

INTERDENOMINATIONAL MATTERS AND HERESY

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Response to Overture 8: Oppose White Supremacy and Systemic Racism, from Classis Greater Los Angeles

A. *Materials*: Overture 8, pp. 506-13

B. *Observations*

As an advisory committee, we add the following as an introduction to our recommendations related to Overture 8 from Classis Greater Los Angeles.

It is a sad commentary on the church in North America today that an overture like the one from Classis Greater Los Angeles tends to get read by Christians firstly through a political or partisan lens. Christians of varying political persuasions, formed firstly by partisan political identities, have a hard time hearing the whole counsel of God in Scripture on such matters as racism, justice, systemic and institutional forms of injustice, etc., even as we desperately need to hear the Word of God in these areas. Racism is sin that plagues all levels of human society—personal, corporate, and systemic—and where it exists in the church, it needs to be repented of. The solution to the sin of racism, and the suspicion and separation of peoples that such racism generates, is the cross of Jesus Christ and baptism into his name, which reconciles and unites “Jew and Gentile, slave and free, male and female” into one new family of God (Gal. 3:28). It is precisely because we have *already* been given the gift of oneness in Christ that we also have an obligation to make this oneness visible, and to repent when this visible oneness is broken by patterns and practices of racism (Belhar Confession, Art. 2).

As Christ’s new humanity, the church must engage our society’s broader conversations about racism and justice in distinctively Christian ways. While we seek to learn from culture insofar as God has graciously revealed certain gifts and wisdom in this arena, the church’s reflections and prophetic statements in such matters must never simply be a mirror of culture—simply speaking back to culture what it otherwise already wants to believe. In the recommendations that we offer as a response to Overture 8, this advisory committee wishes to urge the CRCNA to speak, teach, worship, and live in a way that allows our deep and common Christian identity, rooted in the gospel, to lead the way on matters of justice and racism—to allow the Word of God to speak prophetically from a distinctly Reformed perspective on the matters at hand, such that we might all (individuals, churches, and institutions) be called to repentance and to clothe ourselves with the humility, holiness, and justice of Jesus Christ, who is himself the One who does justice, loves mercy, and walks humbly with his Father (Micah 6:8), and who in himself tore down the dividing wall of hostility that separates his Father’s children (Eph. 2:14). Furthermore, we urge local churches to take seriously their responsibility to be the *primary* site of gospel formation for their members in these areas, training their members to renounce sin *in these areas specifically*, to put on new life in Christ, and to be equipped for lives of sanctified and just service, that the body of Christ might be built up (Eph. 4:11-16). In sum: if the CRCNA must speak at every level of our life together (and we must), let us speak not from

our preferred political tribe, but from the cross: the folly and the weakness of God (1 Corinthians 1:25).

C. *Recommendations*

1. In light of the centrality of the ministry of the word in the CRCNA, we request the following:
 - a. That synod ask Calvin Theological Seminary to give a report to the COD on how they are teaching a biblical and Reformed perspective on issues of race and justice.
 - b. That synod instruct the COD to encourage classes to ask questions of all candidates for ministry regarding their commitment to preach a biblical and Reformed perspective on race and justice.

Ground: We believe the pulpit holds the key and has the responsibility to teach and inspire members to commit to embrace and embody biblical and Reformed perspectives on race and justice.

2. In light of the ministry of the offices which Christ has given his church, that synod remind churches of the following:
 - a. All elders are responsible to defend the faith and doctrine taught from their church pulpit, including our denomination's position on a biblical response to matters of racism and justice;
 - b. All deacons are responsible to seek justice and work to change exploitative structures and systems for the flourishing of all people.

Ground: This is consistent with the charge to elders and deacons in the form for ordination and installation of office bearers.

3. That synod direct the general secretary to request Worship Ministries to curate and provide resources to the churches that help congregations in matters of racial injustice to lament, confess, and receive assurance of pardon in corporate worship.

Grounds:

- a. Worship in the Reformed tradition has historically included confession of sin and assurance of our pardon. As Jesus' church, we model confession for one another and the world around us as we regularly confess all our sin, individually and corporately, including, attitudes and actions of racism, ethnic pride, white supremacy, systemic racism, and any sin that destroys the unity given us in Christ.
 - b. The Heidelberg Catechism supports the need for confession and repentance in Question and Answer 89: "What is the dying away of the old self? To be genuinely sorry for sin and more and more to hate and run away from it."
4. That synod encourage leaders at all levels of the church to provide opportunities for listening, learning, and practicing civil dialogue on the difficult conversations needed to better understand one another's perspective on racism and biblical justice. And that synod also encourage churches to make use of denominational resources.

Ground: Listening has the power to create the change needed for justice between diverse races. The empathy that rises from the power of sharing stories will lead members to actions that will transform the interconnection between justice and racial policy, giving our lives of faith integrity.

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