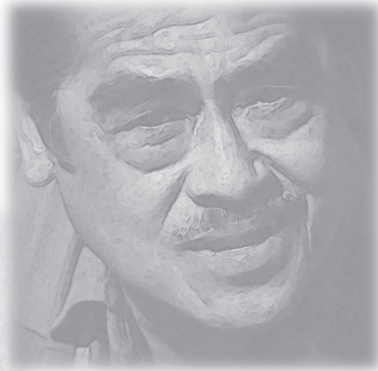




CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH
IN NORTH AMERICA



God's Diverse and Unified Family

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Committee to Articulate Biblical and Theological Principles for the Development of a Racially and Ethnically Diverse Family of God

I. Mandate

At the request of participants in the Multiethnic Conference of 1992, Synod 1992 adopted the following recommendation:

That Synod 1992 appoint a study committee to engage in a comprehensive review and articulation of the biblical and theological principles regarding the development of a racially and ethnically diverse family of God.

The study is to include, but not be limited to, the following:

- a. The biblical basis for the development and use of multiethnic leadership.
- b. An assessment of the present criteria for leadership in the life of the CRCNA.
- c. Biblical guidelines for church-planting principles to be used in the development of a racially and ethnically diverse family of God.

Grounds:

- a. The CRC does not have at the present time a clear biblical and theological basis for its multicultural vision.
- b. The CRC's past and present responses to multiculturalism have been based on sociological factors more than on a well-developed biblical articulation.
- c. Racism negates the redemptive intent of the cross, and the presently growing racial tension must be addressed through Jesus Christ and his Word.
- d. The Multiethnic Conference requests this action.

(Acts of Synod 1992, pp. 720–21)

II. Background

A. *Brief overview of past synodical declarations on race*

1. Synod 1959, in response to declarations of the Reformed Ecumenical Synod of 1958 (Potchefstroom, South Africa), adopted as its own the declarations of that synod (*Acts of Synod 1959*, pp. 82–84).
2. Synod 1968, in the context of unprecedented racial strife in America's cities, called for a day of prayer for racial reconciliation and adopted a declaration affirming the call of the gospel to racial reconciliation (*Acts of Synod 1968*, pp. 18–20).
3. Synods 1969 and 1977 affirmed Resolutions on Race Relations, which were originally adopted by the Reformed Ecumenical Synod of 1968 (Amsterdam) and were subsequently revised at the Reformed Ecumenical Synods of 1972 (Australia) and 1976 (Cape Town, South Africa) (*Acts of Synod 1969*, pp. 50–52; *Acts of Synod 1977*, p. 34).

B. *Brief overview of racial and ethnic diversity in the CRCNA*

From the time of its birth in western Michigan in 1857 and for nearly one hundred years to follow, the congregations and members of the Christian

Reformed Church in North America remained almost exclusively ethnic Dutch American—except for a few German-American congregations. Although the CRC sent its sons and daughters as missionaries to people of other races and cultures in other lands, for the most part, the task of its “home missionaries” was to gather the sheep of Dutch descent who had scattered beyond the reach of already-established congregations in Canada and the United States.

The earliest notable exception was the denomination’s mission efforts to Native Americans, especially the CRC’s sustained outreach to the Navajo and Zuni nations in Arizona and New Mexico, which began with two missionary couples in 1896. Efforts at urban outreach to non-Dutch neighbors in Grand Rapids and Chicago were initiated as early as the 1920s, although the “converted” generally were kept at a distance—worshiping in chapels, often pastored by unordained men and women, and sometimes even steered toward membership in English-speaking congregations from other denominations.

It took an entire century for the church to grant equal status to non-Dutch groups of believers. Prompted by the organization of the believers’ group in Gallup, New Mexico, in late 1956, Synod 1958 advised the classis that this all-Navajo congregation be upgraded from associate-church to full-church status. The 1950s also saw increasing debate over the separate, lesser status of the neighborhood chapels. At this same time, however, the CRC was crossing several other racial and ethnic boundaries as well. Jewish and Chinese ministries were started in Chicago and New York, and African-American pastors were credentialed in Grand Rapids and New York. In the 1960s and following, Hispanic ministries were launched in New Jersey and Florida, Korean churches affiliated in Chicago and Los Angeles, ministries were started among Southeast Asian immigrant groups, and breakthroughs were seen in the formation of multiethnic congregations.

Synod 1959 adopted the Reformed Ecumenical Synod’s twelve-point Declaration on Race, which initially seemed to have little bearing on the life of the denomination. By the mid-1960s, however, as cities burned and national leaders were assassinated, the CRC was forced to deal with race relations head-on. When a group of Black children from Lawndale CRC were denied admission to Timothy Christian School on Chicago’s west side, the matter was brought to synod. The result was the formation of the Race Commission under the auspices of Christian Reformed Home Missions.

Synod 1971 replaced the Race Commission with the Synodical Committee on Race Relations (SCORR). SCORR was provided full-time staff and was mandated to work toward the eradication of racism in the church and in society. Synod also affirmed equality of opportunity for persons from ethnic-minority groups (see note below) and urged the agencies and institutions of the denomination to promote social justice in their policies and practices.

Through broad-based partnership with the churches and agencies, SCORR has consistently supported the development of ethnic-minority leadership in the CRCNA. SCORR also has been unequivocal in its advocacy of racial and ethnic diversity and equality within the CRCNA as a denomination and in relationship to its neighbors—whether in South Africa, south Chicago, or south Grand Rapids.

Note: Though it is recognized that all persons are ethnic, i.e., of a national origin and may be in the minority in certain contexts or environments, in this report the term *ethnic minority* refers to non-Anglo or non-Caucasian persons and groups.

How racially and ethnically diverse is the Christian Reformed Church? At the writing of this report, the total number of ethnic-minority members is estimated at 15,000 persons, or 5 percent of the denomination's 300,000 members (compared to national averages between 20 percent and 25 percent) in approximately 150 ethnic-minority or multiethnic congregations. This 5 percent includes 7,000 members in the fifty or more Korean congregations and an estimated 8,000 members in predominantly African-American, Chinese, Hispanic, Native American, Southeast Asian, and multiethnic congregations.

Much of this growing diversity has been facilitated by Christian Reformed Home Missions—in partnership with growth-oriented churches, classes, and other agencies. By means of locally based *leadership training programs* and *apprenticeship positions* (formerly called Multiethnic Recruitment), scores of ethnic-minority persons are being further trained for ministry leadership in the CRC. Of all the 150 new and emerging churches receiving CRHM funding annually, more than half are predominantly ethnic minority or multiethnic, most of which also are led by ethnic-minority pastors. Home Missions' *ethnic-ministry directors* are key resource persons for their respective churches, leaders, and planning groups as well as for their dominant-culture partners. The ethnic ministry directors oversee the development of contextualized resource and training materials, have a voice in shaping church development policy, and support the development of ethnic-minority leadership on the CRHM board and in other strategic positions.

The CRC's commitment to multiethnic leadership is reflected in other denominational contexts as well. The commitment of the CRCNA Board of Trustees to racial inclusiveness is demonstrated, among other ways, by its appointment of an African-American director of personnel. The Council of the Christian Reformed Churches in Canada has committed itself to addressing the needs and concerns of Indians and Metis in Canada and in recent years also has explored and worked toward ameliorating the causes and impact of racism in Canada with the assistance of a nationwide conference. CRWRC

has shown special concern for issues of race and ethnicity, as illustrated by its hiring of ethnic-minority persons on central and regional staff and by its community-development programming. Faith Alive Christian Resources has worked intentionally to recruit and retain ethnic-minority employees and board members, to improve curriculum sensitivity to multicultural readers, and to obtain ethnic-minority vendors and writers.

Among the denomination's educational institutions, Calvin College employs numerous strategies to encourage multicultural leadership development, including a Minority Concerns Task Force, the president's Multicultural Advisory Council, Minority Fellowship programs for potential new faculty, filling various specialized staff positions with ethnic-minority persons, mentoring services for ethnic-minority students, and a MOSAIC 2000 endowment program to provide special scholarship assistance to ten ethnic-minority students annually. Calvin Theological Seminary regrets that it has yet to recruit its first non-Caucasian faculty appointee. At the same time, it has instituted a number of ethnic-minority training programs, conducts an orientation program for ethnic-minority leaders, has a non-Caucasian student population of about 30 percent, and employs ethnic-minority support staff and special lecturers.

Notwithstanding laudatory goals and the long road the CRC has already traveled in race relations, the process and progress have been slow—there still are many miles to go, on various fronts. For example:

- Ethnic-minority persons working within the agencies, although growing in number, serve primarily in support roles. The ethnic-minority community also remains underrepresented in executive and faculty positions, on denominational boards and committees, and as delegates to synod.
- A disproportionate number of the ethnic-minority pastors receive their training in nontraditional ways, such as through Bible colleges, local training programs, and other seminaries. Credentialing also tends to follow nontraditional paths—admission to ministry on the basis of special need and gifts, by way of doctrinal conversations, or by ordination as evangelists. (The point is not that nontraditional routes should be discouraged but rather that traditional routes should be reexamined in light of the changing needs of a changing church.)
- Generally speaking, ethnic-minority pastors are compensated at lower levels than Anglo pastors. This fact can be explained in part by the smaller size of their congregations (100 members on average, compared to 315 denomination-wide), the comparatively high number of evangelists and bivocational leaders among them, and the economic realities of the communities they serve. At the same time, it is necessary to review extant CRC policies and practices regarding personnel benefits and related matters.

- At all levels of denominational life, persons of color struggle with a sense of *belonging*. Ethnic-minority members from multiethnic or predominantly Anglo congregations often are expected to stretch their comfort zones far more than their ethnic-majority brothers and sisters are expected to do. Leaders of ethnic-minority congregations wonder who made the rules, and they tend to occupy the back seats in many denominational settings. Too many persons from ethnic-minority groups have left the CRC—not because of its Reformed world and life view but because of the lack of full acceptance at the family table.

As the CRC nears the threshold of the third millennium, it is important for us to be increasingly aware of the rapid demographic shifts in North America and of the dramatic reality that in little more than one generation the present majority culture of Canada and the United States will cease to be the majority. This change in the ethnic balance will give us the wonderful opportunity to experience profound new understandings of becoming the new people of God—of becoming a more inclusive church that more faithfully reflects the racial and cultural diversity of the nations among which God has planted us. This is a truly exciting challenge for the CRCNA, which in God’s sovereign grace already is becoming a diverse, multiracial, and multiethnic family of God. It is our prayer that what we slowly and painfully learned in our not-so-distant past will instruct us to go far beyond ourselves and that our struggle to be a sign of the city that is to come will bring much glory to our diversity-loving God.

III. Biblical and theological principles

A. Introduction

Inasmuch as our mandate calls for “a comprehensive review and articulation of the biblical and theological principles regarding the development of a racially and ethnically diverse family of God,” we set forth twelve principles below.

Three introductory comments:

1. We have chosen the framework of creation, fall, and new creation within which to articulate these biblical principles. *New creation* is an inclusive term referring to the one re-creating, reconciling work of Christ, beginning with his earthly ministry, death, and resurrection and fully realized in the new heavens and the new earth.
2. A common thread in many of the principles articulated below is the reality of “the one and the many.” There is “oneness,” and there is “manyness” in God’s world, or unity and diversity. We see this reality in God himself in his triunity. We see unity and diversity functioning in perfect harmony

in the world as God created it. We see how Christ in his saving work creates a single new body, united in him but diverse and inclusive beyond our imagination. The two verses below capture both notes of this song that permeates the Scriptures:

For us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live. (1 Cor. 8:6)

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. (Rev. 7:9)

Having studied Scripture and sought to hear its message anew, the committee judges the following to be a simple but foundational statement of the biblical message with respect to racial and ethnic diversity, a statement that rests centrally on the unity-diversity theme in Scripture:

To be in Christ is to be reconciled with one another as a community of racially and ethnically diverse people of God.

We see this statement as both declaration and judgment, indicative and imperative. It is a statement of the way things are in God's program; it is also a prophetic call to "become who we already are" in Christ.

3. Below are working definitions of terms that arise in the subsequent discussion of these matters.

Race – a term used to describe men and women who share biologically transmitted traits that are defined as socially significant.

Ethnicity – a term used to describe men and women who usually share a common place of ancestral origin, a traditional language, and a historical religion, which together confer a distinctive social identity. Including a reference to "a historical religion" in this definition of ethnicity does not mean that we celebrate or affirm any non-Christian religions as elements in our oneness in Christ.

Culture – the values and beliefs that are institutionalized in a people's collective life; the outward discipline in which inherited meanings and morality, beliefs and ways of behaving are preserved.

Prejudice – a negative attitude or assumption about others on the basis of their identification with a certain group of people.

Racism – a prejudicial attitude and/or behavior directed against persons on the basis of their race. Racism may manifest itself interpersonally as well as institutionally.

Ethnocentrism – the tendency to assume that one’s own ethnic and cultural values and preferences are everyone’s or to believe that they should be.

Stereotype – an oversimplified opinion or uncritical judgment that unfairly categorizes persons or groups.

B. Biblical and theological principles for a racially and ethnically diverse family of God

CREATION

1. The world as God created it is rich and God glorifying in its diversity.

The creation account (Gen. 1) explodes with myriads of divisions—light from darkness, water below from the vapors above, land from water. The world God creates is marvelously varied, with thousands of different flowers and leaves, stars and planets, mountains and meadows, fish and fowl. God loves diversity. Variety and differences are not bad things but are enriching things in the world as God created it.

The crown of this varied creation is the human person, God’s image bearer. As God’s image bearers, all human beings without exception are endowed with royal dignity and share in dominion over all creation. As God blesses them with fruitfulness, all their descendants without any exception also share equally in this royal dignity. Human beings also image God in their capacity for loving relationships with God and with each other in righteousness and holiness.

Human beings are diverse in that each human person is unique—no two people are alike. More profoundly, human beings exhibit this deep principle of unity and diversity in their maleness and femaleness. Human beings, in their maleness and femaleness, are a kind of model of the way diversity functions in the good creation. The differences between male and female are a cause for celebration and joy (Gen. 2:23). The differences between male and female make for attraction, complementarity, and deep communion. Diversity is enriching; it releases creative energies that in turn increase diversity. Again, variety and differences within the human family are not bad; they enrich the world as God created it.

2. The created world, with all its diversity, has its unity in the one God, who created it through Jesus Christ.

The fact that God created the world is clearly attested throughout Scripture. The New Testament elaborates on the presence and role of Jesus Christ in the creation of the world. Three specific passages deserve mention in this regard:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. (John 1:1–3)

He [Christ] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things and in him all things hold together. (Col. 1:15–17)

In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. (Heb. 1:1–2)

From these three passages, which set forth foundational truths, we learn that

- a. Jesus Christ was present with God the Father at creation.
- b. Jesus Christ's role at creation involved "all things." The Greek word for "all things" (*panta*) is used in all the passages to define the scope of Christ's involvement in creation, a scope that is all-inclusive. John further underscores this by stating that without Christ "nothing was made that has been made."
- c. The Greek prepositions used in these passages underscore the rich, even mysterious, involvement of Christ in all things as they were created. All things were created *in* (*en*) him (translated "by" in the NIV), *through* (*dia*) him, and *for* (*eis*) him. Somehow Christ himself is the source (*en*) of creation, the mediator (*dia*) of creation, and the purpose (*eis*) of creation.
- d. Christ the creator holds all things together. Paul says that "in him all things hold together" (Col. 1:17). There is coherence, unity, in all things as they were created by Christ.

This teaching of Scripture is significant for the purposes of our study for at least three reasons.

First, when we seek unity among different peoples and different things, we are not seeking something alien to the nature of things, just as, when people put a puzzle together, they assume that all the pieces were cut in such a way that they fit together. The puzzle was designed that way. Conversely, a puzzle that consists of pieces thrown together from ten different puzzles will never fit together. The former, not the latter, is the picture of our world as God created it. When we seek the unity of diverse peoples and things, we are not seeking something alien to the nature of things and to the goal of God for creation.

Second, applied more narrowly to the human race, this truth of the unity of all things in Christ implies a radical unity and equality of all people. In the biblical picture, all humanity has been created in God's image and has its source not only in Christ but also in Adam and Eve, our first parents. Referring to Adam, Paul says, "From one ancestor he made all nations to inhabit the whole earth" (Acts 17:26, NRSV). According to Genesis 3, Eve is "the mother of all the living" (v. 20). All human beings of all races are related to one another through their common origins in our first parents. The Christian faith allows no room for holding that other human beings are fundamentally different from us or somehow less truly made in God's image than we are.

Third, the unity that Jesus Christ died and rose again to bring into being is not a new unity created for the first time, unknown and untested; it is a primal unity restored, a unity re-created. When the world is reconciled through Jesus Christ, it is going back to being a world that has already been and to the one by whom and in whom and through whom all things were created and existed in unity. This gives Christians hope and direction in their work.

3. The unity and diversity of the human race and of created reality reflect the unity and diversity of the triune God (namely, his oneness and threeness).

In the classical formulation of the Trinity, the church has spoken of God as *one in being* and *three in person*. Students of the Trinity have developed this basic Trinity doctrine as a model for human society. "Social Trinity" is a particular emphasis in Trinitarian theology that asserts that the unity and community of the human family are rooted in the very nature of God.

In Genesis 1:26, God reveals himself in a community of triunity: "Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, in our likeness.'" In John's gospel, the Father is in the Son, and the Son is in the Father (John 10:38; 14:11). The Father loves the Son and shows him all that he does (John 5:20). The Father knows the Son, and the Son knows the Father (John 10:15). When the Son returns to the Father, the Father will send another Counselor, the Spirit of truth (John 14:16–18). The Son prays that his followers will be one just "as we [the Father and the Son] are one" (John 17:11).

The triune God, in the mutual giving and receiving of intratrinitarian fellowship, is the first model for human society. In God's oneness, God calls us to unity. In God's threeness, God affirms our diversity. The communion in which God created us and to which God calls us is already displayed in the triune God.

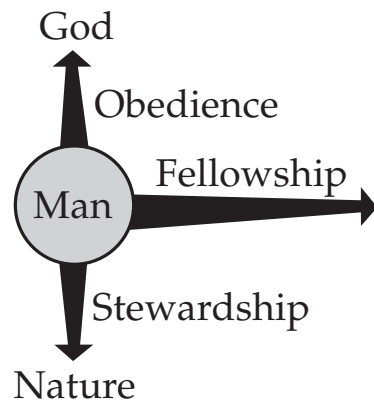
FALL

4. A fundamental effect of sin is the breakdown of community.

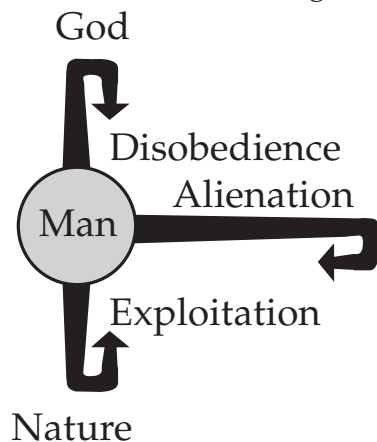
a. The image of God and relationships

Human beings were created in the image of God. To be an image bearer of God means many things, but central to *any* description of what it means to be an image bearer of God is *the capacity for relationship* with which God has endowed human beings. We are relational beings. Giving and receiving, loving and being loved, working with others in creative and uplifting ways, and building community are activities at the heart of being human and of human community.

The late Dr. Anthony Hoekema, professor of systematic theology at Calvin Theological Seminary, often spoke of the threefold relationship into which human beings were created—in relationship to God, to one another, and to nature. Before sin entered the world, these were relationships of obedience, fellowship, and stewardship.



Sin perverts these relationships. In our relationship with God we are now disobedient, in our relationships with one another we are now alienated, and in our relationships with nature we now tend to exploit nature instead of acting as its steward.



Although the effect of sin on any one of these relationships cannot be separated from its effect on all of them, our primary interest in this report is sin's effect on our relationships with one another.

b. What sin does to human relationships

In our biblical study of the effect of sin on human relationships, we discern the following biblical principle: *Sin tends to be most insidious and destructive of human community at those precise points that God intended human community to be most enriching and expressive of his image in us.*

1) The principle applied to the male-female relationship

Genesis 3 is a foundational case study for understanding what sin does to our relationships with one another. After Adam and Eve fell into sin, the Lord cursed the serpent and then announced the effects of Adam and Eve's sin on their lives. Of particular interest to us here is the effect of sin on their relationship with each other. Genesis 3:16 summarizes the effect of sin on the relationship of Adam and Eve when God says to Eve, "Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you" (Gen. 3:16). The exact meaning of this verse is a matter of debate among students of the Bible. Whatever one's interpretation, this much is clear: Sin takes a healthy relationship between male and female, husband and wife, and distorts it, resulting in alienation and harm to fellowship and community. Sin takes a relationship that was intended to be most expressive of the image of God in us and significantly damages and distorts it.

2) The principle applied to other relationships

Again, the principle under discussion is this: *Sin tends to be most insidious and destructive of human community at those precise points that God intended human community to be most enriching and expressive of his image in us.* Marriage is that relationship within which we develop and express much of our God-likeness: giving and receiving, making and keeping commitments, procreation, and enjoyment. We have seen how deeply our fall into sin harms marriage.

This principle is illustrated further in the Cain and Abel story (Gen. 4). Brotherly love has much richness and beauty (David loved Jonathan like a brother [2 Sam. 1:26]), but this very relationship becomes the setting within which the worst imaginable envy, hatred, and violence take place.

To illustrate this principle further, it can be argued that the tongue and our human sexuality are two aspects of humanity that give expression to the image of God in us. The tongue is a marvelous means for language, communication, the expression of ideas,

and the articulation of truth—all activities at the heart of how we image God. In the fall, however, the tongue became a key weapon of destruction of human community (James 3:1–12). Human sexuality is that marvelous means by which husband and wife give to and receive from one another and express God-giving and God-imaging love. In the fall, however, human sexuality became perverted in a host of ways (Lev. 18).

Extending this more general principle to the subject of this report, we observe that racial and ethnic diversity also can be the occasion for mutual appreciation, greater self-understanding through seeing how other people live and think and relate, and the glorification of God for the rich variety in human communities and cultures. All of these activities are centrally expressive of the image of God in us. In the Fall, however, sin turns the very diversity that God intended to be deeply humanizing and enriching into deep alienation. The alienation of Jew and Gentile in the Bible is indicative of broader alienation along racial and ethnic lines. Regrettably, the primary story line of recorded human history is the alienation of peoples along racial and ethnic lines.

c. Two misunderstood texts

Two biblical texts deserve mention in this discussion of the effects of sin on the racial and ethnic diversity of the human community. The point here is to indicate what they do *not* have to say about racial and ethnic diversity.

1) The curse of Ham

Genesis 9–10 gives us the account of Noah’s sons in which Canaan is cursed because of the sin of his father, Ham, whereas Shem and Japheth are given blessings and promises of prosperity. Canaan will be the lowest of slaves to his brothers (Gen. 9:25). This verse has sometimes been used to justify the enslavement of blacks because the descendants of Ham eventually did settle, among other places, in northeast Africa. However, this argument fails to take into account the simple historical fact that those cursed here were Canaanites, who were Caucasian, and the important exegetical fact that the purpose of the Genesis 9–10 narrative (Gen. 10 goes on to list the Table of Nations) is not to justify human oppression but to set up the redemptive line from the post-flood peoples to Abraham, a line established in Shem. Our primary reason for including these clarifications on this somewhat obscure passage in Genesis is not that the interpretation refuted above is so strong and plausible that it requires extensive refutation. Rather, we include it to observe

how the Bible can be misused by one group's seeking to justify the exploitation of another group and to observe that, regrettably, even erroneous biblical interpretations such as this one have a way of persisting in the minds of some Christians long after their exegetical basis has been refuted.

2) The Tower of Babel

Another biblical narrative that has often been misunderstood is the Tower of Babel narrative in Genesis 11. The purpose of the Tower of Babel narrative is to demonstrate the futility of human attempts to build community without God. God's confusion of language at Babel was a tool of his judgment against human pride and not a sign that there is any inherent sinfulness in diverse languages. Human beings cannot build community without God. It does not work. The positive significance of Babel for our subject will be further elucidated when we look at the Pentecost event.

d. The root of alienation: fear

Behind alienation, whatever the lines along which that alienation takes place, lie fear, insecurity, and a loss of identity that are a result of our separation from God.

Instructive again is the story of humanity's fall into sin as recorded in Genesis 3. When Adam and Eve disobey God, they are immediately afraid. They sew fig leaves to hide from each other (Gen. 3:7), and they hide from God among the trees of the garden (Gen. 3:8). In our alienation from God, we lose our proper self-understanding. As John Calvin points out at the beginning of the *Institutes*, our knowledge of God and knowledge of self are interrelated. If we do not know God, we do not know ourselves. We lose our bearings as to who we are.

This loss of proper self-understanding creates fear and anxiety. In this crisis of self-understanding, we often turn to racial, ethnic, or cultural forms of self-confirmation and self-understanding. At the very least, these forms of self-confirmation are incomplete and distorted. They quickly become idolatrous. We re-create God in our own image. These forms of self-confirmation often become the means by which we harm others who are different from ourselves. As differences between individuals or groups increase, so does fear, and the cycle of fear and differentiation spirals in intensity. The effect on the community is pain, misery, and brokenness.

John says, "There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear" (1 John 4:18). This statement follows John's declaration that "God is love" and "whoever lives in love lives in God and God in him" (1 John 4:16). Only love, the perfect love of God, can give people a renewed

identity that casts out fear and anxiety and gives them the courage to relinquish these incomplete and harmful ways of identifying themselves. Only love, the perfect love of God, can create new hearts that cause people to see the world and others in new ways. To that redemptive love of God we now turn.

NEW CREATION

Paul says, “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come” (2 Cor. 5:17). In Christ, God comes to create a new world. In the reflections below, we will see that reconciliation across racial and ethnic lines is not just a tangential goal that gets tacked onto the saving work of Christ; rather, it is at the heart of God’s plan to create a new heaven and a new earth.

5. The uniting of all things in Jesus Christ is at the heart of God’s eternal plan for the ages.

In the first three chapters of Ephesians, Paul seeks to place the work of Christ into the broader perspective of God’s plan for the ages. One important Greek word that recurs in those chapters is *oikonomia*, variously translated “management, administration, or plan.”

- a. In Ephesians 1:9–10, in the middle of Paul’s opening doxology of praise to God for his great work of salvation, a work that is the unfolding of his eternal will, Paul says that

he [God] has made known to us in all wisdom and insight the mystery of his will, according to his purpose which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. (RSV)

What is the plan of God set forth already in Christ? To unite all things in Christ. Notice how Paul grasps for the most inclusive language he can (“all things, things in heaven and things on earth”) when he describes the scope of God’s plan. The purpose of God in his saving work is to unite all things in Christ, indeed, to bring all things back to that unity they had in Christ from the beginning.

- b. In Ephesians 3:2, Paul again refers to the *oikonomia* of God when he says, “Surely you have heard about the *administration* of God’s grace that was given to me for you, that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation.” In verse 6, Paul spells out the mystery:

This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.

The grand plan of God brings together Jew and Gentile. The Greek prefix *sun* (“with”) occurs three times in verse 6 (literally “heirs with,” “body with,” and “sharers with”), underscoring the unifying thrust of God’s work.

c. Finally, in Ephesians 3:8–10, Paul says,

this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make plain to everyone the *administration* of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things. His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Again, the plan of God is to proclaim the unsearchable riches of Christ to *everyone*—Jew and Gentile—God’s plan from the beginning.

6. Reconciliation with God and reconciliation with one another are inseparable in God’s saving work.

Although the New Testament term *reconciliation* (*katallassoo*) is not a frequently used term, it occurs at very strategic points in Paul’s writings and is integral to the biblical vision of a racially and ethnically diverse family of God. For our purposes in this report, we look at four important passages.

a. Romans 5:10–11

For if, when we were God’s enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved by his life! Not only is this so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

It is important to notice, first, that reconciliation is God’s program, not ours. In non-Christian religions, people attempt to be reconciled to God through their own actions. In the Christian religion, God is the initiator of reconciliation. Second, sin in this passage, as in all the reconciliation passages, is specifically described not so much as guilt, though that may be involved, nor pollution, but as our alienation from God. Sin manifests itself in the breakdown of relationship and community. Third, here in Romans 5, in distinction from the passages to be considered next, “believers” are the “object” of God’s reconciliation.

b. 2 Corinthians 5:18–21 (NIV, with modification in v. 19)

All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, by not counting men’s sins against them, and by having given to us the ministry of reconciliation. 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. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that we might become the righteousness of God.

First, observe that in this passage the object of God's reconciliation program is the world. The world is obviously thought of primarily as the world of human beings in contrast to the whole of God's created world (visible and invisible). The world here is not limited to those who have already believed but includes also those who must yet respond in faith to the message of reconciliation, thus giving God's program of reconciliation a strong missiological character, which leads to the second observation: Notice the strategic role God gives the church in this work of reconciliation. Two different times in this passage (vv. 18 and 19) Paul says that God has given us (the church) this ministry of reconciliation. Paul places his own ministry of reconciliation alongside God's work of reconciliation. The church's ministry of reconciliation is not just some human idea or political agenda but an integral part of God's program of reconciliation.

c. Colossians 1:19–22

For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood shed on the cross. Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight.

Interpretation of these verses is made difficult by the fact that the biblical genre changed within these verses: Verses 15–20 are almost certainly an early Christian hymn; they are followed by Paul's application of the truth in that hymn to the Colossian situation (v. 21–23.).

Nevertheless, it is clear that in this passage the object of God's reconciliation program is not believers, as in Romans 5, but "all things" (*ta panta*), explicitly including "the things on earth" and "the things in heaven." God's program of reconciliation is thus as broad as creation. Just as the creation of the world was in, through, and unto Christ (*en, dia, eis*), so the work of reconciliation is in him, where all the fullness was pleased to dwell, and through him, and unto him.

(*Note:* The fact that verses 15–20 are a hymn is probably important in understanding the universalistic statements in verse 20. The statements of the hymn should not be made to provide grist for theological analysis. [It is believed by some that the universalism of church father Origen may be grounded in this verse.] It is probably better to see that the hymn is *not* trying to specify the extent of salvation but to acclaim who is the "mediator of creation and redemption." Thus, "reconciling to

himself all things” in verse 20 is best understood to mean that “Christ is the Redeemer/Reconciler of everything in heaven and on earth that is to be reconciled.” The point is that the Colossian Christians do not need to seek any means of reconciliation outside of Christ.)

d. Ephesians 2:14–16

For he himself is our peace, who has made the two [Gentile and Jew] 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 his one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility.

In this passage, the single biggest new factor, not explicitly present in the other passages, is that God’s program of reconciliation is not simply vertical (reconciling believers, the world, and all things to himself) but also horizontal (reconciling Jew and Gentile, circumcised and uncircumcised, v. 11). What has separated them is the dividing wall, identified as the enmity, and thus, correctly, the NIV translation “the dividing wall of hostility.” Christ destroyed that dividing wall of hostility by abolishing in his flesh (rendering ineffective) the law with its commandments and regulations.

Paul does not say how Christ rendered ineffective (abolished) the law with its commandments and regulations. From what Paul says in other places, we may suggest that Christ did so by fulfilling the law, by both active and passive obedience. That is, he fulfilled the law by actively obeying it and by passively taking on himself its curse against mankind’s sins. Because the law has thus been completely fulfilled, it can never become a source of enmity between Jew and Gentile—especially in regard to what the Jews had quite specifically acknowledged as their “identity markers”—circumcision, clean and unclean foods, and feast days (preeminently the Sabbath). God thus created in Christ out of two, the circumcised and the uncircumcised, one new man. Here, the one new man must be understood in its corporate sense and must be closely identified with the church. Christ “is our peace” (Eph. 2:14), “thus making peace” (Eph. 2:15), and he “preached peace to you who were far away [Gentiles] and to those who were near [Jews]” (Eph. 2:17).

Whereas humans often divide people according to race or nationality, God made only one division among human beings, namely, Israel and the nations, or Jew and Gentile. The breathtaking news of this passage is that God has now removed the only division he ever made in the human family. The point for us is clear: If God himself took away

the only division that he had ever made within the human family, how much more have all other man-made divisions within the human family been taken away.

7. Already in the old covenant, the scope of God's mission is racially and ethnically inclusive.

A common misunderstanding of the mission of God is the belief that in the Old Testament, before Christ, the scope of God's mission is only ethnic Israel and that only in the New Testament, with the coming of Christ, does that scope extend to all nations. In the old covenant, Israel is the redemptive focus of God's mission. The movement is always toward Jerusalem and toward the king. In the new covenant, Pentecost turns the movement of God's mission outward. Instead of people having to come to Jerusalem, the Spirit goes out to people everywhere. The energy flow of God's mission changes from centripetal to centrifugal. However, it is important not to confuse these dramatic *developments within* the mission of God and the universal *scope* of God's mission. The scope of God's mission always was and will remain racially and ethnically inclusive.

All nations are in view from the beginning of God's saving work. God promised, "Abraham will surely become a great and powerful nation, and all nations on earth will be blessed through him" (Gen. 18:18) and "I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and will give them all these lands, and through your offspring all the nations on earth will be blessed" (Gen. 26:4). Isaiah sees the day coming when all nations will stream to the temple of the Lord (Isa. 2:2), "for my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations" (Isa. 56:7). When he cries, "Arise, shine, for your light has come and the glory of the LORD rises upon you" (Isa. 60:1), the vision that follows is a chapter-long vision of all people coming to the throne of God: "Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn" (Isa. 60:3).

The Old Testament prophets made it clear that ethnic identity was subordinate to spiritual identity. Ethnicity is always penultimate to the kingship of Yahweh. Jerusalem is significant because Yahweh is there. Physical circumcision is never enough for a person to be a part of God's people. Moses and Jeremiah call the people to circumcise their hearts (Deut. 10:16; Jer. 4:4). Israel does not result from its own biological ability (Sarah is sterile). God even inverts the normal inheritance protocol (Esau, the older, will serve Jacob, the younger). The book of Jonah is a judgment against ethnocentrism and the mistaken identification of God's mission with ethnic Israel alone. The psalms are filled with references to all people and all nations praising the name of the Lord. The family tree of Jesus (Matt. 1:1–17), with its mention of the likes of Rahab and Ruth, reveals the way

the scope of God's mission reaches beyond ethnic Israel already in the old covenant.

Again, the purpose in stating this principle is not to downplay the dramatic developments within the mission of God. It is rather to head off mistaken notions regarding changes in the scope of God's mission which can lead to mistaken notions regarding the unchanging purposes of God and the role of ethnicity in the mission of God.

8. In Pentecost, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the church, God gives new power to the church—power to break down walls of separation and create a community that transcends divisions of race, ethnicity, and culture.

Just before Jesus ascended into heaven, he told his disciples, "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). This prediction of a worldwide mission follows Jesus' command in Matthew 28:19–20 to "go and make disciples of all nations." When God's Spirit is poured out upon the church on the day of Pentecost, people from every nation under heaven (Acts 2:5) hear the apostles (who were Galileans) speaking in their native language. This is the day of the Lord foretold by the prophet Joel (Acts 2:17–21). Now "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" (Acts 2:21).

In the biblical drama, the blessing of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost stands in bold contrast to the curse of Babel. In the confusion of language at Babel, God declares that his people cannot build human community without him. At Pentecost, God creates a new community where, in the Spirit, people have a unity that transcends their own particular language. The significance of Pentecost is not that everyone who believes in Christ now speaks one language. People still speak in a multitude of languages, but in the Spirit, God creates a unity that transcends the barriers of language. Racial, ethnic, and cultural differences are not erased; they are subordinated to the new unity believers have in the Spirit.

In Acts 10, God shows Peter what the church looks like in this age of the Spirit. Through a vision, God reveals to Peter that the old divisions of clean and unclean, Jew and Gentile, have been demolished (Acts 10:15). Then Peter goes to the house of Cornelius to tell the people there of God's new ways. He announces that God no longer calls anyone impure or unclean (Acts 10:28). "God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right" (Acts 10:34–35).

Paul sees this new unity as transcending every human division—even the division between Abraham's seed and the rest of humanity: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one

in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Gal. 3:28–29).

9. The church, in its unity and diversity, is God's strategic vehicle for bringing into being his new creation.

The church is strategic in God's plan to effect this new oneness. In Ephesians 3, Paul discloses God's plan to unite all things in Christ. In verses 10–11, he explains the role of the church in that plan:

His [God's] intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The church, Christ's gathered body in the world, is the means by which God intends to reveal himself, to proclaim the good news, and to unite all things in Christ.

In John 17, Jesus is more precise as to how the church reveals God. Jesus prays that all the people who believe in him "may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you" (John 17:20–21). Why does he want them to be one? "May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. . . . May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me" (John 17:21, 23). When the church is one, people see God. The power of the church's witness lies precisely in its new oneness in Christ, a oneness of believers that transcends external differences.

The church will be effective in the mission God has given it only when it understands and lives out of a vision that appreciates both its unity and diversity in Christ. The church is one in Christ (1 Cor. 1:10–17; 12:12–13). Christ is the one foundation of the church (1 Cor. 3:11) and the one head of the body (Eph. 1:22–23). "There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope when you were called—one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all" (Eph. 4:4–6). The church, however, is also marvelously diverse. Just as the body has feet and hands and eyes and ears and is incomplete without all those parts, so the body of Christ is made up of many parts. In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul teaches that each part of the body is necessary to make the body function with complete effectiveness, and all parts have equal dignity, regardless of size or function. The gifts of the Spirit to the church are marvelously diverse (1 Cor. 12:27–31; Eph. 4:11–13; Rom. 12:3–8).

This teaching on the unity and diversity of the church is extremely important as we think about matters of racial and ethnic diversity in the church. On the one hand, Scripture calls us to be one in Christ. This is

not just some theoretical oneness. It is a visible, actual unity of people with one another because they share in the common source of life—Jesus Christ. This unity is so real that the world comes to know God through it (John 17:23). This scriptural call to unity judges the church in its lack of unity.

Nevertheless, unity does not obliterate differences. To be whole, the body needs each part. In terms of racial and ethnic differences, the goal in the church is not to rub out those differences and try to make everyone the same. Each of us has a particular race, ethnicity, and culture. We do not cease to be Korean or Kenyan or American when we become part of the body. Rather, each particular person (and community) plays a part in making the body whole. Each person and community brings unique gifts and makes unique contributions. In the Spirit, diversity is no longer threatening; it is enriching. Unity and diversity together confirm that indeed the church is the Lord's work, not our own.

In our work as a committee, we have encountered the confusion that comes when the unity and diversity of the church are not clearly distinguished. On the one hand, we sometimes speak of leaving our culture behind when we come to Christ. On the other hand, we speak of affirming and respecting each person's culture. Often we say these two things in the same breath. The fact is that we do not simply leave our culture behind when we become Christians. Such a statement betrays a superficial understanding of the profound senses in which we are cultural beings. The person who was Italian before she became a Christian is still Italian. When a Chinese brother becomes a Christian, his tastes in food do not suddenly get transformed into some universal diet. When the Native American becomes a Christian, her tastes in music do not suddenly get transformed into some universal musical style. Race, ethnicity, and culture are profoundly important for personal and communal self-identification. They are important both before and after becoming a Christian.

When we become Christians, our identity in Christ judges and transforms those old and incomplete ways of knowing ourselves. The Cuban who becomes a Christian is still Cuban, but now her being a Christian shapes her being a Cuban. We never cease to be of a certain race, ethnic group, and culture, but in Christ, those ways of identifying ourselves are no longer definitive of who we are. Christ is definitive for personal and communal self-understanding. Christ is ultimate; race, ethnicity, and culture are penultimate for self-identification and self-understanding.

Having said all of that, we still must acknowledge difficulties in this area. When we become Christians, God requires that we leave behind those aspects of our culture that are incompatible with his kingdom. The

difficulty comes in that the new Christian invariably adopts new cultural patterns, and these are often not specifically Christian but simply patterns formed by other cultural groups.

The point here is that as Christians of different backgrounds work through these complex issues it is crucial that, among other things, they keep the unity and diversity of the church in proper balance. Stressing the unity of the church at the expense of its diversity can lead to excesses in which we imagine that becoming a Christian erases all cultural differences among Christians. Stressing the diversity of the church at the expense of its unity can lead to excesses in which we give an importance, even an idolatrous autonomy, to race, ethnicity, and culture—an importance that Christ eliminated on the Cross.

Our confessions articulate the unity and diversity of the church. Belgic Confession, Article 27, speaks of “one single catholic or universal church,” which, though it is “spread and dispersed throughout the entire world,” is “still joined and united in heart and will in one and the same Spirit, by the power of faith.” Concerning “the holy catholic church,” Lord’s Day 21 of the Heidelberg Catechism states,

I believe that the Son of God through his Spirit and Word, out of the entire human race, from the beginning of the world to its end, gathers, protects, and preserves for himself a community chosen for eternal life and united in true faith. And of this community I am and always will be a living member.

The church is as diverse as the human race and as singular as Christ.

10. God calls Christians to find their deepest identity in union with and in the service of Christ.

Unfortunately, it is possible to seize upon this acknowledgment of racial, ethnic, and cultural differences in the church (set forth in principle 6) and seek to justify attitudes, practices, and behaviors that, in fact, are sinful in that they unnecessarily create barriers and walls between people and add to the separation that Christ came to remove. There is often a fine line between healthy ethnic and cultural self-identification, which enriches community, and ethnocentrism, which fractures community.

The call of the gospel is radical and clear: Love God above all and love your neighbor as yourself (Matt. 22:37–40). Jesus says that anyone who loves his father or mother or son or daughter more than him is not worthy of him (Matt. 10:37). We finally find our life when we lose it (Matt. 10:39). Jesus calls us to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us (Matt. 5:44). It is no remarkable achievement to love people who love you, according to Jesus. (We could paraphrase that as “It’s no big deal to love people who are like us.”) Even pagans do that. The call of the gospel is to love those who do not love you. Paul says that we should

look out not just for our own interests but also for the interests of others (Phil. 2:4) and that we should develop attitudes toward ourselves and others that model Christ's self-effacing, self-denying life (Phil. 2:6–11).

Jesus certainly modeled this kind of behavior in his commitment to minister to all types of people. Jesus actually enjoyed being with people whom the religious establishment considered to be sinners (Luke 15:2; Luke 7:36–50). He had good news for, of all people, a Samaritan woman (John 4:1–26). He responded to the Roman centurion's faith and healed this Gentile's son (Luke 7:1–10). In the parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus told of the love of Christ at work in a person (the Samaritan) whom others, through ethnocentric eyes, saw as inferior and unworthy of grace. Jesus' social world and world of ministry were not defined along lines of race, gender, ethnicity, culture, or social standing. He looked past those external characteristics of people and saw instead people as image bearers of God.

As significant as race, ethnicity, and culture are for self-identification, Christians find their deepest identity in union with and in the service of Christ. The rhythm of the gospel is not one of self-justification and self-preservation. It is certainly not one that seeks to build up self by defining ourselves favorably over against others who are different from us. There is no room in the kingdom for attitudes that foster pride toward self or resentment toward others. Rather, in the security we have because we know ourselves to be children of our Father in heaven and to be loved by Christ, Christians become "self-forgetful." The love of Christ casts out our fear. In Christ, we have the courage and commitment to step across and seek to break down those barriers that have been erected by race, ethnicity, and culture and to repudiate the ways of self-identification and self-confirmation that have become unhealthy or even idolatrous.

11. Obedience in matters of racial reconciliation calls us individually and corporately to continually repent, to strive for justice, and to battle the powers of evil.

We must be forthright in acknowledging that racism is sin. Racism is more than just bad manners; indeed, any attitudes, words, or deeds of omission or commission that inflict harm upon others and break down community constitute sin against God and sin against God's children. Racism is a disgrace to a civil society; it is a much greater disgrace in the church because racism sends the opposite message from the one Christ sends in his reconciling work on the Cross.

In its penetrating analysis of the sixth and ninth commandments, the Heidelberg Catechism shows how racism is diametrically opposed to the

will of God. In its teaching on the sixth commandment, the catechism says,

I am not to belittle, insult, hate, or kill my neighbor—not by my thoughts, my words, my look or gesture, and certainly not by actual deeds—and I am not to be party to this in others. (Q. and A. 105)

In its teaching on the ninth commandment, the catechism says,

God's will is that I never give false testimony against anyone, twist no one's words, not gossip or slander, nor join in condemning anyone without a hearing or without a just cause. Rather, in court and everywhere else, I should avoid lying and deceit of every kind; these are devices the devil himself uses, and they would call down on me God's intense anger. I should love the truth, speak it candidly, and openly acknowledge it. And I should do what I can to guard and advance my neighbor's good name. (Q. and A. 112)

When Paul analyzes our fallen nature, he sees “envy, murder, strife, deceit, and malice” at the heart of our brokenness. People alienated from God are “gossips, slanderers, god-haters, insolent, arrogant, and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; they are senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless” (Rom. 1:29–31).

Indeed, racism is a glaring manifestation of our sinful condition, which Christ died to eradicate and that, when it is not eradicated, opposes Christ's reconciling work on the Cross.

Furthermore, repentance from this sin, as from all sin, must be radical. It begins at the foot of the cross in confession and self-denial. Indeed, to repent of sin, according to the catechism, is “to be genuinely sorry for sin, to hate it more and more, and to run away from it” (A. 89).

Such repentance calls for fervent prayer on the part of the Christian community. Inasmuch as our prayers reveal our deepest concerns, the Christian community must engage in regular prayers of confession for sins of racism and regular intercessory prayer for racial reconciliation and healing.

Further still, those who have found their identity in Christ not only should have no part of behavior that causes alienation along racial and ethnic lines, but they should be on the frontline of working for racial reconciliation. The deafening silence of the church in matters of racial reconciliation must be broken. A legitimate test of discipleship in this racially polarized world is whether our life and witness for Christ are building racial reconciliation and understanding and breaking down walls of alienation.

Ephesians 3:9 and 10 says, “through the church the wisdom of God in its rich variety might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in heavenly places” (NRSV). In Ephesians 6:12, Paul reminds us that these

same rulers and authorities are also pitted against us in a cosmic spiritual battle. The church needs to be deeply aware that racial and ethnic division is so deep, demonic, and pervasive that opposition to it will involve us in all-out spiritual warfare. In the church's struggle to realize God's will for reconciliation, the powers of evil will seek to divide us anew and destroy our every effort toward unity. Only in the might of God's Spirit, the truth of God's Word, and persistent prayer will we prevail.

12. Christians live and work in the hope that one day the reconciliation of all things will be fully realized.

In the beginning of this biblical study, we explained that in its major divisions of creation, fall, and new creation, *new creation* refers to the one re-creating, reconciling work of Christ as that begins with his earthly ministry, death, and resurrection and is completed in the new heaven and the new earth.

There is certainly a difference between the present world and the new heaven and new earth that Christ will usher in upon his return. From the biblical perspective, however, the work of Christ at his first coming is the decisive moment in history. According to the writer of Hebrews (1:2), the "last days," of which the prophets spoke, are here. The promise of the Holy Spirit (Joel 2:28) has been fulfilled in the outpouring of Pentecost. "If anyone is in Christ," says Paul, "he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come" (2 Cor. 5:17). The decisive turning point of history is the death and resurrection of Christ. All that lies ahead is simply the realization of what Christ has already accomplished.

Yet, there is a tension in the New Testament between the "already" and the "not yet" of the kingdom. Christ's new creation is already being made manifest to us, but it is also not yet fully realized. Christians long for the full realization of Christ's rule. We know there is a difference between the brokenness of our world and the day when there will be "no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away" (Rev. 21:4). We live by faith, not by sight (2 Cor. 5:7). We eagerly await the Savior (Phil. 3:20).

Central to the biblical vision of the new heaven and the new earth is the perfect unity in Christ of all the peoples of the earth. As John gazes at the people of God, he sees "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" (Rev. 7:9–10). The angels sing 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. (Rev. 5:9–10)

The reconciliation of all nations and all things in Christ is our fervent hope. This vision gives Christians encouragement, especially those who suffer because of the racial and ethnic divisions in our world. “Lord, come quickly” is the cry of those who see little of this new unity of all things and who suffer because of the walls of separation that Christ came to abolish. The fact that one day God will set things right is the deepest hope for many who have tasted little of the shalom and righteousness of the kingdom.

This vision also gives Christians confidence. It is possible to look around us and be dismayed, but we know that Christ rules. We know where things are going. We know and live with full confidence that one day

every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain. And the glory of the LORD will be revealed, and all mankind together will see it. (Isa. 40:4–5)

IV. Recommendations

The following recommendations were adopted by Synod 1996 regarding the above report:

- A. That synod recommend the revised report to the churches for study.
- B. That synod adopt the following biblical and theological principles regarding the development of a racially and ethnically diverse and unified family of God:

Biblical and Theological Principles for the Development of a Racially and Ethnically Diverse and Unified Family of God

Creation

1. *The world as God created it is rich and God glorifying in its diversity.*
2. *The created world with all its diversity has its unity in the one God, who created it through Jesus Christ.*
3. *The unity and diversity of the human race and of created reality reflect the unity and diversity of the triune God (namely, his oneness and threeness).*

Fall

4. *A fundamental effect of sin is the breakdown of community.*

New Creation

5. *The uniting of all things in Jesus Christ is at the heart of God’s eternal plan for the ages.*

6. *Reconciliation with God and reconciliation with one another are inseparable in God's saving work.*
7. *Already in the old covenant, the scope of God's mission is racially and ethnically inclusive.*
8. *In Pentecost, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the church, God gives new power to the church—power to break down walls of separation and create a community that transcends divisions of race, ethnicity, and culture.*
9. *The church, in its unity and diversity, is God's strategic vehicle for bringing into being his new creation.*
10. *God calls Christians to find their deepest identity in union with and in the service of Jesus Christ.*
11. *Obedience in matters of racial reconciliation calls us, individually and corporately, to continually repent, to strive for justice, and to battle the powers of evil.*
12. *Christians live and work in the hope that one day the reconciliation of all things will be fully realized.*

C. That synod, on the basis of the above principles, declare that to be in Christ is in principle to be reconciled as a community of racially and ethnically diverse people and that to ignore his calling to turn this principle into experienced reality is sinful according to God's Word and the Reformed confessions.

Grounds:

1. The above report demonstrates that the Bible declares this reconciled community to be God's will.
 2. The confessions declare that the catholicity of the church means that Christ "gathers, protects, and preserves" the church "out of the whole human race" (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 21).
- D. That synod call the **whole church**—individual members, congregations, assemblies, agencies, and other ministries of the CRCNA—to respond to the biblical and theological principles regarding the development of a racially and ethnically diverse and united family of God by committing themselves
1. To pray and work for the increased enfolding of ethnic-minority persons into the CRCNA in order to reflect more fully the racial and ethnic diversity of Canada and the United States.
 2. To ensure the equitable representation and meaningful participation of ethnic-minority persons in leadership and other roles of influence at all levels of denominational life.

Note: The total estimated ethnic-minority membership of 5 percent in the CRCNA compares to an ethnic-minority population of approximately 20 percent in Canada and the United States.

E. That synod call the **churches**

1. To articulate the biblical vision for a racially and ethnically diverse and united family of God by means of the preaching, teaching, and study of the above biblical and theological principles.
2. To evaluate their life and ministry with regard to their racial and ethnic composition, the social factors contributing to their composition, the selecting and training of their leaders, their worship style, and their ministry to congregational members and to their community in light of their sense of God's vision and call for them as congregations.
3. To develop racially and ethnically diverse congregations by all appropriate models and strategies, such as
 - a. Established churches becoming more inclusive ethnically and culturally.
 - b. Planting and developing multiethnic congregations.
 - c. Sponsoring new congregations that are ethnically and culturally different from the parent congregation, in the same or separate facilities.
 - d. Developing relationships (e.g., joint worship, workshops, and work projects) with congregations from other ethnic and cultural backgrounds.
 - e. Supporting persons and programs at home or abroad that are committed to racial reconciliation.
4. To witness publicly *against* racism, prejudice, and related unemployment, poverty, and injustices and *in defense of* all people as image bearers of God.
5. To call individual members to promote and establish interracial and cross-cultural relationships in their neighborhoods, workplaces, and communities.

F. That synod request the **classes**, with the assistance of the CRCNA offices and agencies,

1. To arrange during the next twelve months for the careful classis-wide study of this report and its implications for the churches and their ministries.
2. To provide to the churches and ministries of classis guidance in support of racial and ethnic diversity (and unity) by means of public forums and learning events, multicongregational worship celebrations, and joint cross-cultural ministry ventures.

3. To assist the churches in developing and supporting new churches and other outreach ministries that are committed to ethnic diversity and racial reconciliation.

4. To recruit and assist persons from ethnic-minority groups to participate in the ministries of classis, including representation to synod, agency boards, and other ministries of the CRCNA.

G. That synod mandate the **Board of Trustees**, under the leadership of its CRCNA staff and with the assistance of the Race Relations division of Pastoral Ministries and other CRCNA agencies,

1. To coordinate and monitor the role and response of the agencies in providing guidance and assistance to the churches and classes in support of ethnic diversity and racial reconciliation as outlined above.

2. To serve Synod 1998 with advice and recommendations for ensuring the equitable representation and meaningful participation of ethnic-minority persons in leadership and other roles of influence with the classes and synod, the Board of Trustees, denominational agencies, and other ministries of the CRCNA. The recommendations should include transitional and long-term strategies, training and support needs, financial implications, and periodic reporting to synod on efforts and progress.

3. To continue to explore ways whereby the biennial Multiethnic Conference can assist the churches, classes, and synod to respond more completely to God's call for ethnic diversity and racial reconciliation in the CRCNA.

4. To review CRCNA policies and practices in relation to the training, credentialing, and compensating of ethnic-minority pastors and to give recommendations and advice as indicated.

H. That synod respectfully urge **future synods**

1. To include in their worship times the articulation and celebration of the biblical vision for a racially and ethnically diverse and unified family of God.

2. To encourage the development of specific recommendations and specific practical guidelines for supporting ethnic diversity in all aspects of denominational life, including interchurch relations in general and ministries of the Reformed Ecumenical Council in particular.

3. That denominational response to the above decisions be reviewed by Synod 1998 on the basis of an interim progress report by the Board of Trustees.

- I. That denominational response to the above decisions be reviewed by Synod 2000 in the light of another progress report with advice and recommendations by the Board of Trustees to Synod 2000.
- J. That synod recommend that the Board of Trustees ask representatives of various language groups in the denomination to translate the document into the languages of their groups.
- K. That synod ask Calvin Theological Seminary's Morren Conference Committee to consider organizing a conference on "racial and ethnic reconciliation with repentance and justice" to explore the theological meaning of racial reconciliation and the implications for ministry, pastoral care, ecclesiology, and social justice.

Grounds:

1. Racial reconciliation with repentance is urgent in the light of the above report.
2. Reformed theologians are well positioned historically and theologically to address this issue.
3. The Reformed churches of South Africa are presently experiencing such a process.