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LEARNING TO COUNT TO ONE

THE JOY AND PAIN OF BECOMING
A MULTIRACIAL CHURCH

EDITED BY ALFRED E. MULDER

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A MULTIRACIAL CHURCH



Grand Rapids, Michigan

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FOREWORD

Learning to Count to One is a timely treatment of an important topic. As the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) approaches her sesquicentennial (150th) year in 2007, it is appropriate that she reflect on her journey from having a mostly monoethnic heritage to increasingly becoming a multiethnic community of faith. This discussion is not new, nor is it finished. The discussion is happening globally in the World Alliance of Reformed Churches; *Learning to Count to One* is our contribution to that broader discussion.

Alfred E. Mulder has devoted most of his ministry to understanding and celebrating the richness of cultural diversity among the people of God. He has done so in the practice of ministry, in the writing of songs, in countless meetings, and in taking on this project as editor of *Learning to Count to One*. To Al, and to all who contributed to this discussion, we are deeply grateful. May the discussion be enriched by these reflections, and may the vision of saints ransomed for God “from every tribe and language and people and nation” (Rev. 5:9) be increasingly evident in the Church everywhere.

—Peter Borgdorff

Executive Director
Christian Reformed Church in North America

September 2005

INTRODUCTION

“So in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.” —Romans 12:5

I was born on a farm in northwest Iowa. My great-great-grandfather, Yge Mulder, immigrated to Sioux County from the Netherlands in 1868. Some thirty years later my mother’s father emigrated from the same Dutch village. In my childhood, as far as I know, every known living relative was Dutch American. Every student at my country school was Dutch American. Every farmer in our threshing ring was of Dutch descent. So was every member in our congregation. So were all my teachers, from grade school through high school.



The only folks I can remember who were not Dutch were the undertaker for my brother’s funeral and a young vacation Bible school teacher who led me to commit my life to Christ. Although not “Dutch,” even they were white like me. As a child, my world was all white.

What a difference a half-century makes! I still am white and of Dutch descent. But if you were to hang around with me awhile, you would notice

The author, second of ten children, is seated to the left. Gerald, the firstborn, was fatally injured in a farm accident at age eleven. Younger brother Harold is a retired educator.

that my racial and cultural circle has become more diverse. Our home is decorated with southwestern art. Our gallery of grandchildren includes faces with Hispanic and Navajo features. Our resident grandson is a “white kid” on a mostly black football team. Our first great-grandson has African curls. The supermarket where we shop has the look and feel of an international market. The congregation I belong to is African American, Asian American, Hispanic, and white. In God’s kind providence, I am *learning to count to one*.

I first heard the phrase *Learning to Count to One* in Kalamazoo, Michigan. The Rev. Denise Posie pastors a multiracial congregation there. At the celebration of her fifth anniversary at Immanuel CRC, the Rev. Dr. J. Louis Felton of nearby Galilee Missionary Baptist Church spoke on *Learning to Count to One*. I express my deep thanks to Dr. Felton for generously granting permission for me to use his phrase in this book.

WHY THIS BOOK?

This also is the growing story of the Christian Reformed Church. The CRC numbers approximately one thousand congregations, three-fourths of them in the United States and one-fourth in Canada. Since the beginning of my ministry in 1960, I have witnessed increasing racial and cultural diversity on several fronts in my originally Dutch immigrant denomination. So I am grateful for the opportunity to trace the story of this increasing diversity in the CRC—as hesitant and halting as it has been. To echo my grandson Al Garcia about his experience in the 101st Airborne, “I think I was born for this.”

This project was first posed by CRC executive director Rev. Peter Borgdorff. As a delegate to the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, Borgdorff was monitoring a unique initiative to explore the relationship between so-called mainline churches and immigrant churches.

In 1999 the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and John Knox Reformed International Centre began joint sponsorship of Mission in Unity, with Jet den Hollander as project director.

This prompted him to suggest that the CRC contribute a case study of its own journey as a historically immigrant denomination. As we began imagining this study, another important objective emerged. Because the CRC is committed to becoming a more racially diverse and reconciled family of churches, we became convinced that this study also would enhance this important vision and goal.

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

In preparation for this project, I was privileged to meet with Dutch leaders who had already submitted a study.

I discovered that the Dutch are dealing with issues and concerns that are similar to those in North America—issues like the social and economic plight of immigrants, especially those from Africa, Asia, and the Middle East, as well as the attending mission opportunities and challenges. Another similarity is that the CRC and the Protestant Church in the Netherlands (PCN) are both motivated by the mission of God and by our common identity in Christ.

There also are important differences between the two denominations. In the Netherlands, immigrant Christians formed congregations that are organizationally separate, leaving the PCN membership almost exclusively white. According to Dr. Sjaak van't Kruis, “It is not only remarkable but also disquieting that things remain so ‘white’ within the established Dutch churches” (*Born in Zion*, p. 30). Consequently the primary approach available to the Dutch has been to cultivate working relationships with these newer immigrant denominations across denominational lines. By contrast, more than 150 of the CRC’s 1,000 congregations are made up primarily of persons of color. Another difference is that the Dutch study focuses more on community development, ecumenism, and partnership issues, whereas the CRC has worked harder at evangelizing, church planting, and racial reconciliation.

A third difference relates to the status and nature of immigrant churches. In countries such as the Netherlands, the historic or mainline Reformed churches are indigenous to the countries in which they were founded; virtually all immigrants are relative newcomers and are persons of color. By contrast, North American denominations with European roots may be considered mainline churches, but at the same time are historically immigrant churches as well. This certainly is true of the CRC.

In October 2003, Borgdorff and Mulder interviewed Dr. Sjaak van't Kruis, who wrote *Born in Zion* (2001), and Ms. Elza Kuyk, lead contributor to *Relations with Migrant Churches* (2002).

A related dimension is our differing histories regarding the concept of race. Even though Europeans introduced the “race” construct as a distinguishing feature of people groups worldwide, “race” became a defining and organizing principle in North America in ways that Europeans had neither intended nor imagined. (See origin and meaning of race, pp. 11-12, and an overview of our “racialized” United States and Canadian culture, chapter 1.)

WHAT LANGUAGE SHALL WE BORROW?

Speaking of “mainline” and “immigrant” churches may be accurate in certain European or international settings, but the North American context requires different terminology. For the CRC specifically, the early focus is the “Dutch immigrant” character of the CRC in relation to a variety of racial and ethnic stories.

In 1995, a Calvin College social research project reported that 89 percent of all members in the CRC claimed full or partial Dutch ancestry.

Many of these “other” people groups that are now part of the CRC are immigrants—for the most part, Asian Americans and Latin Americans. However, the distinguishing history of most persons of African descent, particularly in the United States, is not one of immigration but of enslavement and oppression. Similarly, First Nations people in Canada and Native Americans in the United States—while having migrated here once upon a time—certainly are not immigrants. These multiple story lines are all wrapped into the title *Learning to Count to One: The Joy and Pain of Becoming a Multiracial Church*. To help us in our thinking and conversation, we need to clarify some of the reoccurring terminology used in this study.

MULTIETHNIC

Churches with people from various races and countries of origin are often described as *multi-ethnic*. The word *ethnic* comes from the Greek word *ethnee* and refers to nations or people groups. (A biblical example is the people groups named on Pentecost Sunday: “Parthians, Medes

and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia. . . .” Acts 2:9).

Too frequently *ethnic* is used as a code word for *race*—referring specifically to people who are *not white*, or as a synonym for population groups whose first language is not English.

Strictly speaking, *ethnicity* refers to one’s country of origin. In this sense, perhaps, most white gatherings in North America today are multiethnic. Hispanic leaders are quick to point out that many Hispanic congregations in North America also include multiple ethnicities: persons from Argentina, Costa Rica, Cuba, Mexico, Nicaragua, Puerto Rico, Peru, and more. The point is that a *multiethnic* congregation, while a beautiful creation of God, is not necessarily multiracial.

Multicultural

For the sociologist, culture includes such factors as age, economic status, educational levels, gender, geography, language, national origin, political preference, sexual orientation, race, religion, and more. According to the dictionary, culture has a whole range of meanings from artistic and intellectual pursuits to the sum total of how a nation thinks and acts—for example, the Greek culture.

So from one perspective, the term *multicultural* is too generic. When you consider the inclusiveness of culture—economics, education, behavior, age differences—every congregation is multicultural, *with or without* ethnic and racial diversity. From another perspective, however, *multicultural* is comprehensive, including core identity and default behavior plus skin color and national origin. God’s grand new community, drawn from “every tribe and language and people and nation” (Rev. 5:9), is perhaps best captured by the term *multicultural*.

Multiracial

Multiracial is another term used to describe congregations with ethnic and racial diversity. Interestingly, “*race* is actually a categorization invented a few hundred years ago by the earliest

Since the 1970s the CRC has tended to use *ethnic* as a catch-all term that includes indigenous peoples in Canada and the United States, all persons of African descent, Hispanics of whatever hue, and all other non-white immigrants in Canada and the U.S.

European anthropologists to account for the human diversity that was coming to their awareness during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Yet that notion of ‘race,’ or human subspecies, quickly revealed itself—even to fledgling anthropology—to be without scientific validity” (*The Banner*, Sept. 2004, pp. 42-43). Similarly, the Alpen Institute contends, “Scientific studies conclude that race has no biological meaning or significance. The gene for skin color is linked with no other human trait. The genes that account for intelligence, athletic ability, personality type, and even hair and eye color are independent of the gene for skin color” (*Structural Racism and Community Building*, June 2004, p. 8). How insidious that this flimsy construct—gradation in skin color—has greater social and political significance than either ethnicity or culture. Ironically, in spite of its superficial basis, division over race tends to be deeper and wider than either culture or ethnicity. In some ways, therefore, becoming *multiracial* is the greater challenge.

During a 1980s interview for a ministry position with the CRC, Rev. Gina Jacobs, a member of the Sioux nation and a seminary graduate, said, “I’ve always felt more discriminated against as an Indian than as a woman.”

My general preference for the purposes of this study is to use the term *multiracial*. Recognizing, however, that no terminology is best for every situation, at times we will use the terms *multicultural* and *multiethnic* interchangeably or in combination with the term *multiracial*.

Ethnicity and Race

When possible we will identify people in relation to their national origin: Korean, Puerto Rican, Vietnamese, and so on. Some of the time, however, the context may require specific ethnic and racial categories. Although indigenous people in Canada are commonly referred to as aboriginal or First Nations, and as Native American in the U.S., generally they all prefer to be referred to by their tribal name, such as Apache or Cherokee, Navajo, or Haida. Ethnic Haitians, Jamaicans, African immigrants, African Americans, and African Canadians also, at times, refer to their shared racialized identity by the more inclusive term *black*. Other broad categories, such as Asian or Hispanic, also may

be useful in referring specifically to other racialized groups.



Ethnic Minority

Although this language is commonly used to describe persons who are not white, there is increasing discomfort with it. For one thing, *ethnee* is a Greek word that means a nation or people. In other words, we are all *ethnee* or ethnic. Further, whether or not we are members of an ethnic minority depends at least in part on the context. A person who is Chinese American is part of a numerical majority in Chinatown but a member of an ethnic numerical minority in the voting booth or the bank. A white pastor may be a member of an ethnic numerical minority in a black or Navajo community, but still be part of the white majority in terms of privilege and power in the broader society. Given prevailing North American practices regarding ethnicity and race, *minority* conveys lack of access or status and therefore may be a put-down. Similarly, *majority* communicates the not so subtly implied right to rule. Handle with care!

Persons of Color and White Persons

Given our “racialized” society, occasionally we need vocabulary that distinguishes between the “numerical majority” and “numerical minorities” as a whole. Although no race-based language is without difficulty, ordinarily we will use the term *white persons* for Anglos, Caucasians, and “non-Hispanic whites.” And, with apologies to all, we will use the phrase “persons of color” when needing to

The billboard in front of this CRC ministry in Arcadia, California, lists separate congregational worship services in five languages: English, Chinese, Korean, Indonesian, and Spanish.

differentiate ethnic, racial, national, and cultural people groups who are not identified as white.

FROM WHOM AND TO WHOM?

Learning to Count to One is an authentic team effort. I express my appreciation to Peter Borgdorff for envisioning the project and to Patricia Nederveld for leading the publishing process. Special thanks to a committed group of writers—Harry Boonstra, Louis Tamminga, Reginald Smith, Manny Bersach, Edward Yoon, Lois and Mike Vander Pol, and John VanTil—for their chapter contributions. I praise God for those dozens of beautiful saints—persons of color and white persons—whose love for the Lord and his church prompted them to share their stories of joy and pain. Thanks to Stanley Jim, Tong Park, Robert Price, and Gary Teja for their helpful advice in the concept stage of the project. Thanks also to Viviana Cornejo for timely assistance with chapter 6, and to Art Hoekstra for his expert screening out of race bias in our language. Finally, I was encouraged and supported by the journalistic eyes and mission heart of my daughter Bonny Mulder-Behnia, and her material contribution to chapter 10. Whether you are a congregational leader or conscientious disciple, *Learning to Count to One* will inform and challenge you regarding God’s vision for the church in our North American context. If you are looking for small group or adult education materials, I pray that these stories will help you reflect together on your world and life witness as twenty-first century followers of Jesus. In his letter to the diverse congregation in ancient Rome, the apostle Paul emphatically reminded these early Christians, “*So in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others*” (12:5). The angel who spoke to the seven churches in Asia Minor a generation later says to us as well: “Anyone who is willing to hear should listen to the Spirit and understand what the Spirit is saying to the churches” (Rev. 2:7a, New Living Translation).

—Al Mulder
September 2005

CHAPTER ONE

DISCOVERING A CONTINENT

Alfred E. Mulder

“... from every tribe and language and people and nation . . .” —Revelation 5:9

We met at the city library. I was looking for resource materials, and she offered her assistance. It took us a while. The very next Sunday, as I was leaving our early service, I met her again as she was walking up for the second service. We were surprised to realize we attended the same congregation. We greeted each other cordially and introduced ourselves again. We asked about each other’s faith walk and families. When she asked about my work, I told her I was a minister and that I helped the Christian Reformed Church start new Christian Reformed congregations. She then said to me in utter amazement, “Why would anyone want to start another Christian Reformed Church?”

She was enthusiastic about our own congregation, but believed that “we” were different from the rest of the CRC. Living among a concentration of CRC congregations in western Michigan, she had a very negative view of the CRC as a whole.

WHAT DID THE CRC FIRST LOOK LIKE?

In the 1840s hundreds of Dutch-speaking folks immigrated to the United States and located in West Michigan. Many of them came as congregations—with a pastor, elders, and deacons already in place. By 1849, seven West Michigan

immigrant congregations—nearly 1,000 persons strong—had organized themselves as “Classis Holland.” In 1850, with the coaxing of Rev. Wyckoff from New York, they affiliated with the United States-based counterpart of the Netherlands state church, the Dutch Reformed Church (now the Reformed Church in America).

Before long, complaints began circulating among the new immigrant churches: too many hymns were being sung, the Lord’s Supper was open to Christians of non-Reformed traditions, catechism instruction was being neglected, and “what grieves our hearts most in all of this is that there are members among you who regard our secession in the Netherlands as not strictly necessary, or that it was untimely.” Besides, some argued, Rev. Wyckoff “gives us liberty to walk in this ecclesiastical path.” (*Torch and Trumpet*, April 1957).

According to T. Ulberg, the Vriesland group also complained that “colored communicants were seated apart from the rest at the table of the Lord.” This complaint was not repeated as a ground for seceding from its older sister denomination.

So after a tentative seven-year relationship, five immigrant congregations with two ministers and 750 members separated from the RCA. With one minister serving as president and the other as clerk, they held an organizational meeting on April 29, 1857. And that is how the Christian Reformed Church was born. (One congregation and one minister, Rev. Klijn, returned to the Dutch Reformed Church during the first year.)

Immigrants do not arrive without baggage. Hardly a generation earlier, many of these same folks had objected to similar practices in the state-sanctioned Reformed Church in the Netherlands. Their protests had little effect, and in 1834 a number of Dutch congregations officially separated or *seceded* from their mother church. The Dutch government held a dim view of secession, and the seceders suffered significant personal loss (more about this in chapter 2). Understandably, they were skittish about being linked with anyone who might not be totally like-minded.

This is not to say that the seceders made their complaints flippantly. They were tough-minded people with courage and conviction who put their lives on the line for what they believed. They valued the

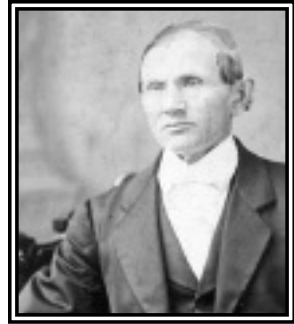
Reformed tradition and championed orthodoxy as they understood it. How could they “trust” a denomination, historically Dutch and Reformed or otherwise, that failed to appreciate the recent struggles in their homeland? Thus, separated from their motherland by the Atlantic Ocean and from their new homeland by language and culture, this small but determined band of seceders further isolated themselves by going it on their own—again.

IN WHAT GARDEN DID WE GROW?

As a boy attending a one-room Iowa country school in the 1940s, I was impressed with the magnanimous spirit of the Declaration of Independence by the United States of America: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness. . . . That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it and to institute new Government . . . in such form as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness.”

As a man starting ministry in the 1960s, I gradually became aware that this magnanimous spirit applied readily to white America—but only reluctantly to other Americans. Ironically, this language allowed a prevailing view—among whites at least—that white persons were created superior to other persons. In spite of these glorious words, many still believed that men were created more equal than women, and that white citizens were guaranteed more “unalienable Rights” than others.

I gradually realized how inconsistently we as Christians truly rise above the culture of which we are a part. I say this about my sometimes complicit role in missionary work among Navajos and Zunis in the Southwest—from boarding schools patterned after the United States government to our paternalistic approach



One of two ministers in the CRC, and for a time the only one, the Rev. Koene Vanden Bosch had newly emigrated from the Netherlands. The Noordeloos CRC centennial booklet described their first pastor this way: “Rev. Vanden Bosch was a man of staunch religious convictions and found it extremely difficult to accept convictions other than his own. For him to forgive someone who had wronged him did not come easily.”



In the mid-1900s, one-room country schools dotted the Iowa countryside—often one every four square miles. The author attended Center Township #5 through grade 7, at which time his parents transferred him to the Christian school in Ireton, Iowa.

“Our coziness with the culture has made us so blind to many of its evils that, instead of calling them into question, we offer our own versions of them—in God’s name, and with a good conscience.”

—MIROSLAV VOLF, *EXCLUSION AND EMBRACE*,
ABINGDON PRESS 1996, P. 36

in training native leaders. I say this about our general difficulty in distinguishing between religious truth and religious tradition, and between Christian convictions and cultural conditioning.

This is why it is so important to understand the context in which we were birthed and grew. We need to reexamine our national histories and how they bear on our personal attitudes and corporate identity—especially in relation to race and culture.

FINDERS, KEEPERS?

The early development and colonization of Canada and the United States was a natural outgrowth of prevailing attitudes among Christians toward the un-Christianized world. The Roman papacy and European monarchs alike touted the belief, also called the Doctrine of Discovery, that the “heathen” were unworthy to possess the physical wealth of God’s creation. In 1482 King Henry VII of England said it this way: “Seek out, discover, and find what so ever islands, countries, regions, or provinces of the heathens and infidels, what so ever they be, and in what part of the world so ever they be, which before this time have been unknown to Christians” (Haudenasaunee UN Intervention, and Sardar and Davies, p. 144). Christian nations were encouraged to “discover” land occupied by non-Christian people and claim it for advancing God’s purposes. Ten years later Columbus “discovered” America, and five years after that Cabot “discovered” Canada. The idea was simple: finders, keepers!

Finding Land

Obviously this philosophy was custom-made for North American settlers in securing land then occupied by “heathen” natives. For the vast majority of our shared histories, our two nations “discovered” both used and unused lands—from sea to shining sea. Sometimes the newcomers paid reasonable prices, and sometimes absurd prices. Far too often they simply took land because they could. For centuries, aboriginal peoples in

Canada and Native Americans in the United States were denied the right to vote or hold property. Both countries adopted Reservation Acts. Both countries reduced the lands available for native use, expanding the resources available to newcomers. Both countries developed and operated boarding schools that separated Indian children from their parents in order to “civilize” them.



The heart of the strategy was devaluing Native people as inferior or less than human—as “wild savages.” Commenting on the adage that “The only good Indian is a dead Indian,” future president Theodore Roosevelt said in 1886, “I don’t go so far as to think that the only good Indians are dead Indians, but I believe nine out of every ten are, and I shouldn’t like to inquire too closely into the tenth. The most vicious cowboy has more moral principle than the average Indian.” In 1895 some synodical delegates argued against sending missionaries among Native Americans “since Indians are a dying race.” The net result of such attitudes has been incredible devastation and degradation of Native populations in the United States and Canada in the name of civilization and progress. Four hundred years after being “discovered,” the majority of First Nations people scratch out a marginalized existence on government reserves, while the heirs of Europeans hold title to the majority of the land and resources.

Both countries developed and operated boarding schools that separated Indian children from their parents in order to “civilize” them.

Finding Labor

Another major factor in the early development of our nations, particularly the United States, was the practice of enslavement. The ancestors of the overwhelming majority of African Americans today were brought to North America for enslavement during the 1600s and 1700s. Driven by the desire for cheap labor, the slave trade flourished in the southern British colonies. Slavery also was accepted in the Spanish colony of Florida, the French colony of Louisiana, and to a degree in New France (now Quebec) and British Canada.

To some extent the prevailing attitude toward enslavement swung back and forth. Prior to New Netherland (now New York) becoming a British colony in 1664, English courts generally had held that when enslaved people from Africa became Christians, they were to be set free. In 1665 Dutch governor Peter Stuyvesant did the British one better by also defending the right of free blacks to own land. However, between then and 1704, six colonies, including New York and New Jersey, passed legislation making it legal for Christians to remain enslaved. Virginia went one step further, declaring that if a master were to kill an enslaved person in the course of giving correction, the master “*shall be free and acquitted of all punishment and accusation for the same, as if such accident had never happened*” (Virginia Colony Slave Codes, Article 34). In 1712 the New York Assembly passed a law forcing free blacks to sell their lands (including the land upon which the Empire State Building stands).

Within the Reformed tradition, attitudes were similar to those in broader society. In 1747 Classis Amsterdam of the RCA still was of a mind that becoming a Christian did not entitle an enslaved person to be set free. In 1812 the general synod of the RCA affirmed that “in the church there is no difference between bond and free, but all are one in Christ,” adding that blacks are to enjoy the same privileges as other members and are to be enumerated along with other members. It did not, however, condemn the practice of enslavement.

HOW DOES A NATION DEFINE ITSELF?

For nearly three hundred years, the colonies in Canada and the United States were dependent on the European powers that had “discovered” them or won them as pawns of war. During the so-called French and Indian War—more accurately, French-and-Indians-against-the-British War—first Quebec fell to the British; and by 1763 France surrendered all its territory east of the Mississippi to British rule.

Citizenship

For the next 186 years, Canadians accepted being defined as “British subjects.” The American colonies, however, were not so inclined. In 1776, after only thirteen years under British rule, the colonial leaders signed the Declaration of Independence, thereby sparking the Revolutionary War against Britain. Not so incidentally, with significant assistance from both the French and the Indians, the colonists prevailed.

In 1790, as one of the functions of a newly sovereign nation, the U.S. Congress ruled that naturalized citizenship would be reserved for “*any alien, being a free white person*” (U.S. Naturalization Law of 1790). Native Americans, of course, were not alien, African Americans were not free, and neither group was white. The patterns of earlier times had created the mold for the future. The attitudes of earlier times were now baked into law. Thus began a legalized system of U.S. apartheid.

Enslavement

Enslavement was never a prominent theme in Canada, but it is part of the story. The largest slave “transaction” took place in 1783 when British Loyalists brought two thousand slaves from Africa and distributed them in three Canadian territories. Ten years later, in 1793, the Legislature of Upper Canada (now Ontario) outlawed the importation of new slaves to their colony. Then, in 1834, the British Parliament condemned both the importation and the practice of enslavement throughout the British Empire—including Canada.

Millions of citizens and immigrants alike were moving west and clamoring for land. The U.S. vision to extend its “boundaries of freedom” collided with the interests of Mexico, sparking war with Mexico in 1845. The final score: in exchange for fifteen million dollars in damages, the U.S. “annexed” what is now Arizona, California, New Mexico, Texas, and parts of Colorado, Nevada, and Utah. The treaty was signed at Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848, the same year that Van Raalte and his band of Dutch immigrants began sinking their roots into West Michigan soil.

From the 1830s to the 1860s the practice of enslavement connected the two countries in a clandestine way. From the time the British Parliament outlawed enslavement among its subjects to the time the United States abolished enslavement by going to war against itself, tens of thousands of African Americans fled enslavement by crossing to Canada with the help of the Underground Railroad.

The story of the United States is painfully different! Although the United States actually prohibited the *importation* of slaves in 1807, the practice of enslavement survived and thrived in the southern states until it was put to death by the American Civil War. The war began in 1861 (four years after the birth of the CRC). President Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863. Two years later, enslavement was finally and officially outlawed by the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution of the United States. In 1868 the Fourteenth Amendment granted full U.S. citizenship to African Americans, and in 1870 the Fifteenth Amendment gave black males the right to vote.

Inequality

As clear-cut as these actions seem, race prejudice and white dominance persisted. Initially, southern blacks made great strides toward equal rights. But as soon as Union troops were withdrawn, southern states quickly enacted laws to limit blacks' access to transportation, schools, restaurants, and other public facilities. The Ku Klux Klan used cross burnings and other forms of violence and intimidation to perpetuate white supremacy. Thousands of black men and women were openly lynched. Most southern blacks continued to live in grinding poverty.

Race wars continued on other fronts as well.

- “In 1868 General Grant, who continued as Commanding General of the Army after the Civil War and before his presidency, insisted that he would protect the westward movement of white settlers ‘even if the extermination of every Indian tribe was necessary to secure such a result’” (*Native American Voices*, p. 85).
- That same year the Navajos were corralled like animals and marched across New Mexico to confinement in Fort Sumner.

- In 1879 the U.S. government sponsored its first boarding school for Indian youngsters, and by 1886 was appealing to the churches to take a more active role in this “civilizing” process.
- In 1882 Congress approved the Chinese Exclusion Act, specifically prohibiting the naturalization of Chinese persons as citizens.
- In 1896 the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the “separate but equal” doctrine—thereby continuing “colored sections” in public places. Nineteenth-century Canada paralleled its southern neighbor.
- In the 1850s British Columbia allowed the segregation of African Canadians in its public schools.
- In 1870 aboriginal people and people of Chinese and Japanese descent were denied the right to vote.
- That same decade saw the approval of the Indian Act, which expanded aboriginal “reserves” and restricted aboriginal rights and cultural practices.
- Beginning in the 1890s, aboriginal children were sent away to residential schools—opening the door to abuses that haunt the Canadian government, sponsoring churches, and, of course, the First Nations people more than a century later.

HOW LONG, O LORD, HOW LONG?

In the first half of the twentieth century, the U.S. remained busy managing the contradiction between its declaration of “liberty and justice for all” and its practice of discrimination and injustice toward persons of color—while delivering

Reaching Out, 1889-1949

1889—Missionary to the Sioux in South Dakota, left after one year

1896—Missionary couples to the Navajo in Arizona/New Mexico

1897—One of the couples relocates to Zuni, New Mexico

1903—Founding of the “Mission” in Rehoboth, New Mexico

1905—First CRC organized in Canada: Nijverdal CRC, near Monarch, Alberta (the Granum and Nobleford CRCs both trace their roots to the Nijverdal congregation)

1907—First CRC missionary to Dutch immigrants in Canada

1918—Mission to the Jews: Chicago and Eastern U.S.

1920—First secretary/director installed for Foreign and Indian Missions

1922—First missionary couples sent to China, workers expelled 1942

1923—Johanna Veenstra begins work in Nigeria “on her own”

1930—First missionaries to Argentina

1939—The CRC began radio broadcasting in English

1940—CRC officially approves missionary work in Nigeria

1947—First secretary/director installed for Home Missions work

1949—Start of mission work in Ceylon

race-based power and privilege to people who could qualify as white. Puerto Rico and the Philippines had become U.S. possessions by way of the Spanish-American War. A 1917 Immigration Act introduced the “Asiatic Barred Zone,” preventing immigration from both Asia and India. The Supreme Court denied appeals for citizenship by a Japanese American and an Asian-Indian American, grounded in the court’s own race-based views of whiteness. Simultaneously, Congress granted citizenship to “all non-citizen (American) Indians born within the territorial limits of the United States.” The traumatic years of World War II were marked by two contrasting developments: the superb contribution of the “Navajo code talkers” in the war against Japan, and the shameful confinement of American residents of Japanese origin.

Midway through the twentieth century, the U.S. finally began facing down its phobia over race. In 1954 the U.S. Supreme Court—in the case of *Brown v. the Board of Education*—made its historic unanimous ruling that “separate educational facilities are inherently unequal.” This ruling helped fuel the U.S. Civil Rights Movement. Blacks boycotted segregated public transportation in southern states. Civil rights groups organized voter registration campaigns, Freedom Rides, and other protest actions. White segregationists fought back with intimidation and violence, and southern law enforcement used cattle prods and attack dogs, fire hoses and mass arrests. An emotional high point in the movement was the massive 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, and Martin Luther King’s “I Have a Dream” speech on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial. A legislative high point was the congressional approval of the Civil Rights Acts of 1964, banning discrimination in public accommodations, employment, and labor unions. This legal centerpiece was fortified by the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and the American Indian Civil Rights Act of 1968.



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In a similar time frame, Canada created its own version of a more welcoming nation. The Citizenship Act of 1947 was key to reshaping Canadian identity from European Canadian subjects of the British throne to a distinctly Canadian vision of a multicultural society. In 1960 Canada adopted a Bill of Rights, rejecting discrimination based on such considerations as race, national origin, religion or gender, and in 1964 prohibited any further segregation of black Canadians in its public schools. The Citizenship Act of 1977 made Canadian citizenship more accessible by reducing prior conditions for immigrants and by eliminating discrimination on the basis of nationality and gender.

Finally, four and a half centuries after Columbus and Cabot set foot on North American soil, “all” legally came to mean “all.” (*Author’s note:* This overview is informed significantly by the research and analysis of Crossroads Ministries and its co-executive director Robette Diaz, and by CRC Campus Pastor Shiao Chong of Toronto, Ontario.)

HOW DOES A CHURCH DEFINE ITSELF?

As we reflect on attitudes and actions regarding ethnicity and race in our North American context, I would love to compare the CRC to the “men of Issachar, who understood the times and

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Mrs. King marching to Montgomery, Alabama, 1965

knew what [the people of God] should do” (1 Chron. 12:32). The reality is that sometimes we led, sometimes we followed, and sometimes we were in the way. Whether our ancestors arrived in North America in 800 or 1600 or 2000, we’ve all been racialized. The same is true of Christian organizations. Even in the church, we still share privilege and power unevenly. Persons in a numerical racial minority are not always truly welcome and frequently are at risk. Similarly, persons in the racial majority often are affirmed and empowered on the basis of their identity with the majority race, not on their identity in Christ. Our attitudes and actions as Christians are infected by the culture around us as surely as by the promptings of the Spirit and Word within us.

A genuine “race crisis” erupted in the CRC in the late 1960s, when children of black families from the Lawndale CRC in Chicago were denied admission to Timothy Christian School in Cicero. Synod 1968 faced the crisis head-on. It declared a day of prayer and called all members to “give themselves to repentance and to public and private prayer.” It affirmed that those who persisted in racial discrimination would be subject to church

photo by Duane E. Vander Brug



Lawndale children at Des Plaines
Christian School

discipline. And it mandated its board of Home Missions “to design, organize and implement programs . . . to eliminate racism, both causes and effect, within the body of believers and throughout the world in which we live” (*Acts of Synod 1968*).

In 1971 synod transferred this mandate to a new standing Race Relations committee made up of people from various racial backgrounds and reporting directly to synod. Race Relations, first directed by white persons but subsequently by CRC persons of color, implemented a wide range of strategies for improving understanding and racial reconciliation. These strategies still include celebrating an annual National Heritage Sunday and sponsoring a biennial church-wide Multiethnic Conference. In its early years Race Relations also involved itself in the struggle against the system of apartheid in South Africa, and cautioned—at home—that “in her pastoral ministry the church should strive to eradicate attitudes of racial superiority . . .” (*Acts of Synod 1979*).

In recent decades the CRC has enjoyed increasing racial and ethnic diversity. One contributing factor was the acceleration of planting new congregations, increasing from an average of five per year in the 1970s to ten per year in the 80s, and twenty per year in the 90s. Remarkably, of the last three hundred new church starts in the CRC, more than half were among immigrant communities or racially diverse populations. In twenty-five years CRC Korean congregations mushroomed to ninety strong, Hispanic congregations more than doubled, and Southeast Asian groups bubbled up across the continent. And more congregations—initially all white or all persons of color—are praying hard and working hard to become multicultural.

Increased church planting was complemented by welcoming actions at other levels. Synod relaxed its rules for receiving ministers from other denominations, declaring that “for multicultural or ethnic minority churches the need for indigenous leadership shall constitute the criterion for meeting the ‘need’ requirements of . . . the Church Order” (Synod 1985, Church Order Articles 7, 8). Also, a growing number of classes embraced substantial racial diversity—from a “minority majority” in Red Mesa and Pacific Hanmi to a deepening mosaic in classes such as California South, Greater Los Angeles, Hackensack, and Southwest U.S.

Reaching Across, 1951-1979

1950—Rev. Eugene Callendar began work among African Americans in Harlem, New York

1951—Rev. Paul Szto began work among Chinese immigrants in Queens, New York

1956—First all-Navajo congregation organized: Bethany CRC, Gallup, New Mexico

1960—“Off-reservation” Indian work transferred from World Missions to Home Missions

1962—Rev. Scott Redhouse became first Navajo to be ordained as CRC minister

1964—“Reservation” Indian work transferred from World Missions to Home Missions

1964—First Spanish-language congregation organized in Miami, Florida

1974—CRC ministry to Canadian aboriginal peoples began in Winnipeg, Manitoba

1977—First CRC Korean congregation of Los Angeles organized, left in 1994

1979—First church planting ministry among Chinese Canadians Abbotsford (Zion) and Richmond, British Columbia

In Reformed church polity, an officially connected cluster of congregations is a *classis* (plural, *classes*). Classis is the middle assembly between local councils and the general synod.

WHAT DOES THE CRC LOOK LIKE TODAY?

At Pentecost the Holy Spirit was given to the church. In pouring out the Spirit on many peoples, God overcomes the divisions of Babel; now people from every tongue, tribe, and nation are gathered into the unity of the body of Christ.

From a handful of isolationist Dutch immigrant congregations, God has been graciously growing the CRC as an increasingly diverse family of nearly one thousand congregations. They are distributed throughout nine provinces and thirty-nine states—plus Guam, Puerto Rico, and Washington, D.C. Although still very predominantly white and of Dutch ancestry, the family circle includes Native Americans and African Americans. It contains Canadian aboriginal peoples, Quebecois, and new African immigrants. It embraces persons of Cambodian, Chinese, Indonesian, Filipino, Korean, Laotian, Pakistani, and Vietnamese descent. It is further enriched with persons of Latin origin from more than a dozen Spanish-speaking countries.

How God is overcoming the divisions of Babel is what the rest of this book is all about.

DISCUSSION STARTERS

1. Read and reflect on Isaiah 60:1-3, “The Glory of Zion.” What do these verses suggest about God’s plan for his church?
2. What is the relationship between truth and love? Which is more important? Evaluate in relation to the attitudes of our “CRC founding fathers” and prevailing attitudes among Christians today.
3. Miroslav Volf wrote, “Our coziness with the culture has made us so blind to many of its evils.” Are we also blind to evil in the culture of others, or only in our own? Why?
4. Compare the earliest U.S. definition of citizenship to Paul’s definition of citizenship in Philippians 3:18-21.
5. In a predominantly white residential area of Grand Rapids, Michigan, a public elementary school is 95 percent black and Hispanic. Right across the street a Christian school is 95 percent white. How might that picture be “inherently unequal”?
6. In 1903 black intellectual W.E.B. Du Bois introduced his now classic treatise *The Soul of Black Folks* by saying that “the problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line.” In what ways is “the problem of the color line” unfinished business for churches in North America in the twenty-first century?

CHRONOLOGY OF RACE

>>>Late 1400s and ff. >>>

United States	1492		1540		1628		1642
	Columbus “discovers” America under flag of Spain		Spaniards came to SW Hopi and Zuni pueblos		Slaves arrived in New Amsterdam, freed slaves owned land in 1644		Gov. Kieft of New Amsterdam led soldiers in murderous raid on Algonquins
	1481	1517	1536	1561	1618-1619	1628	1663
King Henry VII of Britain affirmed Christian “Doctrine of Discovery”	Martin Luther nailed 95 theses on church door	John Calvin’s <i>Institutes of the Christian Religion</i>	Belgic Confession 1563 Heidelberg Catechism	Synod of Dort, Canons of Dort	First Dutch Reformed congregation in New Netherland (New York)	John Eliot translated the Bible into the Algonquin language	
Canada	1497		1534		1628	1600s	1639
	John Cabot of England arrived on east coast of Canada		Jacques Cartier raised French flag on Gaspé Peninsula		First black resident of Canada (New France/ Quebec) was a slave	French policy encouraged intermarriage with aboriginal peoples to create one new people	Usuline Catholics established convent schools to prepare aboriginal girls to marry Christian men

>>>Late 1600s and ff. >>>

United States	1664			1756-1763	1763	1776	1789
	British seized New Netherland and renamed it New York			French and Indian War—resistance to British	France ceded all territory east of the Mississippi to British rule; Louisiana to Spain	Colonies declared their independence against British rule	New Constitution takes effect; Indian Affairs assigned to the War Department
	1690	1740s	1747		1774	1779	
Indian converts received into Reformed Church in Albany, NY	Great Awakening in American colonies	Classis New Amsterdam of RCA ruled that converted slaves were not free.		Pennsylvania Quakers disowned slaveholding members	John Newton, former slave ship captain, wrote “Amazing Grace”		
Canada	1689	1709	1759	1763		1774	1783
	King Louis XIV of France authorized slavery in Canada	Assembly of Lower Canada confirmed legality of slavery	New France (Quebec) was brought under British rule	Proclamation that lands cannot be taken from aboriginal peoples without a treaty		Quebec Act restored and expanded some of its borders	British Loyalists brought 2,000 African slaves to British Canada

>>>Late 1700s and ff. >>>

United States Pre-CRC and CRC History Canada	1793	1812	1812 ff.	1830-1939	1845-1848	1848	1861-1863
	US Abolition Act and start of Underground Railroad to Canada	Following War of 1812, the US-Canadian border remained open	Over 2,000 US blacks migrated to Canada after the war	President Jackson's Indian Removal Act and "The Trail of Tears"	War with Mexico; US annexed vast land areas in the Southwest	US Federal (Indian) Reservation Act	Beginning of US Civil War; Lincoln issued Emancipation Proclamation
		1816	1820s-1840s	1834	1848	1857	
	Reformed Church in America counted blacks as members	Methodists and Anglicans started residential schools in Canada	Concerned congregations in Netherlands "seceded" from Dutch state church	Van Raalte and wave of Dutch immigrants relocated in West Michigan	Several Dutch immigrant "seceder" congregations began CRC in W. Michigan		
	1807	1812	1815		1834	1830-1860s	1850s
	Canada congress ends importation of kidnapped and enslaved Africans	Canadian and British troops repulsed an attempted US invasion	Nova Scotia passes resolution that no more black people can settle in the province		British Parliament abolished slavery in the British empire	Many thousands of African American slaves fled to Canada; 75% returned after US Civil War	Ontario allowed segregation of African Canadians in their schools

>>>1860s and ff .>>>

United States	1863	1868	1979	1882	1890	1890	1917
	Navajo people began "long walk" to Fort Sumner, NM, enforced by the US Army	US makes treaty with the Navajo people, "released" to return home on foot	First boarding school for Indian youth on military training base Carlisle, PA	Chinese Exclusion Act, prohibiting immigration of Chinese	Massacre at Wounded Knee in South Dakota	US Supreme Court upheld the "separate but equal" doctrine	Immigration Act, which included the "Asiatic Barred Zone"
CRC History	1876	1885	1888		1896	1918	1922
	CRC installs Geert Boer as its first full-time professor of theology	Secessionist branch in the Netherlands encouraged immigrants to join the CRC	CRC sent missionary to the Sioux; he left after one year		CRC sent missionary couples to the Navajo and Zuni people	Mission to Jews on East Coast and in Chicago	Missionaries were sent to China; Johanna Veenstra went to Africa in 1923
Canada		1867	1870s	1876	1884	1890s	1907
		Canada became a Federation with its first prime minister	Aboriginal peoples, Chinese, and Japanese denied right to vote	Indian Act expanded aboriginal reserves, other rules	Various aboriginal practices banned, (bans lifted 1951)	Aboriginal children sent away to residential schools	Asiatic Exclusion League led riot against Chinese and Japanese in Vancouver

>>> 1930s to the Present >>>>

United States	1944	1954	1964	1965-68	1990		
	Navajo Code Talkers help win WW II	Supreme Court makes landmark decision that "separate is not equal"	Civil Rights Act banned discrimination in schools and other public arenas	Voting Rights Act & American Indian Civil Rights Act	Prohibiting use of native languages in schools repealed by president		
CRC History	1940	1956	1968	1970	1983	1995	1996
	Missionaries officially sent to Nigeria	First Navajo (and non-white) congregation organized in Gallup, NM	Black youth refused admission to Timothy Christian School, Chicago	Synod established committee on Race Relations	Annual All Nations Heritage Sunday initiated	Synod appoints ethnic advisors to synod	Study report on "Diverse and Unified Family of God"
Canada	1945	1947	1960s	1974	1982	1988	1998
	University of Manitoba dropped admission quotas for "non-preferred" groups	Canada established citizenship with new multicultural identity	Bill of Rights rejected discrimination on the basis of race, national origin, gender, and religion	Aboriginal persons granted the right to vote	Canadian CRC began work among First Nations people in Winnipeg	Canada Act brings "home" the Canadian Constitution including the Charter of Rights and Freedoms	Last residential school in Canada closed

United States

CRC History

Canada

1999

CRC
agencies &
institutions
began
antiracism
training
and
organizing