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Editors' Notes

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Editors' Notes

Stuart and D'Esta Love

The editorial for this issue, *Race and Reconciliation*, is unusual in that it is jointly authored by the guest editors and the general editors of *Leaven*. Our first priority, however, is to introduce and to say “thank you” to our guest editors, **Kenneth R. Greene**, who is the preaching minister for the Metro Church of Christ in Dallas, Texas, and the founder and president of the annual conference for Strengthening the African American Family (STAAF), and **Richard Hughes**, Distinguished Professor of Religion at Pepperdine University, Malibu, California. These two men pooled their talents in a work of faith and labor of love. We thank them and each person whom they chose to write on this vital theme.

Is not the statement true, “The most segregated hour in America is eleven o’clock on Sunday morning”? Isn’t it also true that many of us delighted in the liberation of Africans in the movie *Amistad*? Didn’t we delight in the realization that good people prevailed over the purveyors of slavery and that Cinque and others were judged to have been born free, as Africans, and not slaves? How can such apparent inconsistencies—fundamental ambivalences—exist simultaneously?

Let us see the problem from another angle—the Bible. The application of Peter’s opening statement to the household of Cornelius, “I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him” (Acts 10:34–35), proved to be for Peter—and for us today—both a blessing and a bane. Clearly, Peter meant that God’s impartiality applies equally to Jews and Gentiles. But when Peter went to Antioch, Paul had to oppose him to his face because the religious-social pressure from certain people prompted Peter to cease eating with the Gentiles: “He drew back and kept himself separate for fear of the circumcision faction” (Gal 2:12). Does that enormous gap between conviction and practice remain even today? “My brothers and sisters, do you with your acts of favoritism really believe in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ?” (Jas 2:1).

As you read this issue of *Leaven*, imagine that all of us (red, yellow, brown, black, and white—but especially, black and white) are gathered around a family table for a difficult family meeting. Why is it difficult? It’s difficult because even though we are God’s family, we are also a dysfunctional family in need of racial reconciliation.

Why is it so difficult? It’s difficult because we must hear the pain and anguish of loved ones—family members—whom we don’t know or understand. It’s difficult because it has been a long time since we’ve sat down together. It’s difficult because we’re going to hear things we don’t want to hear, feel things we don’t want to feel. Some of us will be thinking that one family member’s thoughts are irrational—off base—wrong! And yet, because we are committed to being God’s family, we listen. Not every white Christian who reads the following articles, especially those by blacks will find comfort in what he or she reads. But we must bear in mind that

we deliberately asked a number of black Christians to share with us their honest perspectives on the racial situation both today and in years past. They have written with their hearts, and we must hear with our hearts as well. It's difficult because the path to reconciliation is filled with suffering and conflict.

It's difficult because, even in the midst of God's grace, we must toil with sweat and tears as we labor in love to be one. But we gather, and sit, and listen to one another. We need to listen even when we're sure that we disagree, when we're sure that we are right—because we're a family that cares about God's people. Our God is not a God who discriminates and plays favorites. Our God is committed to reconciliation.

As we gather around the table, we learn that members of our family believe that racism, the systematic subordination of one race, is still alive and well in America. And we learn that members of our family believe that racism has taken on a life of its own, that is, has become an autonomous ideology not necessarily linked to other ideological streams in our society. At one time the ideological stream that sustains slavery was used to justify the oppression of African Americans, but today that oppression seems to require no justification. It simply exists.

Praise God, we hear that substantial progress has been made over time—most of us are well aware of the record of blatant segregation and discrimination prior to the mid-1960s. But we also hear that the progress has been uneven and that the day of racial justice has hardly dawned. We hear that some family members vigorously reject the contention that racial problems have been solved, that attitudes and practices entrenched in the culture have disappeared in so short a period of time, that African Americans now have an advantage because of affirmative action laws. We hear that racism remains a major problem in the world, in America, in our churches, and in our hearts; for the masses of African Americans, circumstances have not significantly improved. Racism affects us all!

Finally, we hear and learn that our family time is but one small necessary effort to be repeated again and again until all of God's children are functional—are one. But, thank God, this family has gathered to share the kinds of feelings, thoughts, and information that can give practical insight to the task of being faithful and effective in our common call to “the ministry of reconciliation” (2 Cor 5:16–21). One day, dear Father of us all, one day may our family by your grace and our will to believe and repent—one day, dear God, may our family because of faith, hope, and love—truly be your family, the family of the cross.

We have arranged the articles into six groups. The first group is foundational in the sense that the essays explore biblical, theological, ethical, and historical foundations. **IRA J. JOLIVET JR.** affirms that the cross of Christ has the capacity to break down barriers between human groups and that it “offers an effective treatment” for America's apparent schizophrenia over race. **ROBERT OLDHAM FIFE** challenges us to reconsider the theological reality that it is at the Lord's Table that “the social reformation of the church must be learned.” **STUART L. LOVE** explores the question, “Why is the social gospel essential?” by turning to the Exodus event in the Old Testament and the rule and reign of God in Christ as revealed in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. **DEWAYNE WINROW** proposes that moral equality must constantly measure social practice for the least advantaged.

Two of our articles are reports from the field. **ANDREW J. HAIRSTON** contends in a deeply personal response that Christians and churches of the Stone-Campbell tradition have not been on the “cutting edge” during the period from the sixties to the nineties. **JIM HOWARD** tells the story of the Holmes Road Church of Christ in Memphis, Tennessee, a congregational effort to be one in Christ.

Two of our articles are practical strategies centered on our families (**KENNETH R. GREENE**, "Racism: Its Impact on the African American Family") and on our communities (**JONATHAN J. HUTSON**, "Cross-Cultural Communication in the Culture of the Cross").

The voices of three women are heard. In each instance, the title echoes the message: **CHARLOTTE COYLE**, "Submitting to Equality: One Woman's Journey," **DAISY L. MACHADO**, "The Universality of God's Love Confronts Racism in the Church," and **YOLANDA ROBINSON**, "Looking Beyond: A View from the Edge of Higher Education (An African American Christian Female's Status Report)."

Our fifth group features special insights. **DAVID FLEER** explores aspects of the legacy of Martin Luther King Jr. **FREDERICK W. NORRIS** tells about how he experienced the racial issue afresh during a plane flight from Chicago to Portland.

Finally, **DON HAYMES** writes a bibliographic essay that surely will stand the test of time as a resource for all of us in the Stone-Campbell movement who seek understanding of our heritage.

Our hope is that this issue on race and reconciliation will foster personal growth, small group studies, and dialogue among churches. Our final prayer is that the God of peace will be with us. Amen.

D'ESTA LOVE

STUART LOVE

KENNETH R. GREENE

RICHARD HUGHES

P.S. We are happy to announce that Lynn Anderson, a noted evangelist, writer, and mentor to aspiring ministers among Churches of Christ, has consented to serve on the Advisory Board of *Leaven*.