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*The Black Church, Racism and Theological
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EDITORIAL

The Black Church, Racism and Theological Training

This Journal issue contains informative and enlightening articles about five topical issues i.e., the Black church's need for administrative innovation to retain happy members engaged in various ministries; a call on the Black church to engage in prophetic problem solving in the neighborhoods in which they serve; discussion on the various dimensions of racism as sin; the decline of theological seminaries and schools and how they could use the Sankofa principle reform their curriculums and, finally, the divided self—a dichotomy of the Christian believers who affirm faith in God but exhibit fear at the same time. The following paragraphs provide a gist of the contents of this journal.

Rev. Darryl Lai Fang's article is dealing with the issue of how small and mid-size churches especially the Black Church, "experience a myriad of issues relating to membership retention, membership care, support for ministries, fundraising,

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and attracting millennials.” She asserts that the Black church’s membership retention problem is caused by a lack of membership satisfaction emanating from an absence of regular evaluation of their operation which would reveal areas of strength and those that require improvement. As a specialist in human resources, the writer suggests that churches should apply the Pareto Principle in order to find out how involved its members are in the ministries of the church. Based on her preliminary survey, it has become evident that the 80/20 rule would be broken if the church’s administrative process allowed new members to serve in any position and capacity. But because some chairs of ministries assume their positions for life and jealously guard against any member who comes with new ideas or attempts to unseat them, many church members do not serve or even remain members. Those who do stay in the church cannot help it but complain when they see how poorly those in office mismanage their ministries.

Rev. Tess Powell demonstrates what prophetic problem solving entails. As a member of the Mount Pleasant Baptist Church (MPBC), an elite Black church

in Herndon, Virginia, in Fairfax County, USA, she shares how her conscience was jolted by passing through a squalid neighborhood on her way to and from the church. She found it difficult to align her favorite text, Romans 12:1-2, with the church's noninvolvement in justice issues affecting the poor people of Herndon. That concern led her to the establishment of a ministry called the Community Change Agent Ministry (CCAM) which has gradually expanded its services naturally. While her primary concern is to address social justice issues affecting disenfranchised, marginalized Pan-African communities within Herndon, she also realized that the same prophetic problem-solving ministry is relevant for use anywhere injustice exists. Although she applauds MPBC for offering to its members biblical knowledge, spiritual growth, and for other diverse ministries under its Missions Ministry, it does not directly focus on the socio-economic issues of some Pan-Africans in Herndon communities. This article will demonstrate how the CCAM attempts to turn around the pathetic socio-economic situation of the Herndon community "by dismantling derogatory stereotypical

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perceptions such as Pan-Africans have inferior minds; therefore, they perform best in subservient roles. They are lazy untrustworthy, always seeking handouts, preferring to steal rather than work to satisfy their needs. Community Change Agents (CCAs) endeavor to encourage Pan-African communities to embrace their rich culture, which values family, community, and unity. The CCAs also assist with restoring Pan-African communities by educating, coaching, and mentoring them about the importance of building socio-economic prosperity and mandating social justice.

This collaborative article by Howard Smith *et al.* discusses racism as a sin, showing how the judicial, healthcare, legal, economic, environmental, education, theological, and employment define this sin in a discriminatory fashion. The authors have cited to the society especially among various ethnic groups today. The article closes by discussing and recommending the steps and actions that should be adopted to end institutionalized racism.

Dr. Mark Ellingsen’s article focuses on the declining fortunes of American theological education and its seminaries and the call for seminary curricular reform. The article’s contribution to this discussion is two-pronged. First it unveils what is old and what is new to enable all sides to truly get in conversation. Ellingsen argues that some of what the critics regard as old in the current curricular arrangements and pedagogy is modern or new. Thus, what some critics regard as innovative ideas are actually old and have precedents in pre-19th century curricular arrangements. Thus, reform may best be facilitated by a Sankofa moment, that is, returning to fetch the good that once was. The author also advises that we need to combine the Sankofa principle while paying attention to recent research done in the field of Neurobiology which may shed light to our review the curriculum. Dr. Ellingsen argues that some of the curricular reforms based on Student-Centered, Contextual Learning, and Design Thinking models are not really new, and may even contradict the new data “which seem to challenge their efficiency to facilitate long-term learning. Ellingsen also discusses the benefits and liabilities of

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online learning and provides data “which might support the value of older models of theological education for facilitating long-term memory.”

The emphasis of Dr. Charles Thomas' article is to address the issue of internal reconciliation of the divided self. The divided self is a notion of the internal struggle of the Christian who claims to have faith based upon being created in the *imago dei*. “the image of God.” and having a relationship with the divine through the Messiah and the Spirit of God residing within them. But to the author’s surprise, when traumatic experiences occur, believers lose their faith in the words that the Jesus proclaimed, “Do not fear for I have overcome the world” (John 16:33, NIV)? Reports have revealed that believers are suffering from depression, anxiety, frustration and fatigue while at the same time agreeing with the psalmist, “though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil” (Psalm 23:4, NKJV). The author sees this as emanating from an internal battle between the believers’ intellect and their souls. The

article concludes by offering some recommendations for alleviating the dichotomy caused by our divided selves.

Themba Mafico
Editor