

Introduction

In the U.S. February is “Black History Month.” This well-intended commemoration is also one sad commentary on the egregious reality of racism and racial injustice that has plagued our planet for centuries. Only a year ago Britain celebrated the 200th anniversary of the outlawing of slavery in the empire. To his credit, Rowan Williams as archbishop of Canterbury acknowledged that slavery was the occasion for the greatest cause of grief to God’s spirit, and challenged Christians to face the reality of the church’s complicity and participation in the egregious evil. By contrast, wonderful words were uttered by then Prime Minister Toni Blair, suggesting that, instead of focusing on the sorrow for the evils of the past, people should revel in the reality that times have changed. But have they changed?

Some may have missed the three-quarter-page article and color photo that appeared on page three of the “Nation” section of the *Chicago Tribune* on Sunday, May 20, 2007. The headline read “Racial Demons Rear Heads.” The story was but the first round of the horror story of racism and bigotry perpetrated by “white” students who hung nooses (reminiscent of the terror of the KKK lynching of African Americans) from a schoolyard tree, threatening the lives of the African American students who had simply gotten permission to meet under that tree at their Jena, Louisiana, school. Eddie Thompson, a local pastor commented: “Here in the piney woods of central Louisiana . . . racism and bigotry are such a part of life that most citizens don’t recognize it.” When the formal proceedings for charging the students involved in the incident occurred in the last week of September 2007, the racially charged procedures made international headlines. Thousands of civil rights proponents and national, legal, religious, and civil rights leaders found it necessary to converge on the tiny town to insure that some semblance of justice was done! No, slavery, bigotry, and racism are alive and well in our nation and in our world!

Do we recognize the racism in our midst? And, what have we as a church done to account for *ourselves*? Perhaps the articles in this issue will assist *all* of us in looking once again at our *own* milieu and see with new eyes the racial holocaust that is being perpetrated among *us*.

How we define racism will ultimately determine how we understand its dynamics and what we attempt to do to halt its devastation. Racial injustice has many faces in today’s globalized, terrorized, and ecologically threatened world. Dawn M. Nothwehr, O.S.F., opens this discussion in her lead article.

Lest we be deceived that racism is now only a “black/white issue” Linh Hoang, O.F.M., enlightens us concerning the struggles and challenges of being considered

“Asian” in the U.S. context. He suggests important directions for the conversion of the church to racial justice for our sisters and brothers of Asian heritage.

Cecilia A. Moore provides us with an important history lesson and shows us how the neglect of knowing and understanding past injustices dooms us to repeat them. The formation of Catholic theological thought about racial justice often had much to be desired by those treated as its objects. Moore carefully leads us to the lessons we must learn.

Cognizant of some of the past injustices perpetrated in our parishes Stephen S. Dudek offers us an important reflection on effective frameworks for dealing justly with the diverse peoples who now constitute our parishioners. Dudek reflects on the biblical account of migration and slavery and draws on intercultural communication theory to provide a foundation for responding to the challenges and opportunities the multicultural parish presents.

The first of two special articles in this issue gives us a taste of the 2007 Tolton Lecture that was delivered jointly by two fine theologians, Stephanie Y. Mitchem and Michelle A. Gonzalez. Mitchem looks at the analytical uses of race, class, and gender in the constructions of womanist theology and gives us indications of future directions. Gonzalez raises some concerns regarding the impact of race on the construction of Latino/a and Black identities in contemporary religious discourse.

As our second feature article, the publishers and editors are proud to present the winning essay of the *New Theology Review Prize in Theological Reflection* by Hosffman Ospino. Ospino uses the notion of the “new Catholicity” to assist us in rethinking the urban parish.

In today’s parishes there is an urgent need for the ongoing formation of preachers—both lay and ordained. James E. Hayes explores a collaborative model, grounded in the spirituality of the preacher that seeks to respond to this need.

In the Signs of the Times column, Joan Brown, O.S.F., alerts us to the human rights crisis and the spiritual loss that is imposed by the burgeoning movement to privatize sources of potable water. Brown challenges us: “How do we face our neighbor and God knowing that by 2025, at least 3.5 billion people or nearly 50% of the world’s population will face water scarcity?”

In the Keeping Current column, Elisabeth Brinkmann, R.S.C.J., takes on health-care reform—already a “hot topic” for the 2008 U.S. presidential campaign. She questions what is really at stake? Brinkman unpacks ideas from the Consistent Ethic of Life, Daniel Callahan, and Lisa Sowle Cahill to assist us.

And, in the Word and Worship column, Rodica M. M. Stoicoiu explores the unsettling trend of parishioners not partaking in the eucharistic cup. She concludes: “This is the cup of communion, the cup we share, and it is not an optional addition.”

Finally, I extend my special gratitude to Roger Schroeder, S.V.D., who did the “lion’s share” of the subediting of this issue, thus enabling me to complete my sabbatical year relatively uninterrupted.