

# **The Future: A Strategy For Reconciliation – Response to A Paper Presented by Dr. Vinson Synan**

By Charles E. Blake

The challenge before us is awesome in its dimensions. We have been apart so long that we have developed our own styles and customs. Our separateness has become the norm, the expected thing. We have accepted and accommodated the status quo. We have even articulated a sociological theory to support our separateness called the "principle of homogeneity."

The last thing many of us need is another set of organizational responsibilities, another group to belong to. We are already overloaded and overtaxed. Local church, district, jurisdictional, and general denominational entities are competing for our limited time and resources.

In our home cities, we are confronted by a variety of demands for our time. Politicians, legislators, community leaders, other interdenominational and interreligious confabs, and business representatives all compete for our attention and involvement. I have not even mentioned the call of our families, friends, and our own physical and emotional need for rest and renewal.

And then there are those of all races who have never wandered beyond the boundaries of their own denominational group and racial constituency. They are uncomfortable, insecure, and unfamiliar with situations where they must speak, listen, and relate to races and cultures other than their own.

There is a long history of blacks under white leadership, but almost no history of whites under black leadership. The Seymour leadership period was a brief one. Classical Pentecostal churches are among those institutions, both sacred and secular, which have less black over white leadership than many other organizations and denominations. If it is to be assumed that this trend will continue at any level, then black leaders will perceive little benefit in associating themselves with an interracial fellowship.

Blacks are more prone to be bicultural than whites. This is because blacks live in their own culture, but are exposed in a pervasive way to the dominant white culture. Whites live in their culture and are exposed primarily to their culture. If they are exposed at all to black culture, it is usually to the worst or most negatively spectacular aspects of the same. Do we understand that each of us must unashamedly make our own unique cultural contribution, while aggressively seeking to acquaint ourselves with the uniqueness of others also?

The black church seeks to do the work of the church in a setting filled with complexity and adversity. Many of the people we deal with have been emotionally, physically, economically, and psychologically devastated. What a challenge it is to minister to them and to represent them! The task is urgent, lives are being lost every moment. Our young men and children are being destroyed. The white church faces its own set of equally urgent challenges and circumstances. How can we justify turning away from all these demanding priorities even for a moment to pursue the elusive prize of reconciliation, which we should have grasped decades ago? Aren't there more important things that we should be doing?

In answer to that question, I would say, "Probably not." Few things could be more important to us than racial reconciliation within our historic Pentecostal denominations. Reconciliation is important because we cannot make adequate progress in many other areas until we progress in this area. One of the greatest hindrances to the effectiveness of the witness of the Church is discrimination, prejudice, and lack of love and involvement between the races within the Church. In many ways and places, ungodly people reach a higher level of racial harmony and togetherness than those of us in the Church.

But let us never forget that God placed us in one family and calls us to unity in Christ. We must recognize this theologically and practically.

For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus (Galatians 3:16-28, KJV).

Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free, but Christ is all, and in all ( Colossians 3:11, KJV).

Our reality sometimes speaks so loudly that our witness cannot be heard. Others, who are not Classic Pentecostals, show themselves more loving and authentically Christian than we do, and thus access the diverse harvest of souls more effectively than we do. Thus walking more aggressively toward the future, they will be more adequately prepared for it than we. Since we claim the special gifts of the Spirit, and more years of extensive experience with the Holy Spirit, we should be most advanced in portraying God's love over racial boundaries to a world torn by racial animosities. For this failure, we all must deeply repent.

Prejudice is "judgment without knowledge or experience." It is an unfortunate fact that we have very little knowledge of, and experience with, one another. Therefore, we cannot avoid being prejudiced. Only time together will eliminate our prejudices. Those who fellowship with one another across racial boundaries have the privilege of learning from one another and bringing the best of what they learn to their own world and becoming the richer for the exposure.

I endorse each and every proposal for interaction and mutual effort outlined by Dr. Vinson Synan. I would add that each of us should commit to love our brothers and sisters of other races, and that we should select certain individuals as the focus and special recipients of this love.

Personal relationships and fellowship are the only foundation that will assure long-term organizational involvement. All of us are too busy to play games. Either we must commit to be brothers and sisters, or we should forget it. We cannot expect events and special meetings to bring us together. How many times have we gathered in various situations to bridge the gaps which have separated us! How many times have we set aside "Brotherhood Sundays" to lift up our oneness in Christ! These events and meetings should rather be magnificent celebrations communicating to the world the existing togetherness that we have attained on every level, every day, week, and month. It cannot be something that we take out of the box at meeting time.

There are some who are very unhappy about the efforts we are making this week toward interracial unity: Those who are kings of their own little corners, and are more comfortable dealing with subordinates than with equals in the ministry; those who want to convince their immediate constituents that there is no other way of doing things, and that they have a special insight into God's revelation; those blacks and whites who perpetuate their sense of superiority by keeping themselves separate; those who cannot accept God's revelation that we must be one; even those who have differing agendas, or who are too busy.

But, we cannot wait or delay any longer. We are very late already. Let us join together in our spirits and in reality. Let us show the world that we are Christians by our love.

A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if you have love one to another ( John 13:34-35, KJV).