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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 healthcare 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.
Defining “Racisms” in a Globalized, Terrorized, Ecologically Threatened World

Dawn M. Nothwehr, O.S.F.

Catholics and all anti-racists must become more sophisticated in their analysis of racism and the dynamics of its 21st-century manifestations. Albert Memmi’s work is an excellent resource toward that end.

Introduction: The Idea of “Race”

Human beings are “hard-wired” to distinguish differences (Monteith and Winters, 45). Thus, there is a perennial need to assign meaning to those differences distinguished among fellow humans and then, to act accordingly (Manier). However, “race” is a relatively new idea that has signified a variety of things, depending on the historical period and context. For decades, it has been widely agreed that there is no scientific basis for setting any absolute boundaries that determine the inferiority or supremacy of any one group of humans over another (Harding, UNESCO 1959, 1951, 1964, 1967). Scholars concur that prior to the thirteenth century B.C.E. “race” simply indicated distinctions of difference (Hopkins, 131). However, especially from the medieval period, through the Age of Discovery to

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the Enlightenment, “race” took on increasingly more connotations of a deterministic classification of humans in hierarchies of superiority. Developments in defining “race” in Europe, China, and Japan likely had the most extensive impact, and taken together, those ideas established the basic framework for the major constructs of “race” and racisms around the globe and across time.

In the early sixteenth century the term “race” (“racial stock” as in breeding animals) entered the vocabulary for describing traits of human beings; a fatal step toward deterministic interpretations of difference (Fredrickson, 53). The characteristics distinguishing different “races” grew to include: skin color, eye color, types of hair, customs, language, religious beliefs, and more. In the racist mind, these determined whether or not a people was “civilized” or qualitatively equal to those making the judgment. Thus, when we speak of “race” we are dealing with a “social construct” that takes many forms (Davis, 307–42).

From the eighteenth century to the present, three prototypic and ethically egregious systems for interpreting the human differences stunted human life around the globe: (1) U.S. chattel slavery; (2) South African Apartheid; (3) Nazi Aryan White supremacy. These systems crossed a line by legally establishing racism in the structures of the entire societies (Fredrickson, 1–6).

**From Race to Racisms: Definitions and Dynamics**

The most adequate definition of racism for the twenty-first century is given by Albert Memmi. He holds that racism is fundamentally a structure and a set of social relations, not only a feeling of prejudice toward an “Other.” Racism is a generalizing definition and valuation of differences, whether real or imaginary to the advantage of the one defining or deploying them [accusateur], and to the detriment of the one subjugated to the act of definition [victime], whose purpose is to justify (social or physical) hostility and assault [aggression]. (Memmi, 100)

Further, Memmi claims, the archetype of this oppression is colonialism (more follows).

Memmi distinguishes four moments that, when occurring together, constitute an absolute and timeless occasion of oppression called racism (xviii). Racism is first an instance in which one recognizes that a “difference” exists between persons or among groups. Secondly, a negative value judgment is imposed on those persons who bear or manifest certain characteristics and who are different, and a positive valuation is given to the correlative characteristics born by the one(s) providing the judgment. Thirdly, the difference and its value are generalized to an entire group, which is then depreciated. And finally, the negative value imposed on the group becomes the justification and legitimatization for hostility and aggression.
Memmi has shown that racism has no real content and therefore it can change at the will of the oppressor. Indeed, it is not the nature or the kind of difference that matters; only that a negative difference is perceived to exist. “What counts is the form, the self-approbation that emerges from the assumptions and disguises inherent in any negative valuation of the other group” (xix). It is illogical that racism can be only a personal matter because to make a generalization requires the presence or consideration of a group; thus, racism is a social matter. Racism as a social system relies on its ability to define the “Other.” The act of definition requires the exercise of the power of one group over another. The fact of definition sets up a dependency of the dominant on the “Other” for their own social identity and on the hostility engendered by that dependence. Only legitimization of the dominance as a relationship provides any semblance of content.

Critical for understanding racism in its many forms is to see the integration of the biographical, the historical, the personal, and the analytical in the mind of the racist. Memmi defines racism in two senses. In the “narrow” sense, racism is the focus of biological difference or specific traits that are given to devised paradigms called “races.” Biology (or the criterion given for the discriminating category) acts as a pretext or an alibi. The function of racism is “both the rationalization and the emblem for a system of social oppression” (Memmi, 92).

Racism in the “broad” sense is self-valuation through the devaluation of the “Other,” and the justification of verbal or physical assault or abuse. Racism in the “broad” sense is more prevalent than it is in the “narrow” sense. As Memmi explains: “It would seem reasonable to consider biological racism, which is a relatively recent phenomenon, as a special case of the other, whose practices are more widespread and much older” (94).

Memmi and others also warn of the danger of an illusional insistence that the reality is that there is actually no difference among peoples (See Omi and Winant, 117–18; Bhattacharyya, Gabriel & Small, 28–59, 125–26). He cautions that some psychoanalytic theories “affirm that racism is built on heterophobia, a fear of difference, of those who are different, that is a fear of the unknown. But the psychoanalysts ask, ‘What is this ‘unknown?’’ and, they respond it is our own unconscious, which is frightening because it is strange, and we wish to project it on others” (Memmi, 43).

Memmi distinguishes four moments that, when occurring together, constitute an absolute and timeless occasion of oppression called racism.

DEFINING “RACISMS”
Clearly this and any other purely theoretical approaches avoid dealing with the concrete realities of human differences that do (at least initially) spark discomfort because they are unknown to us. Heterophobia—fear of difference, or xenophobia—fear of strangers, are each rooted in particular concrete experiences and contexts. Any “cure” for such fears needs to be dealt with in equally concrete and experiential ways. One deeply embedded myth, strongly reinforced by Western education, colonial and slave mentalities, is that it is bad to be different (Memmi, 45). This stance makes neoliberal “color-blind” approaches to resolving racism in the U.S. and the xenophobic violence involving immigrants in Europe and elsewhere fully plausible (See Omi and Winant, 117; MacMaster, 193–208). It would thus be a huge mistake on the part of any anti-racist effort, particularly by the church, to stress the universal without also acknowledging the particularity of differences that exist among all peoples. The real task for the church is not only to assist people in developing their intellectual capacity, character, and spirituality, but also to teach them the skills and strategies necessary to draw on “difference” as the occasion for empowerment of all and celebration of the presence of God’s grace in all people, rather than as the basis for fearful exclusion or even violence.

From Race to Racism:
21st-Century Color-coded Racism, Tribalism, and Xenophobia

In light of Memmi’s definition, today three forms of racism require greater attention, namely color-coded racism, tribalism, and xenophobia.

**Color-coded Racism**

Color-coded racism is most viperous in that it presents the criteria for the inferiority of the “Other” in biological and phenotypical terms such as skin color, bodily shape, cranial structure, negroid, caucasoid, or mongoloid. Through a process of racialization, one group (the white majority, for instance) targets the “Other” as inferior, formulating a mythical or ideological construct to support and provide rationale or justification for legal, social, political, and unjust discrimination and oppression (MacMaster, 2). The particular characteristics defining inferiority or superiority are indelibly stamped into the very body of the “Other” and thus, cannot be changed through any form of assimilation into the “superior” way of being or culture (see Douglas, 2005).

**Tribalism or Ethnocentricity**

Tribalism names a form of racialized relations between ethnic groups. A tribe is “a social organization or division comprising several local villages, bands, or lineages or other groups sharing a common ancestry language, culture, and name”
A general sense of belonging that comes through membership in a tribe or some group is necessary for human well-being. But *tribalism* is the attitude and practice of harboring such a strong feeling of loyalty or bonds to one’s tribe that one excludes or even demonizes those “Others” who do not belong to that group. This exclusion is manifested in engaging or failing to engage with the “Other” in obtaining the necessities of life, education, employment, just and fair governance, healthy political and economic relations, membership in social and religious groups, or equitable opportunities for rising to positions of authority or leadership.

Tribalism or ethnocentrism is a universal human tendency rooted in the reality that people are most comfortable with those familiar to and like themselves. However, rooted in their common humanness, people prosper and thrive best in a way of life that allows all groups to sustain themselves within a stable social, political, and economic order that supports human dignity. The legacy of colonialism is the deep disruption of such systems among those colonized.

Significantly, colonizers needed to justify their overtaking the property and persons of those they conquered. Justification required demonizing tribal peoples, exaggerating any conflicts among them. The most common technique used to gain control (of often powerful groups) was that of “divide and conquer.” The colonizers’ most egregious practices were to arm one tribe, set that group up against their neighbors, and then employ them to “catch” their “enemy” and sell them to the slave traders. Their eliminating one group or favoring another over against the “Others” was a genocidal activity.

The effects of this damage live on in the post-colonial world in many ways. The most devastating effect that has plagued newly independent nations is division remaining among peoples that threaten formation of any positive cohesive national unity. Tribalism and ethnocentrism infect all aspects of life with corruption, graft, incompetence, and injustices, resulting in a general sense of distrust and disenfranchise ment among all citizens. Such an unstable political situation when combined with dire economic poverty has frequently been volatile—even to the point of genocide as in Rwanda and Burundi (1994).
Xenophobia

Literally, *xenophobia* means “fear of the stranger” (from the Greek, *xenos* = stranger or foreigner; *phobos* = fear). A fitting definition is:

...a somewhat vague psychological concept describing a person's disposition to fear (or abhor) other persons or groups perceived as outsiders. Xenophobia may have a rational basis to it, such as when it refers to a worker whose job is threatened by the intrusion of migrants whom he labels as outsiders and therefore fears. It may also take an irrational form, for example when someone fears Sikks because he or she believes they carry knives for use as potential weapons. But to call a person xenophobic does not necessarily say anything about the rationality of that condition. Nor does it entail examining the underlying causes of their disposition. (Cashmore, 346)

Xenophobia is so lethal because (rational or not) it is easily manipulated and fueled toward mass hysteria that can fling even the most levelheaded and altruistic persons into aggressive oppression of the “Other” (MacMaster, 190–91). Evidence for this development is found in emerging political parties: the French Front National, the Dutch *Centrumdemocraten* and the *Centrum Parj*, the Austrian *Freiheitlichen*, the German *Republikaner* and *Deutsche Volkunion*, the Belgian *Vlaamis Blok* and the Front National (Voster, 7). In the U.S. in 1989, a well-known Klu Klux Klansman, David Duke, ran as a Republican and won a seat in Congress (see http://www.davidduke.com/index.php?p=350).

Three interrelated phenomena have combined to feed xenophobia and xenophobic behavior:

...the skillful elaboration and diffusion of a “New Racism” that offered a powerful ideological revision of traditional biological racism; the concurrent emergence and electoral challenge of xenophobic “National-Populist” parties that made use of the new current of thinking on cultural racism and national identity; and lastly, the tendency of the “New Right” conservative parties, as well as socialist and all mainstream parties, to play to the same gallery, particularly through the construction of “Fortress Europe” and the scapegoating of refugees. (MacMaster, 192)

The “New Racism” plays on latent xenophobia by lauding the importance and the natural necessity of cultural difference. A typical statement of the proponents of this position is: “I’m not xenophobic, nor does the fact that I like the French and France best mean that I hate foreigners or hate other countries” (MacMaster, 194). Here the vocabulary of “culture” is the code word for the language of “race.” Antiracists’ efforts toward affirming the values of cultural diversity and creating “multicultural societies” are manipulated to exaggerate and emphasize the impend-
ing loss of a comfortable predictable homogeneous society. These manipulations are supported theoretically using Italian Marxist philosopher Antonio Gramsci’s claim that the state depends on material force, economic relations, but also on a cultural hegemony enforced by controlling people’s worldview through managing ideas, language, and their discourse, and thus creating meaning (MacMaster, 194). The “New Racism” supporters also rely on sociobiology, reasoning that certain ways of doing things are right because they are natural, and if they are natural they must be true. Such reasoning argues that people live in particular countries just like fish thrive in certain habitat or wolves live in packs.

Further support is garnered by claiming that the ruling hegemonic majority is a “victim” of the disruptive invasion of the “Other” and the support given those invaders by the “race relations industry.” This victimization is often proclaimed and popularized using cartoons showing ordinary citizens being battered by “the loony leftists,” “fanatic liberals,” or “radical teachers.” When the media is flooded with this new vocabulary, racism is recast in populist “common sense” terms that plays to those who experience themselves disenfranchised by the governing “elites” who control the society, and thus made more reasonable and palatable (MacMaster, 195–98).

The xenophobic national populists were able to gain ground in electoral and parliamentary systems by focusing on this strategy (above). They gave an “acceptable face” to their biases and strategies as the “reasonable right thing to do” to protect national identity and culture. They offered strong, simply stated solutions to two basic fears held by the hegemonic majority: (1) the loss of power and control due to the influx of vast numbers of immigrants and refugees of various colors, religions, and cultures from all over the globe into Europe and North America; and, (2) anxiety about the threat these movements posed for keeping the “old wealth” secure. These solutions were to be accomplished via mainstream political involvement.

Ambiguities among the mainstream political parties in Europe and North America made it easier for xenophobic ideas and actions to take hold. The complexities of the new issues brought about by globalization, immigrants, and refugees caught the mainline politicians without a vocabulary and a plan to address these issues in a popular commonsensical manner. Thus, conventional politicians found themselves

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**Xenophobia**

a somewhat vague psychological concept describing a person’s disposition to fear (or abhor) other persons or groups perceived as outsiders.
in a defensive posture that required compromises and self-preserving strategies to "get tough on immigration." Numerous harsh draconian measures were passed on both sides of the Atlantic to limit immigration and fortify national identities. Many formal declarations about combating racism were brilliantly paraded, but they were weak, rarely enforced, and effectively utterly symbolic.

The Complicity of the Church and the Idea of Race

The Catholic Church’s record concerning the ethics of power and racism, tribalism, and xenophobia is at best mixed. Across history, the actions of church leaders ranged from the biblical prophetic to the near demonic when they and lay Christians yielded to the pressures of their contexts and lost sight of the deepest convictions of respect, equality in Christ, justice, and charity (see Panzer). Just as today, the degree of compliance by Catholics with magisterial teaching varied widely. Indeed, it is the stories believers tell rather than their knowledge of papal teaching or even doctrines that express their appropriation of the Christian faith in their personal lives, and that are most influential for their moral actions (O’Connell, 116–27).

Thus, it is imperative that the church and its ministers not merely impart doctrinal and dogmatic condemnations of racial injustices of the past but also proactively engage the faithful in experiential learning toward preventing racism’s sinful violence, now and in the future. The challenge for present-day Catholics and all people of good will is to learn from the past and honor the victims by not repeating the oppression. While never denying the horrific complicity of the Catholic Church in oppression, slavery, or genocide, significantly and ultimately the official church held a line in favor of its ideals on at least two counts.

First, the church constantly returned to its fundamental position that each human person is created in the image and likeness of God and that each person bears an inviolable dignity that must be respected at all cost. How this foundational principle was interpreted in relation to those understood to be “Other” frequently had more to do with the current cultural and scientific understanding of the human person than theological tenants. Also, the influences of Greek dualism on Christianity allowed tolerating slavery, providing (cf. Philemon) there was a harmonious spirit of charity between masters and slaves (see Frillingos).

Secondly, the church held that in Christ, all persons were redeemed and redeemable. Doctrinally, the Incarnation and the Cross placed no one beyond the bounds of salvation. Thus, early Christians, influenced by their contexts and cultures drew distinctions of difference, but they did not practice racism as we know it (see Hannaford, Thompson, Snowdon, 1983). For example, Greeks allowed that barbarians could be civilized; Romans believed all slaves could be emancipated; and Africans could be converted as was the Ethiopian (Acts 6:26-39). Space here is
insufficient for an adequate examination of divergences from these liberating interpretations of human difference. But certainly, especially today, the church cannot rest on its ancient laurels.

**Facing the Diagnostic Dilemma**

In 1988 the Pontifical Justice and Peace Commission issued its statement, *The Church and Racism: Toward a More Fraternal Society*. It defines racism as “rooted in the reality of sin . . . awareness of biologically determined superiority of one’s own race or ethnic group with respect to others, developed above all from the practice of colonization and slavery at the dawn of the modern era” (#2). The commission then distinguished nine forms of racism:

- Exclusion and aggression (#8)
- Institutional racism (#9)
- Victimization and genocide of Aboriginal peoples (#10)
- Religious and ethnic discrimination (#11)
- Ethnocentrism or tribalism (#12)
- Social racism against the Third World (#13)
- Spontaneous racism [xenophobia] (#14)
- Anti-Semitism (#15)
- Artificial procreation and genetic manipulation (#16)

This document signaled a tremendous advancement in the church’s willingness and capacities to not only denounce sinful practices, but to also utilize social analysis and to act concretely to affect social, political, and economic change (#24–32). Still the emphasis is clearly on the conversion of heart: “Racial prejudice, which denies the equal dignity of all members of the human family and blasphemes the Creator, can only be eradicated by going to its roots, where it is formed; in the human heart” (#24).

Thirteen years later (2001) the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace issued its *Contribution to World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance*. This document affirmed the 1988 statement, but went further to tackle the need for reconciliation for past injustices (#7–12). Additionally, it focused on the need for teaching the values of human dignity, solidarity, and the common good in a variety of ways (#13–17). Significantly it supported concrete affirmative action (just opportunity) to mitigate past injustices and the denial of opportunity to peoples across the globe (#18–19). The church
also recognized the changing shape of racial injustice due to globalization and the unprecedented numbers of migrants and refugees in the world at the start of the new millennium (#20–22).

Returning once again to Memmi’s work, it is critical that the church takes heed of his wisdom as one who has uncovered what he calls “the discriminatory didactic” of the spiraling dynamics of racism: fear, followed by aggression, followed by more fear and aggression. Racists are fearful people. Underneath all racism, according to Memmi, racial affirmation is an instrument for negative self-definition that compensates for the feelings of personal vulnerability that accompanies fear. Indeed, racism in the “narrow” sense is easily defeated on its own weak logic. But racism in the “broad” sense requires the ability to generalize and in order to generalize, according to the skewed logic (illogic) required by racism, one needs support from a society and its structures. Memmi forewarns: “The relative structural coherence of racism in the narrow sense, even in its obsessive aggressiveness and self-interest, is confirmed precisely by the existence of racism in the broad sense” (Memmi, 96).

Thus, it cannot be stressed strongly enough, that if the church is to be effective in combating racism, and establishing racial justice, it must remain vigilant and deal with structural sin as well as personal sin; it must challenge oppressive social, economic, political, and sexual structures that frame the very world in which it would have “conversion of heart” take place. The church must not only proclaim doctrines and theological or moral principles, but also engage in training and forming moral agents who can critically analyze concrete realities in light of the Gospel and view differences as gifts and as positive opportunities. As Bryan Massingale showed in his classic analysis of U.S. episcopal teaching on racism between 1990 and 2000, how racism is defined, analyzed, and diagnosed will also determine the judgment concerning what action is required to overcome it (Massingale, 700–30). Shamefully, his judgment is correct that out of some twenty teaching documents on racism promulgated in the ten-year period (1990–2000), only four adequately defined racism as both structural and personal sin, and addressed concrete corrective actions.

Most significant about recent Catholic moral teachings on racism is that their very existence robs racism of any ethical legitimacy. But more fundamentally,
while requiring a spiritual base, they stipulate that much can and must be done to also create a just structural arrangement within which integral conversion can happen. Bishops’ conferences (e.g., England and Wales) across the globe have issued pastorals in recent years that even set out “in house” policy changes to model necessary structural changes. Individual bishops (e.g., George, 2001 and Hughes, 2006) also began to deal directly with issues of “white privilege” for the first time. More magisterial action like this is necessary if racism is to be fought and overcome in our globalized world. But ultimately, it remains for all people of good will, but especially Catholics animated by the Gospel, inspired by the Holy Spirit, and empowered by God’s grace to proactively fulfill the deep yearning of Jesus: “. . . That they all may be one . . .” (John 17).

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All Look the Same?
Asian American Catholics and Racism

Linh Hoang, O.F.M.

Generations of Asian Americans have experienced great adversity within the prejudicial matrix of society, religion and race in the U.S. What pastoral strategies can address the issue of racism and Asian American Catholics today?

Racism in America affects all areas of people’s lived-experience. Racism is not a matter only of individual attitude but also of social structure. The general discussion of racism in society can be contentious, and when addressed to the Catholic Church in America, it raises disturbing concerns, issues, and questions. Is racism recognized among faithful believers? Is it appropriately addressed in the Catholic Church? A struggle exists between actually showing that it occurs in light of the persistent denial of it. There is also the tendency to believe that if one is not actively engaged in racism, then it cannot persist. Discussing racism offers the church a chance to reflect and evaluate itself in light of the gospel message.

This article will specifically address the experience of racism among Asian Americans within the American Catholic Church. First, I will explain how race restrictions to naturalization and citizenship have affected the perception of Asians in America. Second, I will describe how religion and race were prominent factors of the immigrant experience in America, especially how the Catholic Church reacted to the growing population of Asian American Catholics. Finally, I will suggest some pastoral strategies to address the issue of racism and Asian American Catholics.

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The “Asian American” label attempts to identify foreign- and American-born individuals of Asian ancestry. It is a relatively new racial category that was coined over forty years ago during the height of the 1960s political activism to mobilize Asians, and also to counter the use of terms such as “Mongolian,” “Asiatic,” and “Oriental” that have been part of the racial vocabulary for decades. It also incorporates persons of Asian ancestry who were American permanent residents and citizens, to distinguish them from a white majority, while acknowledging commonality with other racial and ethnic groups. Interestingly, “Asian American” was not decreed by governmental or by other external authorities but rather was coined mainly by U.S.-born Chinese, Filipino, and Japanese college students and community-based organizations on the West Coast and in New York (Lott, 77). Many were second- and third-generation Asian Americans. For some, this label has worked well to unite disparate ethnics; for others it has created an uneasy alliance, especially when many of these cultures have been involved historically in conflict and hatred. Nevertheless, the label has survived and maintains a catch-all for identification. It should also be noted that the term “Asian” has traditionally referred to only Chinese, Japanese, and Korean. I will use “Asian” more broadly to include all ethnics from the Asian continent. Yet, how does it work as a racial category?

The United States government—through the apparatus of immigration laws and policies and through the processes of naturalization and citizenship—has attempted to identify who Asians are in America. These laws established racial differences through the construction of ethnic identities (Haney-Lopez, 20). Since the first naturalization act of 1790, the right to naturalization was restricted to “free white persons.” Asians, at this time, were considered to be “aliens ineligible to citizenship.” This was concretely expressed through the exclusionary laws against Chinese in 1882, against South Asians in 1917, against Koreans and Japanese in 1924, and against Filipinos in 1934.

Congress never enacted a law that specifically names “Asians” or “Orientals” as an Asiatic racial category . . . the sequence of laws in 1882, 1917, 1924, and 1934 . . . combined with the series of repeal acts overturning these exclusions, constructed a common racial categorization for Asians that depended on consistently racializing each national-origin group as “nonwhite.” (Lowe, 19)

Thus, becoming a citizen meant also becoming white because during this period citizenship was guaranteed to whites and freed blacks (who consequently were “legally” white). The requirements for citizenship changed with a series of Asian exclusion repeal acts passed between 1943 and 1952 that dramatically transformed the status of immigrants of all Asian origins from “aliens ineligible” to that of citizen (Lowe, 7). Furthermore, the shift in Asian immigrants to the United States
after the Hart-Celler Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 abolished former national-origin quotas and exclusions, yielded to the broadening of the identities of “Asian Americans.”

Currently, almost half of Asian Americans are U.S.-born citizens and of that group, many date the history of their settlement in the United States back four or five generations. According to the 2000 U.S. Census, the population of Asians was counted at about 11 million, or 4.3% of the total population. It is projected that by the middle of the twenty-first century, 10% of the U.S. population will be Asians. This significant increase will make Asian Americans much more visible in all areas of American society.

How is racism experienced by Asian Americans? What occurs for Asian Americans is racial lumping, which generates the most common forms of discrimination against Asian Americans, including, on the one hand, the ascription of specific ethnic characteristics to all Asian Americans. On the other hand, each ethnic group loses its particular character under the umbrella of “Asian American.”

Inevitably, the ethnic characterization fall into two categories: positive or negative. Positive ethnic stereotypes to all Asian Americans glosses over educational and economic inequities among Asian Americans, and engenders resentment toward Asian Americans by other racial minorities. This is exemplified through the “model minority” stereotype that has created pressure on Asian Americans to succeed (Angelo, 44).

Negative ethnic stereotypes—such as the unwillingness to learn English, unfriendliness, and passivity—breed both racial defamation and racial aggression, including anti-Asian violence. Further, Asian Americans face racial demands, even though they are born and raised in America, to speak their native language fluently, practice all the traditions and customs of the “home” country, and to know the history of their “home” country. These expectations can be innocent, but when Asian Americans are confronted with these on a regular basis it reemphasizes the fact that they remain forever foreign in America (Angelo, 130).

Racial lumping also masks the fact of racism between the Asian cultures and within individual ethnic groups. Historical and cultural tensions have not created explicit hostilities in the United States, but rather maintain hardened attitudes that obstruct productive cooperation among individuals and communities. Within ethnic groups, there is discrimination against recent newcomers. Newcomers are a reminder of the “forever-foreign” place of established Asian Americans because
they struggle to learn the English language and the American culture. Newcomers represent a never-ending cycle of being marginalized people in which Asian Americans have worked hard to overcome.

Many problems of racism that Asian Americans encountered are similar to previous immigrant groups: obtaining language skills, joining the workforce, intermarriage, participating in civic duties and religions. An added difference is that Asian Americans’ physical features also created an easy target for discrimination. The strategy to overcome racism was sought in religion; however, the participation in religion created mixed results for the Asian American, especially with the expectation of religion as transcending the scourge of racism.

Becoming American: Race and Religion

From America’s birth, religious discourse was closely intertwined with the entities of race and culture. It played a pivotal role in the construction of the white race in America.

In 1875, with the publication of the first truly popular book on comparative religion in America . . . James Freeman Clarke’s Ten Great Religions oriented the reader with the statement that “each race, beside its special moral qualities, seems also to have special religious qualities, which, cause it to tend toward some one kind of religion more than to another kind. These religions are the flower of the race.” (Snow, 269)

The task of the mainstream American population was to connect whiteness to rationalist Christianity and nonwhiteness to heathen imagination and emotion, or else to spiritual wisdom transcending rationality. These links are no less prevalent, though perhaps more subtle in America today. It is relatively recent that Americans made a concerted effort to separate them (Snow, 269).

Moreover, recent studies of post-1965—mostly non-European—immigrant groups have neglected to examine the role of race in their religious experiences. For example, neither of two major edited volumes (Gathering in Diaspora and Religion and the New Immigrants) on contemporary immigrant groups’ religions has treated race as a significant category of analysis (although each has paid enough attention to the role of gender) (Min, 21). This may be contributed to the fact that religion tends to be seen as a garden for peacemaking rather than a patch for racism. David Yoo, an Asian American scholar, has stated that “religion does not necessarily transcend the bounds of race” (Yoo, xvii). The sentiment refers to the fact that race and religion have been so entwined that both must appear together in any discussion on American culture.
The complex interaction of religion and race shaped the lives of immigrants and the ideals of American citizenship. To become American translated into becoming Christian. Whites rallied around the hope that if blacks, Native Americans, and the masses of immigrants could only be converted to genuine Christianity, they would also become Anglo-Saxon (Lee, 104). This sentiment continues to be a part of the American psyche.

For the most part, Asians were automatically considered adherers to Eastern religions that deny the immediate authority of God (a Judeo-Christian God). Even if Asians were Christians or converts to Christianity, they were still suspect. The few contemporary American religious historians who give attention to Asian Americans gravitate toward either an assimilationist reading of the Asian American Christians or a sentimentalized reading of “non-Christian” Asian religious communities. Through these interpretations, Asian cultural difference is then either erased beneath the canopy of white Christianity or constructed as the untouchable “other.” As racial minorities, Asian Americans often find they lack full acceptance by members of the dominant society regardless of their level of religious and cultural assimilation and participation.

For Asian Americans, who are Christians, the designation of Christians as “assimilated” fails to recognize how individuals and communities have consciously forged a religious identity in opposition to the discrimination that they have faced and continue to face. The founding and ongoing presence of separate denominations and churches testify to the contested nature of Asian American Christianity (Yoo, xvii). For Catholics, the different ethnic parishes and churches also support this fact. The ethnic communities still feel misunderstood because of their incorporation of indigenous customs and symbols in the liturgies or they feel marginalized because they maintain more traditional devotions and practices.

Furthermore, historian Gary Okihiro contends that whatever it is that makes Asians different from what is considered American is construed as something that is permanent or something to be erased (Okihiro, 30). This type of consideration can be applied to the way mainline Protestants assumed that Asian Americans (as well as all immigrants) would inevitably assimilate into the mainstream and therefore did not require any special attention.

Originally our race stock was exclusively Caucasian, for though both the American Indian race and the African were found upon our territory, yet neither of these entered into the body politic or was a real factor in the social structure. So, too, we were a specifically English-speaking people and a Protestant nation as to all our mental habits and ideas of personal liberty both of thought and action; yet full of religious reverence, Sabbath keeping, Bible reading, and law abiding. (Lee, 101)

Chinese and Japanese transience and reluctance to embrace Christianity discouraged Protestant missionaries and contributed to the loss of confidence in Christian
conversion as a means of assimilation. By the end of World War I, many Protestant mission boards felt that they had overcommitted their ministry resources among Asian Americans (Lee, 105). The Catholic Church’s response to racism and the Asian Americans experience have not been particularly innovative either.

**American Catholic Church and Race Issues**

The first Vatican document to deal exclusively with racism was published in 1989. The U.S. Catholic Bishops issued three statements against racism in 1958, 1968, and then again in 1979. The 1979 pastoral letter *Brothers and Sisters to Us* describes racism as an “evil” that violates human dignity. The letter suggests that racism is manifested in contemporary life, with a sense of indifference to the marginalized and an overemphasis on individualism. The bishops call the U.S. church and society to conversion and renewal. The letter advocates domestic and international policies that alleviate the tragic effects of racism.

The bishops emphasize also that each of us as Catholics must acknowledge a share in the mistakes and sins of the past. Many of us have been prisoners of fear and prejudice. We have preached the gospel while closing our eyes to the racism it condemns. We have allowed conformity to social pressures to replace compliance with social justice (USCCB, 31). The fact is that there have been attitudes and actions that have contributed to racism in the church. Highlighting a few of these attitudes will help us take better action in the future.

Of the over 11 million Asian Americans, more than 35% claim Christianity as their religion with over 21% embracing Catholicism. Among Asian Americans, the largest number of Catholics is found among Filipinos, Vietnamese, and Koreans with growing number of Catholics among other Asian ethnics (USCCB 2001, 9). I will highlight a few incidents of racism that was endured by Asian Americans, and then, discuss some attitudes of racism that hinder full inclusion of Asian Americans into the American Catholic Church.

A reaction from James Bouchard, S.J., challenged the immigration of Chinese into America in a published article in the *San Francisco Catholic Guardian* in 1873. He questioned the sincerity of the Chinese especially since the efforts to evangelize was not very fruitful. He stated that “they are an inferior race of people and consequently cannot be a safe class . . . of people in our country” (Burns, 233). This was in reaction to efforts of Archbishop Joseph Sadoc Alemany of San Francisco to help the growing Chinese population.

Archbishop Alemany invited Father Thomas Cian, the first Chinese priest to work in the United States in 1854. Cian encountered a few Chinese Catholics widely scattered (some fifty or sixty in San Francisco and the mining regions), and a hostile, racist environment (many Catholics on the West Coast had difficulty believing Cian was a priest because he was Chinese). Cian wrote in 1855: “I cannot see much prospect of doing much good here.” He petitioned to build a small chapel
for Chinese Catholics in San Francisco, as he witnessed the inroads being made by Protestant clergymen among the Chinese. No chapel was ever built. At the heart of Cian’s difficulty was that he did not speak the same dialect as the majority of the Chinese in San Francisco. Discouraged by his lack of success, Cian returned to China via Italy in 1865 (McGloin, 50).

There is an estimated one million Filipino Catholics in the U.S.; however, they have been one of the least recognized communities either because members are mistakenly regarded as Hispanic due to their surnames or because they are taken for granted since they communicate well in English and are then expected to adhere strictly to the “American style” of Catholicism. “A singular complaint of Filipino Catholics is that the Roman Catholic Church is forcing them to be like everybody else” (Almirol, 309). Another immigrant added that “we were different and different was equated with inferiority. We were treated like dirt by the Americans, regardless of whether we professed to be Catholics or Protestants” (Almirol, 306). For these reasons, many Filipino Catholics have stopped going to church or have sought other religious groups more welcoming of them and more relevant to their needs (Almirol, 310). The Catholic Church has recently responded to this problem by revitalizing its Ethnic Ministries (in lieu of the earlier American church tradition of creating national parishes) and increasing its efforts to recruit, in this case, Filipino clergy and laypeople to these agencies.

The Vietnamese American Catholics in the Diocese of San Jose in 1981 petitioned to have an ethnic parish established. They felt that similar to previous immigrants such as the Germans, Irish, and Italians this request would be easily accommodated. However, Bishop Pierre DuMaine only set up a center but not an ethnic parish, which ignited controversy among the Vietnamese Catholics. This struggle between certain factions within the Vietnamese Catholic community and the bishop continued for almost twenty years when an ethnic parish was finally established (Burns, 290). Several newspaper accounts describe this controversy as an internal church struggle or a political power play. But the history of the national churches built by previous immigrants was very much instigated by the tension of racism.

Besides these public incidents of racism, there are overall attitudes about how Asian Americans practice Catholicism. One sentiment is that Asian American Catholics are traditional in their practices. This implies that the Asian Catholics are better accepted by “traditional” Catholics because they maintain an old world
Catholicism that distinguish them not only as traditional “white” Catholics but also as part of immigrant groups who have not adapted to the practices of Catholicism today. This contributes also to the “model minority” tension among Asian Americans as also succeeding in terms of religion. They are then distinguished from other minority groups that have become lapsed in devout practice.

Many experiences of racial discrimination have influenced first-generation immigrants to return or establish ethnic parishes. These ethnic parishes have become safe havens. Ethnic churches have a three-part role in dealing with cultural and Christian encounters; they have their own ethnic culture, the dominant American culture, and other American-ethnic cultures to consider (Park, 93).

Nevertheless, these ethnic parishes need to be reevaluated, especially since the vast majority is not only one racial background but also one ethnic heritage as well. There are a couple of reasons for this ethnic segregation. First, most Asian American churches are immigrant churches. Immigrants established them for the purpose of worshiping and socializing in their native tongue. The ethnic churches are most prominent among the first generation. The sole ethnic character is built into its original design. The uniformed ethnic aspect of the church is arguably the most significant drawing factor for new members and visitors. Many Asian American churchgoers admit that their initial reason for attending a church was to meet other ethnics. In a sense, any subsequent religious conversion stems from the original desire for ethnic fellowship.

Second, the large degree of ethnic separatism among Asian American churches is simply due to the enormous number of internal differences. The “Asian” racial category is a social construct in the United States that encompasses a wide range of cultures and histories. Although East Asian countries such as Korea, Japan, and China do share some cultural similarities based on Confucian ideals, each country has its own distinct culture, including language.

**Taking Action: What Next?**

It is difficult to eradicate racism; however, the attitudes of religiously minded people can change in order for right behavior to be actualized. The spiritual giant of Christianity, Saint Francis has been an inspiration not only to his own religious order but to the church universal. During his lifetime, St. Francis allowed the other to be other. He demonstrated the real possibility of living in peace with diverse others while at the same time remaining totally himself. Francis showed us the kind of self we have to be to live in harmony with others (Blastic, 12).

Reflecting on Francis's engagement not only with the Muslims but with his own brothers, Michael Blastic concludes three points that will help us elaborate what concrete things dioceses and parishes can do to develop strong Asian American Catholic communities: (1) To live among and not stand over against others. (2) To be
subject to others for God’s sake. This means not having power over others. (3) To preach the word, one must listen for the word from God in order to determine that the preaching is pleasing to God.

The first consideration to live among and not over against is appropriately applied to dioceses where offices of ethnicity ministries have been collapsed or eliminated. There is a need to revitalize these ministries. These ministerial programs should be revamped in order to take into consideration the diverse experiences of the various Asian ethnicities. Where the cost cutting is necessary to maintain a viable organization, the dioceses must consider where growth in the church is viable. The growth will be among the ethnic communities. Asian Americans will remain within a church that will recognize their value and worth.

The second consideration of being subject to others applies to social ministries to Asian Americans and also Asian Americans toward others. It was not until 1975 when the American Catholic Church got involved with resettling Southeast Asian refugees that the church recognized a presence of Asian American Catholics. Since then the bishops have encouraged Asian American Catholics to create a national organization that is in its seminal stages now. With the revamping at the USCCB, there are efforts to create an office for Asian and Pacific American concerns.

Furthermore, Bishop Dominic Luong (one of three Asian American bishops) has stated that Vietnamese American Catholics tend to care for one another and do not extend a helping hand to other groups. Andrew Sung Park has also stated the same about Korean Christian communities. This is a concern that needs to be addressed in order for Asian Americans to live fully the gospel message of caring for the other while they have been welcomed as members of the larger society. The reality is also that Asian Americans are moving into leadership positions in the various parishes and dioceses and the necessity to help others outside of the particular ethnic group is important.

The third consideration of preaching can help with the training of new priests and lay leaders. Seminaries and theologates must become places where pastors and lay leaders are trained and equipped with skills to minister effectively in culturally diverse environments. Some complaints have been that seminaries had seen Asian Americans as training to minister only to their ethnic group. This overlooks the second-, third-, or fourth-generation Asian American who only speaks English. There is also a need to have teachers and administrators who are aware of the needs of the Asian American. We need innovative parishes that are willing to take the lead in the church in modeling what it means to welcome persons

Worship style is an important way to symbolize to visitors acceptance of other races.
from outside their racial constituency into their communal life. Parishes should intentionally use race as a factor to help them maintain, or build on, their racial diversity.

Worship style is an important way to symbolize to visitors acceptance of other races. An inclusive worship style communicates to visitors of different races that they, and their cultures, are respected. Justo Gonzalez states that “worship is a rehearsal and an act of proclamation.” This means that the church needs to make every effort that “every nation and tribe and people and language be present and represented; that no one be excluded or diminished because of their tribe, or nation, or people, or language” (Gonzalez, 110).

Finally, the current debates over immigration regulations have drawn the attention of the American Catholic hierarchy, especially Cardinal Mahony of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles. He has launched a campaign for immigrant justice to care for immigrants both documented and undocumented. There were over 500,000 undocumented Asians in 2000 (Office of Policy, 10). It is predicted that the number will continue to increase substantially in the future. Hence, it is necessary to pay attention to immigration issues, especially because racism has determined the naturalization process in America.

**Conclusion**

Breaking down obstacles and challenges of racism, Asians have inserted themselves into the American Catholic Church, which has always been a mixture of immigrants and refugees. Asian Americans will continue to participate and grow in the Catholic Church. Their presence is already secured by the increasing number of priestly and religious vocations. It is necessary to nurture these aspiring new leaders to not only bridge stronger ties between Asian American Catholics with others, but also to have them claim ownership in a church that opens doors to the other in the spirit of God’s love.

**References**


From the Ivory Tower to the Pews

Theology’s Role in Shaping Catholic Racial Thought and Practice in the Twentieth Century

Cecilia A. Moore

The Catholic theological approach to race, justice and charity significantly informed the church’s thought and practice in the twentieth century. How does this shed much-needed light upon racism and the Catholic response today?

When and where I grew up shaped my experience of Catholicism and race. I was born in 1966, just after the final meetings of the Second Vatican Council closed and as the reforms of this council started to make their way into the everyday religious thoughts and practices of Catholics in the United States. The Southern Catholic church in which I grew up was the only Catholic church in the city or for that matter in at least a 30-mile radius. Consequently, all practicing Catholics in my hometown and in the surrounding communities no matter where they lived, whatever their racial/cultural background or their social class status was, shared membership in the same parish. This high degree of geographical, racial, cultural, and class integration that is a hallmark the Catholic Church in the South was definitely against the grain. I grew up feeling proud that I went to such an integrated church that had room for everyone who wished to be there. Yet, despite this strong sense of Catholic community that I enjoyed, I can still identify events in my life in the church that were marked by racism. Allow me to share one example.

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My first grade class was arranged in alphabetical order. We did everything in alphabetical order from our assigned desks, to going to the library, to receiving our returned homework. Here I had my first encounter with racism when one of my classmates demanded to be reseated because he did not want to sit beside me because I was black. I know this because he plainly told this to our teacher and to me. Our teacher promptly reseated him. At home I told my mother that my classmate did not want to sit by me because I was black and that sister reseated him. That evening at Mass my mother, who was a daily communicant, approached my teacher about what I said had happened. When she returned from Mass, I asked her if she spoke to sister. She had. She said that sister was sorry that I was hurt but she thought it better that she move my classmate “because after all he came from a very well-bred family.” I really did not understand this then. It did not explain how what was done to me was fair or right or just. And, then and now, I have difficulty seeing how in any way his family was better or more special than mine. But, this was not something we decided to fight. And, for the rest of the year our first grade class alphabet was more than slightly off.

As an adult studying the history of Catholicism in the United States and in particular the experience of African American Catholics, I have learned through my research that this experience I had as a child was something that I shared with generations of black Catholics before me and that the reasons behind these experiences had a lot to do with how Catholics were taught to regard race and their obligations toward African Americans in the first half of the twentieth century. I was born after the thick of the Civil Rights movement and the Second Vatican Council in a church that was progressive on social justice issues, highly integrated, and inclusive in so many ways. However, what Catholics had been taught formally and informally through day-to-day Catholic pastoral practices continued to consciously and unconsciously inform their behavior, attitudes and practices for long after the church began to teach very differently about race and the Christian response to racial difference. In this article, I will present a history of a Catholic theological approach to race, justice and charity that significantly informed Catholic thought and practice for quite a bit of the twentieth century. I believe this can shed much-needed light upon racism and the church’s response to it.

**Asking The “Race Question”**

Spurred on by the mass movement of African Americans from the South to the North in the early twentieth century, American Catholics, primarily theologians, began to address the so-called “race question.” For the most part the Catholic African Americans met in the urban North and Midwest were European immigrants or second- and third-generation Americans. Often these two communities found themselves competing with each other for jobs and living accommodations.
But they also met under less contentious social circumstances, such as in schools and in churches. All of these situations prompted white Catholics to seek advice from their religious leaders about what their obligations to blacks were and about how they should relate to their new black neighbors.

For several decades many American Catholic priests, religious, and laity employed U.S. history, sociology, and economics to develop a theological response to the “race question” for the faithful. Distinctive features of this theology were the essential equality of all created in God’s image and likeness, a distinction between natural rights and civil rights, the insistence that blacks had the right to earn a living wage and to benefit from adequate educational opportunities, a definition of Christian love that emphasized the importance of outward acts of charity to blacks while it minimized the requirement of internal affection for blacks, by privileging self-regard above love of neighbor.

Mainline American Catholic theologians of racial justice consistently advised that the virtue of prudence was the answer to the race question. With time, patience and judicious behavior things would change for blacks in America. In regard to their moral obligations to African Americans, white Catholics owed blacks a minimum of Christian justice and charity. The minimum of Christian charity and justice demanded working for and not standing in the way of economic and educational opportunities for African Americans. The minimum of justice did not include “social equality,” which meant anything that might lead to friendship because friendship could prove a slippery slope to miscegenation (Southern, 67–93). Social equality also included anything that made whites feel “inconvenienced” or that would upset the American social order. For the most part this theological perspective was formed in a Catholic ivory tower, but it was for the people, and it had a profound influence on how white Catholics thought about African Americans and related to African Americans for quite some time. But it also would be challenged by other Catholic scholars who rejected any attempt to minimize or qualify the Christian command to love neighbor as self and to recognize the inherent dignity in all people regardless of race.

The Morality of the Color Line

One of the most comprehensive Catholic theological responses to the “race question” was The Morality of the Color Line by Father Francis J. Gilligan. Gilligan was a priest of the Diocese of St. Paul, Minnesota. He received his doctorate in sacred theology at The Catholic University of America and wrote his dissertation under the direction of Monsignor John A. Ryan. Monsignor Ryan was best known for his advancement of the theory of distributive justice, his advocacy for a living wage, and as an advisor to President Franklin D. Roosevelt on the New Deal (Broderick). According to Gilligan, Ryan suggested that he do a study of
Catholic theology and the American race question. Using American history, sociology, economics, and medieval Catholic theology, particularly St. Thomas Aquinas, Gilligan wrote a landmark study on the race question and provided answers for Catholics about the nature of their obligations of justice and charity to African Americans. *The Morality of the Color Line* was published in 1928.

Gilligan thought his study was necessary because “humanitarians” and “unbelievers who completely misunderstood the words of Christ” had advanced incorrect notions about Christian love that confused Americans seeking to understand their obligations of justice and charity to African Americans. Indirectly, Gilligan accused the Social Gospel movement and liberal Christianity of elevating notions of love of neighbor over love of self (Gilligan, 48). Gilligan asserted that the manner in which liberal Christians demanded white Christians to love their black neighbors was unattainable especially when American law and culture seemed to justify and promote hatred of the Negro. He argued that the only thing that would bring American Catholics to clarity of thought and then proper action was medieval Catholic theology. Gilligan believed medieval theologians and philosophers had already given Catholics the correct understanding of Christian charity. These writers, such as St. Thomas Aquinas, had discovered that love had orders and levels. And though the Christian was always obliged to love his or her neighbor, the Christian also had to know the proper order of that love (Gilligan, 49).

Gilligan introduced his study with a history of the Negro from Africa to America. In this brief survey, he highlighted African accomplishments in civilization and culture. He also used sociological and economic studies to show that when blacks and whites had access to the same educational opportunities they preformed at similar levels in academics and business. For Gilligan, these findings of historians, anthropologists, economists, sociologists, and theologians buttressed the Christian conviction that all people were created in God’s image and likeness. The scholars’ findings also showed blacks as fully human and essentially equal to whites and others. And, according to Gilligan’s reading of Catholic theology, essential equality was the foundation of racial justice.

**Making Distinctions**

Gilligan also discussed the notion of rights in the Christian tradition. He defined rights as “inviolable moral claims to personal goods” (Gilligan, 49). He also made a distinction between natural rights and civil rights. God granted natural rights to all. Natural rights were essential for the person to attain his or her natural end, which was to glorify God. Natural rights could never be abrogated, but the State had a right to limit the extension of natural rights. He also claimed that Americans most commonly understood natural rights to be “the rights to life, liberty, and property” (Gilligan, 40). Because God created blacks in his image and
likeness, whites must never interfere with blacks’ access to enjoy the same number and the sacredness of natural rights that whites enjoyed (Gilligan, 48). Because blacks possessed natural rights, whites were obliged to love blacks as neighbors. Gilligan explained, “the Negro being a rational creature is capable of obtaining eternal happiness, is made to the image of God, and was redeemed by Christ. The white individual is obliged to love the Negro, not because of his swarthy color, but because of his relation to God, because he is loved by God, because: ‘The Lord, of them and you, is in heaven and there is not respect of persons with Him’” (Gilligan, 41).

God was “no respecter of persons,” but the State was and Gilligan’s theology did not change the justice of this. In other words, there was the theological ideal that Catholics accepted as truth, on the one hand, but there was the real world that Catholics had to negotiate, on the other. This world did not order itself to the theological ideal. Gilligan defined civil rights as rights “bestowed by the State for a civil purpose” (Gilligan, 47). The State enjoyed the power to confer civil rights. Gilligan explained, “some rights if the common good demands, may be restricted to certain classes of citizens and may be abrogated by the State if they have already been bestowed” (Gilligan, 39).

He used the right to vote as an example of a civil right the State could choose to grant or to revoke. This was just one of many of Gilligan’s justifications for the morality of the American color line. More than merely explaining how this was moral, Gilligan provided Catholics with a form of reasoning to determine whether their attitudes or actions were just and charitable. In the case of voting rights, he contended that grandfather clauses and literacy tests could be regarded as just when one considered American history, Southern culture, and the common good. He argued that Americans had learned during Reconstruction that the majority of Negroes were not competent to vote or to hold public office. Using accounts from Southern historians, Gilligan painted a bleak picture of the black capacity to vote prudently and to serve in public office with integrity (Gilligan, 39). Though Gilligan admitted that it was perhaps unfair to judge blacks in the 1920s by their ancestors in the 1860s and 1870s, he asserted that the memory of uneducated recently emancipated blacks taking control of and botching Southern politics after the war was still strong in American memory, particularly in the South where most blacks still lived. Each year African Americans were achieving more education, culture, and political wisdom, but it was still not prudent for them to vote en masse. African American voters possessed the
ability to do much harm to the common good. Time and prudence would bring blacks into the electorate; therefore, Catholics did not err in justice or in charity by not supporting universal franchise for African American men and women.

**Charity Does Not Demand “Social Equality”**

Along with this discussion of voting rights, Gilligan introduced a principle that would persist in the mainline Catholic theology of racial justice, and that was that blacks were not yet real Americans, who fully appreciated American heritage and customs. Again, time, education, and economic stability would naturalize blacks into Americans (LaFarge, 24). The “not quite” American status of blacks was another justification for maintaining the color line. And more than providing Catholics with examples of when and how to do justice and charity to blacks, Gilligan provided them a mentality by which they could justify racially prejudiced ideas and actions. In this mentality the realities of African American history and their slow educational and economic progress made them ineligible to vote and ineligible to be regarded as the social equals of most white Americans. And, social equality was what white Americans seemed to fear the most.

Sympathetic to Catholics who might be seeking just this kind of answer, Gilligan acknowledged that it was “arduous or repulsive to many whites to accept the obligation to love the Negro a neighbor” (Gilligan, 47). But, he also reminded Catholics that “the Christian is commended only to love his neighbor as himself,” and he quoted St. Thomas Aquinas’s maxim “man’s love for himself is the model of his love for another” (Gilligan, 48). It was natural for one’s primary wishes of happiness to be for himself or herself. Love of self was not condemned but was commanded by Jesus. Jesus did say that his followers were to love their neighbors, but Gilligan translated or interpreted love as “good will.” He advised “that goodwill however, need not be as passionate or as intense as love of self or kin, since man is attracted to self and kin by natural bonds. Moreover, in the external pursuit of happiness a man is generally permitted to seek first those objects which are reasonably necessary for the welfare of self and family, only secondly need he concern himself with others” (Gilligan, 48).

To hate blacks was sinful, to fail to suppress such hatred was sinful, but removing one’s self from situations in which one would have to interact socially with blacks was not sinful in and of itself. Gilligan made this case even though he insisted on the equality of blacks and whites before God. In the real world of America black and whites were unequal in Gilligan’s mind; in fact they were of different classes. Their inequality had nothing to do with God’s design but with history and culture. Because of the realities of slavery and cultural racial animosity in the United States, whites were of a class that was distinct from and higher than the class to which blacks belonged. And, again, using Aquinas, Gilligan reminded American
Catholics that within their theological tradition there was a respect of class distinctions and levels. He compared whites to nobles and blacks to the peasants of Aquinas’s day. As Thomas warned against the practice of nobles marrying peasants, Gilligan warned against the social equality of blacks and whites and strongly recommended that whites not put themselves in circumstances with blacks that might result in friendship. Whites did not owe blacks friendship. Invoking Thomas again, Gilligan quoted, “outside of cases of urgency to show such favors belongs to the perfection of charity” (Gilligan, 50). The following narrative demonstrates how what Gilligan proposed in terms of an authentic Catholic approach to the race question worked practically.

**Gilligan’s Theology in Action**

A little more than a month before Gilligan’s mentor Monsignor John A. Ryan delivered his Charter Day address in 1943 to Howard University faculty, students, and guests, Jean Quartersman, a student writer for *The Hilltop*, the Howard University paper, responded to an *Atlantic Monthly* article titled “Nearer and Nearer the Precipice” by Virginius Dabney (Quarterman, 5). Dabney was a renowned Jeffersonian and Southern historian, editor of the *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, and self-described “Southern liberal.” As a Southern liberal, he claimed to be progressive on the issue of American race relations. As a white sympathetic to black concerns, Dabney felt justified in his criticism of African American leaders and newspapers that demanded immediate desegregation and “political and social equality” with white Americans. Such was the subject of “Nearer and Nearer the Precipice.” Dabney accused black leaders like A. Phillip Randolph and black newspapers like *The Pittsburgh Courier* of sowing seeds of racial violence and strife in America by agitating for the federal government to immediately end racial discrimination. Dabney believed that Americans would one day live in a segregated society, but such a society would be “the fruit of gradual evolutionary development” rather than “forced by executive fiat” (Dabney, 100).

He also criticized black leaders and newspapers for not being thankful enough to whites who were committed to helping blacks achieve more rights and privileges in the United States, and he warned that constant criticism by blacks of white efforts would ultimately alienate sympathetic whites. Dabney concluded by accusing blacks of failing to support the American war effort fully. He wrote,

. . . while the Negroes are overwhelmingly patriotic, too many of them have been indoctrinated with the belief that since the Japanese are a colored race the blacks might be more equitably treated by Tokyo than by Washington, and that consequently the Negroes have little to fear from a Japanese victory over the United States. (Dabney, 99)
In an impassioned and severe response, Jean Quarterman took issue with practically every assertion and accusation Dabney made in “Nearer and Nearer the Precipice.” But, she directed her strongest comments at Dabney’s charge that black race leaders and newspapers were guilty of fomenting potential racial violence in America. Quarterman wrote,

...he [Dabney] continues by saying that if the race question reaches such a pitch that resorts to violence, that is armed violence, we will suffer the most in the end. But will we? I imagine that “Brother Rat,” Adolph Hitler to you, would enjoy getting hold of Mrs. Roosevelt as well as Miss Bethune. Probably more so! But can we suffer any more outrage like race riots after the last war to preserve democracy, lynching after Pearl Harbor, and other discriminations? (Quarterman, 5)

Quarterman declared that blacks could not and would not wait until the war was over to demand equality and civil rights, and she was convinced that it was precisely the time to fight for these rights. She said African Americans were engaging in this fight, “not by complete armed resistance, but by uniting sanely, and strategically.” And she concluded her response with a sharp rebuke of Virginius Dabney. She wrote, “frankly, I think Mr. Dabney displays the symptoms of a moron, and if he thinks that we are Uncle Toms, he is an imbecile, and I do mean imbecile” (Quarterman, 5).

Knowing Your Place

Apparently, Ryan was keeping up with both The Atlantic Monthly and The Hilltop because in his Charter Day address, Ryan defended Virginius Dabney by name and called for prudence in American race relations. In his address, “The Place of the Negro in American Society,” Ryan focused on economics and job discrimination. Following very closely the form of reasoning Gilligan employed in The Morality of the Color Line, Ryan discussed several ways in which white employers discriminated against blacks. Ryan said it was almost always unjust to deny blacks work because of skin color, but he added, “sometimes the motive is racial; sometimes it is mainly economic” (Ryan, 5). If employers refused to hire blacks because they did not want blacks in their presence or to be in contact with blacks this was an “unreasonable prejudice” and could not be justified. If an employer refused to hire blacks because in the past he had experienced blacks to be unreliable workers then the employer acted unfairly, punishing all blacks for the actions of some. But, if an employer refused to hire blacks because white employees protested, the employer’s motive was economic and was “in the circumstance excusable” (Ryan, 5). And finally, if the employer refused blacks employ-
ment because the employer thought blacks should not have such high positions then the employers act was “uncharitable and contemptible” (Ryan, 5).

Ryan declared that in each of these cases “the human dignity of the Negro is outraged and the virtues of justice and charity, or both, are violated.” Discrimination in the area of employment was the most offensive form of racial discrimination to Ryan because it denied the person a right to earn a living wage, and to Ryan the living wage was part of the person’s natural rights that could never be abrogated. But, he also had great confidence in the way the United States was addressing employment discrimination. He told the Howard audience, “happily our government is endeavoring, however feebly and temporarily to fulfill its obligation of enforcing this natural right of Negro workers, through the Fair Employment Practices Committee. I repeat that in so doing it is merely performing a definite moral obligation” (Ryan, 5).

Ryan urged blacks to be patient in their demands for universal enfranchisement and said that laws that prevented blacks from voting were not “necessarily a violation of the Negro’s moral rights” because the only moral right a person had in politics was “the right to have a government that promotes the common good. This end can be attained without universal suffrage” (Ryan, 7). Instead of demanding the right to vote, Ryan suggested a better use for black efforts would be to secure “elementary schooling” for education was the prerequisite for voting in the United States. Although Ryan did not support universal enfranchisement for blacks, he did support the desegregation of the armed forces saying, “I did not see any valid reason why black and white soldiers cannot be placed in the same regiment” (Ryan, 7). Ryan also advocated desegregation in higher education, theatres, concert halls, public transportation, and restaurants. He concluded his Charter Day address by calling black Americans to accept that changes in America had to come gradually, and he urged them to accept gratefully the help offered to them by white people like the “very good friend of the Negro, Virginius Dabney” (Ryan, 11).

Ryan’s invocation of Dabney was intentional. It revealed the attention he paid to the discussions and arguments that were happening at Howard specifically and in the United States about whether blacks had a just claim to demand radical changes in the American social structure. At the end of his speech, Ryan told the

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Ryan suggested a better use for black efforts would be to secure “elementary schooling” for education was the prerequisite for voting in the United States.
audience “if Christ’s gospel of love were put into practice by all classes, neither the Negroes nor any other minority group could honestly complain of unfair treatment” (Ryan, 11). Ryan warned the black audience that as they claimed that whites had an obligation to love them that blacks had an obligation to love whites as well. He said blacks “should love especially friends like Virginius Dabney, even when they advocate patience and a realistic approach to interracial conditions and practices” (Ryan, 11). Ultimately, Ryan identified education as the answer to interracial justice because “prejudices, discriminations and artificial conventions from which the Negro suffers” were based in prejudice. He cited a proposal made at the American Catholic Sociological Society for interracial justice education as a ray of hope for America’s future. Prudent youth educated in interracial justice would create an American society where racial discrimination and prejudice no longer existed. The true hope was with the future, and those in the present day would have to accept the realities of American society and prepare for the future day of justice.

*The Washington Afro-American* reported on Ryan’s address. It claimed that “Monsignor Ryan provoked a controversy among his hearers, some of whom thought he did not go far enough in urging an all-out attack on intolerance.” That Ryan would come to a black university and present such an address on the occasion of the founding of the university indicated the degree to which some Catholic leaders had committed themselves to the mainline theology of racial justice. Because Ryan was the featured speaker at Charter Day, he did not have to deal directly with black criticism of his message. Directly after his address, the Howard University Choir sang the spiritual “O, Mary” to honor and thank their Catholic guest.

**The Legacy and Continuing Challenge of Gilligan’s Theological Approach**

Gilligan’s theology of racial justice was important for three reasons. First, it provided white Catholics living in the wake of the Great Migration with clear answers about what their obligations as Christians were to blacks they met and worked with in the cities. Secondly, he provided a model of how to apply Catholic theology to the race question, a question that would not be settled in any satisfactory ways until the latter 1960s. And, thirdly, it provided a theological justification for those who decided to acquiesce to American racial discrimination. Though there were serious and successful Catholic challenges to Gilligan, the history of U.S. Catholicism for the first half of the twentieth century shows that Gilligan’s theological reasoning and teaching on race, justice and charity made its way into the practices and thinking of many American Catholics. While some Catholics were arguing and working ardently for racial justice, desegregation, and under-
standing of all people as children of God and as essentially equal, others endorsed and practiced a stratification of love and obligation that inadvertently justified racist acts.

Having knowledge of this history of U.S. Catholic teaching on race, helps me to understand what happened in my first grade class. Carefully taught and deeply engrained practices and thoughts such as these are difficult to unlearn and erase. It is my hope that historical knowledge about the roots of our racial practices and thoughts can help those who really care about addressing racism in the church to know where to start.

References


Becoming Inclusive Communities of Faith

Biblical Reflection and Effective Frameworks

Stephen S. Dudek

A growing number of parishes strive to become ever more culturally and racially inclusive communities of faith. Reflecting on the biblical account of migration and salvation history and drawing upon intercultural communication theory provide an excellent foundation for responding to this challenge and opportunity.

Ethnocentrism, Prejudice and Race

Race and ethnicity are strong forces that mobilize a wide range of emotions among people. Even for people of faith, tolerance and mutual understanding of ethnic/racial differences are not always apparent or desired. To some degree all of us are ethnocentric, in that we perceive ingroups to be “virtuous and superior” while we see outgroups as “inferior” blaming them for our troubles, as we try to maintain social distance (Gudykunst, 130).

When ethnocentrism leads people to make a prejudgment based on membership in a social category prejudice is born. Prejudice can take different forms rooted in gender, social class, place of origin, skin color, and other identifying characteristics. When it is based on race the resulting attitude is racism.

Discrimination and bias frequently develop because outgroups are perceived to be a threat, but equally as important “because positive emotions such as admira-

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tion, sympathy, and trust are reserved for the ingroup” (Gudykunst, 137). In a global age, where the compression of time and space is evident, people who previously had little or no contact with each other now live, work and worship, side by side, with their prejudices becoming increasingly apparent.

Twenty-five years ago racism was defined as “a sin that divides the human family, blots out the image of God among specific members of that family, and violates the fundamental human dignity of those called to be children of the same father” by our nation’s bishops in Brothers and Sisters to Us (BSU, 3). They acknowledged this “radical evil” to be a tragic reality that denies the creation of a “redeemed world.” Not just one sin among many, racism we were told calls for fundamental change, real conversion, and challenges us to look closely at our relationship with others. Through biblical reflection and the help of two frameworks drawn from intercultural communication theory, this article is an attempt at helping parishes navigate the uncharted waters of becoming ever more inclusive communities of faith. Throughout the text, references to “culture” apply equally to “race.”

Migration and Salvation History

Abraham: Prototype Stranger and Model of Hospitality

The age-old experience of migration is the canvas upon which the sacred story of salvation history is painted and comes to life. Abraham in the book of Genesis is presented as a prototype stranger whose father migrated from Ur in present day Iran or Iraq, to Haran located now in Turkey. From there Abraham made his way to the foreign territory of Cana, then was driven by famine to Egypt, and eventually moved back to Cana (Gen 12:1–13:18).

At the sacred tree of Mamre, Abraham and Sarah shared genuine hospitality with three strangers. They provided them water for washing their feet and nourishment. All this was a way of showing deep respect for the stranger and may well have been a result of their personal experience of migration. This contrasts with what follows immediately in Genesis with respect to Sodom, a city not blessed but destroyed (Gen 18:16-19, 29). The destruction of the city had to do with transgressions regarding the law of hospitality and the protection of strangers. Mis-treatment of the orphan, widow or stranger had serious consequences.

Moses: Caught between Two Cultures While Learning How to Feel

Moses was born in Egypt of Hebrew slave parents. Jews at the time were being forced to work in the brickfields for the great building projects of the era. At birth Moses faced a death sentence by decree of the pharaoh, along with all male Hebrew babies. In a mysterious turn of events, he was adopted by the very daughter of the pharaoh, survived, and led his people to their Promised Land.
Moses was caught between two cultures and as a result had a lot to sort out. He appears as a sensitive man who became indignant both at the injustice shown his own Hebrew people at the hands of the Egyptians; and the sometimes self-destructive behavior evident among Hebrews. He killed an Egyptian who was exploiting and abusing a fellow Hebrew (Exod 2:11-12). He also attempted to break up a brawl between two Hebrews; which resulted in his having to flee into the land of Midian (Exod 2:13). Caught between two cultures he had to find himself with respect to his cultural identity and his place in the world.

It was in the desert that Moses and Israel learned God’s name, received the law, and became a covenant people. In the desert experience, they found their relationship with God defined. This physical and spiritual place was a barrier and means of communication; it was a place of intimacy and instruction; a place of danger, temptation, and trial not unlike the barren landscapes that countless immigrants cross, to find work in Europe, Australia, and the United States, and other “lands flowing in milk and honey.”

Moses and the prophets remind Israel that the most important border to cross is that of one’s heart. Having experienced the pain and suffering of oppression, Israel was uniquely equipped to seek justice on behalf of the orphan, widow, and stranger. This spiritual quality of empathy allows people connected to the Judeo-Christian tradition to mindfully walk in the shoes of others. When we take time to feel and remember the lessons of our desert past, we regain the ability to enter into solidarity with people on the move today.

**Ruth: Salvation through a Foreigner**

The story of Ruth takes place during a period of great social/political disintegration and violence. It is a simple adventure of daily life concerning a Moabite woman, who marries an Israelite, despite Ezra’s discouragement of such mixed unions. When Ruth’s husband dies she demonstrates uncommon loyalty to her mother in law and to the God of Israel. Eventually she finds a new spouse, Boaz, among her former husband’s relatives.

Ruth was nameless like so many immigrants and people of color today, her place of origin and family connection with Israel define her (Ruth 2:6). Our protagonist invites Israel to a spirit of openness that transcends nation and race. Through her marriage to Boaz, Ruth, a foreigner, becomes King David’s great-grandmother.

Ruth helped Israel break free of the chains of ethnocentrism. Could it be that at this time in our own nation’s history when immigrants are suspect that our salvation might hinge upon foreigners as well? Will our national and ecclesial response to people of color, to the stranger, and to those who are poor, be in keeping with the spirit of invitation that Boaz extended to Ruth: “Stay here . . . gather here . . . be protected here . . . and be refreshed here” (Ruth 2:8-9)?
**The Holy Family: Refugees both Political and Economic**

Two of the gospels provide us with infancy narratives. Luke’s version is situated in the context of an empire-wide census. With Joseph and Mary on the move to fulfill their civic duties, the time came for Jesus to be born. His birth took place not where savvy travelers stayed but in a manger where desperate people found refuge. Fearful shepherds who lacked religious status were the first to visit Christ at his improvised home (Luke 2:1-20).

A desperate attempt at survival is a central feature of Mathew’s infancy narrative. Under the cover of darkness, a refugee-like flight is undertaken into Egypt, which situates Jesus as a new and greater Moses (Matt 2:13-15). Finally this family of sojourners makes its way to Nazareth located in Galilee rather than Judea, most likely for Joseph to find work. Joseph and probably his son as well were not carpenters as we know them, but “tectons,” skilled laborers specializing in stone (Matt 2:19-23). The nearby city of Sepphoris was being rebuilt as Herod Antipas’ capitol, resulting in employment for laborers anxious to support their families.

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**Frameworks for Understanding and Advancing Inclusion**

**Predictable Stages**

When a new cultural group appears on the horizon and is welcomed into a parish, a process of accommodation begins that has a profound effect on both established parishioners and those seeking acceptance. Identifiable stages are evident when two or more cultures interact with each other: one being already established in the parish or institution known as the “ingroup”; the other or others, attempting to create a new spiritual home identified as the “outgroup” (Gudykunst, 75). Congregations and other entities involved in welcoming new cultural groups negotiate a number of predictable stages on a continuum toward increased sophistication and growth.

Framework 1

*Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity*

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<th>Denial</th>
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<td>ETHNOCENTRIC STAGES</td>
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These stages are drawn from the writings of Milton J. Bennett and were originally applied to individuals and their development of intercultural sensitivity (Bennett, 21–66). I believe these same six stages can be applied to parishes and other entities as they increasingly move away from cultural and racial isolation.
toward tolerance and the acceptance of strangers. It must be noted that the process of accommodation is generally a slow one and frequently is painful for both the ingroup and outgroup. What is important is not where a community of faith is situated on this continuum of increasing sophistication, but rather when and how the community takes the next step toward greater inclusion.

Of critical importance in all of this is how parish leadership responds to the challenges and opportunities which help congregations grow in intercultural and interracial sensitivity. Parish communities rarely move beyond where their pastoral leaders find themselves on this continuum. And while it is true that in any given faith community parishioners will be scattered over quite a number of stages, the response of the congregation’s formal and informal leaders is what in large part determines movement toward greater acceptance of others.

Denial

Certain faith communities have for years lived in relative isolation. When this is true they tend to minimize or even deny cultural difference. Physical and social barriers develop in these settings that create distance between the ingroup and the outgroup.

During this period it is not uncommon for the dominant culture to overlook, ignore, or even deny the presence of others whom they perceive to be different. One predominantly European American congregation was asked, “when did the parish’s Hispanic presence arrive on the scene?” people responded: “in the 1950s or 1960s”; when in reality the parish’s baptismal records indicated that the parish’s Hispanic presence went back at least to the 1930s! Parish histories tend to be written by the ingroup sometimes to the exclusion of other groups and tend to minimize or deny the strangers presence.

Since intercultural sensitivity is not natural, denial is a normal way of dealing with cultural difference. However once the number or frequency of contacts with strangers increases to a certain level, denial can no longer be utilized as a way of coping with reality. A second combative stage becomes imminent.

Defense

This stage has to do with how a faith community postures to counter the impact of what is perceived to be threatening. The “foreign culture” can no longer be ignored, now it must be defended against! Attitudes of superiority are employed by the ingroup with respect to the outgroup, along with negative stereotypes, in an attempt at preserving one’s worldview as being absolute.

This stage expresses itself in various ways. It can take the form of animosity, angry undercurrents, and above all fear. Separate but equal worship arrangements are frequent, even to the point of purchasing adjacent storefronts or chapels to ensure appropriate distance between cultures. A wide variety of creative defense strategies can be employed to what is perceived to be a threat.
**Minimization**

A third stage occurs when the dictates of cultural similarity begin to be employed on a regular basis. Cultural difference is no longer evaluated negatively but rather is rendered relatively unimportant when contrasted with cultural similarity. Minimization begins to downplay cultural difference. Cultural difference is trivialized by the ingroup with respect to the outgroup in an attempt to preserve one's worldview.

This phase provides opportunities for deeper sharing across cultural boundaries and greater self-awareness particularly on behalf of the dominant culture. “Integration” is generally the operative mode for cross cultural interaction in this phase, since a “separate but equal approach” can no longer be defended.

**Acceptance**

Parishes mark an important transition when they pass from minimization to acceptance as a way of relating to cultural difference. Defense strategies are no longer employed. Cultural difference is both acknowledged and respected. For the first time, the ingroup begins to perceive their worldview as being relative and tolerance for ambiguity is noted. Respect for both the behavior and values of others become evident. No longer is the “other” perceived to be “good” or “bad” but simply “different.”

Parishes at this stage sometimes employ a “parallel tracks approach” with respect to worship, catechesis and ministry due to linguistic differences; but generally have begun to bring the various cultural groups together at least periodically.

**Adaptation**

This stage involves seeing the world with two or more internalized cultural frames of reference. Bennett describes this stage, the former, and the next one, as being “ethnorelative” or as I prefer “ethnopluralistic” in nature. Cultural difference is perceived to be nonthreatening and is accepted; it is enjoyable and sought out. Empathy is a key skill that demonstrates this adaptation phase. It involves the ability to feel and comprehend from another’s perspective. Enhanced relational and communication skills are also evident.

Proof that parishes have reached this stage can sometimes be found in their Mission Statements or in the architecture and design of new or renovated sacred space. The explicit exclusion of assimilation is what gives witness to this ethnopluralistic stage. Faith communities living this reality promote unity without uniformity as they defy standardization.

**Integration**

The final stage involves the ability to both analyze and evaluate situations from a number of chosen perspectives. The ethnopluralistic stages prior to this moment involved suspending evaluation when it came to cultural difference. Here, evaluation is clearly present based on the cultural context. This leads to cultural
marginality that allows for the construction of appropriate frames of reference for specific purposes.

Congregations who have come to grips with a multiplicity of realities are at this stage. I believe they are exceedingly rare and special. They possess the ability to both analyze and evaluate situations from more than one chosen perspective. The marginality they live can at times be painful. They are always in the process of being “apart of” and “apart from” a given culture. These parishes like the intercultural people described in *Welcoming the Stranger Among Us* are specially equipped to “appreciate differences, work out conflicts, and build on commonalities” (WSAU, 34).

**Intercultural Dialogue Ladder**

A second framework, a developmental ladder, enables congregations to get beyond ethnic communities living side by side without any connection to each other. I am deeply indebted to Alejandro Aguilera Titus for this framework. Originally used in a presentation at the National Catholic Stewardship Conference, this model sensitively yet realistically promotes communion. It has been reworked with an emphasis on its implications for culturally diverse parishes. With it we ask: what promotes communion when the Body of Christ does not always enjoy a common narrative, relationships, decisions, or a shared sense of ownership? As with every ladder, you begin at the bottom and work your way up. Opportunities for intercultural dialogue must be provided in multiple and intentional ways since in any given congregation parishioners will be found on a number of different rungs.

Framework 2

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<th>Intercultural Dialogue Ladder</th>
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<tr>
<td>8. Practicing Stewardship</td>
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<td>7. Accepting Ownership</td>
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<td>2. Sharing Stories</td>
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<td>1. Welcoming</td>
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Welcoming

While intercultural communication is a slow and sometimes uncomfortable process, it is greatly facilitated when strangers experience hospitality. Research has repeatedly shown that a positive emotional climate facilitates intercultural communication, while a negative one contributes to a lack of self-confidence, increased anxiety, and a lessening of desire for ongoing contact with the new culture. A stress-free environment is neither possible nor totally helpful in the adaptation process. What is best is an environment where adaptation and receptivity are in optimal balance. The everyday stress that strangers experience in a new cultural milieu is more than sufficient to activate the adaptive energy that helps people reorganize their lives and leap forward.

Anxiety levels are high when intercultural communication is initiated. Strangers face uncertainty dictated by gross stereotypes, often a result of racism, rather than accurate insights about them. Hosts are anxious as well and frequently quite unaware of their anxiety, which makes tolerance difficult. This typically results in formal and sometimes inquisitive conversation on the host’s behalf. Care must be taken to avoid intrusive or inappropriate questions.

There is a tremendous variance in cultural norms with respect to appropriate welcoming patterns for strangers. The host community generally, however, inflicts more damage with inaction than through an inadvertent less than perfect welcome, which may result in minor offense to the stranger but usually can be overlooked due to the new cultural context.

Serious attention must also be given to how a parish’s art, architecture, and environment speak to others. Sacred imagery is a particularly important concern. Not only must it appeal to the cultural sensibilities of newcomers, but serious thought must be given to its placement and illumination as well. The timing and location of worship services among the different groups also communicates volumes with respect to hospitality and welcome.

Sharing Stories

Once we have begun to welcome one another, we can then open ourselves to each other’s narratives. Storytelling is a sacred act. The narratives of our lives come from a hallowed space deep within and call for reverence and awe. There is no better way for cultures to connect than through the sharing of life stories that inspire and heal.

The chasm of culture often prevents us from experiencing the inherent wisdom in other people’s narratives. Processes are urgently needed for the ethical sharing of stories across cultural divides. Storytelling is the key element for relationship building in the multicultural context, especially when it is based on mutual respect and encourages bonding between insider and outsider. It is here that the “little stories” of people’s lives connect with the “bigger stories” of faith and theology in ways that the latter are heard and understood, and sometimes radically altered (Garcia-Rivera).
Strangers, in order to integrate themselves into a new society, rely on the narrative of their adopted communities, where they are called to be both unique and joined. This integration takes place at whatever rate the stranger deems appropriate. Host communities also need the stranger’s narrative if they are to be complete. All of us are incomplete without each other’s narratives, which are required to fully live life with purpose and the deepest of emotion.

**Building Relationships**

Researchers have discovered that the “quality of contact” was what primarily influenced the development of positive intercultural attitudes (Stephan, 247). The contact must be among people of similar status and be “voluntary, positive and individualized.” The building of relationships cannot be forced; however, it is to be encouraged. When it comes to building relationships with others, take advantage of opportunities that center around sharing, food, and the simple senses.

**Belonging**

For belonging to happen, host communities must not only share space and resources; they have to create them anew. The biggest danger at this point is to offer others solely what is left over or inconsistent with the ingroup’s mission. Another danger is paternalism, when insiders treat outsiders as children, fearful of their ability to adequately handle adult challenges. Both perspectives fail to recognize that at this point, the outsider is no longer fully a stranger nor has the insider remained unchanged. While outsiders may still approach institutions with guarded confidence, frequently they are willing to travel long distances to interact with others they perceive to be friendly to their perspective or culture. An initial sense of belonging generally takes root among the outgroup sooner than some might think. By this time mutual ethical and relational obligations become real. If either party pulls out of the relationship without discourse, serious spiritual and emotional damage will likely occur.

**Complaining**

This step is one many pastoral ministers wish would just go away! Complaining is an unpleasant yet intrinsically necessary part of intercultural dialogue. When seen in a positive light, complaining or friction, become a force for understanding and life giving change. They are positive indicators of the ground that has been covered on the journey toward greater understanding and communion. People do not complain before they have been welcomed, shared their stories, built relationships, and feel an initial sense of belonging.

Friction provides real opportunities for cross-cultural understanding when it is reflected upon in an intentional way. It can provide people with opportunities to go beyond customary “surface interaction” to explore another’s way of being in the world. In the culturally diverse context, friction is required for the interaction
among groups to be fresh, real, and vital. Complaining is not to be feared and avoided, but seen as a mile-marker and positive force in overcoming both egocentric and ethnocentric tendencies.

Making Decisions

How decisions are made and by whom varies tremendously from group to group. Multiple ways of making decisions are evident in culturally diverse parishes. This can be very unsettling for people accustomed to a culture of standardization. A high tolerance for ambiguity is required for successful navigation through diversity’s waters.

Collectivist cultures make decisions quite different from individualistic cultures. Group consensus is of great importance to the former and may result in extended deliberation, beyond what is customary to the latter. Among some groups it is fine to select representatives for consultation, while with others what is required is extended dialogue with the community’s “power brokers” or a decision by the “elders.” When these approaches are not respected, real decision making rarely takes place.

There is a tendency for the ingroup to appoint “ethnic representatives” from the outgroup to boards and committees with the hope that these individuals will provide the minority community’s perspective on matters at hand. However, unless they become a “critical mass,” outgroup members tend to be guarded when it comes to giving their real opinions. Honest feedback can best be achieved through the formation of “reactor groups” made up of outgroup members. In these settings frank discussions readily take place and real learning is made possible.

Accepting Ownership

Accepting ownership is a major paradigm shift for those who previously perceived themselves as guests but have now significantly integrated themselves into a new cultural context. While it is more comfortable to maintain a familiar identity and repeat habitual practices, the acceptance of ownership implies change. This is a time of transformation where the old is not forgotten but is reconfigured in the process of becoming something new.

An insightful African proverb provides the following advice: “Don’t ask the stranger to carry the head end of the coffin.” Why, we might ask? Because the stranger in the lead, not knowing the lay of the land, might never get you to the cemetery! Up until now the prudent approach taken by many outsiders was to avoid taking on ownership. But now that one has become familiar with the roadmap of a given culture or parish, ownership is precisely what is called for!

Practicing Stewardship

The practice of stewardship involves gratefully sharing the gifts we have been given, including who we are and our cultural attributes. Stewardship is a way of
life rooted in grace and responsibility. The goal of communion and the Christian steward’s response parallel each other. Communion and stewardship are about the art of giving as people “place their gifts, their resources—their selves—at God’s service in and through the Church” as we were reminded by our nation’s bishops in Stewardship: A Disciple’s Response (SDR, 34). Both result in a heightened sense of human interdependence and solidarity. Healthy intercultural dialogue requires the participation of both insiders and outsiders. We climb the ladder of life together, one rung at a time, a spiritual journey that leads to true communion.

Conclusion

Immigrants and people of color are challenging and revitalizing local communities of faith. Social distance among parishioners is no longer measured solely in kilometers but increasingly in centimeters, in church pews each Sunday; as “people of every race, language and way of life” are gathered together. Eucharistic communities increasingly are becoming broad sweeps of people “from east to west.”

The age-old experience of migration continues to be the canvas upon which the sacred story of salvation history is painted and comes to life. This life and our salvation are frequently found in places and people where many would never think to look: progeny to form a great and mighty nation in elderly and barren couples, like Abraham and Sarah; liberation from enslavement by prophets, like the stuttering Hebrew adopted by the Egyptian Queen, as was the case with Moses; salvation won through foreigners, often women, like Ruth, who legitimized the male centered Davidic dynasty; and safety found not always in promised lands, but places of slavery like Egypt, as experienced by the Holy Family!

In these biblical settings and in the theologically fertile venues of culturally diverse parishes, the sins of ethnocentrism and racism are still apparent. Strained relationships between insiders and outsiders continue to lead to misunderstandings and even hostility. But within our congregational narratives and our scriptural tradition, we also discover an unremitting challenge to our idolatrous tendencies. New pathways for grace and blessing become apparent when people no longer make an absolute of their own culture and/or race to the exclusion of the other tribes. The Spirit is at work in the church every time the diversity of our assemblies astonishes and amazes the world, when people ask once again, “What does this mean?” (Acts 2:12).

References


FEATURE ARTICLE
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PART ONE
Womanist Theology
Looking to the Future

Stephanie Y. Mitchem

Looking at the analytical uses of race, class, and gender in the constructions of womanist theology gives indications of future directions.

Womanist theology and ethics explore the uniquely situated religious thought of black women. The studies began in the 1980s, initially based in a United States’ context and inspired by a definition from activist and writer Alice Walker. Womanist religious thought, to some degree, developed from the shortcomings of white American feminism, black feminism, and black male theology. Being aware of this disjunction between black feminism and black communities is of special note to those of us who work in fields of religion for we bridge into a pastoral world, often remaining grounded in religious communities. The challenge for black women religious scholars is to speak to and with black women in the pews or on the prayer mats. The word womanist bridges far more intellectual and social

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barriers for African American women religion scholars who remain connected to black communities.

Womanist theology draws the real life experiences of African American women to the center of theological processes, including the methodologies that are used. As a result, womanist theologians and ethicists have been committed to the analysis of gender, race, and class, at the bare minimum, in order to deconstruct oppressions, sometimes recover lost meanings, and construct re-envisioned possibilities of being fully human.

**Gender**

Many younger women today have no personal memory of a world that had not been influenced by feminist movements. The ongoing public relations effort by some media analysts to diminish the perception of gender bias affects all women. Don’t all women want to be soccer moms living in suburban America? Women in high leadership positions are no longer surprising. And because there are a few black American women in leadership positions, some believe that all black women have had the same opportunities as many white women. But this is not true. Most black American women carry the burdens of family care, often unwed and alone. This situation is not the result of a conspiracy on the part of black women to reject marriage and family. It is rather the constant situation of, first, living under the aegis of stereotypes (including mammy, sapphire, and jezebel). Rising above such stereotypes to change living situations is further complicated because black women’s labor has been so normalized that social assistance programs are viewed as evidence of some lazy resistance to honest work.

One unhealthy answer to black American women’s social situations has been a slew of programs offered by some evangelical churches, such as Virtuous Woman or Woman of Virtue. The idea behind these programs is simple: black women need to become “real” women by being married and doing what the Bible supposedly says—be subservient to their husbands. The influence of such programs is not limited to select churches: speakers and preachers, such as T. D. Jakes, are published and televised and the ideas constructing black women into narrow frames are promoted throughout black communities. Similarly, such black American popular religion is promoted through contemporary gospel music, often played on top forty stations across black communities. Some of the popular gospel stars give testimony about their own experience of learning “correct” gender behavior through Jesus, “saved” from watching pornography or being homosexual. Their messages further constrict black women’s gendered identities. Sexism in black communities has been strengthened by popular religion.

Yet, the African American women with whom I speak outside the academic world generally have no interest in black feminism. It is not that they have no interest in justice. These women often hold highly sophisticated analyses of injustice at the grassroots level. Between black women’s stereotyped realities and
contemporary church-blessed sexism, the need for gender analysis has shifted, no longer exactly what it was when womanist religious scholars began their analyses in the 1980s. Political pressure that blames poor black women for being poor or church-based pressure that they fit limited gender constructions are contemporary forms of black American women’s gender trouble. Womanist theological analysis continues to ethically analyze black women’s gendered identities and the impact on their religious lives.

Social Class

Social class is complex, made up of access to money, social connections, knowledge, and experience. Many of these aspects are hidden because the United States is a country that pretends to be classless: anyone who works hard can have all of these things. But, as we face the realities of select and gated communities, that hard-working-success myth is simply not true. Black Americans continue to work hard, especially when we are poor, and we are most likely to benefit the least from our labors. So, although African American women are present in the so-called first world, we are often Othered in a process that Kristin Kopituch refers to as “third-worlding at home.” “Forms of power/knowledge generally associated with the colonial and postcolonial exploitation of a distant third world are also becoming increasingly apparent in the treatment of U.S. minorities” (Kopituch, 237). An example of being third world-ed became clear when the waters from Hurricane Katrina receded: many of those left behind were poor and black, women and children.

These processes create a social class dilemma for all black Americans: poor black people are accused of being lazy and not taking advantage of all the benefits of a rich economy. After all, the charge continues, this is the land of equal opportunity. Another concept also used against black Americans is that of the so-called permanent underclass: people who are many-generations poor will not be able to ever move out of their low social class because some genetic mutation has occurred, becoming the idea that “blood tells.”

But the realities of black American life are often invisible. For instance, in November 2006, the unemployment rate for white Americans was 3.9 percent and 8.6 for black Americans (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics). Fields that are expected to grow are health care, education, and professional and business services, all of which require access to higher education. Giving these numbers’ meaning in the daily life of many black people, Manning Marable stated: “The new racial domain is constructed as a deadly triangle (or perhaps an ‘unholy trinity’) of structural racism: mass unemployment, mass incarceration, and mass disenfranchise. . . . The cycle of destruction starts with chronic, mass unemployment and poverty” (Marable, 215).

Many white Americans prefer to take no responsibility for this situation. After all, a young white and very Catholic student in one of my classes stated angrily, “Why should we give them something they haven’t worked for?” Because most African Americans continue to be “third-world-ed,” womanist theologians must
continue to ethically analyze, to seek justice, and to reach for theological statements with integrity.

**Race**

Gender and class are not as contentious as the category of race. Part of the “third-worlding” of African Americans has been enforced by deliberately muddling the category of race. Some politicians support the idea that African American identity is considered to have lived past its prime. After all, it is argued that slavery is over, civil rights have been assured, and black Americans are full citizens. Social mores are used to control discussions of race. One is deemed gauche if one plays the race card; yet the cards are not of black Americans’ devise. Further, the situation of black Americans is sometimes thrown into a global light that falsely sets up comparative oppressions: black Americans do not know “real” suffering, not like those poor people in other countries. In very few cases, white people do not walk up to black people and insult, lynch, or rape them. However, playing the antirace card is an effective social control of black Americans.

These contemporary ways of denying race and, consequently, the structures of racism ignore historical realities that impinge on the present. We must face facts: black U.S. identity was not crafted on a census sheet but in the forges of enslavement. People from multiple African ethnicities often had to forego those other identities as a matter of survival. This was a pattern of colonizing black bodies that did not end with the emancipation proclamation in 1863. Considering black Americans as colonized subjects moves away from victimization and vindication as approaches to racial dialogue and theological analysis. Recognition and use of the colonized subject argument moves toward a stronger critical analysis of being black in America, resulting in stronger theological constructions. The failed period of reconstruction was turned into Jim Crow, another intense period of colonization, made even more intense as black Americans throughout the country were repeatedly deemed less than human by the deformed identity constructions of minstrelsy, religion, law, and the science of the times.

Certainly, as blackness was constructed, social theorist Michelle Wright points out, the black female Other was constructed in opposition to the black male. Blackness can be considered a “unity of diversity.” “[T]he category of race can never be fully divorced from the related categories of gender and sexuality” as the American social structure insists that male and female conform to idealized constructions (Wright, 5–6).

At the same time, whiteness was also being constructed as Jews and Irish people were moved to the white column. After the 1960s, white ethnicities became cool.
Today, these ethnic categories, like the unreal construction of the “Hispanic,” were ranged against the constructions of blackness. This was brought home to me when a white man asked: “So what are black people going to do now that you are no longer the largest minority and Hispanics are?” Simplistic understandings of race abound, and interracial conversations are stymied as was depicted in the movie Crash.

Womanist theologians continue to use race as a category, taking into account the changes of the times. The changes of the times demand new tools of scholarship. One route by which new tools have been developing happens as womanist theologians enter dialogues across the African Diaspora. These dialogical processes create new strands of discourse in the broader contexts of globalization, and as a result, gender, class, and race take on new meanings.

The uses of gender, race, and social class as tools of oppression were not imaginary inventions of women and people of color. The constructions of black American women’s identities began centuries ago and are continued in sometimes subtle, sometimes blatant, ways today. Many people are complicit in the construction of African American women’s identities. Many people benefit (and richly) from normalizing black women’s labors; unfortunately the beneficiaries are not often the black women themselves. Continued injustices against American black women demand more, not less, analysis. Greater scholarly rigor is needed as situations of injustice are complicated by new realities. Present and future womanist theological work involves further refinement, more intense conversation, and stepping more fully into global dialogue.

Womanist theology has begun tasks of analysis, deconstruction and reconstruction, tasks that would be impossible to complete in barely thirty years. Womanist theology is being refined and becoming more sophisticated as more and more conversation partners become involved. The future holds so much more promise.

References


PART TWO

Womanist and Latina/Mujerista Theology in Dialogue

Michelle A. Gonzalez

Dr. Gonzalez raises some concerns regarding the impact of race on the construction of Latino/a and Black identities in contemporary religious discourse.

In this essay my emphasis is on the particularity of the Latin American and Latino/a condition and the manner in which race has shaped the identity constructs we employ today. I begin with a historical nod toward the construction of Latin American identity that serves as the foundation for contemporary Latino/a identity construction. I then turn to the constructed identity of Latino/a and Black theologies respectively. I conclude with some comments that open up a conversation with Black and womanist theologies surrounding the question of race.

Any discussion of race in contemporary Latino/a culture must ground itself in the Latin American historical condition. The Latin American colonial subject lived in a pigmentocracy where one’s closeness to mother Spain and the color of one’s skin determined their social status (Castellanos, 19). However, factors such as...

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culture and religion also played a role. This complex picture of identity is in sharp contrast to the monolithic manner in which Latino/as and Latin Americans are often categorized today. The colonial subject was always attempting to legitimate its voice in the face of the European-born Spaniard (Martínez San Miguel). This is an important historical moment in the constitution of an “American” subjectivity, found at the intersection of Spanish, Indigenous, and African cultures, religions, and worldviews. *Mestizo/as* and *mulatos*, in order to secure their political power and racial privilege, often distanced themselves from their mother’s indigenous or African blood and culture. The idea was to model their culture and behavior after the lighter-skinned Spanish *criollo/as*. They thus supported the use of the Spanish language, embraced Christianity, downplayed Indigenous and African communities, and argued for a new ethnicity that united the *mestizo/a* and the *criollo/a*. It is for these reasons that Latin Americanist J. Jorge Klor de Alva argues that we must nuance our understanding of post-independence Latin Americans and pay special attention to the function of race and power in Latin American identity construction. “In short, the Americas, as former parts of empires which, after a series of civil wars, separated themselves politically and economically, but not culturally or socially, from their metropoles” (Klor de Alva, 247). The leaders of the wars of independence were not the subalterns of Latin America; they were not blacks and Indigenous peoples; they were *criollos, mestizos, and mulatos*. As Roberto Fernández Retmar echoes, “While other colonials or ex-colonials, in metropolitan centers, speak among themselves in their own language, we Latin Americans continue to use the language of the colonizers” (Fernández Retmar, 10). This is also why, in turn, *mestizaje* and *mulatez* can be problematic notions, for they can privilege the Spanish. Claiming a *mestizo/a* or *mulato/a* identity is a manner of “whitening” one’s racial identity, gaining privilege over black and indigenous populations.

Since its inception, Latino/a theology has identified Latino/as, and consequently Latin Americans, as *mestizo* and *mulato* peoples. This mixture of Spanish, African, and Indigenous cultures has been the clearest marker of Latino/a racial, ethnic, and cultural identity. Anthropologically, *mestizaje/mulatez* functions to name the ambiguity and in-between-ness of Latino/a identity. Latino/a theology, at least within theological and religious studies, presents a notion of Latino/a identity where the indigenous, African, and Spanish are not oppositional but coexist as constitutive of Latino/a identity. This is seen directly in the sources of Latina theologies. Latino/a scholars are quite at ease in using the cultural and religious
production of Indigenous and African peoples to be sources for our theological reflection while simultaneously maintaining a dominant paradigm within our construction of Latino/a identity and religiosity. We do this without acknowledging the function of power within our academic appropriation of non-Christian and non-European sources. This is seen most sharply in the Christian starting point of Latino/a theologies and the ways in which non-Christian sources and cultures are appropriated into our discourse. Latino/a theologians approach Latino/a religion from a Christian foundation, adding the flavors of African and Indigenous America as they see fit.

In their retrieval of Latino/a culture and context, Latino/a theologians have recovered a vital dimension of historical and contemporary Christian religious expressions. In this process, Latino/a theologians have constructed a Latino/a religious identity. Whether it is Our Lady of Guadalupe, *mestizaje*, or the Conquest of the Americas, there are certain key themes that have become “canonized” in the corpus of Latino/a theology as fundamental dimensions of Latino/a religiosity and history. This has resulted in, whether intentional or not, a construction of Latino/a identity that foregrounds particular elements of Latino/a culture and history at the expense of, I argue, the fullness and diversity of Latino/a peoples. Most notably, the presence of African peoples and their participation in Latino/a history and identity have been downplayed. The black Latino/a experience is strikingly insignificant within the narrative and construction of Latino/a historical identity. This has led a depiction of Latino/a history, religious experience, and culture that privileges certain elements and erases others. Latino/a theologians of all backgrounds, not just Mexican Americans, perpetuate this normativity.

Within black and womanist theologies, the Afro-Latin is glaringly absent. Black and womanist theologies have strongly emphasized race as a central analytic lens through which to interpret the experience of African Americans in the United States. While recent scholarship has sought to nuance this depiction of African American identity, race remains a central marker of the African American experience. In their retrieval of black sources and black experience, black and womanist theologians have delineated a particular understanding of black identity that determines the themes of their theology and consequently the nature of blackness in the United States. This construction of blackness is limited, I argue, in that it
totally excludes the experiences of Spanish-speaking blacks in the United States. Black theologians have systematically ignored the lives, history, and religiosity of black Latino/as and Latin Americans.

I will focus my comments on womanist theology, though were I to discuss Black theology my analysis would be quite similar. As defined by Delores S. Williams, “Womanist theology attempts to help black women see, affirm, and have confidence in the importance of their experience and faith for determining the character of the Christian religion in the African-American community” (Williams, xiv). Similarly, in her own excellent introduction to womanist theology Stephanie Mitchem defines womanism as, “The systematic, faith-based exploration of the many facets of African American women’s religiosity. Womanist theology is based on the complex realities of black women’s lives” (Mitchem, ix). Black, for most womanist theologians, is equivalent to African American. The black community which womanist theologians claim as their community of accountability is the African American community.

The womanists cited above are unclear, however, about why their construction of blackness is solely African American and does not include, for example, black Latino/as. Not all blacks in the United States self-identify as African American, and one must wonder if womanists choose to ignore their religious experiences or if they are being wrongfully (and for some against their will) subsumed into the category of African American. There is, therefore, a construction of identity operating in womanist theology that defines blackness in narrow terms without critical criteria for their exclusionary process of constructing the black community solely in terms of African Americans. This is, I would argue, in direct contrast to the intention of Walker’s definition, which not only uses black, but the even more inclusive category of “feminist of color.”

As a Latina, I in no way intend to dismantle womanism and its significance for womanist theologians. I am, however, challenging womanist theologians to become more explicit in the implications of their construction of black identity. In other words, I do not find it problematic that womanist theologians chose to focus their scholarship on African American women. My concern is regarding the ambiguous use of the terms black and African American within womanist scholarship. Womanists cannot claim to be writing about black women’s experiences in the
United States if they are only focusing on African American women. They cannot use black and African American interchangeably as if the terms are equivalent.

For both black and Latino/a theologians yet another challenge is before us. As theologies that are informed by liberationist movements in the Americas, we must address the current state of the church that is before us. Here I will limit my comments to Roman Catholicism. Much has been made of the current exodus of Catholics to primarily Pentecostal and evangelical churches. While this is a concrete reality that scholars of Catholicism must face today, I would argue that at least from my area of expertise, Latin America, the numbers are grossly inflated. What is not inflated, however, is the growth of a more Spirit-focused, what many would label conservative spirituality that is clearly seen in the growth of Charismatic Catholicism. I would also like to challenge us to think more broadly about the church here in the United States. In my eyes it is no longer useful to speak of a Northern or Southern Church but instead an American Church that embraces all of the Americas. This is not a revolutionary statement. Whether one looks at John Paul II’s 1999 Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in America* or economic and cultural analyses of globalization, the porous nature of national borders in these domains is our lived reality today. Nonetheless, academic theology, both black and Latino/a is slow to face this contemporary context. We have isolated ourselves in our exclusive attention to the United States and debates about minority politics. Those debates need to end and we need a more inclusive realistic depiction of the communities we claim to represent and the manner in which the power of our academic voice distorts the lived realities of the millions of black, brown, Asian, and white peoples our presence supposedly symbolize.

Engaging the question of race, whether it be through the lens of theology, pastoral life, or any field within the academy, cannot merely be a conversation about racism or a discussion that centers on race in isolation. To reduce conversations about race to racism is to ignore the function of race within the global Catholic Church and the manner in which race currently functions within the spirituality and lived religion of Catholic communities across the globe. There is also a danger in treating race in isolation of the other factors that shape our identity. I only speak here for the Latino/a experience when I state that race, culture, ethnicity, gender, class, and immigration status create a complex web of identity where each piece can be studied individually yet always in light of the whole. For me a conversation between Latinas and womanists cannot occur in isolation, but must incorporate the plurality of issues and shades of color that constitute the American Church.

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Rethinking the Urban Parish in Light of The New Catholicity

Hosffman Ospino

Three Catholic families head to their parish in the heart of a New England city to attend Sunday Mass and meet with friends and relatives at church. They all share a weekly ritual that not only gives them a sense of being part of a larger faith community, but also shapes their lives.

The O'Gradys have been part of the community for the longest time. Their fore-parents built the church with their own hands as they laid brick after brick to erect a monumental building that soon they named, faithful to their Irish tradition, St. Patrick parish. Approaching the church building one can see the pride in the older couple's faces because this is their church and these are the people whom they’ve known since they were young. They know most of their friends by name. Their three young adult daughters went to the parish school, but they seem not to be as committed to the love and care of the church as their parents and grandparents were at their age. The couple was married in this church and hopes to have their farewell Mass in the same place where they were baptized. This is their parish because they built it, because this is the only parish they know as theirs, and because there they find a family. They care jealously about it because this parish is their community.

The Rodriguezes migrated from the Dominican Republic in the 1980s in search of better opportunities and have lived in the city for almost two decades. They

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attend Mass in Spanish because that is the language in which they first learned how to communicate with God. The children are bilingual and wouldn’t mind attending Mass in English, but they would rather go to the Mass in Spanish to be with their parents. For them this parish is a place to meet with God and others in a way that resembles the religious expressions of their native land. The parish first reached out to them because of the increasing number of Spanish-speaking Catholics in the area (70% of the total population of the city!) and then made a permanent niche for them. This is their parish. Though they still have not developed the full sense of ownership of those parishioners who have been in the parish for several generations, St. Patrick parish is their community.

The Nguyens migrated a few years ago from Vietnam. They only celebrate Sunday Mass in their native language twice a month because there are not enough priests to do so on a more regular basis. Their cultural traditions and the way they celebrate their Catholic experience reveal a deep commitment to their faith convictions. In Vietnam they were a religious minority and such a circumstance helped them to become more aware of the struggles to witness the Christian faith in the midst of multiple religious and secular traditions—some of them hostile toward Christianity. Because of sharp variances in the Vietnamese language and the difficulty for non-Vietnamese speakers to learn it, the older members interact less with other groups within the parish, but their children adapt faster to the English-speaking community. When this family approaches the church they know that they are welcomed to celebrate the same faith as other groups in the community along with the richness of their own cultural tradition. They may not be as visible as the other groups in terms of numbers, but St. Patrick truly is their community.

The sociological landscape of most urban cities in the United States has changed dramatically in the last four decades. As the city changes, so does the face of the parish—and also, I argue, its theological significance. This is not a new phenomenon in a country that is often reshaped by continuous waves of immigration; yet it is a reality that invites theologians and ministers to rethink the way we understand the urban parish. The three families described in the above vignette also belong to clearly defined cultural, ethnic, and linguistic groups that together form a larger community: the parish. For all three groups the parish is their intentional community of faith. In this essay I propose to reflect as a practical theologian on the meaning, challenges, and implications of belonging to and worshiping in parishes that are culturally diverse. I draw on Robert Schreiters’ understanding of The New Catholicity as a frame to guide this reflection.
Defining the Parish: Two Perspectives

Frequently one hears that a parish offers services and liturgies in different languages. Also one hears that a parish serves a number of ethnic groups. Such phrasing discloses an understanding of the parish as an unchangeable, static, and final unit. Thus, the parish offers a series of already defined services for an already defined clientele. Why should there be any differences among parishes? A too literal reading of canon 515.1 in the Code of Canon Law may give the wrong impression: “A parish is a certain community of the Christian faithful stably constituted in a particular church.” Such a juridical definition argues for the stability of the parish as a legal entity within the organizational structure of the church, but does not say that the parish must be understood in monadic terms. If the parish is this unchangeable, static, and final unit, then the experience of any newcomer is not expected to contribute much to its definition. Much less if these newcomers speak a different language and worship by means of practices that, for those already established, are too “culturally diverse.”

Parishes constituted by worshiping communities from different ethnicities and various language groups are a common reality in most urban centers. A parish in these contexts can be best defined as a community of communities. The parish as community of communities demands a more dynamic reflection about its nature and mission because its identity is continuously adjusting. Though all groups that join the territorial entity called parish do so to share their experience of what it means to be a Catholic Christian, they also bring with them a number of needs and expectations that constantly reshape the nature and mission of the parish. It is possible that at some point the urban parish may focus on preserving the cultural and linguistic identity of a group (or groups), but later it may shift its efforts to deal with the social challenges that its new members confront. Furthermore, the same parish may later have to invest in developing structures of ecumenical and interreligious dialogue to respond to the fragmentation of the religious experience of the families that constitute it. Finally, the same community of communities may need to become a missionary parish that reaches out to a new audience, especially younger families, because its aging population does not guarantee future survival. Thus, the nature and mission of the parish are constantly redefined by the changing circumstances that shape the lives of its members, the presence of newcomers, the diversity of its members, and the emerging needs and expectations that all the parishioners share in common.

Insights from History: The Catholic Parish in the U.S.

From the very first moments of their presence in the United States parochial organization played a key role in shaping the experience of Catholics in the country. Historically it is possible to identify various organizational arrangements
that preceded, resembled, and eventually grounded the parish as the juridical unit that we have today. Since the establishment of the Nombre de Dios Mission at St. Augustine, Florida, in 1565, also considered the first Catholic parish in the continental territory (Hennessey, 11), various circumstances in the life of the church in the U.S. have shaped the idea of the parish. A close look at these circumstances reveals that the understanding of the nature and mission of the parish has rather evolved as a process of adaptation to the most immediate needs and expectations of its members.

Notwithstanding the shadows of colonialism, the Jesuit and Franciscan missions in the Southwest, to cite only two examples, illustrate how the organization of Catholic faith communities in the sixteenth century responded to the most immediate needs of the indigenous peoples. Despite the shortcomings of these efforts, positively the missions were centers of education, occupational training, religious instruction, cultural preservation, and protection from political and social movements that eventually devastated the native population.

With the arrival of millions of Catholics, mainly from Western Europe, right after the United States became an independent nation in the eighteenth century, new models of parish organization were necessary to respond to the needs and expectations of these newcomers. The lack of an adequate number of bishops and priests to serve the exploding Catholic population in the early part of the nineteenth century, coupled with a number of official laws that limited the expansion of Catholic structures, motivated the laity to take the initiative to buy land and build churches. Most parishes were initially established under boards of trustees whose members were mainly laypeople. These boards of trustees not only owned the church buildings, but also exercised some power in the day to day decisions of the parish—often providing catechetical and prayer services (Coriden, 36) and occasionally determining the appointment of priests (Dolan, 1:18). By the time of the First Council of Baltimore in 1884, the body of bishops of the United States agreed and enforced that parish property belonged to the dioceses, not the trustees. Gradually, in the nineteenth century the parish basically became the central neighborhood institution, thus making it possible for Catholics to shape an identity as a more defined community (Dolan, 1:3).

These new Catholics are not only immigrants from other countries, but also children of previous generations of Catholics who are challenging the structure and the understanding of the traditional parish.
National parishes in turn responded to another set of needs and expectations. Not bound by territorial limits, they were organized to serve Catholics who shared a common language and ethnicity, often the same nationality. Many of these parishes opened their own schools and cultivated ethnic pride. They functioned almost as independent units, though under the oversight of a pastor and the bishop. After the decline of the immigration flow from Western Europe, most Catholics in the country became more “Americanized.” English became the common language, most joined the mainstream culture, and the majority of national parishes have either been merged with others or closed after their raison d’être ceased to exist.

For many communities culture has been and continues to be a vital element to define their identity. Parishes in Mexican-American neighborhoods have maintained English and Spanish as concomitant languages for worship. Culturally, they live a *mestizaje* that discloses the richness of belonging to two cultures: Hispanic and U.S.-American (Elizondo, 26). Parishes in the Southwest are incessantly renewed by a constant flow of Catholics from both cultures thus forcing these communities to rethink their action as new members make their needs and expectations known. But such phenomenon is not limited to the Southwest. Thousands of Catholic parishes across the United States, many resembling St. Patrick parish in the New England city described at the beginning of this essay, are currently responding to the needs and expectations of culturally diverse groups that come together to worship in their churches. Though this trend is more evident in urban settings, the whole church is in a process of transformation.

This can be seen as the emergence of a truly multicultural church. As of today there are no large-scale efforts to create “national” or “personal” parishes; the membership of the parishes continuously changes due to the high mobility of families in urban settings; the new Catholics are more open to engage others who do not necessarily share their religious convictions; and the parish is not the exclusive center for the new Catholics to share their faith (e.g., homes, halls, study groups, universities). These new Catholics are not only immigrants from other countries, but also children of previous generations of Catholics who are challenging the structure and the understanding of the traditional parish to meet their new needs and expectations. These are the challenges that the Catholic parish in the United States faces in light of *The New Catholicity*.

**The New Catholicity**

Theologian Robert J. Schreiter has suggested that theology and the life of the church today stand between the global and the local (Schreiter, ix). It is a fact that globalization poses challenges to contemporary societies calling for fresher perspectives as to how theologians and ministers reflect about their faith. I think that the same principle applies to our understanding of the nature and mission
of the parish. Globalization invites us to rethink the local parish in the context of a world that is continuously adapting to all kinds of challenges through newer forms of technology, communication, and transportation. Citizens in the global world seem to just begin to settle about any of such forms when new technological advances and new loads of information demand being up to date. Societies like the United States are magnet centers in the global world. The population exchange between this country and others is higher than ever in order to compete with similar societies in a global economy. Faster means of transportation and highly advanced forms of communication transform whole communities in a matter of a few years. Millions of people who have arrived in the country in the recent decades are Catholic and they are also changing the understanding of the Catholic parish, especially in the urban areas where most settle.

The New Catholicity emerges as a response to the challenge of globalization (Schreiter, 129). It is the conviction that the Word of God can reach the ears of all women and men across cultures and that all cultures, different as they are, can somehow communicate with one another about their faith experiences (Schreiter, 128). If at previous stages of Christian history the church highlighted, at times unevenly, the theological marks of unity, holiness, and apostolicity, it is now appropriate to highlight the mark of Catholicity (Schreiter, 119).

Culturally diverse societies like the United States are microcosms that reflect the encounter of cultures from all over the world. It is not a strange phenomenon that large urban dioceses and archdioceses across the country become centers where the faith is celebrated in hundreds of languages. The cultural background of most Catholics in the United States today is not primarily Western European any more. In less than two decades Hispanic Catholics will represent the vast majority of Catholics in the country. But they are not alone because they share their parishes with millions of Catholics from many other cultural backgrounds—not to mention the large diversity of cultural traditions among Hispanics. Thus, because the encounter of cultures is a clear phenomenon occurring in thousands of urban parishes around the country, Catholics must rethink the nature and mission of their parochial communities in urban settings to meet the most urgent needs and expectations emerging in light of The New Catholicity. In the final section of this essay I consider some theological implications of this specific challenge.

Toward a Renewed Theological Understanding of the Parish

I firmly believe that an appropriate metaphor to understand the Catholic parish in a multicultural society is that of community of communities. Understanding the parish as a community of communities not only provides a wider theological horizon to expound the prevailing juridical definition, but also prevents us from
enthroning one model of parish life as normative. Let us consider five theological implications of the parish as community of communities in light of *The New Catholicity* and the challenges they pose to ministers and theologians, especially to those working in urban settings.

First, the parish as community of communities reflects the true Catholicity of the church. Catholic comes from two Greek words: *kata* (every, including, according to) and *holos* (whole, everyone). Traditionally we translate “Catholic” as *universal*, but a more accurate rendering of the term is *welcoming everyone* (Groome, 397). This theological category reminds us that God’s call to humanity to relate with the divine as a community of hearers of the Word is not limited by the boundaries of ethnicity, language, or cultural tradition. On the contrary, the more that relationship is expressed in diverse ways, the more evident the mark of Catholicity appears. When a parish intentionally fosters what makes its inner communities unique, it discovers that there is more than one way to relate with God. Such an experience enriches the whole as well as the parts.

Second, hospitality and welcoming emerge as theological categories that spring from the life of the mature community that opens its arms to newcomers and shares the gifts that make that parish a true body of disciples of Christ. The presence of newcomers often challenges the status quo of our established communities and invites us to review our traditional ways. At the same time the new members bring their own gifts, often shaped by their culture and particular histories. They are called to recognize the values that permeate the life of the welcoming community and thus must show respect and appreciation for God’s presence at work in that parish. Each time a new person or community joins the parish there is an opportunity to welcome Christ in the *other*. When someone comes to the parish “to stay,” the spirit of hospitality of the community is set in motion to make this their Christian home. Since parishes in culturally diverse contexts are dynamic realities shaped by constant change, welcoming and hospitality emerge as theological categories that catalyze that change in Christian terms.

Third, ministry in a community of communities requires the maximum amount of collaboration possible. A concept that sums up that collaborative effort in a fine way is the Spanish concept of *Pastoral de Conjunto* (whole community ministry; my translation). The presence of various group communities within the parish

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In less than two decades Hispanic Catholics will represent the vast majority of Catholics in the country.
same parish poses new challenges to its leadership. Beyond the traditional services in the areas of evangelization, liturgy, faith formation, spiritual development, and social concern in the parish, a renewed perspective of that community in culturally diverse contexts asks for models of ministry that are more inclusive, participatory, and attentive to the diversity of religious and cultural experiences of all members of the parish. Pastoral de Conjunto offers a model of ministry in dialogue in which the members of the community listen to one another at all levels, plan together, and respond to the most urgent needs and expectations of each community within the parish.

Fourth, this renewed model of parish yields a more dynamic christology and soteriology. The community learns that Christ has many faces and the experience of the paschal mystery is not a homogeneous reality. The suffering Christ of Good Friday in Hispanic popular religiosity tradition meets the more familiar risen Christ in Euro-American imagery. The Vietnamese understanding of Christ as the eldest brother encounters the liberating Christ experienced in the stories of freedom and hope of African American Catholics. Salvation for some is the encounter with God beyond death, while for others it begins with liberation from unjust social structures in the present history, and still for others it begins with a more conscious self-understanding of who they are as individuals and as members of a faith community. Such multiplicity of experiences of Christ converges in the liturgical celebrations, social commitments, and aesthetic expressions that each community shares with one another within the parish.

Finally, the parish as a community of communities leads its members to a clearer understanding of the other. The other is not an outsider anymore or somebody who one encounters by accident. The other is not a threat or someone radically different from who I am. The other is a person who lives and worships with me in my own community and challenges my own, often biased, experience of God and church. The other bears some good news that I would not have been able to encounter if I had not met this person and/or community at all. The other is the neighbor of the gospels who may have an unfamiliar face, a different way of doing things, may speak a different language to express a similar experience, and certainly a different history. Often all these differences strike us at once, but it is precisely in experiencing such differences that I truly discover who I am and the other as my neighbor.


Conclusion

The three families described at the beginning of this essay remind us that most Catholic parishes in the United States are highly diverse communities. These families represent a number of cultural, ethnic, and linguistic communities within the parish that represent a wealth of experiences along with a number of specific needs and expectations. The task of rethinking the parish in light of *The New Catholicity* calls theologians and ministers to develop new models of parish life that supplement and give life to the notion of parish as a juridical unit. The model of parish as community of communities that I offer in this essay seeks to respond to the challenges of understanding the nature and mission of the parish in culturally diverse contexts. I offer these reflections to theologians and ministers reflecting and working primarily in urban contexts, but their relevance does not exclude consideration in other settings. A closer look at the life of any parish around the country will reveal that speaking only one language, sharing a similar social status, or assuming the existence of a commonly agreed ethnic/cultural background does not guarantee homogeneity. There are always smaller communities within the larger community (e.g., men, women, youngsters, single mothers, young adults, educated families, uneducated families, conservatives, progressives, concerned members, unconcerned members, etc.). If the changes brought by globalization and its transformative effects continue such as we witnessed in the latter part of the twentieth century, eventually the vast majority of Catholic parishes in the United States, and other magnet countries in the world, will need to rethink their models of parish life to respond to diversity in terms of culture. Why not begin now?

References


Radical Preacher Training

James E. Hayes

There is an urgent need for ongoing formation of preachers both lay and ordained at the local level. Hayes explores a collaborative model grounded in the spirituality of the preacher that seeks to respond to the needs of local churches with limited resources.

The primary concern of this article is radical preaching training—ongoing training in local churches. The ground of this pedagogy is a blend of necessity and reaction. The necessity springs from the lack of manageable ongoing formation for preachers in a rural region of Iowa, which lacks educational institutions related to preaching. The reaction is the fruit of my denominational context, Catholic, which remains confused about who should be preaching, when he or she should preach, and how he or she should be trained. The inherent relationship of spirituality and preaching underlie the investigation not only for the preachers themselves, but for the people they serve.

Social Context

We begin with the question of local necessity. Local churches and denominations vary in their expectations of the ongoing formation of preachers. The default model allows the individual preacher or congregation to choose how he or she might best improve his or her preaching skills. Typically, ordained preachers

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interested in deepening their appreciation of the art of preaching and refining the craft participate in the occasional workshop. I have personally taken part in many such workshops and learned plenty. Through personal experiences I have consistently noticed that time constraints impede practical application of the theories presented. The inspirational thoughts of facilitators, reminder notes for future projects, and intentions to implement the ideas discussed are placed in files entitled “Preaching,” often never to be seen again. Such impediments limit the transformational quality of the educational experience of those who attend. There are also overconfident or lethargic preachers who feel they have no need for improvement! In Iowa, geographical challenges further hinder preachers desirous of improved skill. There are few graduate theological schools in Iowa, even fewer that deal specifically with pastoral theology and specialties such as preaching and the spirituality of the preacher. This lack of resources renders difficult the ongoing formation for ordained preachers, to say nothing of the dearth of responsible initial training programs for the nonordained. Some preachers seek improvement by traveling to educational institutions or programs, but most lack the desire or financial resources to pursue such methods. There is a strong need for radical preacher training that will spring from the roots of the local community and is both accessible and serious.

The second challenge of preacher identity springs from my Catholic context. The bishops of the United States have studied and made comment on the status and training of lay ecclesial ministers (USCCB, 2001). The explosion of ministries in the postconciliar church includes lay preaching in various forms. The renewal of this charism has resulted in the need for theological clarity in the area of lay ministry and its relationship to the sacrament of holy orders. Recent Vatican documents reflect the concerns of the hierarchy for sharper distinctions between clergy and laity (see *Ecclesia de Mysterio*). There is concern that the various roles and ministries of the church have become confused. In my opinion this concern has led to mistrust and division. As church, we are called to collaborate in the ministry of the Word, regardless of particular vocation. One goal of my consulting and teaching is that in the context of small groups touched by time-tested trust, the members will recognize the gifts they have to offer one another vis-à-vis their growth as preachers and ministers of the Word. Perhaps through a renewed focus on the shared life of the spirit to which we are all called will help the church to bridge the often painful divide.

My interest in the above challenges and proposal of radical preacher training as an appropriate solution is personal, professional, and prophetic. Personally, I have been passionate about preaching for some time, which led to my pursuit of doctoral studies in the discipline. Professionally, I am anxious to put my passion and study of preaching research to good use in the local churches, teaching and facilitating skill development for preachers—ordained or lay. On the prophetic level, my project includes subversive interests. Lay preachers in the Catholic tradition, particularly laywomen, have often lacked ready acceptance from various
quarters. My hope is that the pedagogy discussed in this article will affect preaching at its roots, helping those who often find themselves marginalized or invisible to the larger church to excel locally as preachers with a strong sense of identity and self-assurance. With the Word of God burning in their hearts, these healthy radicals—like the prophets of old—cannot keep silent.

Importance of Local Formation

My awareness of the above social context and challenges results from time I have spent with preachers around the country accumulating qualitative data through recent focus groups. The rich experience of gathering with lay preachers provided me with insights related not only to my research, but to the nature of preaching and ministry. I offer the following conclusions.

In one Midwestern city I noticed the need to acknowledge the dynamic of power in working with church groups. The lay preachers were well aware of the differences that exist between them and ordained preachers, especially on the level of required ongoing formation. From them I learned that if there is to be an expectation of growth on the part of lay preachers, it must be a value for all preachers in order to be effective. The insight of these preachers regarding their unique voice also contributes to our study. The people in the pew mention to them that their insights and credibility are treasured. This means that not only are they in need of mentoring in some kind of an ongoing formation model, but that they also have insights to offer to ordained preachers. Though many members of the church value the concept of ongoing formation, it is not something that can be forced. If preachers are truly to grow from the experience, they must be motivated. If the church expects quality on the part of ministers, they must be supported by the resources of the community as they seek to improve in carrying out their call.

The gathering of a focus group on the East Coast impressed upon me the importance of the support of the bishop and priests for any program of preacher formation to be truly effective. That support allows for contagious energy on the part of all persons involved in the preaching ministry. It also provides sustenance for a spirit of collaboration, which builds trust among the preachers and renders them better able to hear honest criticism so that they might grow in their abilities. I learned, too, that a curriculum for ongoing formation based only on theoretical experience is not sufficient. If you want to know what the preachers need in order to improve in their preaching, ask them, and then provide them with the necessary resources to grow in the areas expressed. Any program of ongoing formation must also take into account the importance of individual needs and experience. The areas for growth in preachers are as myriad as the number of preachers themselves. Thus, any model of ongoing formation must leave some decisions at the local level where the respective preachers understand their needs best. A blanket
curriculum proposed by diocesan or seminary leaders might not understand the local requisites for improvement.

By the time I interviewed a final group in another part of the country, it dawned on me that women represented the majority of each focus group. Any proposal for ongoing formation of lay preachers requires input and critique from women of the local church. If the church is to truly respect the ministry of the Word, we must acknowledge that preaching on the part of laypeople is widespread. We must do our best to assure that the preachers ministering are qualified and competent and that they have dependable structures to support them in their ministry.

Time spent with these preachers has led me to a deeper conviction of the importance of local and adaptable models to continue the formation of spiritually enlivened preachers. The conviction is not only mine. The bishops of Canada have also noticed the social context of the preaching ministry of the church, and as early as 1981 they recognized the necessity of regulating the selection, training, and ongoing formation of all preachers (CCCB).

Though their opinions were motivated by the inability of a diminished number of priests to minister to the local communities, their insights gaze far beyond the pragmatic. In the area of lay leadership they called for a process of discernment of spirits in order to find pastoral leaders from within the local community, including preachers. Preachers needed when priests are not available or “morally competent” should be chosen from the community. The persons chosen to carry on the preaching ministry should be either those already in roles of leadership or those who “are capable of becoming adequate leaders” (CCCB, 103). The National Bulletin on the Liturgy also mentions what the diocese is obliged to provide these new lay leaders: formation, so that they are able to think according to the mind of Christ and his church, which takes time, effort, and prayer; training in the manner of preparing and leading, including how to use the liturgical books; and occasional renewal—the piece that seems to be missing from many formation programs (CCCB, 103). The same document calls on dioceses to assess their current programs and add to programming and training where necessary in order to provide the required help to the lay ministers while maintaining a long-range view regarding vocations.

These directives, in my estimation, are not limited to the scarcity of ordained ministers, but to a charismatic church that feeds a world hungry for the Word of God. William Skudlarek agrees with the sentiment: “The opening up of preaching to the non-ordained makes possible a wider, and therefore more creative, intersection between the Word of God and human experience” (Skudlarek, 500).
The questions thus become: How can a diocese, professor of preaching, or local church establish and maintain a program that speaks to all the insights we have gained through this investigation of social context? What model of preacher training and ongoing formation could possibly respond to the breadth of needs to which the ministry of the Word must speak in the contemporary church?

To respond to the above challenges and questions, I first describe what I have learned about establishing a consulting resource for ongoing formation of preachers on the local level. Then I offer critical reflection in order to evaluate the effectiveness of the pedagogy as it actually occurred in a local church. I conclude with some hopes for the future to address the urgent need of preacher formation in the local churches.

**Collaborative Preaching Consulting**

To understand the necessity of establishing a local consulting resource for preachers requires a closer look at who is preaching, particularly in the Catholic context. The Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) released a study in 2002 on the effects of lay preaching in the Diocese of Great Falls/Billings, Montana. The training program for these preachers was administered by diocesan officials and Partners in Preaching of Eden Prairie, Minnesota, whose founder, Patricia Hughes Baumer, provided both direction and inspiration to my research. The CARA study is extensive, soliciting data from clergy, laity, and the preachers themselves. Some of the data is of direct consequence to the assertions of this article. The overall findings of the research point to satisfaction among the people of the diocese regarding the implementation of lay preachers. In general the data show that the people are more concerned about the quality of the preaching than the nature of the preacher.

The most common setting for lay preaching for the study was the ritual *Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest* (SCAP). The majority of the lay preachers in the study were women, 62 percent of whom were married. Specific to the purposes of our study, the research opines that though “[l]ay preachers are sufficiently prepared, most would like more training in preaching” (Gautier, 2). A radical training and ongoing formation model speaks directly to this desire for more training. “Nine in ten agree that every lay preacher could benefit from mentoring after initial training” (Gautier, 2). Twenty-eight percent believe lay preachers are not sufficiently prepared. Ninety-three percent of the priests surmise that the lay preachers would benefit from mentoring, though there is no mention of what percentage might find it personally beneficial for the priests themselves.

The study is of particular interest for the purposes of this article because of the demographics of those questioned, including three publics: the lay preachers, priests and pastoral administrators, and parishioners. The CARA study shows
that priests, pastoral administrators, and the people of the assembly—though they are pleased with the quality and experience of lay preaching—also recognize the need for substantial initial training and continuing formation. This recognition implies that the initial training be supported by ongoing training and formation.

The new model of training and formation that I developed to respond to this need is especially attentive to the needs of rural locales for whom schedule or lack of resources represent insurmountable challenges to standard academy-based programs. This is true not only for the ordained, but especially for lay preachers who might need substantive initial training.

I established and designed Collaborative Preaching Consulting in order to evaluate, consult, and strategize follow-up with local congregations. The resources include workshops and retreats on the nature of the ministry of the Word, resources that help the local community and preacher(s) identify the most important electronic and bibliographic literature relative to their needs, tools for structuring sermon preparation and critique groups, and individual training and critique for preachers seeking to improve in their ministry. The hope of this enterprise is that it remains adaptable to local needs in a way that complements the existing structures of continuing education provided by more organized seminary and distance-learning programs through affordability, accessibility, and adjustable programming tailored to the needs expressed by the community.

A Prototype

One local church recently engaged in the program provides evaluative insights vis-à-vis the usefulness and necessity of ongoing preacher formation on the local level. The pastor, who has three parishes in his charge, sensed a dull inadequacy as a preacher and was not convinced that paying deeper attention to his preaching would improve the life of the local church. His language of spirituality in his self-assessment is worth noting. In spite of his skepticism, he was interested in any program that might intensify the church’s love of God and sense of discipleship. His concern as a preacher was not only for his own spiritual identity as a pastor and preacher, but also for the faith formation of the entire church. In addition to his duties as pastor of the three churches, he is also a spiritual and retreat director at a nearby retreat center. Personally stretched in terms of how to best offer his time and talent to the church, he regularly invites his parishioners to deepen their commitment in order to advance the mission of the church.

These are small, rural churches with little access to professional spiritual and faith formation. The lack of resources should not be misconstrued as a lack of desire of the people to grow in their faith. Their invitation to develop a workshop demonstrates the depth of their spiritual commitment. I have selected these churches as the example of my proposed model for preacher training and ongoing
formation because they represent what is happening in the Catholic Church in Iowa and many other areas in the United States.

The planning process started with a private meeting through which the pastor made clear his agenda and expectations. He hoped that, in our working together, the community would gain a deeper understanding of the transformative nature of preaching, rather than approach the sessions as a basic Bible study class. This pastor had a deep concern and regard for the Word of God as the foundation of the preacher’s spirituality, as well as the mandate to go forth and preach that Word to others. He explained:

I hope we will think/pray/participate in the sessions, and Sunday liturgy, not just to gain information (about the scriptures, or the life/teachings of the church, or even God), nor improve our conformation (to the laws and rules and regulations and expectations of . . . whomever, even God), but that we open more and more to the transformation that it’s all about.

After the initial invitation from the pastor, I proposed the following model for working with the churches. First, I wanted to take advantage of the local assets. They already had a faith-sharing group in place that met weekly to study the Lectionary readings. In other churches, establishment of such a group has been the first stage of my design. The pastor wanted the faith-sharing group to have individual attention on how they might reflect, not only on how the weekly Scriptures related to their lives, but how their time together related to the preaching process, particularly since the pastor/preacher was a member of their group. In addition, we hoped to invite the parish in general to consider their role in the preaching ministry. The pastor assumed that an effective way for this to occur would be to invite the entire parish to attend an adult education opportunity in order to reflect on how the proclamation of the Word impacts their daily lives. Thus, the initial commitment was to facilitate two workshops, one for the committed weekly group and one for the parish in general. In this instance there was no need to train lay preachers to help carry out the preaching mission. The idea was to evaluate what the parish would need after the workshops if they were to commit to an ongoing formation model that dealt specifically with preaching.

Critique from the Roots

Once the training sessions and adult education opportunities with the three churches were completed, I was interested in how the time we spent together related to the expectations of the participants. I had hoped that the consulting would lead to a sense of empowerment and appreciation that the preacher and people both share in a common spirituality and mandate to proclaim God’s Word.
and that there would be a deeper sense of commitment and understanding that all its members share an identity as ministers of the Word.

To evaluate the process, I asked the pastor and two members of the group to provide comments on the significance of the experience and on how the ministry would be continued in the future.

What follows are some of the suggestions and comments of the three:

**The Pastor**

- . . . I really liked the idea/explanation that people could experience better preaching by bettering their own side/role in the conversation that a homily is, even though the preacher's preaching may not change at all.

- And . . . I utterly loved the identification of the word used in description of the Emmaus disciples' conversation/discussing as the same word for homily.

- I have long been familiar with the process of preparing and participating in a homily preparation group such as ours . . . so the particulars of that were not really new to me, but the follow-up and follow-through possibility was, though no one here has picked up on that.

**Rose**

- I find the weekly question, “What would your sermon be this Sunday?” particularly challenging. It really puts us on the spot.

- I have deepened my love for and study of the Bible.

- I know that what we do helps to deepen the insights of the homilies.

- We get more out of the preaching because we've participated in the work.

- You're not going to get the entire parish to these meetings, but it really benefits those who come.

**Shannon**

- When you pointed out to the people that what they brought to Mass was very much linked to what they would get out of Mass, this placed the responsibility squarely in the laps of each parishioner. I believe that is where the responsibility lies in faith growth—in our own laps. After working with priests for a number of years, I recognized the need for ALL people to share in the ministry of helping those in need—whether that be spiritually, physically, or emotionally in need. Really, we are ALL in need of spiritual growth and renewal, but as I already mentioned, that growth has to come from within, not from someone else.
• At first, I was very excited about the opportunity to give input about the homilies. Yet, as the weeks progressed, I found it challenging to work in the time to set aside for that input. “Not having time” is probably the biggest reason or excuse most folks will make, but indeed, it would take a sincere effort to come up with a perfect time for a small group of people to meet for this reflection. There are days that I find it very difficult to get through the study notes and readings that are sent to us for our Scripture reflections, let alone try to come up with ideas for a homily as [the pastor] often asks. If there are times when I “reach out” to people, I feel I do so more outside of church than within its walls.

A Plentiful Harvest

This article has explored the notion of radical preacher formation and offered further reflection on the ongoing formation of lay and ordained preachers in the local churches today. I drew on comments by the participants in the consultative session because those comments focus the questions that have been raised throughout:

• Does small group faith-sharing and ministry of the Word respond to the need for ongoing preacher formation in geographical areas that lack seminaries and graduate schools of theology?

• Does participation in such groups prepare non-seminary-trained persons to responsibly share in the preaching ministry?

• Do such groups further blur the lines of identity between clergy and laypeople in the Catholic tradition?

• Does participation in such groups lead people to establish similar groups in future parishes?

The questions currently evade response because the quality of the harvest is yet to spring forth. However, a preliminary forecast is possible based on my ministerial experience and my motivations to be personal, professional, and prophetic.

My personal passion for the power of preaching to touch people’s lives has been confirmed. I was most touched by Shannon’s comment: “If there are times when I ‘reach out’ to people, I feel I do so more outside of church than within its walls.” If participation in the preaching process and ministry leads to similar spiritual insights, I see great potential in such programming.

There is rich soil to be tilled with this pedagogy. The social context described at the beginning of this article reveals the need for preacher training and ongoing formation at the local level. Such radical preacher formation requires the attention
of the church, specifically of those trained in the teaching of preaching. Moreover, formation ought to be affordable, accessible, and adaptable. Ongoing guidance is needed as well in order that local faith-sharing groups are able to appropriately critique preaching in their communities.

I sense in my soul that there are roots ready to burst into the light of my faith tradition; there is urgent need to tend carefully to this budding life. Ultimately, such care is also rooted in the spirituality of the preacher. Edward Schillebeeckx captures the essence of this spirituality and the ministry we all share:

The real norm and justification for competent proclamation of the gospel message is the praxis of Jesus himself embodied in the life of the preacher. The Christian who is really competent to preach today is one who, in his or her faith, is able to enter into the sequela Jesu (imitation or following of the life of Jesus) fully. The competent preacher is one who can be totally concerned with human situations, one who can set in motion the processes of admiration, joy and liberation that Jesus himself set in motion and continues to initiate today. (Schillebeeckx, 37)

References


I carry a quart glass mason jar filled with water from our well to my father who is plowing a field on our Kansas farm. Reaching the red Farmall tractor, my father stops and turns off the engine. He gratefully receives the jar of water and drinks. Precious drops drip down his chin onto dusty overalls. Finished, he offers me the empty jar with a heartfelt “thank you.” He continues plowing and I turn and walk across the moist rows of soil back home.

Carrying water to my father was one of my childhood responsibilities. Offering the mason jar was more than giving a drink of water; it was a relational act of hospitality between my father, the sacred gift of water, and me.

This simple, life giving act of hospitality carries profound spiritual and moral lessons about “Sister Water” (St. Francis of Assisi, Canticle of the Creatures). Sister Water in the mason jar speaks of mystery and water hospitality in a world where conflicts and wars increasingly revolve around water resources amid ever mounting population growth or extreme weather such as droughts resulting from global climate change.

Water hospitality of the mason jar instructs that water is a sacred gift, a sister who actually makes up at least 70% of our bodies, just as the earth’s body is 70% water. We are born out of the water of our mother’s womb and we are baptized by water that carries us into the sacred womb of God on earth where we live out our life’s journey. Beginning in Genesis, we see the waters are good. “. . . and the waters gathered together God called ‘Seas’, God saw that it was good” (Gen 1:10). The root meaning of good is “to bring together” (Ayto, 259). In creation all the elements of life are brought together through water.

Hospitality brings together people, creatures, and elements so that they know they are not strangers, but are one family or community. St. Francis’s Canticle of the Creatures
sings loudly of this amazing truth that all are one within the kinship of the Holy One, Compassionate God and Creator.

From the beginning we are part of the earth’s cycles of which water’s cycle intimately entwines our planet. Humans are not outside of this natural cycle, but part of the intimate relationship that allows the hospitality of water. Just as Genesis begins with our relationship to the waters as good, one can assume from this, the common good for which we are called to be in relationship of gratitude and responsibility.

However, our waters, which have been home to life, are being threatened by toxins that violate the purity of water, even within the womb, which is the first human experience of water hospitality. “In 2005 a study of the umbilical cord blood of ten randomly chosen newborns in the United States was tested for toxic chemicals. A total of 287 toxins were found, with the average for each individual infant being 200. Nearly three-quarters of the chemicals were known carcinogens, and the rest were identified as threatening the nervous, endocrine, and immune systems” (Gottlieb, 10).

The deterioration of water quality poses numerous moral and spiritual questions. In the story of the Samaritan woman at the well, Jesus speaks of himself as living water. One can only know the meaning of such teachings if one experiences water as living and healthy. I have pondered the question. If our waters are polluted and pure water even threatened to near extinction, can we really understand the spiritual meaning of living water? Is not our understanding of God and Jesus threatened if our waters are threatened?

While Aquinas did not experience the ecological devastation on a global scale that we face, he reflected in his time upon the understanding of the Divine in relationship to the natural world. “The whole universe together participates in the divine goodness and represents it better than any single being whatsoever” (Summa Contra Gentiles, St. Q. 47, Art. 1).

Anne Clifford, C.S.J., writes, “From the standpoint of an ecological theology based on Aquinas’ insights, the destruction of our earthly habitat suggests that discernible traces of the Trinity are lost. When species are made extinct, a unique manifestation of the goodness of God is gone forever” (Zayac, 54).

Deterioration of water quality, however, addresses only part of the ethical and spiritual dilemma we face with current global water concerns. The other element involves access to water within globalization and commodification of water where increasingly those with money and power hold the mason jar of water to the exclusion of millions of people, whole rivers, watersheds and bioregions.

Hebrew Scripture speaks of the water hospitality as an obligation to friends, guests, strangers, and enemies, and I will include the natural world as part of this community. “If your enemy is hungry give him something to eat, if thirsty, something to drink” (Proverbs 25:21). In fact, if the book of Matthew is an indication, we will be judged upon our abilities to share in the gracious gift of water in hospitality. “For I was hungry and you fed me, I was thirsty and you gave me drink” (Matt 25:35). There is no cost for water; it is a gift of the Creator.

What is the moral implication we face today with 1.1 billion people (17% of world population) without access to improved sources of water? 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? (Water: Essential for Justice and Peace). Currently the average U.S. citizen in their home uses 293 gallons of water a day while the average African family uses 5 gallons of
water a day. How do we deal with such disparity in distribution?

In *Water, An Essential Element for Life*, the Pontifical Justice and Peace Council’s 2003 paper for the Third World Forum on Water, held in Kyoto, Japan stated, “Sufficient and safe drinking water is a precondition for the realization of other human rights. . . . There is a growing movement to formally adopt a human right to water” (*Origins*, 738).

At the Fourth World Forum on Water in Mexico City in March of 2006 the effort to make water a human right was taken up and was not passed by the assembly, though numerous people’s groups and religious constituents worked for its passing. While people of faith have been silent too long on ecological concerns of water and climate change, people of various religious traditions are beginning to claim their prophetic voices. An Interfaith Statement given at the forum as part of a panel of union members, indigenous people, and organizers from throughout the world stated:

Preserving and making available fresh water as a sacred legacy is a collective responsibility that includes the involvement and participation of all. . . . Of special concern to us are the increased instances of the commercialization, commodification, and contamination of water and water services which often result in the disturbance of the natural flow of water systems disrupting ecosystems and decreasing accessibility of water for marginalized people. (*Water: Essential for Justice and Peace*)

While corporations such as Coca-Cola, Pepsi, and Nestle see water as one of the major business opportunities of the twenty-first century, the ancient ideal of water is that it is sacred. Sitting with Sister Water, we have much to learn as is echoed by Pope Benedict XVI in a recent call to address the ecological challenges of our times by listening to the natural law:

Everyone can see today that humanity could destroy the foundation of its own existence, its earth, and therefore we can’t simply do whatever we want with this earth that has been entrusted to us, what seems to us in a given moment useful or promising, but we have to respect the inner laws of creation, of this earth, we have to learn these laws and obey them if we want to survive. . . . This obedience to the voice of the earth is more important for our future happiness than the voices of the moment, the desires of the moment. . . . Existence itself, our earth, speaks to us, and we have to learn to listen. (Allen)

Our dualistic thinking and acting that usually interprets the material world devoid of spiritual essence makes it very challenging to hear and obey the voice of the earth or of water. Water invites us to look deeply into the glass of water that we drink as pure gift. She invites us to open our hearts to hospitality and live out relationships as part of not apart from the sacred earth community.

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With the 2008 presidential race underway, healthcare reform is once again in the national spotlight. Thirteen years after the last attempt at reform, the number of uninsured in the United States is close to 47 million; the cost of insurance premiums is increasing at twice the rate of inflation; and battles over who should bear the burden of these costs are being waged in the nation’s legislatures and boardrooms. The debate over reform is focused principally on the kind of healthcare system Americans will accept (single payer, like that in Canada and some European countries; a mix of government funded and private insurance; health savings accounts, etc.) and how such a system would be funded. This is an essential part of the discussion, of course, but it is not enough.

One reason for the spiraling cost of healthcare, as Daniel Callahan and others long ago pointed out, is the ever-growing demand on medicine “to relieve the human condition” (McKenny). Buoyed by the medical successes of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, we have created a healthcare system that “wants to conquer all diseases and stay the hand of death” (Callahan, 1990, 23). Yet in the face of human finitude, this is a futile goal. We will inevitably grow old and eventually die, and as we age, our bodies will decline. While it is certainly the appropriate role of medicine to seek to alleviate suffering caused by physical debility, no healthcare system can ease all the spiritual and emotional suffering that unavoidably comes with human finitude. Together with the debates about what kind of healthcare system is best for the United States and how to finance it, there must be discussion of the appropriate role of medicine in society.

In this discussion, theological bioethics in general, and Catholic bioethics in particular, have important contributions to make.

Theological Bioethics and the Common Good

In her recent book, Theological Bioethics: Participation, Justice, Change, Lisa Sowle Cahill argues for a “theological bioethics...
that aims at social justice, defined as inclusive participation in the common good” (Cahill, 7). She proposes that such a bioethics must enter the public debate with its own “thick” discourse, formed by particular traditions, narratives, and symbols, as a way of dislodging “the thick discourses [of science, economics, and liberalism] that are so widely entrenched that their constituting narratives and practices are no longer directly observed” (Cahill, 27). The challenge for theological bioethicists, according to Cahill, is to expand their role of teaching and scholarship by entering into the fray of policy discussions and social activism, inserting into the debate the religious values and worldviews that are all too often sidelined in the ethical debates over issues such as stem cell research, end-of-life care, and reproductive technologies.

The values and world view that Cahill wants to insert into the debate are those found in the tradition of Catholic social teaching. She is sympathetic to social conservatives’ resistance to the “instrumentalization and commercialization of vulnerable life,” but maintains that opposing legalized abortion, stem cell research, or physician assisted suicide simply on the basis of the “rights of embryos, fetuses, the handicapped or comatose persons” does little to challenge the culture’s systemic individualism and consumerism, which underlie the objectification of human life (Cahill, 27). Instead, Cahill appeals for solidarity with those who are marginalized or excluded from the healthcare system, both nationally and internationally as the basis from which to work for greater distributive healthcare justice. This, she argues, will also more effectively enhance respect for the dignity of all human life.

**Emptiy or Justice?**

The difficulty for Cahill and others who call for greater justice in healthcare distribution is the inescapable implication of their position: that to expand access to those currently excluded from the healthcare system, we must be willing to limit our expectations of what that system can achieve for any one individual. This is the specter of “rationing” that so effectively helped jettison reform efforts thirteen years ago. Those who call for limiting medicine’s ever-expanding reach into every aspect of an individual’s life in favor of greater justice in healthcare distribution are vulnerable to accusations that they lack empathy. Indeed, in the face of appeals from celebrities debilitated by Parkinson’s disease or spinal injuries, or even a family member’s slow deterioration from Alzheimer’s disease, it is difficult without seeming cold-hearted to argue against, e.g., stem cell research, which purportedly holds out the promise for a cure in favor of spending resources on expanded access to basic care.

Daniel Callahan makes this point in his review of Cahill’s book. He affirms Cahill’s vision and agenda for theological bioethics, but criticizes her lack of attention to the practical “nuts and bolts” application of such a vision to policy questions. His concern, he states, is how we “get there from here.” In his words, “while justice is a needed and legitimate language for theology, empathy remains a more important motivator of action; or perhaps justice without empathy (and vice versa) provides too thin a foundation for getting things done” (Callahan, 2007, 265). Yet it is precisely in its potential for creating the empathy necessary to break the existing stalemate in so many bioethical debates, including those about healthcare reform, that I see Cahill’s vision as being most useful.

Appeals for distributive justice in healthcare are not appeals to some abstract principle, as more and more of the middle class in the United States is discovering. It is no coincidence that calls for healthcare reform are reemerging at this time, when over one
third of those without insurance have a family income above $40,000 and two-thirds of the uninsured are in households with at least one full-time worker. As the middle class becomes increasingly vulnerable to the same loss of access to medical care as those living on the socioeconomic margins, questions of just healthcare distribution are all too concrete for many people.

Much more abstract, one could argue, are debates about the status of fetal and embryonic life, or whether respect for life demands indefinitely continuing artificial nutrition and hydration for patients in a permanent vegetative state. Moreover, as was all too evident in the recent Terry Schiavo case, such debates when framed in terms of competing individual rights, can lead to polarization and impasse from which nobody benefits. On the other hand, appeals to the very real sense of vulnerability among a growing segment of the American population could create common ground from which to shape a more inclusive vision of medicine's role in society. Theological bioethicists and the Catholic Church in the United States could play a vital role in initiating such a dialogue, and they have a tradition from which to draw in doing so.

A Consistent Ethic of Life and Healthcare Access

Prior to every presidential election since 1976, the Administrative Committee of the U.S. Catholic Conference of Bishops (USCCB) has issued a document aimed at helping the Catholic electorate go to the polls with a “properly informed conscience.” In it, issues relevant to the upcoming election are analyzed through the lens of Catholic social teaching. Since 1988, the moral framework proposed for addressing these issues has been the consistent ethic of life. As the bishops insisted in 2003, “for Catholics, the defense of human life and dignity is not a narrow cause, but a way of life and a frame-work of action.” Quoting the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, they continue by asserting that “a political commitment to a single isolated aspect of the Church’s social doctrine does not exhaust one’s responsibility toward the common good” (Faithful Citizenship, Section V).

In November 2007, the U.S. Bishops voted on a similar document to guide Catholic voters in deliberations about their choices at the polls. When it comes to the issue of healthcare reform, use of the consistent ethic of life is particularly fitting. As is becoming all too obvious to too many people, the individualistic focus of the existing healthcare system on alleviating every possible kind of suffering and extending life indefinitely for those who can afford it, leaves ever more people suffering and needlessly dying from a lack of access to even basic care. On the other hand, drawing on the empathy of those who fear exclusion from the current system for those who already are excluded, has the potential to help create a more just system that is respectful of all human life and dignity.

Callahan is right when he writes that theology “has to pitch in and join a messy world dealing with messy problems . . . allowing the grease found on the nuts and bolts of practicality to stain our hands” (Callahan, 2007, 466). But theology needs to do this in a way that builds common ground. One way, I suggest, is to shift the focus away from individual rights, as Lisa Sowel Cahill proposes, to our universal human vulnerability to suffering in order to build justice on a foundation of empathy. Without such a shift, the nuts and bolts of reform will be holding together a system doomed to collapse under its own weight.

References


I remember a time, not so long ago, when taking the cup was something I assumed everyone did. Not taking the cup, like not receiving Communion at all, was something that made you stand out in our small parish community. Now as I stand with my brothers and sisters as one body that prays together and receives together, it seems more and more people are passing the cup by. This is not an isolated event. There are still many communities in this country that have yet to experience the cup as a regular part of their eucharistic celebrations in the first place, and of equal concern are those communities who once shared this experience but do so no longer. Recent official shifts combined with a lack of understanding by many in the pew have led to accepting the cup as an optional addition rather than an integral action of Eucharist. It is time to remind ourselves why we “take this,” “do this,” in memory of the Christ.

Scripture

Scripture reminds us clearly of the radical nature of our eucharistic actions, actions rooted in the lived experience of the earliest Christian communities. Their eating and drinking were the means by which they expressed their participation in the paschal mystery (La Verdiere, 5). It was these experiences that would go on to influence the works of Paul and the gospel writers. That is to say, celebrating the Lord’s Supper was the experience that both preceded scriptural accounts of the Last Supper and shaped the telling of those accounts. In eating the bread they expressed the radical new way of being human that was called forth by the resurrection of Christ. In taking the cup, they accepted the cost of this discipleship. Jesus’ followers had been together with him for meals throughout his ministry, and now “the appearance of Jesus as the risen Lord brought them together as never before, inviting them to remember their days with Jesus of Nazareth and seeing Jesus life with them in an entirely new light” (6). Not surprisingly then, the tradition of celebrating the Eucharist would be influential when the various New Testament writers sought to communicate the meaning of Jesus to their respective communities. These writers

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used the liturgical tradition of celebrating the Eucharist to reveal the meaning of living as a Christian outside of worship.

Mark's gospel draws on his community's experience of eating and drinking the Body and Blood of Christ to communicate the truth of being a disciple of Christ. For Mark, the cup is event (59)! He impresses upon his community this reality: to drink of the cup of Christ is to accept the cost of their baptism, to follow Christ and share in the paschal mystery. “In drinking the Eucharistic cup of Christ, the Christian community offers its life for the redemption of many” (59). Whenever the cup appears in the Gospel of Mark it is a symbol of the cost paid by Christ for the salvation of the world and those who drink of it accept their participation in this cost. To drink the cup is to “join in Jesus’ sacrifice.” This is the cup Jesus asks his disciples to share, “Can you drink the cup that I drink or be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized” (Mark 10:38)?

For these early Christians then, the cup they drank is an event, an active participation in the mystery of Christ, and part of a symbolic whole, fully understood only when in relation to the breaking of the bread. Together they are a unity of “word and service, of goods and meal” (Power, 30). To break the bread and to drink the cup is to become one community taking up the challenge of baptism. It is eating the Body to become the Body and drinking the Blood to bear the cost. They are part of one single eucharistic reality but do not have identical meaning. They are complimentary symbols that together communicate a new reality.

Yet something happens to this understanding of the Eucharist. The symbolic whole understood as an event of eating and drinking is replaced with a focus on the Eucharist as object rather than event, we need to pay attention to our use of symbols. The expression: “it’s not real, it’s just a symbol,” reflects an understanding present in our culture today. Historically, we moved from an understanding of symbol as something that invites us more deeply into the mystery, engages us, and draws us into relationship to treating symbols with suspicion, as objects more likely to conceal the truth than means of more fully encountering that truth.

Through the early medieval period the church worked hard to maintain the concept of symbol as revelation of reality. Symbols invited the participants more deeply into the reality symbolized (Mitchell, 1998, 98). The cup as the Blood of Christ had a depth of meanings, never exhausted. Over time there was a narrowing of the understanding of symbol and a subsequent loss of sacramental imagination. Symbols become understood in opposition to reality rather than an encounter with the deeper reality signified. The result of this is the treatment of the Eucharist as an object rather than an action. In turn, these objects became the territory of the ordained, the focus rested on the bread and the cup was no longer offered to the laity. This shift in symbolic understanding which treats the cup as object rather than event allowed the celebration of the Eucharist to be understood as a “rite performed by the clergy, as opposed to an action celebrated by the entire community” (Mitchell, 1982, 87–88). Symbol was reduced to sign.

Combine this loss of symbolic understanding with the rise of vernacular languages and the result was “the distancing of lay persons from altar and sanctuary” (Mitchell, 1982, 88). Latin became the language of the clergy, and those who spoke the language have access to the eucharistic species (Mitchell, 1982, 88). There also occurred a series of events that removed the cup from physical contact with the laity. Sipping through a
straw or intinction (dipping) of the bread, both practices used in the care of the sick, over time become normative for all. “It was a case of the extraordinary exceptions becoming the pastoral (though not the theological) norm” (Mitchell, 1982, 96). Under these circumstances the laity continued to receive but no longer handle the cup. When the understanding is introduced that one species alone has the real presence of the whole Christ, the cup seems even less necessary (Mitchell, 1982, 96). This situation persisted for the next nine centuries and took the reforms of Vatican II to return the cup to the fullness of eucharistic action. The Eucharist again is an event, where eating and drinking by all the baptized is the norm.

**Final Thoughts**

Change is in the air again today. Recent documents once more seem to consider the cup as non-essential for the laity. Limitations on use, whether it be size of congregation, or limited availability of clergy to purify the vessels, or choice of language that treats Eucharist as object, give the impression that the cup, though valued, is not indispensable for the laity (see *Redemptionis Sacramentum*, nos. 100–104). A return to emphasizing the hierarchic is evident in the situation surrounding the purification of vessels and the denial of recent indult requests would seem to bear out the direction of the shift (see Purification of Sacred Vessels by Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion).

The need for an energetic catechesis of the cup is obvious. It is our communion in suffering and hope, bitterness and joy with, in, and through the Christ and our parish communities. Through this cup our suffering is transformed into a new hope and joy only experienced through the power of the paschal mystery. The cup is the cost we are willing to pay to follow the Christ. This is the cup of communion, the cup we share, and it is not an optional addition. We come together as a eucharistic community to take, and drink, in memory of Christ.

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Power and Christian Theology.
Pages, xii + 180. Paper, $24.95.

Reviewed by
Catholic Theological Union

A small child may have power (physical capacity) to poke out someone’s eye; the state may have power (legitimated authority) to execute a criminal; a parent may have power (moral authority) to shape a child into a virtuous adult; and a nation may have power (military capacity) to obliterate a city. Clearly, “power” in its many manifestations—including dominion, might, suasion, coercion and divine or human action—is a highly complex notion and a polysemic term. To have a real master to lead one through the maze of meanings, applications, and implications, is a great boon. Stephen Sykes—theologian, former Anglican bishop of Ely, and current principal of St. John’s College, Durham—is such a master, and Power and Christian Theology offers a clear path to would-be travelers in theological thickets.

For all its physical manifestations, the concept of power is “morally ambivalent” (103)—or perhaps ambiguous or neutral. But once it is applied, the actual use of power provides us with case studies and contexts for moral assessment. To assert flatly that power corrupts, as the dictum has it, and that absolute power corrupts absolutely, may be tempting but is much too neat. Stephen Sykes has produced a masterly, compelling, systematic, and readable gloss on Lord Acton’s pungent observation, in relation not to political power as such, but to power as it has been understood and wielded for broadly theological purposes, both at the level of theoretical discussion and of practical action.

Two opposing theological perspectives on power are contrasted. Some people maintain that power is broadly suspect (or even unequivocally evil), and its use antithetical to the life and spirit of Jesus. Others begin by identifying God as the fons et origo of power, and then defending a derivative use of (Godly) power by humanity, and specifically in an ecclesial context. Yet, as Sykes shows very well, things are not that simple: legitimately derived power has been dreadfully abused, historically: God has been invoked for most unGodly purposes.

This book draws on the best insights of sociology as it carefully builds its arguments, showing that since theological thinking is inevitably dependent on cultural tropes, notions about what is Godly can become inextricably linked with more secular ideas of appropriate government, sanctions, or warfare. Little by little, wielders of power may then be deemed by their peers (or subjects) to have deviated disastrously from the paths of peace, meekness, and service, as they justify the dubious means they employ in service of their well-intentioned ends. Thus do controversies build, mutual recriminations intensify, and reform movements come to birth.

The thesis developed is that power is good, manifest in God, and therefore Godly, but that it is also subject to usurpation or
manipulation by human agents, even as they invoke God in justification of its use. Since humanity is a complex of selfishness and altruism, domination and collaboration, so power becomes ambiguous in its use, and fallen humanity tends to use it inappropriately and to be corrupted by it. Sykes tracks the cumulative abuse of ecclesial power between the ages of Constantine and Luther; but rather than simply blaming “the church,” he is careful to show that because the Christian tradition itself, relative to power, “is anything but homogeneous” (57), there are always likely to be contrasting—and opposing—views. Dialectical theological thinking will always tend to be more judgmental and intolerant than analogical thinking, and dialectical thinkers will tend to see power as the antithesis of service, despite the fact that Jesus combines both so palpably. An undercurrent of tension seems to run through the church and its theology when advocates of each mode of thought take the floor.

This book has all the scholarly apparatus and bibliographical depth of a research tool, but does not, thankfully, suffer from “academiaitis.” It invokes the authors from Arndt to Aristotle and from Weber and Zwingli, and combines theology and sociology appropriately. The clarity of thought, supplemented by a good index and references, makes this excellent graduate reading.

**Lift Up Your Hearts: Homilies and Reflections for the “B” Cycle.**

**Lift Up Your Hearts: Homilies and Reflections for the “C” Cycle.**

**Reviewed by Eileen D. Crowley**
*Catholic Theological Union*

By their very nature, homilies are “disposable,” and publication of homilies “freeze dry them.” So admit the authors of these two volumes of liturgical homilies based on the Roman Catholic Lectionary for the “B” and “C” cycles. (Their “A”-cycle volume came out in 2004.) Yet they also know that words crafted for a specific occasion can sometimes transcend the occasion and live to speak a word in other contexts. For preachers who seek inspiration for their own crafting of Sunday homilies and for other readers who want to continue to reflect on Sunday Scripture readings, the *Lift Up Your Hearts* series will likely be a welcome word.

*Lift Up Your Hearts* belongs to the genre of preaching resources that provide sermons from outstanding preachers who are also skilled teachers of the art of preaching. Guerric DeBona, O.S.B., James Wallace, C.Ss.R., and the late Robert P. Waznak, S.S., are so recognized in Catholic homiletics circles. Waznak taught homiletics at Washington Theological Union from 1980 to 2001. Wallace has been teaching homiletics there since 1987. Over the last decade, DeBona has taught preaching at St. Meinrad Seminary and School of Theology.

While collections of sermons often are either entirely the work of one preacher or are a sampling from many different preachers, this series allows readers to “hear” the voices of three fine homilists. These homiletics professors share their own homilies “as material for reflection by both preachers and listeners.” Consequently, exclaim their books’ covers, these volumes are “Not Just for Preachers!” After each homily, readers will find two other features, “Questions for
Reflection” for individuals or groups, and suggestions for “Other Directions for Preaching” on these Sunday readings.

The introduction to the B-cycle volume provides the authors’ vision: “These homilies attempt to offer a biblical interpretation of some aspect of human life by drawing on the readings assigned for a particular Sunday or feast and using them as a lens on the life of a particular community, naming its concerns, its struggles, and its joys, and attempting to address now and again some of the events occurring in the world in which we live” (vii).

The homilies themselves are presented not in prose paragraphs but in sense lines. This typographic approach does effectively provide a visual cue to remind readers that these were originally oral texts. The sense lines also give some hints as to the rhythm and cadence of their delivery.

At the start of each volume, the authors provide a brief introduction to the gospel that predominates in that cycle, Mark in the B cycle and Luke in the C cycle. The homilies follow, organized according to the seasons of the liturgical year. The greatest number of sermons come from Wallace (25 in each volume), with only slightly fewer sermons from his long-time colleague Waznak (22 in B, 24 in C). DeBona contributes a significant number, too (17 in B, 14 in C).

So many Catholics (including ministers-in-training) continue to hear Sunday homilies of lesser quality than those shared in these volumes. Consequently, in preaching courses in seminaries and schools of theology and ministry, teachers could select particular homilies from Lift Up Your Hearts to illustrate what the liturgical homily form can be. Teachers of Scripture or leaders of teen or adult Bible study might likewise want to mine these homilies, since they are so biblically based. The one minor weakness of these collections, though, is evident in the questions for reflection. Too often these sample questions are posed in a form that would elicit a “yes” or “no” response. Readers and group discussion facilitators using these books would benefit from rewording these suggested questions to make them more open ended. Given the homiletic riches contained in these two volumes, though, this is a small quibble and a matter easily addressed in local settings.