

A Mighty Long Journey: Reflections on Racial Reconciliation
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TN 2000 (42 Quotes selected by Doug Nichols)

1. Racist Attitudes Changes by People, not Precepts

Sons of the South at mid-century, we did not escape the prejudice and cultural entrapment of our families, friends, and neighbors. We learned to survive and to succeed, but only slowly did we begin to transcend the powerful grip of racism and its soul-destroying influence in our lives. For both of us this happened through individuals who taught us, more by example than precept, that God is no respecter of persons, that Jesus loves all the little multicolored children of the world, and that hatred is a boomerang that always returns with a vengeance on those who practice it. (Introduction, p. 2)

2. Perseverance

They taught us to keep on knocking at the door even at the midnight hour. (Introduction, p. 3)

3. Racism Is a Spiritual Malady

As theologians of the church and preachers of the gospel, we believe that the community of Jesus Christ has something to say about racial reconciliation that no one else can say. At its heart, racism is a spiritual malady. Ministers of the gospel are charged with declaring the entire counsel of God. What then does the Bible have to say about prejudice, discrimination, and favoritism based on race or class? How do we deal with the history we have inherited, the past that is still a formative factor in our attitudes and behavior? What is the place of repentance, forgiveness, and restitution? How can we move beyond pious rhetoric to construction acts of reconciliation and partnership? What do Anglos and African Americans have to learn from one another about worship, evangelism, and social ministry? These are not questions faithful ministers of the gospel can avoid.

(Introduction, p. 3)

4. God's Word calls us to confront the horrible sin of racism.

While much good can be said about the traditions of southern civility and gentility, they can also mask insidious evil. In retrospect, we are amazed that so many "good" Christians in pre-Nazi Germany seem to have been oblivious to the prevailing anti-Semitism in their society. We know that in our own country slavery was once defended on the basis of biblical injunctions. And for many decades, segregation was regarded as a divinely appointed way of life. We dare not forget this history, for it continues to shape our attitudes and actions in ways that are sometimes hidden from our own conscious awareness.

(Introduction, p. 4)

5. Sermons Preached to Express God's Revealed Will

It is not the business of preachers to talk *about* the Bible but *from* it. The sermon must not become a personal diatribe or a political harangue, but it must convey, fervently and forthrightly, the prophetic burden of God's revealed will in Holy Scripture.(Introduction, p. 5)

6. Name the Idolatries of Our Cultures

The contributors to this volume all hold to a high, evangelical doctrine of Scripture, but they believe that biblical authority requires us to name the idolatries of our own culture. Precisely as faithful expositors of Holy Scripture, we must proclaim the Word of God with the kind of discernment that will lead to repentance and renewal.

(Introduction, p. 5)

7. The Gospel is Addressed to Living Souls

We must not divorce conversion from discipleship. In John 6, Jesus gave food to hungry people on the same occasion he presented himself to them as the Bread of Life. the sermons in this volume recognize that the gospel is addressed to living persons, soul and

body, in all their broken humanity and need for wholeness.

The great Methodist missionary to India, E. Stanley Jones, got it right: a soul with a body is a ghost; a body with a soul is a corpse. (Introduction, p. 6)

8. Only God's Grace and Power Can Heal and Restore

“We preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord.” Paul said (2 Cor. 4:5). We do this because we believe that the brokenness of the human condition is so severe, the alienation so deep, that only the sovereign grace and transcendent power of God revealed in Jesus Christ can bring real healing and restoration. (Introduction, p. 6)

9. James Weldon Johnson's Birthday Prayer for Abraham Lincoln

One hundred years ago, in 1900, James Weldon Johnson wrote the following prayer to celebrate the birthday of Abraham Lincoln. We offer it here as our own prayer and the prayer of all others who have joined us in this mighty long journey:

God of our weary years,
God of our silent tears,
Thou who hast brought us
thus far on the way, Thou
who hast by thy might
Led us into light,
Keep us forever in the path, we pray:
Lest our feet stray from the places, our
God, where we met Thee, Lest our
hearts, drunk with the wine of the world,
we forget Thee ... Shadowed beneath Thy
hand, may we forever stand
True to our God, true to our Native Land. (Introduction, p. 8)

10. **Racism is Sin.**

Faith communities have come to the realization of the truth that *racism is sin*. We don't need to have any timidity about that statement. Racism declares that access to God, favorable status to God, is gained on the basis of race, whereas the gospel declares that favorable status with God is always based on *grace*. "For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men" --black men, white men, up folk and down folk --"Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lust, we should live soberly, righteously and godly, in this present world" (Titus 2:11). (McKinney, George, *Not an Easy Road* (Chapter 1), p. 11)

11. **Racism is prejudice plus power.**

Racism is prejudice plus power. It is the institutionalized expression of a controlling group's prejudices. *Racism is sin* and it is sin on several counts. It is the clear violation of God's law of love. It has enslaved, impoverished, and oppressed people in the United States and around the world. Racism is idolatry because it teaches that salvation is by *race* rather than *grace*. It is sin. It is an act of rebellion against God's revealed truth that all human life is created in God's image. Humanity fully expresses God's image in a wealth of diversity. (McKinney, George, *Not an Easy Road* (Chapter 1), p. 11)

12. **Man's Relatedness to God.**

Racism is sin because it teaches that man's dignity and worth are determined by skin color and not man's relatedness to God. (McKinney, George, *Not an Easy Road* (Chapter 1), p. 11)

13. **God is no respecter of persons.**

Racism is sin because it teaches the lie that grace is selective and racially inclusive of the majority group. The Bible declares that God is no respecter of persons. Whoever loves God, and fears him, is acceptable to

God.(McKinney, George, *Not an Easy Road* (Chapter 1), p. 11-12)

14. Culture and Custom Above Scripture.

Racism is sin because it places culture and custom above Scripture. For too long the Church has failed to use Scripture in dealing with racism. the racists stand on the quicksand of vacillating customs and ever-changing laws and society's norms. But we must always stand on Scripture. It is not God's will that any should perish. All have equal access to God through grace in Jesus Christ. It is strange how the church allowed itself to drift and to reflect the prevailing notions of culture rather than the clear teachings of Scripture regarding God's love for all people. In the life of Christ, it is quite clear, not only during his personal ministry, but in his parabolic teachings. For example, his story regarding the Samaritan was about someone who was different and yet whose behavior and faith placed him within God's favor and grace.(McKinney, George, *Not an Easy Road* (Chapter 1), p. 12)

15. Exclusion from the Family of Faith.

Racism is sin because it distorts the gospel. *Racism is sin* because it teaches that a person can be excluded from acceptance into the family of faith based on skin, when the gospel clearly teaches that the only basis of exclusion from the kingdom, from the family of faith, is *sin*, not *skin*.(McKinney, George, *Not an Easy Road* (Chapter 1), p. 12)

16. Racism tells Unscriptural Lies.

Racism teaches that God has been prejudicial in his act of creation. We know that it is sin because it tells lies on God. The Bible says that God, from one blood, created all nations to dwell on the face of the earth. *Racism is sin* because it gives the message that a person can be excluded from the fellowship of faith and from the abundant blessings of God on the basis of cultural determination rather than Scripture.(McKinney, George, *Not an Easy Road* (Chapter 1), p. 13)

17. The Church Did Not Own the Problem.

Racial Reconciliation is a vital part of this unfolding drama of redemption. While there have always been groups of Christians who have openly renounced racism as sin, it is only recently that major Christian bodies in America have opened up and declared that racism is sin and have repented on this sin. For too long, the Christian church in America did not deal with racism as sin. Rather it was treated as a sociopolitical phenomenon with deep roots in culture and history. It was not to be tampered with from the religious perspective. The church did not own the problem. It was a problem seen as society's problem to be addressed with social and economic solutions.(McKinney, George, *Not an Easy Road* (Chapter 1), p. 17)

18. Love Goes to Suffering and Ugly Problems.

It is love that has working clothes on that moves into the arena where there is suffering. It is love that's fearless, bold to address the ugly problems and to deal with human failure and dare to believe that grace is greater than all our sins.(McKinney, George, *Not an Easy Road* (Chapter 1), p. 18)

19. Ministry to Those Without Advocates.

It is ministry that translates into service to those who have no advocates -- to the voiceless, the homeless, the youth who are disaffected and disconnected, prisoners, the mentally ill, the children, the older Americans.(McKinney, George, *Not an Easy Road* (Chapter 1), p. 19)

20. Materials to Correct Views of History.

For racial reconciliation to move forward at the end of this century, we must continue to develop new Christian education materials that will reflect a correction of the view of history that has so often left out the contributions of African Americans, Native Americans,

Hispanics, and other minorities and their involvement in the brotherhood of man. (McKinney, George, *Not an Easy Road* (Chapter 1), p. 19)

21. Reconciliation Takes a Long Time.

I must caution those who would travel the road toward reconciliation that it is not an easy road. The years of estrangement, ignorance, injustice, and the pain and the suffering have resulted in bitterness, rage, hatred, and distrust. Some of these elements are to be found even among believers. So it is very important for us to understand that there must always be patience and compassion without compromising our position: “God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation” (2 Cor. 5:19). (McKinney, George, *Not an Easy Road* (Chapter 1), p. 19)

22. The Church to be Light.

I think we would all agree that God has called us, the believers, the church, the *ecclesia*, the called out ones to be light in this present darkness. (McKinney, George, *Not an Easy Road* (Chapter 1), p. 20)

23. The World Misunderstood the Why of Dr. King’s Mission.

It regularly occurred that the klieg lights for the television cameras would be turned off during Dr. King’s speeches when he dwelt on the religious and moral-philosophical basis of the movement for racial justice. They would be turned on again when the subject touched upon confrontational politics. In a luncheon conversation Dr. King once remarked, “They aren’t interested in the why of what we’re doing, only in the what we’re doing, and because they don’t understand the why, they cannot really understand the what.” (Land, Richard, *Moving Toward the Kingdom of Racial Reconciliation* (Chapter 2), p. 26)

24. Spiritual, Legislative, and Judicial Remedies.

The fact that racism is at its foundation a spiritual problem and will be vanquished ultimately only by spiritual means does not mean that legislative and judicial remedies should not be, must not be, applied to racial discrimination and bigotry. Another myth that must be challenged is the belief that “you can’t legislate morality.” Actually, to a very significant degree, society can, and it must. As New Testament Christians, we believe the most sustained statement in the Bible concerning the divinely appointed civil magistrate is in Romans, and it says God ordained civil magistrates to punish those who do evil and reward those who do what is right (Rom. 13:1-8). If you take away from the government the authority and the ability to do that, you have taken away from government the primary reason God gave us government. (Land, Richard, *Moving Toward the Kingdom of Racial Reconciliation* (Chapter 2), p. 26-27)

25. Light of Gospel Changes Hearts.

However, while the salt of the law can change actions, it is only the light of the gospel that can change attitudes. The salt of the law can change behaviors, but it is only the light of the gospel that can change beliefs. The salt of the law can change habits, but it is only the light of the gospel that can change hearts. (Land, Richard, *Moving Toward the Kingdom of Racial Reconciliation* (Chapter 2), p. 30)

26. The Need to Be Salt and Light

We have failed too often in the past in America. We have had two great religious awakenings and slavery survived both, because we did not understand adequately the need to move from our personal lives to our prophetic commission to be salt and light in our society. (Land, Richard, *Moving Toward the Kingdom of Racial Reconciliation* (Chapter 2), p. 35)

27. Racism is a Global Problem and Has a Global Solution

Jesus *commanded* us to be salt. He *commanded* us to be light. Salt

has to touch that which it would preserve and come into contact with that which it would purify. Jesus commanded us to be salt and light. A Christianity that has lost its vertical vision has lost its salt. But a Christianity that forgets its horizontal commission to be ambassadors of reconciliation has forgotten the Incarnation, the Word made flesh that “dwelt among us” (John 1:14). Racism is a global problem and it has a global solution. That solution’s hope is found in the cross of our Savior. Now I’m not talking about a merely pietistic, “let’s change hearts.” We have to call for racial justice and we must live racial justice and racial reconciliation. And those who have been identified as the oppressors have a special burden to reach out again, and again, and again to those they have historically pushed away and shunted aside.(Land, Richard, *Moving Toward the Kingdom of Racial Reconciliation* (Chapter 2), p. 35)

28. Color Scheme is God-willed.

The fact that God raises the race question in the text is a signal for the necessity of asking: Why cannot an Ethiopian change his skin? Why would he want to to? The first question calls us to realize that *color scheme* is God-willed. In the science of color, black is basic; other colors come out of it and can be returned to it.(Glover, N. Spencer, *Don’t Let Skin Stop You!*(Chapter 3), p. 39)

29. Black is Unchangeable

Black is basic, uneraseable, unchangeable, but not the product of a curse; it cannot be changed. Biblical geography makes clear that races are intentional and have divinely intentional roles on the master plan of him who doeth all things well. To allow racism to cause us to decide against being who and what we are makes living in the is world one big problem.(Glover, N. Spencer, *Don’t Let Skin Stop You!*(Chapter 3), p. 40)

30. Both Black and White Skin a Curse.

If we believe that the Bible teaches black skin to be a curse, then we must also believe white skin to be a curse. Read carefully Genesis 9,

and you will see that Canaan, Ham's son, was cursed to be a "servant of servants ...unto his brethren." Note that Noah, his grandfather, cursed him--not God. Read also 2 Kings 5, and see that Gehazi, the servant of Elisha, was cursed with leprosy from which Naaman had been healed because he disobeyed the prophet. Verse 27 says, "The leprosy therefore of Naaman shall cleave unto thee, and unto thy seed for ever. And he went out from his presence a leper as white as snow." I believe you can see from these quotes they are open to speculation, and the answer derived depends upon who is doing the speculating. Glover, N. Spencer, *Don't Let Skin Stop You!*(Chapter 3), p. 40)

31. Color Scheme in Overall Plan of God.

To give heed to the testimony of nature is to understand that "color scheme" has purpose in the overall plan of God. It has to do with climate, survival, beauty, and comeliness, but it was never intended to promote separation and estrangement. Diversity, yes, but estrangement, no. The reality of God's human creation is "out of blood, God made all nations to dwell upon the earth (Acts 17:26) -- not out of one skin.(Glover, N. Spencer, *Don't Let Skin Stop You!*(Chapter 3), p. 40)

32. Out of one blood all nations were created.

The "one blood" tie of all nations that dwell on the face of the earth is deeper than visible skin. We are all ancestrally connected. The Bible tells us we are geographically connected and religiously connected.

If you are deeply interested, study Genesis 2, geographically and Genesis 10, biographically. Turn to Acts 8, and be enlightened by the race of the Ethiopian eunuch, which would lead you to check on Philip, his chariot companion, who you can discover to have been black in skin color. Keep reading and you will come upon the men of Cyprus and Cyrene who carried the gospel from Jerusalem to Antioch. Geographically, they were men of dark hue. I'm simply calling to your attention the necessity of not dismissing a biblical testimony: "out of one blood" all nations were created. (Glover, N. Spencer, *Don't Let*

Skin Stop You!(Chapter 3), p. 41-42)

33. The Family of God is Blood Kin.

It's not a matter of what color we are, or what nationality or what language we speak, but whether we are true beings in right relation with God. This puts us in right relation with each other. This means that the oneness of the family of God makes us blood kin, for it is the blood of Jesus that cleanses us from all unrighteousness--and that "all" includes racism. To be reconciled to God through the blood of Christ binds us to the "in Christ" emphasis of the apostle Paul.(Glover, N. Spencer, *Don't Let Skin Stop You!*(Chapter 3), p. 46)

34. Skin Not Stop Us From Unifying as One Family in Christ.

We cannot change our color. We can "mix it, mask it, tan it, but we can never change it at the root. Cosmetology, scientific gadgeting, or mere wishing will never make it so. Neither will racist vocabulary or political schema, God does not intend change of skin, but he does intend that skin not stop us from unifying as one family in Christ. Now it's no surprise to God that human beings object to that. They opposed the reconciled life that is in Christ.(Glover, N. Spencer, *Don't Let Skin Stop You!*(Chapter 3), p. 47)

35. The Transformed Life.

Much is being said today about self-esteem and self-affirmation, but remember that the reconciled life finds a new form of self-affirmation. It is a transformed life wherein we are reconciled to both God and man. Racism is full of the will to power and glory. That glory is pure self-glory. It lifts one human being above another because of creed and color, and that's racism. But Christian self-esteem or self-affirmation is loving ourselves as a gift from God. A gift is not to be kept but surrendered to God, to be used according to his purposes.

Instead of striving to climb on and over one another, we lose ourselves in dedication of our lives to God. I hear somebody saying, "That's wiping self out." Not really; that's simply recognizing that the "old

person” has been crucified with Christ. The damnable ego has died, and the sanctified ego has been resurrected.(Glover, N. Spencer, *Don't Let Skin Stop You!*(Chapter 3), p. 48-49)

36. Thank God for the sameness.

Can the Ethiopian change his skin? No, by the grace of God he is what he is. Can the Asian -- can the African American -- can the Caucasian -- change his skin? No, by the grace of God they are what they are. I invite you, though, to get under the skin -- where it really counts -- and see that the inner man is in no way different from you. Learn to thank God for the *sameness*. (Glover, N. Spencer, *Don't Let Skin Stop You!*(Chapter 3), p. 49)

37. Paul's View of Racial Discrimination.

Speaking to the Athenians who boasted of their racial superiority, Paul declared, “[God] has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and boundaries of their dwellings” (Acts 17:26 nkjv). Few words in Paul's theology are more pregnant with significance as they relate to racial discrimination. He states here that the one common origin of humanity is inseparably bound up with the unity of the Godhead. (Olford, Stephen, *The Answer to Racial Discrimination*) Chapter 4), p. 53-54)

38. All Under the Creator

All local circumstances of soil and climate that influence human characteristics come under the heading of the “boundaries of [man's] dwellings.” Thus, even though races can be divided into Caucasian, Mongolian, and Negroid, they are in fact united under one supreme Creator and sustainer of the universe. No one can hold this biblical doctrine of our common ancestry and be racist. (Olford, Stephen, *The Answer to Racial Discrimination*, (Chapter 4), p. 54)

39. Relationships with Others.

Our responsibilities do not reach an abrupt end when we enter into a personal relationship with God through Christ, but by the very nature of that unique relationship we are called upon to enter into relationships with fellow human beings. (Thurman, Michael, *Love: Fundamental Ingredient of the Christian Life* (Chapter 5), p.68)

40. Craddock's story "I was born that day"

Fred Craddock tells the story of vacationing one summer in the Smoky Mountains of Tennessee. He and his wife have found a lovely little restaurant at a place called Black Bear Inn. He said they were seated there looking out at the mountains, when this old man with white hair, a Carl Sandburg-looking person, came over and spoke to him. The man said, "You here on vacation?" And they said, "Yes." "Well, what do you do?" Craddock said he was thinking this was none of his business, but he finally said, "I am a minister."

The old man said, "Oh, a minister! Well, do I have a story for you." And he pulled out a chair and sat down, just took a place uninvited, and proceeded to tell his story. Craddock said he found out later that the man was eighty years old and a former governor of Tennessee.

"I was born here in these mountains," the man said, "and when I was growing up, I attended the Laurel Springs Church. My mother was not married and as you might expect in those days, I was greatly embarrassed about that. At school I would hide in the weeds by a nearby river and eat my lunch alone, because the other children were very cruel. And when I went to town with my courageous mother, I would see the way people looked at me trying to guess who my daddy was. The preacher at the little church fascinated me, but at the same time, he scared me. He had a long beard, a rough-hewn face, a deep voice, but I sure liked to hear him preach. But I didn't think I was welcomed at church so I would go just for the sermon. As soon as the sermon was over, I would rush out so nobody would say, 'What's a boy like you doing here in church?'"

“But one day,” the man said as he continued to tell his story about his boyhood days, “I was trying to get out of the church, but some people had already gotten in the aisle so I had to remain. I was waiting, getting in a cold sweat, when all of a sudden I felt a hand on my shoulder. I looked out of the corner of my eye and realized it was the face of the preacher, and I was scared to death! The preacher looked at me. He didn’t say a word, he just looked at me, and then he said, ‘Well, boy, you’re a child of ... umm. Why you are a child of God. I see a striking resemblance, boy! He swatted me on the bottom and said, ‘Now go and claim your inheritance.’”

And then the old man who was telling the story said to Fred Craddock, “I was born on that day!” (Jackson, Alvin, *Obsessed with the Obvious* (Chapter 9), p. 119-120)

41. God’s Dream of Reconciliation.

Reconciliation is a bold dream of God ...a dream that we must ever struggle for, but a dream God guarantees to bring to fruition.

The slaves knew it and sang about it: “I’m gonna sit at the welcomin’ table; I gonna sit at the welcomin’ table, one of these days, glory hallelujah, one of these days.”

42. Light to Recognize a Person as brother or Sister.

There is an old rabbinical story in which the rabbi asked his students, “Children, how can we determine the moment of dawn when the night ends and the day begins?”

One student responded, “When I see the difference between a dog and a sheep?” “No,” said the rabbi.

A second student asked, “Is it when I can see the difference between a fig tree and a grapevine?” “No.”

“Please tell us the answer,” begged the students.

The old rabbi responded, “You know the night ends and the day begins when you can look into the face of any human being and have enough light to recognize the person as your brother or sister, when you can say, ‘I see myself in you.’ Up until that time it is night, and darkness is still with us.” (Dunnam, Maxie, *Reconciliation: Our Calling* (Chapter 4), p. 126)