

## WHITE PRIVILEGE AND RACISM

- Topic: Theology in Dialogue:  
The Social Sin of Racism and the Social Sciences
- Conveners: Laurie Cassidy, Trinity College, Connecticut  
Alex Mikulich, St. Joseph's College, Connecticut
- Presenters: Barbara Andolsen, Monmouth University  
Susan Abraham, St. Bonaventure University  
James Perkinson, Marygrove College  
and Ecumenical Seminary of Detroit

This year's session honored the twentieth anniversary of the publication of Barbara Hilkert Andolsen's groundbreaking volume, *"Daughters of Jefferson, Daughters of Bootblacks": Racism and American Feminism* (Mercer University Press, 1986).

Using the convention's theme as a touchstone, Barbara Andolsen began the session with her paper entitled, "The Necessity of Social Scientific Research for Understanding White Privilege and Racism." She argued that dedication to the common good in Catholic ethics ought to promote a consistent examination of social science research on the changing dynamics of race in areas such as employment or residential segregation. While there has been modest decline in residential segregation since the 1970s, many African Americans remain isolated in inner cities, while non-Hispanic whites are least likely to live in racial and ethnically diverse neighborhoods. Many blacks, especially younger men, face unemployment difficulties partly because of the adverse employer attitudes. Andolsen challenged Catholic theologians to continually update our understanding of white racism, so that we can more effectively advocate for a genuine *common* good in our nation.

Susan Abraham's paper entitled, "Against Race: Theology in Dialogue with Postcolonial Theory" described that the dialogue between postcolonial theory and Roman Catholic theology as being in its infancy. Abraham claimed that some postcolonial theologians have utilized the theoretical frameworks of postcolonial theory with marked success to affect a reformation of the intellectual exclusions of the Western academy. She critically examined a prominent postcolonial theorist's analysis of race and racism—a significant concern for theology since the last half of the twentieth century. She argued that a theological imagination can address the elisions and exclusions of postcolonial theory that continues to marginalize religious methodologies and insights in the matter of race and racism.

James Perkinson addressed the utilization of critical race studies in his paper entitled, "Transforming Theology and Theologians: A Future Trajectory of Theology in Dialogue with Critical Race Studies." He began his presentation with a personal sketch under the aegis of baptismal delineation and duress. He believes the controlling mediation of white supremacy in American history has been its conditioning in a particular form of hegemonic embodiment that has operated

precisely by claiming universality under the guise of invisibility. Perkinson claimed, “baptism” becomes important to think with because of its insistence on the primacy of work with body in any attempt to alter one’s engagement with reality. Perkinson argued that however much the body may comfort itself inside the precincts of sacramental congress controlled by its ordained elites—both Catholic and Protestant—until such a body is rebaptized back into the experiential anguish and survival artistry of the planetary body of color, its theological pronouncements remain, at the most mundane level, mere masquerade.

The thought provoking nature of these three papers engaged a lively conversation of how to interpret social scientific data in theology, how to enact the challenges of the praxis suggested by the papers and what authentic white solidaristic praxis looks like in the academy and in society. The discussion was cut short because of the time limit, and the session concluded with a business meeting on the future of the developing group’s work.

LAURIE CASSIDY  
*Trinity College*  
*Hartford, Connecticut*