgia expressed sorrow for the 1963 bombing of the 16th St. Baptist Church in Birmingham Alabama.



1940s and 1950s

- By contrast many of the more conservative Southern Presbyterians and writers of the *Presbyterian Journal* supported segregation on theological and social grounds. They implicitly assumed white supremacy. They feared miscegenation, i.e. interracial marriage. They argued theologically that God ordained and commanded segregation. To quote Taylor “thus those who espouse Jim Crow upheld divine law and those who thought otherwise were heretical.”
- Many of the same arguments that had supported the 19th-century defenses of slavery were used by the founders of this future denomination.
- The intellectual backdrop was of course the assumption of white supremacy. Rather than being overtly racist, Southern Presbyterians promoted patriotism and American Christian culture as the root cause for maintaining the status quo and upholding the old racial order.



1940s and 1950s

- The Journal gave these theological reasons for segregation.
 - The curse of Noah
 - divine approval of geographical segregation
 - disapproval of miscegenation
 - and Jesus's explicit support for segregation: John 4
- Segregation was part of God's temporal plan because of fall, but heaven would be integrated. The father of Pres. Woodrow Wilson, Joseph Ruggles Wilson and pastor of the First Presbyterian Church of Augusta had made a case like this in defense of slavery from his pulpit years ago.

1940s and 1950s

- Fundamental to the biblical interpretations in the Southern Presbyterian Church was the explicit assumption that the church was supposed to focus on spiritual matters such as doctrine not on worldly concerns such as an attempt to change social order.
- This is in part why Bell, Faulkner, and Flow all criticized the Federal Council of churches later to be known as the National Council of Churches
- From their point of view too much emphasis was put on matters of social, economic and political affairs rather than religious matters or spiritual matters
- Key to this argument according to Journal writers was a justification of Jim Crow. Why? Because they believed that segregation maintained peace, law and order; it was American; it was practical.
- Civil disobedience was dangerous and they fundamentally believe that more laws would not foster racial justice. Segregation maintained the peace.
- This is one of the main criticisms of the methods of the Dr. Martin Luther King and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. They promoted civil disorder, civil disobedience and ultimately race riots.



Morton Smith and the origins of the PCA

1973

- ***How is the Gold Become Dim***, Smith's critique of the decline of the PC US, largely showed how the church moves from the gospel imperatives to more liberal, social scientific and political, humanist approaches to reaching America, including civil rights
- Defenders of the formation of the PCA point to the fact that they were in fact by policy racially inclusive. The PCA never had a segregated presbytery for African-Americans. The PCA only has a Korean presbytery (ies) for linguistic purposes.
- By the 1960s, and with the influence of Billy Graham, the ***Presbyterian Journal*** eventually came to embrace an openness to a more racially diverse church in principle but not in practice.



1960s

- The 1964 Statement on Biblical Principles on Racial Discrimination (The Evangelical Presbyterian Church)
- Affirmed that all “men” “regardless of their color or race, national origin, are to be regarded as our neighbors whom the Bible enjoins us to love as ourselves (Matt. 22:29)...”
- “no difference in Christ” was the main affirmation of this statement based on:
 - Acts 17:26; Luke 10:25-37; Rom. 3:22, 23; Rom. 10:13; Gal. 3:28; and Col. 3:11.



1960s

- The Report on Racial Questions (RPC,ES)
- 1966: the basic thesis of this report is that all men everywhere are to repent for their sins and to trust in Christ and the church has been entrusted with the proclamation of the saving message to all nations.
- This report then addresses seven primary texts which relate to the question of racial justice:
- Acts 17:22- 34, the unity of humanity, the need of all for a Savior
- Genesis 9:18 -27; no proof that Negroes are descendants of Ham; and the curse was on Canaan anyway; even so, the Gospel counters every curse with Christian love
- Genesis 10:32- 11:9: The unity sought in the Tower of Babel is not racial, but linguistic. Pentecost reverses Babel and brings unity of all believers
- Luke 10:25- 37; the Good Samaritan points to love for the alien, the strange, and perhaps to the Negro
- James 2:1-9; a call to love ones' neighbor; to show no favoritism
- I Corinthians 6:15 -17, 7:16, 30; intermarriage is allowed; "only in the Lord".
- I John 4:20- 21, 3:16-19: A man that does not love his brother, cannot claim to love God



The Report on Racial Questions (RPC,ES) 1966

- The Bible maintains the unity of the human race before one Redeemer and judge, Jesus Christ.
- The report gave no final conclusion on the quote have medic curse end of quote as it applies to the Negro. However, if it did apply it is as something to be counteracted by the gospel"
- Conclusion: In "our approach to the Negro whether Christian or unbeliever we do so in the spirit of repentance". Make disciples. And love one another.



1960s

- The Committee on Racial Questions (RPC,ES)
 - 1968: Proposed Statement on Interracial Marriage
 - Based on 1 Cor. 6:15-16; 7:16, 39
 - ...”the only marriage clearly prohibited is that of a believer to an unbeliever.”
 - “The Bible does not teach that interracial marriage of believers is morally wrong.”
 - The children of such unions may face problems of identity in a world of prejudice, but these may be overcome, “...where the commitment to Christ is uppermost and where the church welcomes all who are in covenant relationship to the Lord into its fellowship.”
 - Amazingly, after this report was given, the Committee on Racial Questions was abolished.



1970s

- 1977 delegation of the PCA attends NAPARC on the question of racial reconciliation:
 - They acknowledged that their churches “failed to speak and act boldly in the area of race relations.”
 - They knew that their churches remain racial homogeneous, i.e., almost exclusively all white
 - They affirmed that the true church is a unity of all people created in the image of God who have become, through faith in Jesus, a chosen race worshipping the Lamb; I Peter 2:9, 10, and Rev. 7:9, 10

1977 NAPARC

- In repentance they confessed:
 - They have not recognized the humanity of other races.
 - They have not loved their neighbor
 - They discouraged membership of “others” in their churches
 - They have not take positive action in home missions
 - They have practice a kind of cultural exclusivism



1977 NAPARC

- But they were also happy to report that Westminster Seminary and Covenant Seminary had taken steps to assist inner city pastors through their individual Urban Institutes.
- Final recommendations:
 - Cross-cultural evangelism
 - Churches should remain in changing neighborhoods
 - Preaching, modeling, and discipling
 - Church planting in ethnic diverse communities



2000s

- 2002: Overture 20 from Nashville Presbytery:
 - Racial Reconciliation
 - Publically named the “heinous sins” associated with the history and traditions of southern American Presbyterianism:
 - Oppression
 - Racism
 - Exploitation
 - Man stealing
 - Chattel slavery



2002: Overture 20 from Nashville Presbytery: Racial Reconciliation

- Sins of omission and commission were also acknowledged
 - “our pride, our compliancy, and our complicity
 - Forgiveness of our brothers and sisters was asked, but it was not explicitly address to African American. This was not technically an apology. Or was it?
 - “slighting or offending a brother in Christ” was also acknowledged.



And there were Resolves

- Resolves:
 - Self-examination as to the sins of partiality, favoritism, or prejudice
 - The seeking of forgiveness
 - The PCA should pursue racial reconciliation
 - The continuation of carrying out the Great Commission across economic, cultural, and racial barriers
 - Worshiping together across racial lines
 - Welcome all to membership



Committee on Mission to North America: Pastoral Letter on Racism

- 2004: The Gospel and Race
- One of the purposes of this letter as a pastoral letter was to give definition to racism; offer the theological perspective to racism; and a pastoral response to racism.
- Another goal for the letter was to encourage racial reconciliation and Gospel outreach to people of every tribe and tongue (Rev. 5:9)

Committee on Mission to North America: Pastoral Letter on Racism

- Again, there was a confession and call to repentance for “our pride, our complacency, and our complicity, and to ask forgiveness.
- Again, under the rubric of Gospel imperatives, we pledged to work harder at:
 - Racial reconciliation: 2Cor. 5:14
 - The establishment of urban and minority congregations
 - And the enhancement of existing ministries of mercy to the poor.

Committee on Mission to North America: Pastoral Letter on Racism

- Racism is sin
- Racism denies the Gospel: Gal. 2:11-16
- Racism is idolatry
- Racism is murder: 1 John 3:14-15; Matt. 5:21-22
- Racism is lying: Ex.20; Le. 19:16
- Racism reflects a corrupt view of the doctrine of Creation and Providence
- Racism minimizes the doctrine of the Fall
- Racism is a rejection of the doctrine of Redemption
- Racism corrupts the doctrine of Consummation (Rev. 5:9)

Sins of the Fathers

- Finally, Key to this document was a justification for seeking forgiveness for the sins of past generations:
 - There is a call to prayer
 - To self examination
 - But also a call for repentance for our history
 - Daniel 9
 - Ezra 9
 - And other texts were used to justify the biblical basis for such action, but even today not everyone in the PCA is convinced that one could or should seek such forgiveness as a corporate body.

Today, 2015-16

- Overture 4 from the Missouri Presbytery
- Confession of Sin and the Commitment to Racial and Ethnic Diversity
 - As “continuing” Presbyterians we also inherit the history of past generations
 - In particular while confession and repentance has been sought for slavery, we have not acknowledge the sins of the Fathers (and a few mothers) for our attitudes and roles during the Civil Rights era.

Overture 4

- Most failed to support the CRM.
- Some worked against racial reconciliation in both church and society
- Most barred African Americans from worship services
- Some distorted the Bible to support segregation
- Some participated and defended white supremacist organizations
- Many failed to speak out against state-support segregation or efforts to achieve basic human and civil rights, i.e. voting right for African Americans



So, Is there anything to Repent of?

- We have seen that before, during and after the heyday of the Civil Rights Movement, some significant Christian leaders, pastors, and church members in the PCA:
 - Published defenses of the racial status quo and racial segregation
 - Refused African American Christians entrance to their churches, their camps, their colleges and their seminaries
 - Actively supported and participates in white supremacist “citizens” groups
 - Were silent about police and white mob brutality in the name of “law and order.”
 - Used state and local governmental forces, including the judicial systems to abort justice and civil rights for African Americans and other minorities.
 - Ignored or supported unfair working conditions in the private sector of which white southern employers dominated.