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Racism

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Racism

Many of the articles in this issue explore, in different ways, the racism we encounter within ourselves and the death involved in coming to terms with it. Victoria Ekubia writes graphically, "No, we are not all the same . . . " That, it seems to me, is the very heart of the matter. We are not all the same. And how do we deal with the differences?

Susan Thistlethwaite, in her book, *Sex, Race and God*, reflects on the difficulty we have in sitting with that question. We want all the time to emphasise our sameness or connectedness, she says, or to look at the strides we have made in dealing with, or even moving beyond, racism; and she concludes: "There is no way for me . . . to be anything other than a 'recovering racist.'"[1]

As I was preparing the articles in this issue for publication two facts struck me very forcefully

- that this issue is full of questions; almost without exception the contributors prefer to raise questions than to answer them
- that the African province is seriously under represented; Agnes Solomon is the only contributor from Africa.

I liked the questions I found in article after article. I believe we need to take time to hear and to savour the questions before we rush in with answers. As Rainer Maria Rilke famously observed:

> *. . . before all beginning, I want to beg you, as much as I can, to be patient toward what is unsolved in your heart and to try to love the questions themselves . . . Live the questions now. Perhaps you will then gradually, without noticing it, live along some distant day into the answer.*[2]

About the absence of articles from Africa I can only say that I am deeply sorry that our best efforts could not secure more contributions. The lack of African articles seems to slant this whole Source, and to raise a number of questions, not least whether racism, like so many issues in human society, may not fundamentally be a problem of communication. Perhaps, in the spirit of Rilke, we need to reflect not only on what has been written in the following pages, but on what has not.

Judith Lancaster SHCJ

Catholic Teaching About Racism

Barbara Linen SHCJ

CATHOLIC social teaching has often been referred to as 'our best kept secret.' The church's modern social teaching is a body of standards which have been worked out over the course of the last century. The publication of Leo XIII's *Rerum Novarum* in 1891 marked the beginning of modern social teaching because, while the gospel itself is social teaching, many of its social tenets had been lost sight of. The conditions of peace and justice and love which characterize the reign of God preached by Jesus have everything to do with how we treat orphans and widows, people with AIDS and those who are homeless.

Reading *Rerum Novarum* is a good reminder of how far the sources for social teaching have changed. From 'natural law' philosophical concepts, paternalistic urgings of a 'mother' church, and ahistorical perspectives, to 'the joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the [people] of this age especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these too are the joys and hopes, the grief and anxieties of the following of Christ,' we have come a long way.

The teachings of our church on racism are strong and to the point:

> *Racism is an evil which endures in our society and in our church. We do not deny that changes have been made, that laws have been passed, that policies have been implemented . . . . But neither can it be denied that too often what has happened has been only a covering over, not a fundamental change.*

Today the sense of urgency has yielded to an apparent acceptance of the status quo. The American bishops wrote that statement at the beginning of *Brothers and Sisters to Us* in 1979. In spite of undeniable advances made by people of color in our country the status quo continues.

From my experience in Shreveport, Louisiana, I relate the following examples of grief and anxieties we shared in a committee established to try to deal with racism in our church in the diocese:

> *A young friend in Shreveport was a union committee member in the GM plant in town when I met him. He had moved to the South from*

The problem of racism is as deep as the mystery of sin and evil

the Midwest some 18 months before. John had two young children and lived with his wife in a neighborhood that was predominantly white. He was shocked to learn after a short stay that the children in his neighborhood were being forbidden to play with his little ones. He shared his story with our mixed group. We in turn shared our wonder about how such things continue to happen in our country.

Leo was a counselor for people with drug and alcohol problems. He is black, his wife is white. He had many stories from both sides of the race divide, stories of shock and dismay and wonder on the part of people who would get to know him — and then meet his wife. And vice versa.

Vincent, a young African priest and member of the St Paul Society, a mission-sending order of Nigerian priests, told me of the racism in rectories where he had lived in New Orleans. It seemed that Vincent had reason to be returning the treatment he received — in kind.

Is there no way of moving beyond the *status quo* which these stories reflect? Another church document, this one from the Pontifical Council on Justice and Peace in 1988, stated that 'racist ideologies and behavior are long-standing: they are rooted in the reality of sin from the very beginning of humanity, as we can see in the biblical accounts of Cain and Abel as well as in that of the tower of Babel.' The problem of racism, then, is as deep as the whole mystery of sin and evil from the beginning of humanity.

Anna Quindlen in a recent piece in the *New York Times* on the 'Politics of Meanness' offered her assessment of why bigotry exists among us. 'Otherness posits that there are large groups of people with whom you have nothing in common, not even a discernible shared humanity. Not only are these groups profoundly different from you, they are also, covertly, somehow less: less worthy, less moral, less good.' Again, it seems that racism goes very deep in our social fabric.

I sometimes feel that we in the church are in need of a major conversion, one that could provide us with a weapon for overcoming racism. (I choose the word 'weapon' pointedly because some violence needs to be fought and racism is violence). The conversion needed is to a new awareness of the common good; it is a social conversion.

Too often I hear the common good set in opposition to individual good, as if the choice were simple: I do what I want, or I do what the group wants. Again catholic social teaching is a source for new understanding of the deeper meaning of the 'common good'. Amata Miller, writing in the *Network Connection* (9/94), urges that we

> *lift up with new vigor and nuances the concept of the common good. In Vatican II's* Gaudium et Spes *the common good is defined as 'the sum of those conditions of social life which allow social groups and their individual members relatively thorough and ready access to their own fulfillment' (par.26).*

I still remember the 'vigor' and 'nuancing' of the concept which I learned from Fr Bob Reicher in the first course I had on social justice in the 60s at Loyola. Common good involves not just the social — that too easily becomes 'communist' with bad connotations; nor can it be reduced to the sum of individuals' goods with all the bad press which individualism suggests, especially in religious circles. The common good is the very complex matter of trying to work on the sum of conditions of social life which allow individuals and groups relatively thorough and ready accessibility to their own fulfillment.

Racism is an evil which endures in our society and in our church

Conversion as a change of mind and/or heart comes in a variety of ways. Religious conversion works a change of mind and heart in us through God's attraction to better ways. It happens sometimes as it did with Paul, in an instant; other times we realize over time that our ideas or hearts have changed on any number of subjects.

Moral conversion happens when a certain value or complex of values makes its appeal and we find we are able to endure all kinds of hardships for the sake of the value or values.

Finally, there is another conversion when we are ready to be in search and to continue to search for the good, letting any relevant questions challenge our own fixed ideas and attitudes.

Conversion to the common good as a social phenomenon could perhaps help to illumine the problem of racism. *Brothers and Sisters to Us* calls us to this. Consider the following quotations:

Every problem we have is worse because of racism

¶ 4: *We do not deny that the ugly external features of racism which marred our society have in part been eliminated. But neither can it be denied that too often what has happened has been only a covering over, not a fundamental change. Today the sense of urgency has yielded to an apparent acceptance of the* status quo. *The climate of crisis engendered by demonstrations, protests, and confrontation has given way to a mood of indifference; and other issues occupy our attention.*

¶ 5: *In response to this mood, we wish to call attention to the persistent presence of racism and in particular to the relationship between racial and economic justice. Racism and economic oppression are distinct but interrelated forces which dehumanize our society.*

¶ 6: *Major segments of the population are being pushed to the margins of society in our nation. As economic pressures tighten, often those people who are black, Hispanic, native American, and Asian — and always poor — slip further into the unending cycle of poverty, deprivation, ignorance, disease, and crime. Racial identity is for them an iron curtain barring the way to a decent life and livelihood.*

¶ 7: *Mindful of its duty to be the advocate for those who hunger and thirst for justice's sake, the church cannot remain silent about the racial injustices in society and in its own structures.*

¶ 20: *Racism has been part of the social fabric of America since its European colonization. . . Our history is littered with the debris of broken promises . . .*

¶ 22: *Under the guise of other motives it is manifest in the tendency to stereotype and marginalize whole segments of the population whose presence is perceived as a threat.*

The challenge that is offered in the teaching must be met with action. A few suggestions follow (with acknowledgment to John Carr, the U S Bishops' Secretary of Social Justice):

1 Theology needs action to be good theology. Social teaching comes out of social living. It is experiential. We need to practise what we preach.

2 We need to recognize, welcome and celebrate the diversity of the Body of Christ. That diversity must be reflected in our leadership and liturgy, in vocations and media, in every aspect of catholic life. How do we as SHCJ live this?

3 Political responsibility is a duty of catholic life. We need a 'constituency of conscience' which measures policies and proposals by their effects on human life, human dignity and human rights. Carr points out that every problem we work on from health care to the infant mortality rate in our cities, from housing and homelessness to capital punishment — every problem is worse because of racism. Attacks on racism will help us deal with the problems; attacks on the problems will help us deal with racism.

4 We need collaboration, we need to build bridges. Often we have variety in social action groups. We have groups for black catholics, one for hispanics, one for homeless people, etc. with a consequent division of energy. Some division of labor is necessary to focus, to empower. But there should be times when groups come to work together, to bring all our energies to bear on the problems we face. (See again #3 about every problem in our economy having something to do with racism).

Can we learn to be franker about the problems that are near at hand?

5 We need to 'think globally and act locally'. Carr has coined a principle which he calls further/franker: The further away the problem is, the franker we are about it. Apartheid was easy to denounce in South Africa. What about the presence of apartheid, we need to ask, in our parish, our church, our SHCJ provinces, communities, etc.? Can we learn to be franker about problems that are near at hand?

6 We need to see our efforts as rooted in faith. The National Catholic Conference for Interracial Justice has as its motto, 'Keep the Dream Alive'. The dream lives when we bring it to life. Jesus has gone before us, bringing God's imagination for our good to life in his life.

Jesus' prayer, 'that all may be one. . .' reveals part of God's imagination for us as humanity. In Jesus, Jew and Greek, slave and free, male and female are called to forget differences: 'All are one in Christ Jesus.' (Gal 3:28) Through our life in Christ Jesus we are called to share this imagination. Will we commit ourselves to any or all of the actions which church teaching suggests would bring about reconciliation of races, of humanity, of all God's people?

(Copies of *Brothers and Sisters to Us* are available from the Provincial Office at 460 Shadeland Avenue, Drexel Hill, PA 19026)

From Apartheid To Gelykheid

Eileen Sweeney SHCJ

(*Gelykheid* is the South African word for *Equality*)

Ten people
Wey de rule
ten thousand people
bicos dem
get plenti moni
an' diffren diffren colour
dat na apartai.
(*Mamman Jiya Vatse*)

These lines from the Nigerian soldier-poet encapsulate the main features of the racist system we have known as apartheid: a small minority (17%) ruling a large majority (83%) who had no say in their election and were themselves debarred from standing for election; that same ruling minority enriching themselves from the wealth of the country while the majority remained poor and downtrodden, and the reason for the whole godless system being the colour of a person's skin — a reason that dehumanises both oppressor and victim.

One of the features of apartheid which has always astounded me was the speed and efficiency with which the whole unjust system was set up and implemented. Speed and efficiency facilitated by the political situation and the legal system.

In politics, the National Party, which gained power in 1949, remained in government until the elections of April 1994 — 45 years of unbroken domination. Now, 45 years is a short span in a country's history, but in that brief time the beautiful face of South Africa was scarred, mutilated and nearly destroyed by increasingly brutal attacks upon her people.

Apartheid was a legal system, and the involvement of the country's security forces was the second element in the speedy and thorough

the reason for the whole godless system was the colour of a person's skin

implementation of unjust laws. Over the years, more and more power was given to the police and the military against the black people because, 'Apartheid is a violent system . . . a system that can only be maintained by ongoing violence, by wanton violence, one that would not survive for one single moment if there were no police force or there were no army.'[1] Over the years, the defence budget needed to keep the security forces going had to be increased to such an extent that it threatened to bankrupt the country.

Maybe we need to remind ourselves again of what apartheid involved. Two of its main pillars were the Population Registration Act which classified people by race, and the Group Areas Act which forced them to live in zoned areas. White people could live anywhere, in cities, towns, villages, in any part of the country. Black, coloured and Asian people, on the other hand, were forced to live in poor locations of miserable condition on the outskirts of a town or as far away from it as 5-10 km. In the countryside, if black people were living on good land, the land was taken away and the people removed, relocated, or, as Desmond Tutu put it, 'dumped in large inhospitable areas'.[2]

I have seen both kinds of location. The beautiful little town of Warmbaths in the North Transvaal has a population of only 6,000 white people. The township Bela-Bela outside it, houses 40,000 black people, and there are similar but smaller locations for the 200 Indians and the 500 Coloured people. The rural 'homeland', Botshabele, on the way between Maseru (Lesotho) and Bloemfontein (Orange Free State), is a desolate and degrading place, its degradation made worse by the siting there of a gambling casino for affluent South African whites.

In these desolate places where few jobs were available, people had to rise at 4 am to travel many miles to the nearest town where work was available, and they did not reach home again until 11 pm. It was planned that areas like the Transkei, the Ciskei, Venda and Bophuthatswana were to be developed into so-called independent statelets so that eventually there would be no such person as a Black South African because they would all have been removed to these Bantustans.

Then there was the question of the passes, the hated Dompass, and the Pass Laws, called by Alex La Guma 'the entangled chains of

infinite regulations' the rivets 'driven in with rubber stamps and the scratchy pens of the Native Commissioners. They were like branding irons which leave scars for life.'[3] Desmond Tutu characterised them as the most hated part of a hated system.[4] These restrictive and inhuman passes were the cause of a peaceful protest by the people of Sharpeville in 1960 — a demonstration which ended in horror when the police opened fire on the crowd and killed 69 of the demonstrators.

What actually were these hated and hateful passes? After a black African had been duly registered under the Population Registration Act, as soon as he reached the age of 16 and wanted to leave home to go looking for work, he had to get a first permit to leave the place where he was living; then a second to be in the place he had travelled to; and then a third to work for the person he was working for — and this one had to be signed and stamped every month. A fourth was needed for his wife, children and other relations to live with him; a fifth to leave one job and take up another — with the same process repeated for every new job, every change of location.

If a person failed to carry out any one of these regulations, he could be pounced upon, arrested, charged, convicted, jailed, maybe tortured — have, in words which La Guma puts into the mouth of a Native Commissioner,

> *all permits cancelled so that you cease to exist. You will be nothing, nobody, in fact you will be decreated. You will not be able to go anywhere on the face of the earth, no man will be able to give you work, nowhere will you be able to be recognised; you will not eat or drink; you will be as nothing, perhaps even less than nothing.*[5]

Pass Laws: the most hated part of a hated system

It was not until 1986 that the Pass Laws were repealed. One beautiful irony at the end of this terrible saga was that the hated Dompass became acceptable as an identity document enabling a person to vote in South Africa's first multi-racial elections, held in April 1994, elections which I had the great privilege of preparing for and attending as an international observer.

Even worse than any of these laws was the utter powerlessness, voicelessness, of the majority of South Africa's people against whom the unjust laws had been

the utter powerlessness, the voicelessness, of the majority of South Africa's people

enacted. Black African people had become disenfranchised: they had no say in how their country was governed or in what laws were passed. No black African could become a member of parliament or take part in either provincial or local administration — could not, therefore, make any official protest against the unjust regime under which he existed.

You can have a good idea of what black people must have felt when in 1960 whites only voted in a referendum to change the political status of South Africa from a commonwealth country to an independent republic. Again, 23 years later, only white people voted on whether coloured and Asian people should be franchised and allowed a limited share in the power of parliament. Even as late as 1993, only whites were consulted on whether the Negotiating Forum talks should be continued with the ANC and others in order to create a new constitution for a democratic South Africa.

But powerless and voiceless as the vast majority of these oppressed people were, they had, down through all the bitter years, their heroes and champions, notably Albert Luthuli, Oliver Tambo, Steve Biko, Nelson Mandela, Chris Hani and Walter Sisulu, to mention but a few. All of these set out to end apartheid by peaceful means — by delegations to the government, by public and private protests, by industrial strikes, by passive resistance and defiance campaigns, by repeated calls for the setting up of a National Convention with power to create a new constitution for South Africa.

Not only did these pleas and protests fall on deaf ears, but each time the government reacted with greater violence against the people. In 1956 it arrested and tried 156 people, among whom was Nelson Mandela himself. In 1961 Mandela and others regretfully concluded that as violence from the government was inevitable they had no choice but to set up an armed branch of the ANC, *Umkhonto We Aizwe* (The Spear of the Nation). Mandela reported at his Rivonia Trial that 'it was only when all else had failed, when all channels of peaceful protest had been barred to us, that the decision was made to embark on violent forms of political struggle and to form Umkhonto We Aizwe'. [6]

Of the four options open to them — sabotage, guerilla warfare, terrorism and civil war — the group chose the first, sabotage, 'as it did not involve loss of life, and it offered the best hope of future race relations.'[7] Umkhonto wanted to disrupt the economic life of the country, thus compelling the voters of the country to reconsider their position.

In the 1950s the aspirations of the oppressed people were embodied in two Freedom Charters, *The Women's Charter* in 1954 and in the following year *The Freedom Charter*, this latter endorsed by Black, Coloured, Indian and some white people.

The Women's Charter arose from a situation in which women had a double burden to bear. Not only did they suffer with their men 'the social evils and obstacles to progress' arising from apartheid, but in addition they had to endure 'the refusal of a large section of our menfolk to concede to us women the rights and privileges that they demand for themselves'. And they vowed, 'we shall teach the men that they cannot hope to liberate themselves from the evils of discrimination and prejudice as long as they fail to extend to women complete and unqualified equality in law and practice'.[8]

Principles of *The Freedom Charter* included, 'South Africa belongs to all who live in it, black and white . . . No government can justly claim authority unless it is based on the will of the people . . . All shall enjoy human rights.'[9] The immediate reaction of the government to this document was to arrest and bring to trial 156 of the people who had endorsed it, among them Nelson Mandela who at one stage spoke for the defence. The people were charged with high treason, but all were acquitted.

"it was our children who rose up and said no to apartheid, to racism and oppression"

The decades of the 60s, 70s and 80s saw increased activity both by the repressing government and the resisting people. In 1964 Mandela and many others were condemned to life imprisonment and incarceration on Robben Island. 1976 saw the uprising of the Soweto children, protesting against the new law that Afrikaans must be the language of their schooling.

Earlier Prime Minister Verwoerd had enunciated the policy that 'blacks should not be educated above certain levels', that 'education was to enable them to be good servants of the whites'.[10] The same man had stopped

school feeding for black children on the grounds that since this could not be provided for all children, then none must have it.

the clouds were lifting, a new day was dawning for South Africa

Alan Boesak comments on the Soweto Children's protest, 'After about a generation of passivity, it was our children who rose up and said no to apartheid, to continued exploitation, to inferior and unequal education: no to racism and oppression'.[11] Many of us saw in the film *Cry Freedom* how children and teenagers were gunned down by the security forces on 16 June 1976. Altogether 573 were killed and more than 1,000 were injured. Hundreds of school-children were taken into detention; 18 months later, some were still there, and some were never seen again by their families. And in the two years after this massacre, 42,000 people — 9,000 of them under 18 — were prosecuted for offenses like public violence and arson. A further effect of this uprising and the vicious retaliation by the police was a sharp decline in foreign investment in South Africa.

Other developments in these decades included the granting of self-government status to four of the nine regions set apart for black people as 'homelands' or Bantustans — Transkei (1976), Bophuthatswana (1977), Venda (1979) and Ciskei (1981). None of these was recognised internationally. Over the years they remained wretched and overpopulated until their dissolution in 1984 when the new South Africa emerged.

1979 saw the legalization of African Trade Unions. In 1993 a new constitution gave coloured and Asian people — but significantly not Africans — limited participation in central government. Naturally, black Africans strongly resisted their continued exclusion and in 1984-86 there was prolonged and widespread resistance to the regime in African townships. This led once again to violent government reactions and the proclamation of a state of emergency with mass detention and the imposition of censorship. Armed security forces could now enter townships in the night and journalists were forbidden to follow to see what they were up to.

But it was not all bad news. 1986 also saw the repeal of the hated Pass laws. And all the time the international community was growing in abhorrence of and resistance to the regime. Since the country was highly

dependent on international trade, sanctions began to bite and there were negative outflows of foreign investment. The value of the rand kept falling — when I was there in 1989 the exchange rate was £3.00 to the rand, but when I returned in 1994 it was £5.00. All this kept the government under pressure to change its policies in relation to its black population. And gradually they were forced to do just that.

The biggest step in the dismantling of apartheid, on the journey to gelykheid, was the release of Nelson Mandela on 11 February 1990 after 27 years of imprisonment. He emerged with his spirit and his courage undaunted, still determined to continue the struggle for the freedom of his people. That same year saw the lifting of the ban on the ANC, PAC, SACP and 33 other organisations. The government decided to open negotiations with black leaders with a view to drawing up a new constitution based on universal franchise.

After Mandela's release ANC refugees soon began to return from exile. By the end of the year social segregation had mostly disappeared with people of all races using beaches, swimming baths, trains, hospitals, hotels and restaurants. In the new South Africa I recalled the outrage Julian and I had felt one morning in 1988 when we were shopping in Ficksburg (OFS) with a Basotho sister and she was refused entry into a cafe where we had gone for a cup of coffee.

In February 1991 President De Klerk announced the repeal of all remaining apartheid laws, including the Group Areas Act and the Population Registration Act. The EC and the US abandoned most economic sanctions and South Africa was once again admitted by the International Olympic Committee to the world of international sport. The clouds were lifting, a new day was dawning for South Africa.

Talks began between the government and the black leaders once a Negotiating Forum had been set up. In 1992 the ANC and the government agreed on the release of political prisoners, the return of exiles and the abandonment by the ANC of its armed struggle. But the talks were continually being threatened by the rising tide of violence by the Inkhata Freedom Party under Mangusothu Buthelezi — a violence which the security forces were suspected of fomenting and abetting — a suspicion later confirmed by the Goldstone Inquiry, set up to investigate the matter. The situation had become so bad by 1992 that after the Boipotong massacre in that year, the ANC felt obliged to break off the talks.

In April 1993 the parties finally returned to the negotiating table, and by July the election date had been set for April 1994. Laws were enacted setting up the Transitional Executive Council (TEC), the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) — the body that gave us our official accreditation as international observers of the elections — and the Independent Media Commission which was to ensure that state media were fair to all parties. A new interim constitution was thrashed out. It incorporated a Bill of Rights which was to be considered sacrosanct and unchangeable even if the constitution itself was changed in the event of any one party getting more than a two-thirds majority in the forthcoming elections.

The first of these rights was that of Equality — Gelykheid: 'Every person shall have the right to equality before the law and to equal protection of the law.' [12] The new constitution was signed by the state president, Frederick De Klerk, and assented to on 25 January 1994. Three months later, the first multi racial elections were held, resulting in a resounding majority for the ANC whose leader, Nelson Mandela, then became the first black president of the Republic of South Africa. His commitment to tolerance, forgiveness, harmony in what he called a 'rainbow' unity of all the nation's peoples made his inauguration day, 10 May 1994, a day of festivity, joy, thankfulness to God, not just in South Africa but throughout the world — the day when apartheid finally died.

Apartai
no be
betta ting O!
An 'e go die-O!
Na quick-quick die
'e go die-O!
I no lie-O!

It was a day on which we remembered the many people who had struggled and died before they could reach the promised land of Gelykheid. I remember too a young man sitting on the steps of Union Buildings telling an Irish reporter that he hoped Ireland would soon follow South Africa's example and do away with their conflicts and divisions. I am happy that as I finish this article, the IRA has today, 30 August 1994, declared a complete cessation of violence. May we, too with God's inspiration and help be able to work for our own gelykheid, peace and harmony.

Notes

1 Used as #8 of the 1994 Constitution of the Republic of South Africa
2 Alan Boesak, If This Is Treason I Am Guilty, (London: Collins, 1987) p.104
3 Alex La Guma, In the Fog of the Season's End, (London: HEB, 1972) p.80
4 Desmond Tutu, Hope and Suffering (London: Collins, 1983) p.46
5 La Guma, p.82
6 Nelson Mandela, I Am Prepared To Die (London: IDAF) p.34
7 Mandela, p.34
8 Federation of South African Women, The Women's Charter, 1954
9 Congress of the People, The Freedom Charter, 1955
10 Tutu, p.90
11 Boesak, p.180
12 Act no.200, 1993 Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, #8

Acknowledging Our Racism

Veronica Grover SHCJ

Some Working Definitions:

'*Racism* is 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. Racism is the sin that says some human beings are inherently superior and others essentially inferior because of race . . . . Racism is a denial of the truth of the dignity of each individual revealed by the mystery of the Incarnation.'

Brothers and Sisters to Us (US Bishops' Pastoral Nov 1979)

Cultural Racism is an expectation that the standards of the dominant culture will be the norm, with the failure to recognize and appreciate differences of culture.

Institutional Racism is any policy or practice of an institution which benefits one race at the expense of another.

(Taken from *Reassignment Race,* a project of Church Women United)

> *Racism is an evil which endures in our society and our church. Despite apparent advances and even significant changes in the last decades, the reality of racism remains. In large part it is only the external appearances which have changed.*[1]

Thus do the American bishops challenge the church to accept the formidable task of working for racial justice. While it is true that there have been many advances by persons of color, evidence of racism abounds. All around us we see situations of injustice that are rooted in racism. Examples can be found in all parts of the world. Honesty demands that we acknowledge the fact of racism in our civil societies as well as in our church and, yes, even in the SHCJ.

Even as I write this, I want to deny it, to offer proof of inclusiveness and openness to all. Perhaps it is this human tendency to ignore the evidence that makes it so difficult for us to talk about racism and our struggles to overcome it. Few if any of us are comfortable speaking about racism. It is emotional and controversial. I have been in groups of SHCJ when we have tried to address this issue only to get bogged down by our own fears and discomfort.

Racism often flounders in a host of self-fulfilling prophecies, so that a vicious circle of racial stereotypes are 'proven' to be true and we need not feel guilty. Or we justify white racism with examples of minority racism. But humanity is one species. Its members share a common creation in God's image. Racism has roots in human passions, in pride, envy, and greed. It is found among all peoples and all races. The children learn in each generation from the example of the adults in their lives.

Recently our local newspaper, *The Charlotte Observer*, carried the story of an inner city neighborhood which had become so deteriorated and demoralized that those who lived there were condemned to a life without dignity and often without basic needs. The author of the article commented at the end of the story that the greatest tragedy was not the demise of family neighborhood, but rather the fact that many other citizens used its streets on the way to their homes or employment, but never saw what was happening. Such 'blindness' is the greater tragedy.[2]

It is so much easier to recognize and discuss the fascism 'out there'. We see it clearly in the apartheid system as it operated in South Africa until recently, or in the 'ethnic cleansing' of the Balkans. We don't always recognize it as clearly in the day to day happenings nearer to home.

Honesty demands that we acknowledge racism . . . even in the SHCJ

Here in United States, our history of slavery sometimes leaves the impression that racism has only affected the African American population. A closer look at history colors it brown, yellow, and red as well. Racial discrimination against African Americans, Native Americans, Hispanics, and Asians continues to this day in every walk of life. We are a part of that history. The forms racism takes today are not so blatant as in the days of slavery and this in some respect makes today's racism even more dangerous. Because it is less blatant, more subtle, it is easier to deny and ignore.

Racism is a global problem as the headlines of our daily papers indicate. Colonial practices all over the world have left a residue of racism, to be continued in later

history under the guise of imperialism or nationalism, the most noted example, the terrible holocaust of the Nazi era. Elie Wiesel writes of that awful moment:

Today racism is less blatant, more subtle, easier to deny

> *The God of love, of gentleness, of comfort, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob . . . vanished forever beneath the gaze of children in the smoke of a human holocaust exacted by race, the most voracious of all idols!* [3]

Today we continue to recognize and condemn racism in the actions of the Skinheads and the Klan and other neo-nazi groups. Can we also recognize it in the plight of the Haitian boat people, in the tribal rivalries in Africa, especially at this time in Ruwanda, and in the endless flow of refugees throughout the world? Can we see it in our inner cities and in our more affluent suburbs, and in the migrant worker camps? It can be found in small rural towns and in major metropolitan areas.

Do we understand the connection between racism and economic oppression, between racism and sexism? Today's paper carries an account of over one hundred million children under age fifteen, some as young as five, in slave-like labor conditions in various countries around the world — all non-white countries — producing the goods we purchase at such low prices in our stores.[4]

All of us are somehow accomplices in the sin of racism. To the degree that we become bystanders, we tacitly endorse the evil and so share in the guilt. We cannot remain silent about the racial injustice in our own countries or in the church and its structures or in our own communities. To do so is to deny our firm belief that all human beings are created equal in the image of God, brothers and sisters all!

Racism In Our Daily Lives

It is easy to recognize the obvious structures of racism around us. It is much harder to look inside and acknowledge our own prejudices and stereotypes. Yet if racial injustice is to be overcome it must be overcome in the heart and mind of each person. The pastoral letter, *The Challenge of Peace*, speaks of the need to 'disarm the human heart.' This seems to me an objective equally applicable in the struggle to overcome racism. Until we can disarm our hearts of our fears, prejudices, and misunderstandings, and put them out where we can see them for what they are, they will likely continue to influence and control our attitudes and behaviors.

Not long ago I was giving a workshop to catholic school teachers on the subject of teaching peace and justice. At the morning break, as the participants milled about, a young black teacher went to use the phone. When she had finished with her phone conversation, a nun, very much in habit, got up and wiped off the phone. I am quite sure that sister did not reflect on her action nor realize the racism it manifested. Likewise I believe we, at times, speak and act out of our own prejudices and experiences in ways that are unthinkingly racist.

Let us ask for the grace to look into our hearts and examine our own speech and behaviors. Only as we recognize our own brokenness can we help to heal the broken people of our world. We and the church at large must come to see how we participate in the continuation of the sin of racism, before we can help to change it. Vatican II called for the 'rooting out and eradication of every form of discrimination.' There is still a long road to walk to make this goal reality. Where do we stand in the journey?

Recently I was driving home from a class and saw a group of black youths gathered on the corner. Instinctively I checked to see that my doors were locked. Reflecting on this action, I had to admit I would not have reacted that way had the group of youths been white. Too often we let our fears dictate our behavior. Can we look at those fears and ask some questions of ourselves: Where do they come from? Are they based in reality, hearsay or myth? To what degree are my fears aggravated by one-sided media presentations? Or are they kept alive by ignorance of the facts?

All of us are somehow accomplices in the sin of racism

One day I stood with a sister watching the children being dismissed from school. The comment was made, 'They look so lovely even though they're black'! Do we listen to what we say?

When stories come over the news about acts of crime or violence in the community, do we ask, as I have heard asked, 'Was he black?' There are questions I need to ask myself repeatedly. I invite you to ask them of yourself also.

Disarm our hearts of our fears, prejudices and misunder-standings

1 In our lived experience what does it mean for me (for us) to believe that we are created equal in the image of God? Does this belief have any real effect on my (our) day to day living?

2 How do I (we) as sister(s) dedicated to helping others believe in the reality of the Incarnation, live that reality in my (our) relationships?

3 Am I free enough to reach out in friendship to persons of other races?

4 Do I have any first hand experience of relating to persons of other races? What has this been like for me?

— have I embraced the opportunity?

— have I welcomed the other as sister or brother?

— or have I let my fears and prejudices get in the way of a truly human relationship?

5 Do I appreciate other cultures and their contributions?

6 How do I feel about liturgical celebrations reflecting other cultures?

7 Do I try to educate myself about other cultures?

8 What are my prejudices? Can I name them?

9 How does my prejudice manifest itself . . .

— in my relationships?

— in my speech?

— in my concerns and actions?

10 Do I laugh at or at least keep silent in the presence of racial/ethnic slurs or jokes?

11 Do I teach others, especially children, that racism is a sin?

12 Have I allowed conformity to social pressures to replace compliance with social justice with regard to racism?

13 In whatever neighborhood I (we) live in, does our presence make a difference?

We, along with other women in the church, continue to make our voices heard in opposition to the sin of sexism. How can we expect to be credible in this stance if we do not at the same time stand against racism in the church and in society? Racism and sexism are both sins equally destructive of the Body of Christ. They mock the sacred dignity of persons revealed by the mystery of the Incarnation. Racism is not just a social issue, it is a moral issue. It is, like sexism, a sin that eats away at the very roots of our faith. The church and the world need the witness of each one and of the whole body, so that the truth that will make us free can be known. Sometimes that truth will also make us uncomfortable.

Elie Wiesel writes at the end of his book, *Night*: 'I pray to the God within me, that he will give me the strength to ask the right questions'[5] . . . I too pray for that strength.

Writing this article has caused me to look again at my own prejudices and to examine my own actions. It has also renewed my dismay and anger at the systems and structures that we are all part of and from which we benefit, too often at the expense of minorities. I realize that the gravest danger of racism is not hatred but indifference. I am reminded of the adage that all it takes for evil to triumph is for good people to do nothing. We live in a racist society and a racist world. We are members of a church that is often racist in practice though not in creed. We carry our own prejudices into the Society of the Holy Child Jesus. Like Elie Wiesel, I pray that we may all have the courage to ask the right questions.

Notes

1. Brothers and Sisters to Us: A Pastoral Letter on Racism, US Bishops' Conference, 1979
2. The Charlotte Observer, 10 October 1994
3. Elie Wiesel, Night (New York: Bantam Books, 1960)
4. The Charlotte Observer, 12 October 1994
5. Wiesel, op.cit.

Some Very Subjective Thoughts on Racism

Jean Newbold SHCJ

A FEW weeks ago, on my way from London to Bali, I had rather an extensive wait at Bangkok airport. I spent a lot of the time idly watching passengers of various nationalities arriving, departing, eating, drinking or just wandering around like me. What a wonderful mixture of races, I thought, and how interesting to see so many different faces — black, brown, white, oriental, western. You name it, it was there. Tired of walking about, I bought coffee and a sandwich (western food?) and sat for an hour or two watching aircraft arrive and depart. This was easy, as the airport has lounges with large viewing windows. Half asleep, I speculated rather vaguely on the complexities of a busy international airport. Planes of every description were there, big ones, small ones, jets, non-jets. Aircraft from many countries, each sporting its own distinctive colours and markings, landed, took off, were refuelled or serviced, guided backward into the runway or directed to the correct parking bay.

As this was Bangkok, the men driving the nifty little wagons loaded with Air France, Granda Indonesia or Cathay Pacific food containers, were Thai. What co-operation, I thought. Without the Thais, that Cambodia Airlines jet couldn't land, take off or even be cleaned. I wouldn't have landed safely in Thailand either, as I flew with Quantas. At the time, in my half stupor, I had the idea that these thoughts were rather profound. In retrospect they were remote preparation for this article.

I arrived in Bali in a fairly good humour. Being familiar with the airport and the rather slow Indonesian immigration procedures, I made it to the front of the passport queue in double quick time. To my chagrin, however, the man at the desk couldn't understand my visa and I had to go to one of those side rooms reserved for further investigation of suspect people! It turned out that the official on duty when I left the country was an 'orang baru' (a new man) and he had stamped my passport wrongly. No problem, said the more experienced men, and they disarmed me by smiling broadly and asking about the earthquake on Flores, just as my thoughts were beginning to go down a familiar road, i.e. 'What incompetence! Honestly . . . '

So, still in a fairly good humour, I managed to get out of the airport and into a taxi to a hotel. I had pre-arranged booking there and had gone to great lengths five weeks previously to explain my time of arrival, the day, the date, everything. Two young fellows were lounging in the front hall sleeping as there was a temporary blackout and so no T.V.. The one candle didn't give much light but I was able to point out my name clearly written in large black letters on a whiteboard, the top of the list in fact.

But of course there was no room available. They'd forgotten. It was raining. My thoughts were grim. Spurning help, I got myself a room in the place next door, not nearly as good, with a dim light and a leaking bathroom, and it was more expensive. I sat on the side of the bed at midnight and asked myself seriously why I had come back to Indonesia.

It's quite hard to answer that question. I love the Indonesians, but they drive me mad too. The VSO [Voluntary Service Overseas] Handbook talks about 'sharing skills and building capabilities,' 'valuing two-way partnership,' and 'valuing and respecting diversity of culture.' But these are big words and high ideals. It's the day to day attitudes that really count, the minute by minute thoughts and feelings, the small, ordinary experiences and above all, individual relationships with people.

Because I'm in Indonesia, Indonesia is what I'll talk about. Racism is a big topic anyway. I don't pretend to understand it. I can only talk about what I know.

it's the day to day attitudes that really count

I like to think I get on quite well with most Indonesians. In many ways, people are the same wherever you go. We all feel happiness, sadness, pain, grief, annoyance, pleasure, though ways of expressing these feelings may vary. I can relate to Indonesians on many levels. I understand, for instance, the anger and frustration my Indonesian counterpart feels because his wife was unfairly dismissed from her school. I understand the obvious pleasure the people next door have in each other's company, though I often wish they'd be quieter. I certainly understand the frustration and boredom many Indonesian students feel as they sit through lesson after lesson being talked at.

The things that make me happy would make me happy anywhere. I feel good when I'm invited out for meals, when people greet me in the street or when people

on the bus know me. I like it when I see an Indonesian teacher using more relevant methods confidently and I love the spontaneity of the students when they're enjoying a lesson.

things that annoy feed underlying racist attitudes

Similarly, the things that annoy would annoy me anywhere. It irritates when people promise to do something and then forget about it. I get annoyed when professional people act as if wearing a uniform is more important than doing the job well. I'm annoyed when teachers can't organize themselves enough to prepare things, or think they're busy when in my view they're merely filling in time. I'm somewhat put out when Education Department Officials get things wrong because they don't really listen to me.

It's probably the things that annoy, that feed underlying racist attitudes. What might be a reasonable criticism at home where, as one VSO friend put it, 'you understand what's going on,' becomes subtly overlaid with racist thoughts: Students don't remember much and make little progress because they are Indonesian rather than because, through no fault of their own, they have been inadequately taught. Teachers teach badly because they are lazy rather than because they have been poorly trained and have little experience. The reason for the loud pop music next door is that Indonesians love loud noise because then they don't have to think rather than merely being an individual's preference for music that I don't happen to like. The bus going round and round a town adding hours to a journey is inefficiency and thoughtlessness rather than friendliness, willingness to help and a very different concept of time. If one is not careful, different ways of thinking and acting can quite easily and almost imperceptibly be viewed and experienced in racist terms.

I don't really know how to define racism except to say that it is something to do with seeing oneself as superior to another or others because of differences of skin colour and/or cultural background. The first is easily dismissed. It is much more practical in a tropical country with strong sun all the year round to have dark skin and thick hair. The second is harder to come to terms with. We are all products of our own culture and we all need a nest to come out of and go back to. But our background marks

us, and I can honestly say that if I were to live in Indonesia for the rest of my life, I would never be at ease with nor understand certain ways of thinking and behaving.

The problem, it seems to me, is our tendency to put people down because of these differences in approach to life. Perhaps the first step towards becoming less racist — and I believe whether knowingly or not all of us are racist — is to be aware of one's thoughts and feelings no matter how fleeting of deeply buried. 'Let there be tolerance and understanding in the world, Lord, and let it begin with me.'

During my time in Indonesia a small number of my Indonesian friends, mainly priests, have gone abroad to study, to Ireland, England, Germany and Rome. I've often wondered if any of them have met up with racist attitudes and if so how they have coped. It's difficult to put myself in their position. As a white person, I stand out here in Bajawa like the proverbial sore thumb. I hate being stared at and I detest being called 'Missis' or 'Mister' (!) and being shouted at from across the street. But although I've frequently got annoyed, angry even, I've never questioned my identity. Deep down, I have an innate assurance of my own worth. I'm white, English in fact, and that's that. 'They' might not understand me but that's because their world is so small and they are so uneducated. What do they know of Oxford, London, concert halls and gin and tonics in elegant surroundings? So run my thoughts, often not really articulated, but there all the same.

we all need to be valued as persons in our own right

What it's like to be an Indonesian or Pakistani in east London is outside my experience. I think the nearest I have come to a sort of understanding is when I lived at Seminari Hokeng. For the most part I was happy there. I stayed four years after all and have been back twice since I left. But it was a very male world and there were times when I felt furiously angry and frustrated, humiliated and ignored. Groups of priests would come for meetings for instance, westerners included, and not even acknowledge me. I could sit through meals and it was as if I were invisible. I even used to say out loud sometimes 'I'm the invisible woman.' But nobody heard!

feelings of suspicion and fear and beliefs of superiority are deeply embedded in all of us

I can laugh now. But more seriously, these experiences, small as they were, gave me at least a faint glimpse of what it must be like to be at the receiving end of racist attitudes and bigotry. What makes people want to rebel and fight, I decided, is being ignored, humiliated or insulted. We all need to be valued as people in our own right.

I do value my Indonesian friends and acquaintances. I feel privileged to have worked here for so long. I agree wholeheartedly with VSO policies. Sharing skills and building capabilities is something I hope to achieve in however small a way. Valuing and respecting diversity of culture is a worthy and essential aspiration in our world. We ignore it at our peril and we certainly lose out if we do. The Indonesians might be different but they have a lot to give, not least here on Flores. Here spontaneity and friendliness abound, family values are cherished and there are no abandoned children or old people.

Not that the Floriese are perfect. They too are often prejudiced, bigoted and racist. Every group of students I've taught has laughed at pictures of people from Irian Jaya (West New Guinea) and this is one of their own provinces. They laugh because the pictures show black people with curly hair. Their ideal is to have creamy skin and glossy black hair.

Indonesia is a powder keg of ethnic rivalries and religious divisions which could easily explode if ignorant people are manipulated: Muslim against Christian, Javanese against others . . . I could go on. I'm tempted to introduce the idea of the rainbow ribbon worn by those who work for racial harmony on the Isle of Dogs. I hope with all my heart that Rwanda doesn't come to Indonesia.

The story of the Tower of Babel where nobody understood anyone else seems to me to be one of the most perceptive in the Bible. Feelings of suspicion and fear and beliefs of superiority on the grounds of race or country are deeply embedded in all of us. But, to go back to my picture of the international airport, working together, caring for the safety and well-being of all races, however big or small they are, or whatever colour, is what a truly religious view of life is about, as against a greedy, grasping, intolerant view. Being with VSO has at least given me an insight into this truth.

Lastly, and hoping not to end on too frivolous a note, I must add that Judith more or less twisted my arm to get me to even half agree to write this article. When I said I didn't really know what racism was, she told me that a 'gut reaction' would do. Having finally put pen to paper, I think my gut reaction is something like this:

- I am racist at least to some extent whether I know it or not.
- I can acknowledge and accept it, and become aware of the often small racist responses within me.
- I can try to meet people of other races and cultures in as open a way as possible in spite of these initial or barely articulated responses.
- For me, in my work here in Indonesia, that means working with people from their starting point and background, sharing skills and building up capabilities together.
- Above all, it means making friends. Quite a challenge!

Finally, on a rather chilly day in the middle of Bajawa's cold, dry season, my attempts to formulate and write down my gut reactions and responses to 'Racism' have at least succeeded in warming me up!

Racism from the Roots

Mary Lalor SHCJ

ALL of us would, I am sure, like to answer emphatically, 'Not I,' to the question, 'Are you racist?' because over the centuries the experience of racism in our world has been very distressing.

My biggest problem with the word and the actuality of racism is that I find it very difficult to distinguish between the following:

nationalism — a patriotic feeling with a policy of national independence, which many countries in today's world are seeking

racism — a tendency to feelings of antagonism towards different races, which also seems common today

prejudice — a preconceived bias about some other race.

Though it may sound contradictory, these words could, I presume, carry positive meanings — in favour of other races — but mostly they are used in a derogatory way with detrimental effects.

When I look at myself, an Irish woman, a catholic, a sister in a congregation founded by an American in England, I find that if I scratch the surface, tolerance is not always easy. Is this because I am racist or have such tendencies?

We must all go back to our roots if we wish to find out more about ourselves. Our roots, our peers, our particular social and educational background are what formed us.

My background is rural Ireland, and reflecting on my childhood I can only say that I was indeed fortunate in seeing the *meithal* — the local farming workforce — very much in evidence. Men, women, girls and boys from the neighbourhood met, worked and supported each other at sowing, harvesting, building projects, even feeding each other when necessary, and all on an equal footing. These people, in my midland area, were of different denominations. The only division came with schooling and church on Sundays. We accepted these differences and as far as I could see there was no animosity, nor was there any domination by one group of the other. We were different, but that was acceptable.

In later years, and even without knowing academically about ecumenism, on the death of a catholic, protestants called and offered help, and similarly with a protestant bereavement. As early as the 60s Mass cards were offered by protestant neighbours, and catholics started attending services for weddings and funerals of protestant neighbours. The neighbourliness was more powerful than the church divisions.

It might truly be said that we had no awareness of colour differences since there were no Indians or Africans in my rural area; the only people of other races that we knew were the Poles and Germans who came to live near us. 'Black babies' were supported, but that was a missionary endeavour to spread the gospel. How it was done we didn't question.

During my college days there were still very few people of different races in Dublin, and as UCD remained quite separate from Trinity or the College of Surgeons we had few occasions for meeting people from different countries.

But I believe that racism is not necessarily colour based. It springs from a different source — from a feeling of being less acceptable, the under-dog. And in Ireland there was quite definitely an urban/rural divide. The transport system then was not so efficient and the 'ruralites' had no choice but to stay in Dublin, so they possibly felt more at home in the city than the students of Maeve Binchy's *Lilac Bus* when they fled the city at week-ends. Language, however, is very revealing: *culchies* versus *jackeens* (country versus city) has long been a slogan in Ireland.

scratch the surface, and I admit tolerance is not always easy

Possibly my first experience of real differences came when I was a novice at Mayfield. Perhaps racism would be too strong a word, but certainly some form of superiority/inferiority/prejudice was in evidence. While there was a genuine love and care for people, the Irish-English struggle made itself palpably felt — perhaps because the nature of the training placed us (no longer immature youths) in a learning situation. At that time there were other similar struggles around: north of England versus south; Holy Child educated versus other-educated . . . . Some would have been unconscious of the

feelings but others were very aware of them. However, it was not possible to address them constructively since they were unspoken, nor was it considered necessary to do so. Was this a form of racism in embryo?

we cannot get away from our history but we can free ourselves of our pre-conceptions

Reflecting now, years later, on all this, helps me to see more positively the interminable division between the north of Ireland and the south, where generations of bitterness are still unaddressed. Caricatures of the home-spun, non-intellectual, drunken, fighting Irish, which were originally penned in magazines such as *Punch*, are still alive and well. No one on either side of the Irish sea questioned these caricatures when they appeared.

Our roots condition us, and ideas like these — notions which perpetuate racism — were rampant in previous generations of English people. Since we are peoples of these islands we cannot get away from our history, but we can move from our pre-conceptions, admitting that they might be stereotyped or over simplified or untrue.

This was brought home to me in my recent short stay in Indonesia where, at the start of my visit, I found myself somewhat fearful, unable to understand the language and so feeling inadequate and threatened. When I realised that 'they were not out to get me' I was able to relax and enjoy the people and situations in which I found myself. The gospel message proved true again, 'Love your neighbour as yourself.'

So am I a racist? Yes, deep down I believe there are tendencies in me to react negatively to some people who are different from me — and not just in colour. But being aware of this and accepting it is already a help:

- acknowledging it gives me courage to face it;
- facing it gives me courage to deal with it;
- dealing with it enables me to see how unjust it is,
- and so leads me, as in Indonesia, to be more tolerant, and to try to act more justly,
  love more tenderly,
  walk more humbly with our God.

Plus Raciste Que Moi, Tu Meurs

Margeurite Bouteloup SHCJ

RACISM in the Society? No — not really. Certainly not at the beginning when uniformity enveloped everything, when to be different, to be singular, was equated with mortal sin . . . . By our heritage we were encouraged (or commanded?) to 'be yourself' the specific SHCJ culture prevented us from being just that.

It was during my term as a superior that I came to realise fully that besides being an SHCJ I was really at heart a French woman. Despite its title, 'the European Province' has remained very English. Even today some — when speaking directly to me — speak of 'the English Province.'

In the noviceship I was not aware of racism — because of uniformity, and because of my decision to join a congregation which had always been presented as 'English', not as international. Young and new, I tended to accept. Yet I minded letters being opened by a novice-mistress incapable of realising they contained sad news (reading a language is never the same as speaking it) and confessing she did not understand; I regret 'wasting' two years in the scholasticate when everyone else was studying (I had to 'battle' to be allowed to take the certificate of proficiency in the use of the English language).

racism is practised in subtle ways, more by what is not done than by what is

Later on, over and above the natural cultural differences — in Ireland or in England — I came to regret the absence of reference to specific French systems/organisations (some of them concerning not just the French sisters), feasts, holidays, not to mention the different hour which very few have taken on board, all publications in English, on maps and charts an arrow for the continent (France, Germany, Italy); all this did hurt, does hurt, despite some improvement.

But if one aspect of racism is to ignore the minority — and we French were and are the minority — this is, to me, superbly illustrated by a pretty constant refusal/reluctance to learn our language and above all to speak it, whilst we are all the time — even in our own country — obliged to express ourselves/write reports in English (and translate during official interviews with heads of school, the bishop etc . . .)

Yes, in subtle ways, and rather by what was not done than by what was, I did feel a sort of racism being practised. However I realise that I am so proud of being a French woman that I am guilty of being racist too: *'plus raciste que moi, tu meurs.'*

From Kulcher to Calcha and Back Again

Helen Forshaw SHCJ

THE great trunk of the tree of fear of otherness throws out some odd little shoots as well as the more substantial branches. The odd shoots are worth a little consideration occasionally, for they offer examples of the human tendency to regard our own culture as the gold standard by which to measure others, examples which are not so deeply hurtful and unjust as the more serious manifestations of this fear. For that reason we can look at them with some objectivity and even some healthy humour, and use the experience to realise how easily we can slip into the exclusive mode in relationships with others.

The odd shoot that many of us experienced some forty and more years ago in the European province was the deliberate effort made by those responsible for formation to replace regional accents by a uniform received pronunciation of English. I do not know what particular accent was originally taken as the basis for this acceptable way of pronouncing our mother tongue; to my northern ears it sounded very 'posh,' with its strangled vowels and its bewildering reversal of the open and closed 'u' sounds that I had grown up with in my native Lancashire. The title of this reflection sums it up.

But let me begin at the beginning of the experience of this mild culture shock. Of the twelve of us who entered in September 1954, five were from Lancashire, with between us a variety of local accents. Fairly soon we were being given lessons in correct pronunciation which didn't particularly upset me, but which I found rather strange. Though willing enough to conform at this stage, I did jib at calling good old ducks, which we had kept for a few years in our back garden at home, *dacks* — or something near to that! It made them sound so namby-pamby, which anyone who has kept ducks knows they definitely are not.

In fact the words with 'u' in them were a minefield for me throughout the noviceship. Before reading in the refectory I would go through the passage so carefully, locating the 'u's and trying to work out which was the correct pronunciation for Mayfield. Once *op* in the *polpit* it was quite a strain to remember which was which — especially as in my part of Lancashire we pronounced *but* in the way we were expected at

Mayfield to pronounce *bull*, and *bull* as they pronounced *but*! Confusing? It certainly was. And it made me wonder who had decided in the past that one form was 'correct' or 'good' English, and the other was, well, what? 'Incorrect'? 'Bad'? 'Uneducated'? The words imply that a judgement had been made on one's native culture and it had been found inferior, and that one's speech would have to be 'improved' if one was to be a proper, well-groomed Holy Child nun . . . sorry, *non*.

my native culture had been judged inferior

The reason given, as I recall, for this imposition of a different way of speaking was that we had to be intelligible when teaching in the South. Now the South of England has a great variety of local accents, so what was actually meant was when teaching at Mayfield, St Leonards or Combe Bank. Here they spoke with a pronunciation which was not regional, but which belonged to a particular class in society, what might be called the old governing class.

A regional accent, then, betrayed not only where you came from but also to which class in society you belonged. So the underlying message was that to communicate intelligibly with the upper classes you had to sound as if you belonged there yourself, as if you were 'one of us.' Otherwise you would not be understood, or, more probably, you would not be taken seriously. This of course had been the thinking at the BBC in its early years, but that was already changing by the 1950s.

The oddity of the Society's stance, the lingering snobbishness, struck me quite forcibly when I went to Bedford College, London University, in 1958. Shortly before this I had spent a few months in Paris where dear old M M Joseph Casella used to take me for walks in the Bois de Boulogne. She would weave into our conversation words which she thought I had pronounced incorrectly, so that I would hear them correctly pronounced and take the hint. On one occasion when I demurred, she told me that she wanted to make sure that I wouldn't be laughed at by the other students when I went to college. I took great delight in the fact that on the first morning the first two lecturers had broad regional accents, one Midlands and other Yorkshire! And no one but me (for my special reason) was laughing . . . .

So now I ask myself, after this reflection: Helen, who have you excluded today in thought, word, or deed, and for what laughable reason?

Bendición

Carmen Socorro Torres SHCJ

Bendición
Dios te bendiga
Bendición
Dios te bendiga
Hija
Hijo
sobrina
sobrino
nieta
nieto
niño
niña
Dios te bendiga
Bendición
Dios te bendiga
llena de gozo
llena de ánimo
llena de ezperanza
Dios te bendiga
Bendición
Dios te bendiga
simple
rica
con Dios
con nosotras
Bendición
Dios te bendiga
Amén

our cultural heritage is a blessing

IN THE Puerto Rican culture we have a tradition of blessing the child. The child could be five, thirty-three, fifty-eight years of age; age is not a factor. The blessing involves two parties, the one who requests the blessing and the one who gives the blessing. The child is to request the blessing upon waking up in the morning, going to bed at night, upon leaving the house (going to school for example), upon returning home, and when one calls home. It is the responsibility of the parent, aunt, uncle, or grandparent to give the blessing whether the child requests it or not.

It is a beautiful tradition and one which I have come to appreciate more and more as I have grown older. But why share this tradition to begin this reflection on 'racism'? Probably because it begins to respond to some of the questions that I often find myself pondering on these issues of prejudice, discrimination, and racism. As a Hispanic woman in our 'little Society', I wonder about my own biases and prejudices:

- What are my expectations of this SHCJ community?
- Do I tend to want to impose my cultural heritage upon others?
- Do I tend to hide this significant part of myself?
- Am I willing to accept/honor/respect the cultural heritage of others?
- How open am I to the telling of my cultural heritage?
- How open am I to learning new ways?
- How do I experience others in what may be considered my ways?

racism and discrimination begin when we fail to hear the blessing

These are challenging questions for me and I invite all of us to probe them sometime. These are questions that we can respond to only for ourselves, and thus for the good of all.

In my wonderings I have come to this symbol of blessing. Augsburger in his book, *Pastoral Counseling Across Cultures*, comments that 'to become culturally effective is a gift, a gift received through learning from other cultures, through being teachable in encounters with those who differ, and through coming to esteem other world views equally with one's own.'[1]

I truly believe that our cultural heritage, whatever it may be for each of us, is a blessing — a gift. Racism and discrimination begin when we knowingly or many times unknowingly fail to hear the blessing, when our eyes, our ears and our hearts are turned to other than the potential gift of difference. Be it language, food, music, or a particular way of doing the dishes, there is a blessing being asked, being given, and being received. Yet, like the Puertorican tradition of blessing, the child's forgetfulness to ask for it does not excuse the adult's responsibility to give it, nor the child's response to accept it when it is given.

I challenge us to look closely at how we receive each other

It would be wrong to say that I have yet to experience racial prejudice in the Society, for this is not so. It would be equally erroneous to say that I have not felt welcomed as a Latino woman in the Society, because this is not so as well. The joys and pains of being who I am as a Latino woman, as a person, contribute to who I desire to become for others. Yet, I am challenged and I challenge us to look closely at how we receive each other:

- What are the feelings that emerge upon hearing a language other than our own?
- What feelings emerge upon the invitation to smell and taste a new food?
- What feelings emerge upon listening to and being with a person of color?
- What blessing am I saying 'no' to? What blessing am I saying 'yes' to?

Blessing — God bless us . . . full of joy, full of courage, full of hope.

Blessing
God bless you
Blessing
God bless you
daughter
son
niece
nephew
granddaughter
grandson
child
God bless you
Blessing
God bless you
full of joy
full of courage
full of hope
God bless you
Blessing
God bless you
simple
rich
with God
with us
Blessing
God bless you
Amen

Notes

1 David W Augsburger, Pastoral Counseling Across Cultures (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1986) Introduction, p.18

Bridging the gap

Agnes Solomon SHCJ

WHEN I was asked to write an article on racism I hesitated, and then I said, 'You'll get what you get!' What you are going to read is *my own* opinion, my experience, which includes, of course, what people have shared with me.

Racism has always existed in different parts of the world and in different forms. The caste system and tribalism, are they not racism by other names? Racism has to do with looking at another's culture, race, tradition or group as *inferior* to my own. This could include regarding another person as not capable enough according to my standard. Do we sometimes find ourselves doing that or feeling that way?

In South Africa racism may be glaring and condemned by the world; but what about the Osu system in Nigeria and 'man-know-man'? Why do some of us feel uneasy or not accepted in some communities? What about taking for granted that because she is from that place she will do a poor job? What of choosing one type of food or another? (This does not include reasons due to health.)

the caste system and tribalism, are they not racism by other names?

I once saw a poster: 'All the colours of Benetton'; underneath it was a group of children encircling a child of a different colour. Why are there no 'black American' SHCJ? Sometimes we even believe that goods from certain parts of the world are better than those from other parts. I often hear 'This is useless . . . ; These people can't reason . . . ; That will not succeed . . . ' because the one referred to has been labelled inferior.

Is it true that 'each member enriches the Society with her gifts,'[1] and that 'our mission is enriched by a diversity of persons and cultures'?[2] How often and sincerely, do I allow myself to be enriched by others? Do I enrich the community with my gifts and culture? Does the nature of our foundation mean anything to me? Do those of us who are missionaries try to enter as much as we can into

others' culture? Not look down on it? (This includes those working in their own country but away from home.)

What is the meaning of Cornelia's claim, 'The whole world is my country and heaven is my home'?[3] Does it include people or only places? Do I see/experience racism in any form? Do I perpetuate it? Can I at least reduce it? 'Let us love one another and pray.'[4] Who is the 'one another'? God, help us bridge the gap.

the opposite of racism is bridging the gap

I feel, when all is said and done (and I haven't said enough) that the opposite of racism is bridging the gap. In our Society I have experienced sisters who are real advocates for Christ and I thank God. We can never do too much good; so I pray in the spirit of this season that each one will look around her and react to racism according to the light of the gospel. We need conversion, we need reconciliation. Why not start now?

Notes

1. Constitutions 49:1
2. Constitutions 7:5
3. D73:253
4. D65:94

In Hiding

Victoria Ekubia

WHEN I was first asked to write this article, my initial feelings were of apprehension. Then I asked myself, why? Perhaps this was the usual feeling of anyone being asked to do such a task. However, I asked myself why I should be afraid to share some of my experiences. I am not saying that as a black young woman of thirty I speak for all, but that I, as an individual, count. After all, I am part of the community.

I remember that as a child and then as a young person, I was afraid to be seen. I was quite happy to sit quietly during church services and not question why, on many occasions, I was the only black face in the congregation. I would sit there trying to make myself a part of what was being taught even though what was being taught was not part of my experience.

Nowadays I just get angry. I get angry when I feel that I am being hidden away and excluded. I get angry when I listen to those who, when they speak or act, do not consider what real life is like for me and others like me. There have been times when I wanted to shout out, 'No, we are not all the same and do not all have the same background or speak the same language.'

As a child I was afraid to be seen. Now I just get angry.

It wasn't until my mid twenties that I started my fight to be seen. This did not come easily. The parish community I was a part of believed in individuals making up the whole body of Christ no matter who you were or what you had done. It is those people to whom I owe many thanks. We all shared our experiences and our ideas to create a place which was open to and for all. We would all be encouraged to talk, act or sing of our many experiences which would then enrich our liturgies.

At times I would find myself re-telling a story I had heard from my mother about her life, and how I saw it linking to mine. It may very well be an Afrocentric way of

viewing life but to me this has much meaning. It is part of my history which can be shared with others. As I grew up in my family, we were surrounded by stories and 'sayings' from the past. I think that these are things that we are all inter-related to.

Having completed a case study about some of the experiences of a small group of young black women, I wonder how far the church has actually progressed in its treatment of those who are black. My question to some of those in the church is, 'Why do you not want to see us and what is it that you are afraid of?' 'On completing the discussions of personal experiences of being in the catholic church, sharing the pain and the joy with those black young women and their families, I was proud to be black and to be part of the struggle to be seen. They gave me a sense of hope.

No, we are not all the same . . .

An image which stays with me constantly and empowers me is found in Isaiah 6; 'Here I am Lord.'

An Experience Beyond Western Liberalism

Susan Rattenbury

In January 1994 I left Manchester to live and work in Ajegunle for three months. Manchester is a large industrial city in the north of England, the home of 'dark satanic mills', which grew and prospered on the proceeds of the cotton trade and the Empire. During my eight years living in the city I had worked first with unemployed people and then as a nurse. I had lived in areas which had received the many waves of people coming to Britain for political or economic reasons — Jews, Irish, Poles, Afro-Caribbeans, Pakistanis and Indians, and most recently refugees from Somalia. As a white English woman I have always been part of the majority population with people from these groups as 'clients', rarely colleagues.

I went to Lagos, I hope, fairly open to what might happen and ready to be challenged. I wanted the experience of living and working with people whose whole life experience would be different from my own. During my brief stay I learned a lot about my own personal limitations and the limitations of the understanding of others which I had unwittingly absorbed.

First impressions remain. I arrived, tired after an overnight flight from Paris, hit by the oppressive humidity, and suddenly realised I was in Africa. Everyone looked different. I was in someone else's continent and country and I felt unnerved.

Over the three months I was in Nigeria I absorbed many new experiences. I found I could assume nothing. Everything I held to be 'normal' and 'reasonable' was challenged. In many ways I felt threatened. The little assumptions and securities which sustained me were questioned and challenged, from the dramatic (an armed robbery in the market) to the everyday ('do I wear my headscarf in church?') This latter question became a sign of my changing attitudes and adaptation. On arrival I was anxious not to offend so I wore my headscarf in church and sat with the women. This increasingly offended my dislike of enforced difference between the sexes so I decided to sit with the men (and a few less compliant women). I then ventured to leave off the headscarf, except

for communion (bishop's orders!) — only to be reprimanded by an officious parishioner.

I was challenged beyond the limits of my upbringing and experience

Working as a nurse in the clinic I found the crowding and lack of privacy difficult. The desire for drugs and injections to cure everything was anathema to the care I had been trained to provide and taught to consider better.

Becoming ill myself then taught me a lot about Africa. No one could have taught me the feelings of repeated listlessness and lethargy in the oppressive heat and humidity with only intermittent electricity to drive the overhead fans.

Living in Ajegunle certainly opened me to accepting other ways of living beyond a western liberal tolerance of difference; it opened me to a deeper understanding and awareness of difference as a means of finding God. I was challenged beyond the limits of my upbringing and experience and came to accept that there were things I just could not understand.

For me this has been a source of liberation from confining definitions of 'what ought to be'. I was brought up to believe that 'our' way of life was some kind of 'norm' by which to judge the degree of peculiarity and deviancy of other 'cultures'. I now realise there is no 'norm'; everything is open to interpretation and to a different understanding; and from listening to the other I can grow myself.

My experience has helped me to recognise and acknowledge my own racism, to see myself as the product of my particular culture. Being able to see these limitations has enabled me to feel less threatened by difference and to learn to trust the experience of others. There were times when I found it very difficult to find God in my daily experience. God was completely incomprehensible — but it is precisely that inability to 'pin God down' into a God of my own likeness which is so life enriching and life enhancing.

My Racism – A Personal Experience

Anne Stewart SHCJ

DURING the year 1992-3 I attended a part-time foundation course in Psychoanalytic Group Therapy, which involved, among other things, taking part in an experiential group every Monday afternoon. Not counting the supervising psychotherapist, there were nine of us in the group, seven women and two men, all of different nationalities and from a variety of backgrounds. Among our number were a psychiatrist, social workers, counsellors, and other people working in the caring professions. There were two black women and seven white people. The purpose of the group was to help us integrate lecture material with the actual experience of becoming a member of a group, through recognition and understanding of the group process in the here and now.

Early on in the year the two black women expressed concern about the policy of the course organisers towards black people. As they were the only black people on the course they had been unhappy about being placed in separate groups and had asked to be in a group together. The women brought this anxiety and anger to the group and I felt increasingly that as a group we were refusing to look at the issues raised.

no-one seemed willing to enter into any real dialogue or discussion

Nobody seemed willing to enter into any real dialogue or discussion about their expressed needs as black people in the group. I seemed to get no response from my white colleagues whenever I tried to ask people to talk about it. People talked about their own experiences of discrimination on the grounds of gender or sexual orientation, but I felt increasingly uncomfortable that the issue of what it means to be black or white was being avoided.

As months went by I felt more and more angry, not just with the group but with the black women themselves. At least I had been willing to own my own struggles as a white person with the issue of racism and I had stated my

willingness to face into whatever work needed to be done. Time and again I tried to raise the issues and found myself stranded and alone. Not only did the group not respond, but my black colleagues did not seem to support me either. They continued to challenge and to ask questions; but when I asked for help in looking for ways forward they refused to give me any solutions or ideas. As I look back now I recall thinking that I was on their side. I don't think I was honest enough to say how angry I had become with them or the group.

. . . the frightening realisation of my own racism

On one particular afternoon, one of the black women was absent. The black woman who was present had by this stage fallen silent and often did not speak at all during the one and a quarter hour meeting. As this session progressed, I felt her silence weighing very heavily on me and on the group. After some time I addressed her directly across the room and asked her if she felt we could talk about the black and white issue, as I felt things were simmering beneath the surface, in myself and in the group. Her response to me was scathing and devastating, and in a flash I was confronted by the frightening realisation of my own racism.

She quite simply refused to take on the issue and she asked how I could dare to put her in that position, in the absence of her black colleague. What she demonstrated to me was the fact that I had asked to look at the issue when she was alone, one black person in an otherwise totally white group. What I remember most was feeling that she offered me nothing to alleviate my pain and discomfort. I at least expected her to acknowledge that I had meant well. At this point I broke down in tears and some of the group came angrily to my defence, a situation which only added to my fear of what was happening.

In that moment I saw my own racism so clearly, as quite simply a frightening abuse of power, more frightening because I thought I was actually doing something useful and constructive. What my black colleague showed me was how I had asked her to talk about being black in a context where she was totally alone and vulnerable in an all white group and how time and time again white people expect black people to take on and carry responsibility for a situation, which they alone are responsible for both creating and maintaining.

It is a symptom of how disempowered black people can be, that my use of power came so easily and naturally, so unconsciously. I take my position for granted. All our systems, structures and organisations reinforce our comfort and security as white people and continue in many ways the oppression of black people. It seemed to me later that I had in fact been angry with the black women and, in putting one of them on the spot, I acted quite aggressively, even if I had not consciously intended to act in that way.

The black women in our group had simply refused all year to take upon themselves responsibility for dealing with the racism issue in a predominantly white group. It is we as white people who have to deal with the racism. It is quite simply our problem. I learned that I must not expect my black friends and colleagues to alleviate the pain and the burden of my racism.

racism . . . an abuse of power

Understanding Privilege

Peggy McIntosh

THROUGH work to bring materials and perspectives from Women's Studies into the rest of the curriculum, I have often noticed men's unwillingness to grant that they are over-privileged in the curriculum even though they may grant that women are disadvantaged. The denials, almost amounting to taboos, surrounding this subject — the existence of advantages which men gain from women's disadvantages — protect male privilege from being seen, acknowledged, lessened, or ended.

Thinking through male privilege as a phenomenon with a life of its own, I realized that since hierarchies in our society are interlocking, there was most likely a phenomenon of white privilege which was similarly denied and protected, but alive and real in its effects. As a white person, I realized I had been taught about racism, which puts others at a disadvantage, but had never been taught to see its other side, white privilege, which puts me at an advantage.

I think whites are carefully taught not to recognize white privilege, as males are taught not to recognize male privilege. So I began in an untutored way to ask what it is like to have white privilege. I have come to see it as an invisible package of unearned assets which I can count on cashing in on each day, but about which I was "meant" to remain oblivious. In fact, white privilege is like an invisible, weightless knapsack of special provisions, assurances, tools, maps, guides, codebooks, passports, visas, clothes, compass, emergency gear and blank checks.

Since I have had trouble facing white privilege, and describing its effects on my life, I saw parallels here with men's reluctance to acknowledge male privilege. Only rarely will a man go beyond acknowledging that women have disadvantages, to acknowledging that men have unearned advantages, or that unearned privilege has not been good for men's development as human beings, or for society's development, or that privilege systems might even be challenged or changed.

Writing this paper has been difficult, despite warm receptions for the talks on which it is based, for describing white privilege makes one

newly accountable. As we in Women's Studies work reveal male privilege and ask men to give up some of their power, so one who writes about having white privilege must ask, "Having seen it, what will we do to lessen it . . . ?"

My schooling gave me no training in seeing myself as an oppressor, as an over-rewarded person, or as a participant in a damaged culture. I was taught to see myself as an individual whose moral state depended on her individual moral will. At school, we probably would not have been taught that the institution of slavery demanded slaveholders. Slaves would have been seen as the only group at risk of being dehumanized. My schooling followed the pattern which Elizabeth Minnich has pointed out: Whites are neutral, normative, and average, and also ideal, so that when we work to benefit others, this is seen as work which will allow "them" to be more like "us". I think many (women) know how obnoxious this attitude can be in men.

After frustration with men who would not face male privilege, I decided to work on myself at least by identifying some of the daily effects of white privilege in my life. . . . I will give here a list of special circumstances and conditions I experience in my particular existence, which I did not earn but which I have been made to feel are mine by birth and by virtue of being a conscientious law-abiding "normal" person of good will. I have chosen those conditions which I think in my case attach somewhat more to color privilege than to class or ethnic status and geographical location, though of course all these other factors are intricately intertwined. As far as I can see, my African American co-workers, friends, and acquaintances with whom I come into daily or frequent contact in this particular time, place, and line of work cannot count on most of these conditions.

1. I can arrange to be in the company of people of my race most of the time.
2. I can avoid spending time with people whom I was trained to mistrust and who have learned to mistrust my kind or me.
3. If I should need to move, I can be pretty sure of renting or purchasing a dwelling in an area which I can afford and in which I would want to live.
4. I can be pretty sure that my neighbors in such a location will be neutral or pleasant to me.

5. I can go shopping alone most of the time, pretty well assured that I will not be followed or harassed.
6. I can turn on the television or open the front page of the paper and see people of my race widely represented.
7. When I am told about our national heritage or about "civilization", I am shown that people of my color made it what it is.
8. I can be sure that my children will be given curricular materials that testify to the existence of their race.
9. If I want to, I can be pretty sure of finding a publisher for this piece on white privilege.
10. I can be pretty sure of having my voice heard in a group in which I am the only member of my race.
11. I can choose whether or not to hear another woman's voice in a group in which she is the only member of her race.
12. I can go into a music shop and count on finding the music of my race represented, into a supermarket and find the food I grew up with, into a hairdresser's and find someone who can deal with my hair.
13. Whether I use checks, credit cards, or cash I can count on my skin color not to work against the appearance of financial responsibility.
14. I can arrange to protect my children most of the time from people who might not like them.
15. I do not have to educate my children to be aware of systemic racism for their own protection.
16. I can be pretty sure my children will be well liked by their teachers, if they are obedient children; my chief worries about them do not concern societal attitudes towards their race.
17. I can talk with my mouth full and not have people put this down to my color.
18. I can swear, or dress in second-hand clothes, or not answer letters, without having people attribute these choices to the bad morals, the poverty, or the illiteracy of my race.
19. I can speak in public to a powerful male group without putting my race on trial.

20. I can do well in a challenging situation without being called a credit to my race.
21. I am never asked to speak for all the people of my racial group.
22. I can remain oblivious of the language and customs of persons of color who constitute the world's majority without feeling in my culture any penalty for such oblivion.
23. I can criticize our government and talk about how much I fear its policies and behavior without being seen as a cultural outsider.
24. I can be pretty sure that if I ask to talk to "the person in charge" I will be facing a person of my race.
25. If a traffic cop pulls me over or if the IRS audits my tax return, I can be sure I haven't been singled out because of my color.
26. I can easily buy posters, post-cards, picture books, greeting cards, dolls, toys and children's magazines featuring people of my race.
27. I can go home from most meetings of the organizations I belong to feeling somewhat tied-in, rather than isolated, out-of-place, outnumbered, unheard, feared, or hated.
28. I can be pretty sure that an argument with a colleague of another race is more likely to jeopardize her chances for advancement than to jeopardize mine.
29. I can be pretty sure that if I argue for the promotion of a person of another race, or a program centering on race, this is not likely to cost me heavily within my present setting, even if my colleagues disagree with me.
30. If I declare there is a racial issue at hand, or there isn't a racial issue at hand, my race will lend me more credibility for either position than a person of color will have.
31. I can choose to ignore developments in minority writing and minority activist programs, or disparage them, or learn from them, but in any case, I can find ways to be more or less protected from negative consequences of any of these choices.

white privilege is a knapsack of special provisions

32. My culture gives me little fear about ignoring the opinions of women and men who are not of my race.
33. I am not made acutely aware that my shape, bearing, or body will be taken as a reflection on my race.
34. I can worry about racism without being seen as self interested or self-seeking.
35. I can take a job with an affirmative action employer without having my co-workers on the job suspect that I got it because of my race.
36. I can be pretty sure of finding people who would be willing to talk with me or advise me about my next steps, professionally.
37. I can think over many options, social, political, imaginative, or professional, without asking whether a person of my race would be accepted or allowed to do what I want to do.
38. I can expect to find in the grocery store staple foods which fit in with my cultural traditions.
39. I can be late to a meeting without having the lateness reflect on my race.
40. I can choose public accommodations without fearing that people of my race cannot get in or will be mistreated.
41. I can be sure that if I need legal or medical help, my race will not work against me.
42. I can arrange my activities so that I will never have to experience feelings of rejection owing to my race.
43. If I have low credibility as a leader in the dominant society, I can be sure that my race is not the problem.
44. I can choose blemish cover or bandages in "flesh" color and have them more or less match my skin.

In this potpourri of examples, some privileges make me feel at home in the world. Others allow me to escape penalties or dangers which others suffer. Some keep me from having to hide, to be in disguise, to feel sick or crazy, to negotiate each transaction from the position of being an outsider or, within my group, a person who is suspected of having too close links with a dominant culture.

In proportion as my racial group was being made confident, comfortable, and oblivious, other groups were being made proportionately insecure, uncomfortable, and alienated. My whiteness protected me from many kinds of danger, distress, criticism, violence, and hatred which I was being subtly trained to visit, in turn, upon people of color. Just as Women's Studies courses indicate that women survive their victimization to lead effective lives holding the human race together, so I have come to see that people of color who are really the world's majority, have survived their victimization and lived strong lives, from which the global minority can learn and must learn.

my schooling gave me no training in seeing myself as an oppressor

My reflections here do not suggest that privilege produces genuine superiority or moral strength. It often produces carelessness, thoughtlessness, ignorance, and fear and hatred of the unknown. In many ways, those dominated have actually become strong through not having all of these unearned advantages, and this is one reason why they have a lot to teach . . . .

Since race and sex are not the only privilege systems at work, I think we need to similarly examine the actual effects of having age privilege, or ethnic privilege, or physical ability, or privilege related to sexual orientation.

It seems to me that obliviousness about white privilege, like obliviousness about male privilege, is kept strongly inculturated so as to maintain our myth of meritocracy, the myth that democratic choice is equally available to all. Keeping everybody oblivious to the fact that freedom of confident action is there for just a small number of people props up those in power and serves to keep power in the hands of the same groups that have most of it already. A pressing question for me and others like me as we embark on this work is what we will do with such knowledge — whether we will determine to find ways to use privilege or weaken privilege systems — and whether we will use any of our unearned power to reconstruct power systems on a more humane basis.

Are You a Racist? Racist Quotient Questionnaire

Concept: Carol Taylor, Test: Mari P Saunders

The Racism Quotient Questionnaire is a step towards learning about (and subsequently coping with) our individual prejudices. Be as honest at possible: it is only possible to change what we have first acknowledged. Choose the answer that most nearly mirrors the way you think and feel. If you would like to know your own score along with an explanation, write to RQ Test, c/o *The Village Voice*, VPV 1001, 36 Cooper Square, New York 10003. Include a stamped, self-addressed envelope. Circle your answers in the box provided at the end of the questionnaire.

1. With what racial origin or background do you identify yourself? (Check as many as apply)
   - A. Native American
   - B. Caucasian
   - C. Black
   - D. Hispanic
   - E. East Indian
   - F. Asian
   - G. Aborigine
   - H. Other
2. At a social gathering of 30-40 people, you enter a room where you appear to be the only member of your ethnic group. You would most likely:
   - A. Leave the room in search of members of your own ethnic group
   - B. Stand around and hope someone would talk to you
   - C. Open a conversation with whomever looks interesting
   - D. Feel bored or uncomfortable and wish you hadn't come
3. A close friend calls to tell you her son/daughter is engaged to marry a person of another race. You would most likely feel:
   - A. Appalled and warn her of the possible consequences
   - B. Delighted that your friend's child has found someone to share her/his life
   - C. Surprised but somewhat skeptical as to the wisdom of such a marriage
   - D. Sad because of all the trouble they are probably going to encounter
4. A person of different ethnic background is elected to a high office instead of a candidate of your ethnicity. You would feel:
   - A. No special feelings if he/she seemed to be the best person for the job
   - B. Somewhat threatened now that more of "them" are taking over
   - C. Upset because you voted for someone else you really believed in
   - D. Not too concerned, but suspect that sooner or later he/she will do something disgraceful
5. A museum will soon open in your neighborhood with displays of culture far removed ethnically and geographically from yours. You would most likely:
   - A. Probably not visit it because you couldn't identify with it
   - B. Consider it an interesting place to visit because it is different
   - C. Write your congressperson protesting that the museum should reflect your neighborhood's culture
   - D. Organize a children's group and take it for a visit
6. You belong to a club that has a few minority members, one of whom (as well as a majority member) is running for president. The majority member shares your racial background. Before voting, you would most likely:
   - A. Assume that the majority member is the best person for the job
   - B. Thoroughly investigate the majority member's background
   - C. Encourage other members of your race to vote for the majority member
   - D. Investigate the credentials and desirability of both candidates
7. You are told by a recognized authority that your 12-year-old would fare better educationally if she/he were bused to a more distant location where she/he would be in an extreme minority. Your reaction would be:

A. Immediately remove your child and have her/him bused to the new location

B. Discuss the possibility with your child and investigate the new location together before making a decision

C. Let your child stay where she/he is. It will be emotionally more comfortable for the child

D. Investigate the merits of the new location for yourself before making up your mind

8. A couple of your own race in your neighborhood decides to adopt a child of a different race. Your feelings are that:

A. The child will fare well depending on how loving and nurturing the parents are

B. The child will probably suffer because she/he is "different" from other children in the neighborhood

C. The couple should move to a mixed neighborhood where the "different" child won't stand out

D. If the couple want to take that kind of chance, you're glad the child has found a home

9. You need to process a complicated business transaction at a bank. There are three or four available managers, all of different racial backgrounds. You will probably:

A. Choose one of your own racial background. He will probably understand your needs better

B. Choose the one closest to you. After all, they're all trained to do the same thing

C. Ask the receptionist which banker might best serve your particular needs

D. Pick the banker who is the best groomed and has the most welcoming smile

10. The newspaper headlines often focus on articles concerning international and/or foreign politics about unrest, struggles for freedom, human rights for Jews in Russia, apartheid in South Africa, or the plight of Vietnamese children. Your attitude is:

A. The United States should steer clear whenever possible of such controversy. These are really not our problems

B. People all over the world have a right to support and help in their fight for liberation and human rights regardless of how much it upsets the *status quo*

C. Many of these countries were peaceful until their minorities or dissidents began to relocate, protest, or riot

D. Those in power should gradually make changes to support and accommodate minorities or the oppressed

11. You are invited to a racially mixed picnic. Everyone has been asked to bring a sample of their own ethnic cuisine. Having no dietary restrictions, you would most probably:

A. Bring something that is commonly accepted among all ethnic groups

B. Eat only what you have brought: you are a little suspicious of what ingredients are in some of the other dishes

C. Be curious and willing to sample a little of what everyone else has brought

D. Question what is in each dish before deciding whether you will sample it

12. You are a teacher in a junior high school and the administration has suggested a course in "black English" be introduced into the curriculum. Your attitude is that:

A. Since black students do speak differently, it might be easier to teach them in their own jargon

B. Black students would welcome the change and feel a lot more comfortable

C. The majority culture in which most black students will ultimately work does not communicate in "black English," so such a course would be doing black students a disservice

D. Most black students are never going to master the King's English, so at least they will be educated in their own way of speaking

13. Recently, Martin Luther King's birthday was made into a national holiday. Previously, only the birthdays of prominent white Americans were celebrated. Your attitude about this is:
    A. Blacks will pursue any opportunity to be equal with whites, deserved or not
    B. If we turned every martyred hero's birthday into a holiday, pretty soon there wouldn't be any work days
    C. Martin Luther King's nonviolent protest against appalling social conditions was deserving of such recognition
    D. Considering what blacks have invested in this country, it's time they had their own holiday
14. During World War II, atomic bombs were dropped on Japan but not on the other two Axis nations (Germany and Italy). Our last two wars were with Koreans and Vietnamese. Which statement below comes closest to your reaction to the above statements:
    A. I notice that our last three wars did the most damage to non-Caucasians
    B. The Japanese are sneaky and pulled a sneak attack on us. We were justified in dropping the A-bomb on them
    C. The Koreans and Vietnamese were themselves divided, so we were fighting with them as well as against them
    D. Any means we employed to end any war was justifiable
15. A Hispanic youngster stopped by the police late at night appeared to make a threatening gesture and was critically shot by the police. No weapon was found on him. Your reaction to this is:
    A. What did he expect, being out on the streets at that late hour of the night?
    B. The police had a right to defend themselves against a threatening gesture. They often have to make quick decisions
    C. Hispanics are noted for their quick tempers, so it's understandable that the police reacted as they did
    D. Did the police exhaust all avenues of investigation and warning before pulling the trigger?

16. At your place of business, the head of personnel has a choice of hiring an eminently qualified black and an equally qualified white for a policy-making (hiring/firing) position. You are asked by secret ballot after reading their qualifications to make your choice. You feel:
    A. I would choose one of my own racial group. He would understand my problems better and I'd be more likely to keep my job
    B. If the person picked is not of my race, they will undoubtedly begin to hire members of their own group and try taking over
    C. I would choose the black person because chances are she/he has worked harder and is more qualified for the position and will be more fair in dealing with others different from her/himself
    D. If they are equally qualified my choice will be based on each one's knowledge of the inner workings of the company and how well she/he communicates and deals with people
17. You have been hospitalized for a somewhat serious illness and confined for at least a week in a semi-private room. Your room mate is of a different race. Your reaction is:
    A. Grin and bear it: it's only going to be for a week
    B. If you're not too ill, be glad to have someone to talk with occasionally
    C. Go out of your way to be pleasant: you don't want your roommate thinking you have racial hang-ups
    D. You're not familiar with people of other races, but if they seem friendly, you'll try to be friendly too
18. When you're out in public and see couples or lovers of obviously different racial backgrounds — i.e. black/white, Asian/Hispanic, Indian/white — your reaction is:
    A. If these two people want to be together, it doesn't make any difference to me: it's their problem
    B. It doesn't bother me as long as it doesn't happen in my family
    C. As long as neither of them is from Mars, I say, "Hooray for love!"
    D. I don't believe in mixing the races

19. Assuming that there is a grave national and world-wide problem of racism, which of the following best expresses how you feel about it?
    A. Leave it alone: it will work itself out naturally
    B. Start teaching your children early on about the commonality of human beings and the human experience
    C. Keep the races separated and you won't have the problem
    D. I don't believe we live in a racially prejudiced society
20. If you were not of the racial or ethnic origin you believe yourself to be, which of the following would you choose to be? (Check as many as apply)
    A. The one I am
    B. Native American
    C. Caucasian
    D. Black
    E. Hispanic
    F. East Indian
    G. Asian
    H. Aborigine
    I Other
    J It doesn't matter

Your initials or your name _____

Date _____

R.Q. Test Answer Sheet

1. ABCD EFGH	6. ABCD	11. ABCD	16. ABCD
2. ABCD	7. ABCD	12. ABCD	17. ABCD
3. ABCD	8. ABCD	13. ABCD	18. ABCD
4. ABCD	9. ABCD	14. ABCD	19. ABCD
5. ABCD	10. ABCD	15. ABCD	20. ABCDE FGJIH

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