The book cover features a dark, almost black, rectangular central panel with a slightly irregular, torn-edge appearance. This panel is set against a background of a textured, painterly border. The border is composed of vertical bands of color, primarily yellow and blue, with some darker, more abstract brushstrokes in brown and black. The overall effect is that of a hand-painted or mixed-media artwork.

Reflections on

Black / White

Relations

in

America

Ralph Ennis

Reflections on Black / White Relations In America

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This booklet is about race relations - specifically between Blacks and Whites in America. It's about seeking internal heart changes to genuinely treat people with dignity across racial hurts and barriers.

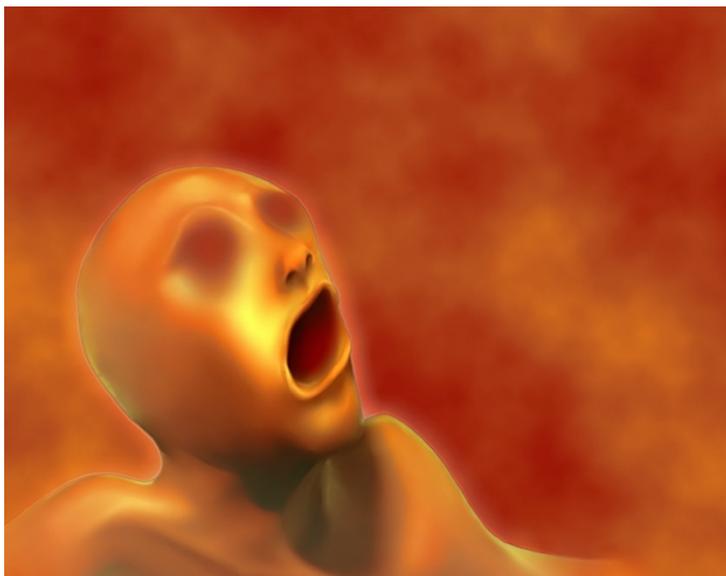
Let me first share a little of my story. I'm a White male born in the North Carolina in 1950. Growing up involved negotiating the White only dentist waiting room, White only schools, White only privileges. It involved hearing people, Black people, called very degrading names by people I loved.

As a young child, I remember standing on my Grandmother's front porch with a decision to make. Would I believe Whites that Blacks deserved to be degraded or will I believe that they were just as worthy of dignity as Whites? The choice to disbelieve the messages of people dear to me and choose to believe that God had made us as equals and worthy of dignity was a life changing alignment of the heart.

Some alignments are tested by struggle. Part of God's spiritual transformation journey for me included receiving the anger of Blacks who had been so deeply hurt by Whites. Some of those pains were trivial. Some of the pains were long lasting.

This booklet is about facing ways the White community has stripped dignity from Blacks, better understanding their sufferings, and seeking forgiveness as equal humans before God Who is drawing us all to Himself.

Please use this booklet for your personal reflections and for discussion with others – Black and White.



Shallow Words, Not Enough Substance

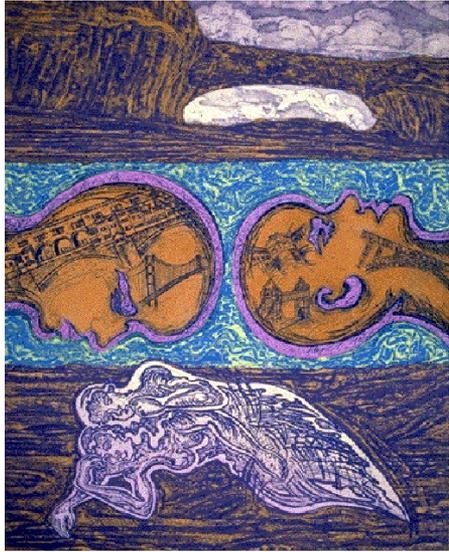
My African American brothers and sisters often tell me that the racial reconciliation movement among Christians today can sound very sincere and yet be very shallow. We must look deeper to understand the wounds, the shame, and the consequences of slavery and racism in America and then, with sincerity and humility, repent and act. This booklet is a letter of repentance before God to African Americans by a White European descent male. It is part of my journey that I hope will encourage you in yours as we grow in friendship and dignity with one another.

For Reflection ...

Do you sense sincerity in your heart regarding racial reconciliation? Is that enough?

Psychological and Spiritual Oppression

Superior attitudes are part of our heritage. But a superiority that stated, “Blacks have no souls” almost goes beyond belief. This statement may astonish some today, but as a primary justification of slavery it was accepted that Blacks were sub-human and could be treated as such. This was the fundamental sin against our Black brothers and sisters. Can pride and arrogance take a higher form than to judge another human as sub-human and soul-less?



To our African American brothers and sisters, please forgive our extreme arrogance and pride. You are precious brothers and sisters in the human race. Our failure to acknowledge this fact should call into question our place in the human race. However, we are still filled with too much arrogance to see this. Please forgive our sin and pray for our souls.

For Reflection ...

**Do you have an inner sense of superiority regarding race?
What surfaces inside you as you read this question?**

How can you humble yourself before God and recognize the dignity of others without humiliating either?



Economic Oppression

Slavery was far more than economic abuse, but it *was* economic abuse. We, I and the White community, profited from your labors. We built our home with your labor. We ate and clothed ourselves from your labor. We don't share our wealth. We were greedy and lustful. We did this at your expense. Slavery was abolished, but we still exclude you from the halls of economic power. Your differences just scare us too much. To serve alongside you as economic equals would force us to face our shame and greed in ways we aren't prepared to do.

To our African American brothers and sisters, please forgive the shame of our greed, lust, weakness, and unwillingness to repent.

For Reflection ...

How have past sins of greed permeated into present day American culture? How has greed impact racial reconciliation?

Are there practical economic ways you can help the African American community?

Physical Oppression

Slavery was not voluntary. Therefore, physical oppression enacted through fear, hard labor, strict discipline and brutality was a necessity. Slaves had to be taught their place. They had to be coerced to do the work others desired not to do.

To our African American brothers and sisters, please forgive our willingness to humiliate you through brutality in order to get undesirable work accomplished.

For Reflection ...

Have you seen physical oppression of people? How do you react internally? What steps can you take to bring dignity, justice and mercy into these situations?



Sexual Subjugation

In every war, rape is used as a weapon. It is used to conquer. It occurred many times within the slavery system - on plantations by masters and their sons. White males used and abused Black sisters



repeatedly over generations. It's estimated that a majority of African Americans have some white blood in them - and it wasn't mainly through interracial marriages. These sexual acts of violence had little to do with the desire for pleasure, intimacy, or procreation. Rather, racial rape is about power, lust, hate, revenge, subjugation, and humiliation. It's about conquering a person's soul. Those within the White male population used sexual subjugation to satisfy their lust and humiliate you. This humiliation was not only targeted at the women but also the men. The Black man's powerlessness to bring to justice the White rapist was deeply humiliating.

To our African American sisters, please forgive our willingness to humiliate you through sexual violence. To our African American brothers, please forgive our humiliation of you by taking your women and keeping you powerless from justice. Our sin is tremendous. We are the ones who deserve the dishonor. We are speechless in the face of these crimes and know not how to respond.

For Reflection ...

In your heart and outward practice, do you treat people across races with sexual dignity?



Religious Oppression

Religious institutions have a way of justifying their existence. The Christian church institution justified the slavery as a Biblically acceptable economic institution. However, the Apostle Paul made it very clear that slave trading is sin. This is not to say that all White Christians agreed with slavery. Many did not. But as an institution, slavery was often justified. Northern and Southern branches of several mainline churches split over this issue when they should have united to help eliminate injustice.

To our African American brothers and sisters, please forgive our unwillingness to hold our church institution to the high standards of Jesus to love one another.

For Reflection ...

Have you ever used organized religion to justify something you knew as wrong? How have you dealt with the inconsistencies and contradictions of Christian doctrine and Christian practice regarding racial justice?



Social Segregation

The message has been clear. Most White Americans don't want to associate with you. Slavery breed segregation in the workplace, schools, marriages, country clubs, neighborhoods, etc. This social banishment still has many present-day manifestations within our hearts. Our insecurities and superior attitudes haven't allowed us to see the sin within our hearts or the God-given dignity in yours.

To our African American brothers and sisters, please forgive our unwillingness to associate with you as friends. We are wrong. Please pray for us to grow in love toward you.

For Reflection ...

As you choose friends, do you naturally include those from other races and ethnicities?

Judicial Oppression

You want and need justice. We have never given you true justice for that would implicate us. It is hard for us to not think the best of ourselves and easy to think less than the best of you. We do not balance mercy and justice equally.

To our African American Brothers and Sisters, please forgive our many injustices toward you. They are numerous.

For Reflection ...

Why have so many in the African American community been incarcerated? Is this justice?

How can you help those in prison experience the love and mercy of Jesus?



Political Oppression

The desire for the benevolent welfare of the people is not always the motivation for political rule. The lust for power is usually mingled into the equation. Equal rule in our society is still not a reality. We curtail your political influence through intimidation and voting districts. We listen poorly to your concerns. We don't share power well.



To our African American brothers and sisters, please forgive our unwillingness to share power. Please forgive our abuse of power. We are ruled more by our need to control than we will admit.

For Reflection ...

How have you seen politics oppress people in the African American community? How can you help bring political justice with mercy?

Minimizing and Marginalizing Pain

One of the hardest things to deal with in any abusive or oppressive situation is for those pains to be minimized or marginalized - “It’s not that bad, and we don’t want to talk about it.” Or similarly, “It was bad, and we’ll talk about it to our comfort level. It’s not as bad as you portray, and we won’t talk about that part.” These pains are not just from the past. They are renewed regularly.



To our African American brothers and sisters, please forgive our refusal to allow the full extent of your pain to be publicly validated. We still wish to shield ourselves from your pain. Please forgive our weakness at the sight of pain we’ve caused you and thereby causing you more pain and for not allowing God to enter in and heal us both.

For Reflection ...

Do you feel the pain of systematic racial oppression? Do you want to?

Refusal to Admit Shame

The world asks the question, “What kind of human being could participate in or allow the holocaust to occur?” That’s a question intended to encourage people to face their personal and cultural shame. The implied answer is someone less than truly human could be involved in such cruelty or else humanity is deeply flawed to an extent that we just can’t bear look at it. Are we that rotten at the core?



A similar question is also applicable - one which we don't want to entertain about our heritage as Americans. “What kind of human beings could participate in or allow the brutality of slavery?” That question also is intended to encourage European-Americans to face their generational shame of oppressing African Americans.

To our African American brothers and sisters, please forgive our deep shame of greed, lust and power.

For Reflection ...

Do you feel a sense of ethnic shame for the abuses Whites have committed against Blacks? Do you believe that you should?

Broken Covenants

We pride ourselves as honest people who abide by the law. However, that didn't apply with you. We consistently deceived and betrayed you - and felt justified. Over and over again you hoped to believe us and still we couldn't keep our promises.



To our African American brothers and sisters, please forgive our lies, deceptions and betrayals. In no way was this justifiable. It caused much distrust and hatred between us.

For Reflection ...

How do you feel when others lie to you? How has the White community lied to the Black community?



Self-Righteousness, Self-Protection

In order to not face the pain and humiliation of our shame, we have devised a shell of self-righteousness. “We were not that bad.” “We’ve already confessed our wrong doings.” “You must stop acting like the victim and get on with life.” We’ve confessed our guilt to some extent but not embraced our shame and learned its lessons. We’ve found self-righteousness to be a protective barrier from it all.

To our African American brothers and sisters, please forgive our self-righteousness and self-protection. We are not righteous, and we are too weak to face the extent of our sin. You see our self-righteousness more than we do. May God and you have mercy on us.

For Reflection ...

Do you struggle with self-righteousness and self-protection? How might this impact your relationships across races? In what ways might you be aware of self-righteousness? What’s it like to engage with this question?



Refusal to Engage

It seems impossible for us to truly engage. And we often give the impression that we think we really can understand. Our ability to truly engage is limited by our ability to feel your pain and our ability to overcome our fears in the face of your anger. The effort to engage emotionally seems beyond our reach.

To our African American brothers and sisters, please forgive our refusal to engage. We would have to face too much of our shame. Pray that we will grow to that point soon.

For Reflection ...

Does standing back and not engaging seem like a godly option? Notice what response you had as you read the above paragraph. When you think about really engaging with African Americans what surfaces inside you?

A Vision of Racial Reconciliation within the Kingdom of God

Do we seek justice in racial reconciliation? Yes, but we seek much more than justice. We seek mercy for mercy overcomes judgment!

Does racial reconciliation mean total blending of

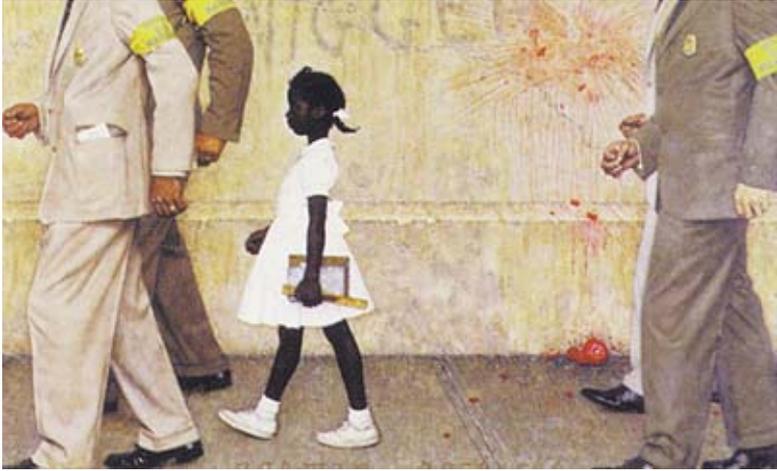
Black and White culture? No. We are to appreciate the diversity of cultures. But we must cross the prejudices of the heart that judge across cultures and establish real avenues of demonstrating love.



To our African American brothers and sisters, please forgive us when we have wanted you to become just like us before we accept you. Forgive us for not appreciating your cultural distinctives that portray the diversity of God. Pray that we will embrace God's mercy that overcomes judgment and honor you as created in the image of God.

What's it like to honestly pray this prayer? Notice if you can honestly pray this prayer. If not, notice what happens in you with that awareness.

For Reflection ...



Consider Jesus interaction with the Samaritan woman in John 4 and the Canaanite woman in Matthew 15:21-28.

Did Jesus always or ever engage with the ethnic struggles of His day? How does Jesus' example help you engage?

A Further Agenda for Racial Reconciliation

Pray, pray, and pray. God can and does hear and heal. We must turn to Him.

We have come a ways in the racial struggle in America. The past efforts of godly people, both Blacks and Whites, have not been lost in this struggle. But we have more to go, much more.

Journey inwardly. We are being invited again to allow God to transform our hearts. We must face our inward realities. It is the issues of the heart that must be dealt with for true racial reconciliation to occur. Racism, bigotry, prejudice, sexism, self-righteousness, power fears, cultural fears, economic fears, generational sins - all these and others help form the mosaic of interpersonal conflicts between people. We need to face the human condition and implore God to give us discernment and love in relating to one another.

Engage outwardly. Intentional steps of love and goodness are needed. Make friends. Be involved at many levels. Avoidance and denial will not overcome the trauma wounds of oppression. Jesus is our model as the Reconciler between God and humanity.

Let's ask Him to guide us down the path of deep and abiding racial reconciliation.

For Reflection ...

What are two practical step you can take to bring healing to any racial prejudice in your heart?

What are two practical steps you can take to offer love, compassion, dignity, justice and mercy to African American individuals and communities as you continue your own inner journey?



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