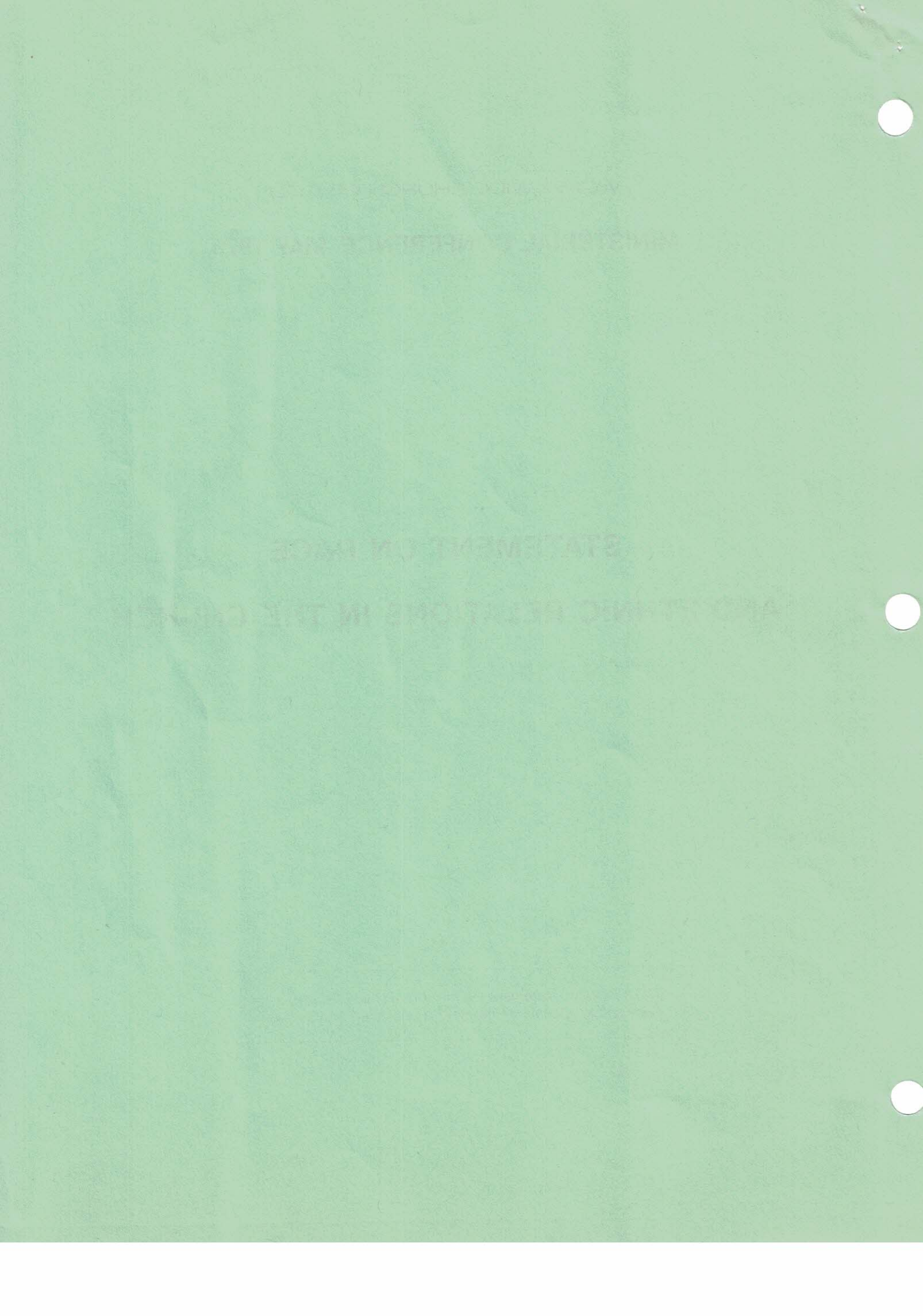


WORLDWIDE CHURCH OF GOD

MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE MAY 1976

**STATEMENT ON RACE
AND ETHNIC RELATIONS IN THE CHURCH**

The following statement of the Worldwide Church of God
supersedes all material heretofore published on this subject.



STATEMENT ON

RACE AND ETHNIC RELATIONS IN THE CHURCH

The teaching of the Church of God has been and will always remain: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Matt. 19:19; Lev. 19:18). This second of the two great commandments is the perfect standard for each member's interpersonal relationships, including those with another racial or ethnic group.

God Is No Respecter of Persons

God is no respecter of persons; He shows no partiality (Acts 10:34-35; Jas. 2:2). He deals justly with all men. There is no double standard with the Almighty. "There shall be one law for the native and for the stranger who sojourns among you" (Ex. 12:49; cf. Num. 15:15, 16).

How to deal justly and how to love one's neighbor is set forth plainly by Paul in Philippians 2:2-4, "Complete my joy, by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord, and of one mind. Do nothing from selfishness or conceit; but in humility count others better than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others."

The giving of esteem one to another is a two-way street. To love one's neighbor is to be concerned for the spiritual and physical welfare of the other. To love one's neighbor means to respect one another, to admire the accomplishments of others, to esteem fellow Christians better than oneself, because one knows his own weaknesses in contrast to his brother's accomplishments. It is this attitude of love and concern which is imperative if we are to have proper individual and group relationships.

In addition, we must learn to understand each other. Misunderstandings have often arisen from incorrectly interpreting another's thoughts or motives. When the topic of race relations is brought up, many in the white community tend to think immediately of the question of racial intermarriage. The black and other minority communities, by contrast, are more concerned about having the same opportunities for education, work, advancement, and economic reward that the average citizen has, than about interracial marriage or ethnic assimilation.

The very essence of Christianity is love, an outgoing concern for the welfare of all one's fellow human beings, not just his own group. Surely no baptized member of the World-wide Church of God can read such scriptures as Luke 10:25-37 and Galatians 3:28-29 and not realize the pain and sorrow and suffering caused by ethnic or racial discrimination! Degrading or malicious ethnic jokes, pejorative epithets, condescending attitudes, prejudice, discrimination, or feelings of superiority are contrary to Christian love.

Social and Spiritual Fellowship

Ethnic integration of the races is as much a factor of modern Western society as was integration of various ethnic groups in the Roman society of the first century. The examples of the early history of the New Testament Church was to show no partiality between Jew, Greek, or any other ethnic group.

"Truly I perceive," said the Apostle Peter, "that God shows no partiality, but in every nation everyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him" (Acts 10:34-35). And again: God has "made no distinction between us and them" (Acts 15:9). See also Galatians 2:11-16.

While the political situation in some few areas of the world may require a limitation of social integration, this is not a doctrine or overall policy of the Church. In matters of Church fellowship and office, there is no discrimination because of ethnic background. Different ethnic groups are free, of course, to preserve their own culture and identity, including having such Church-sponsored ethnic socials as a Latin dance or a German evening. But the Church does not teach or practice a regular segregation of different ethnic groups in its services. Members are encouraged to get to know the members of groups other than their own. Only then can they appreciate the qualities of others and practice that love of one another which is the central message of the Bible.

In matters of Church fellowship and office, there is no discrimination because of ethnic background. The criteria for baptism are repentance and belief. Ordination to the ministry--at whatever level--is based on those spiritual criteria indicated in the Bible, such as conversion and calling. Ethnic origin is no factor. This is the present belief and practice of the Church, and it holds this to be in accord with the Bible and the mind of God.

Meaning of Integration

Over the years both inside and outside the church the term "integration" has been tarnished with the corrosive taint of emotionally loaded epithets.

Therefore, the ministry must take into account, when addressing the membership on the matter of the right kind of integration within the church, the need to repair these sentiments of mind. Webster's New World Dictionary defines "integrate" in the primary sense to mean: "to make whole or complete by adding or bringing together parts... (secondarily) unity..."

God has integrated his church--brought together different parts (people), if you please--to teach us His culture. It is this cultural unity--Christian unity--the Christian experience and the mind of Christ, rather than the rigid ideas and entrenched biases of men which unites rather than separates us and which will determine how "integrated" or fitly framed together we (the Church of God) really are (see I Corinthians 12:12-27).

Minority people perceive their struggle for justice, fair play, and racial equality to be life-and-death attempts to stay afloat in a competitive society while shooting the rapids of racial prejudice and injustice. Human cultures have their inherent weaknesses. So long as this present evil world stands, there will always be unjust weights and measures--something God Almighty hates. But the Kingdom of God will be a Christian Culture, not distinctly Anglo, Black, Latin or Oriental. The integrated Church of God is the herald of that Kingdom and New Culture.

Church history reveals that the attitude of contemporary society has, to one degree or another, always been reflected in religion. But we in the Church of God cannot allow society to determine our mores and standards, nor to set the pace for us. Our conduct is to be exemplary of the principles set forth in the pages of the Bible. Our unity cannot be artificial but a clear expression of Christian love.

Race relations in the church can be termed human relations--the attitude, respect, appreciation and brotherhood that should be expressed among all races. We are admonished by the Word of God that we should be willing to lay down our lives for our brethren. Read I John 4--that we should not love in word or speech, but in deed and in truth. And who is our brother? Christ clearly answers this for us: "For

whoever [regardless of race] does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother, and sister, and mother" (Matt. 12:46-50). God does not see as man sees, nor does He look on the outward appearance.

There is no limit to what the Holy Spirit can do through the individual that submits himself to God, regardless of racial stock. Let us break the bonds of prejudice by putting on the "new man which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him. Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision...bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all" (Col. 3:9-10 and following verses).

The Church believes that Almighty God is the Creator of the different races of man. And we should always remember that He puts no spiritual distinction between these races (Acts 15:9; Gal. 3:28, etc.). In the Kingdom of God there will be no racial stigma of any kind. The Church of God should reflect the coming Kingdom of God in its attitudes toward race at the present time.

Marriage

One of the major teachings of the Church is that the marriage relationship pictures the plan of God.

In view of the grave importance of marriage--for what it symbolizes, for the stability of society and for the happiness of the individual--the Worldwide Church of God strongly urges that dating and marriage emphasize similar racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds. The reason for this is to insure the greater likelihood of mutual compatibility between marriage partners and the predictability of patterns of appearance, talent and temperament in their children, and that their children may fit in with society more easily.

Wise marriages are those which match people suited for each other. Compatibility may be determined by consideration of the many different traits of personality, cultural background, intellect, character, and even physical features. A marriage in which neither partner properly understands the other's language is not likely to be the most fulfilling! The same general considerations come into question when people of two obviously diverse racial or ethnic backgrounds consider marriage. Two people could, hypothetically, be compatible though of diverse racial backgrounds. In actual practice, such differences usually imply other important differences which will compete with rather than complement each other.

Marriage is for adults. Marriage is for people with their eyes wide open. If two people decide to marry in the absence of--or contrary to--wise counsel, they have to bear the responsibility of that decision, as we all must ultimately bear responsibility for all our decisions.

The Church must also exercise its responsibilities in teaching prospective marital partners to adhere to the soundest scriptural principles. Two of the Ten Commandments are especially important in the area of marriage planning:

1) "Honor your father and mother." Parental advice and counsel should be sought as is very obvious from the Fifth Commandment and other biblical examples. One hardly honors parents by refusing to consult them for their opinion or deliberately opposing their honest and legitimate objections to the choice of a mate.

2) "You shall not covet." Any marriage contracted through lust--no matter what the ethnic origin of the partners--involves a violation of God's law. Unions based on such a shaky foundation are not very likely to be successful.

The Church cannot and does not forbid people of the same race or ethnic background to marry even when obviously unsuited for one another. And they are not put out of the Church when no direct violation of God's law is involved. Consequently, we cannot and do not forbid people of different racial or ethnic backgrounds to marry even though such marriages may not be wise. And no stigma must ever be attached to children that may result from such a union--though in the world they may well face social strains and heartaches.

A marriage contracted without consideration for the future lives of children is primarily selfish, lustful, and not based upon those Christian principles God's word commands. If children will almost certainly be faced with a deeply disturbing identity crisis, become the object of ridicule or persecution (from both racial groups), or be forced to bear the shame of the usual epithets heaped upon them by a society which is primarily non-Christian, and heavily racist in attitude, then such marriage is based upon purely selfish considerations without regard for the future lives of as yet unborn children.

Even as the Apostle Paul urged Christians to consider remaining single because of the "present distress," meaning

arrest of Church leaders, persecution and martyrdom of its leaders and members, so it must be understood that racial violence even now rocks the world, that racism and ethnic hatreds form the basis for much of the turmoil in Asia, the Mideast, Africa, and in many internal struggles in many nations, that racial violence will most certainly play an important part in the coming tribulation. Even as Jesus Christ warned that Christians were to pray that the tribulation did not come upon them while in advanced pregnancy, or prior to the weaning of children, and as He shows religious martyrdom is yet ahead of us in this age, so it is obvious to thinking persons that those who marry across racial lines are taking upon themselves an almost automatic handicap and future burden which may ultimately prove unbearable.

The Responsibility of Each

The preceding discussion can be summarized as follows:

1) It is the responsibility of each Church member to repent of past wrong attitudes toward those of other race or ethnic groups. We are all one in Christ and must have that Christian love for all which only God's Spirit makes possible.

2) It is the responsibility of young people when dating and contemplating marriage to consider the serious concerns involved in entering a lifetime partnership with another. The physical and romantic attractions of the moment should not blind their eyes to consideration of the many different aspects of compatibility. Any union entered into simply as a protest against parents, authority symbols, or society in general, is almost certainly doomed to failure. So is a marriage contracted purely on the basis of physical attraction. Differences of intellect, emotion, culture, background, and physical appearance, which might seem insignificant through romantically-colored glasses, may assume a much more important role later on when it is too late to do much about them.

3) It is the responsibility of each minister to teach these truths for the good of each Church member. It is not his responsibility to force his own individual opinions or tastes on others. Nor is it his responsibility to assume the role of policeman or the duty of parents. If young people contract unwise marriages which are not otherwise contrary to the clear teachings of God's Word, the minister should not attempt to persecute them or treat them as second-class Christians. After all, the fruits of such unions will have to be borne by the couple.

Many of the problems of the past are plainly the result of misunderstanding the concerns, needs, desires and intents of other ethnic groups. This myopic and selfish tendency of seeing a question only from one's own point of view is condemned by the mere mention of it. The natural and cultivated biases and prejudices of human nature have played a large part in creating those former situations which produce suspicions, wrong attitudes, and even deep hurts in some. It is now time that each individual--regardless of his ethnic origin--accept his responsibility in promoting peace and harmony within the Body of Christ.

It is the teaching of the Worldwide Church of God that each should love his neighbor as himself. The whole of God's Word is directed toward this principle of love. The policies and teachings in this paper are aimed at implementing the practice of love in the important area of relations between different racial and ethnic groups.

APPENDIX

A number of scriptures bear--or have been thought to bear--on the race and ethnic question. We can begin with these by noting, first, that the Bible is not a textbook on genetics. Secondly, the racial or ethnic makeup of Adam and Eve--skin color, cranial shape, or physiognomy--is not defined in the Bible. Since the Bible does not give specific information, we have no means of classifying our first parents into any of the multifarious modern racial or ethnic types that anthropologists propose.

The different racial and ethnic stocks originated some time during history. But the Bible, not being a textbook on genetics, is unspecific about the time and mode of this. God has not chosen to address the question of genetic variations in His Word. Anthropological deductions based on extra-biblical data cannot be placed on the same level as clear biblical teachings.

Genesis 6:9 was thought to refer to pedigree, at least from the wording of the King James version. However, a study of the Hebrew text shows, this is not likely the case. A better translation is, "Noah, a righteous man, was blameless among his contemporaries" (see the New English Bible, New American Bible, standard lexica, and modern commentaries such as E. A. Speiser's Genesis in the Anchor Bible series. The Hebrew word dor "contemporaries" is not normally used in the sense of physical descent or genealogy.

God's concern throughout history has been with those who obey Him. Granted, God honored righteous individuals such as Abraham by working with their physical descendants. But these same descendants were punished and even rejected when they refused to obey. In the New Testament, God made it clear that the individual physical descendant of Abraham had no spiritual advantage because of his ethnic origin--the only thing which counted was the Spirit of God. This basic equality before God is anticipated in an Old Testament passage: "So you shall divide this land among you...shall allot it as an inheritance for yourselves and for the aliens who reside among you and have begotten children among you. They shall be to you as native-born sons of Israel" (Ezek. 47:21-23).

Further, the genealogies of the Bible themselves show a certain amount of ethnic mixing in the line of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Looking at Genesis 38 we see the story of how Judah had three sons--Er, Onan, Shelah--by a Canaanite woman.

(The kingly line was through his daughter-in-law Tamar. Tamar's ethnic background is not delineated though she is not identified as being of the family of Abraham. In any case, we see that part of Judah's descendants had an admixture of Canaanite heritage. Some centuries later, Ruth, a Moabite woman, became the great-grandmother of David.

There were certain prohibitions against marriage with the Canaanites at a later time (Deut. 7:3-4). These prohibitions do not, however, state race as the reason. It was a case of religion rather than genetics: "For they would turn away your sons from following me, to serve other gods..." The example of Uriah may also be instructive. He, being a Hittite, married Bathsheba. We are not certain of her ethnic background. But if she was Israelite, this shows that cases of marriage with non-Israelites were not unknown. If she was not Israelite, on the other hand, then her marriage to David added further non-Israelite genes to his line.

Much later Nehemiah faced the issue of intermarriage. "In those days also I saw the Jews who had married women of Ashdod, Ammon, and Moab; and half of their children spoke the language of Ashdod, and they could not speak in the language of Judah... Did not Solomon king of Israel sin on account of such women?" (Neh. 13:23-26). The reason for Nehemiah's strictures is culture, with religion also implied. If ethnic background were the issue, Boaz' marriage to Ruth the Moabitess would also have been condemned. This dramatizes the importance of cultural compatibility.

Throughout the Old Testament, the individual Gentile who chose to be circumcised and adopt the Israelite way of life became a part of Israel. Thus, a circumcised Ethiopian or Egyptian male was considered as much an Israelite as an actual descendant of Jacob; likewise with the female captured in war (Deut. 21:10-14). Since no comment is here made about ethnic background, we conclude that there was no formal law against such a union even if it involved ethnic differences.

Before the Areopagus Paul stated: "And he made from one [Adam] every nation of men to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their habitation, that they should seek God" (Acts 17:26-27). Here Paul recognizes the basic brotherhood of man. We are all ultimately derived from the same ancestors.

Paul is here speaking to Stoics and Epicureans who were unlikely to be familiar with the Old Testament, including such passages as Deuteronomy 32:8. The wording of the passage

rather suggests that he was using well-known Stoic arguments for God's existence. (The Greek word translated "periods of time" was a reference to "seasons of the year," as shown by Acts 14:17. "Boundaries" referred to the inhabitable zones of the earth's surface--see, for example, Cicero, Tusc. disput., I, 28. The continual progression of the seasons and the existence of the temperate zones of the earth were used by the Stoics as a proof of God's existence.) In other words, Paul was warming up his audience by discussing things they already agreed with. Thus, Paul is not discussing the question of intermarriage or social integration one way or another.

Another scripture we can note is Leviticus 19:19. While the passage has sometimes been explained as a command against interracial marriage, the passage actually says no such thing. In fact, the Hebrew text of the passage is somewhat obscure. Later Jewish scholars did not understand the passage to forbid the crossing of domestic breeds of cattle. Such crosses as that between horse and ass were not prohibited since mules were widely used (for example, I Kings 1:33; Ezra 2:66). Whatever the exact meaning of Leviticus 19:19, human marital relations are not discussed. Furthermore, if interracial or interethnic marriage were to be prohibited, one would expect to find the instructions in the previous chapter, Leviticus 18, since various types of unlawful intercourse are discussed there.

In sum, none of these scriptures command against marriage between two different genetic types. Such unions cannot be labeled sin, except as they also involve a direct violation of God's law. Yet we know that God is both the Creator of the various races of man and concerned about whom one marries. Many examples are recorded in Scripture to show care in the selection of one's mate. The principles of like marrying like are self-evident--and are discussed in the body of the paper.