

Comment

*Hauna Ondrey, editor, teaching fellow in church history,
North Park Theological Seminary, Chicago, Illinois*

Our May issue begins with a contribution by Bo Lim, university chaplain and associate professor of Old Testament at Seattle Pacific University and Seminary. Lim's article, "Exile and Migration: Toward a Biblical Theology of Immigration and Displacement," originated in the 2015 Nils W. Lund Memorial Lectureship at North Park Theological Seminary. Lim reads Jeremiah 29:1–7 through the lenses of migration studies, postcolonial theory, and the contemporary refugee crisis, highlighting pastoral implications that emerge from these readings. He argues that the church must attend to the great diversity of immigrant narratives—biblical and contemporary—in order to better understand the biblical text and more effectively minister in a time of increasing global migration.

Recent NPTS graduate Ramelia Williams then surveys points of Covenant engagement in the civil rights movement, 1963–1968, at the denominational level and through two congregational case studies: Community Covenant Church in Minneapolis, Minnesota, and North Park Covenant Church in Chicago, Illinois. Williams's important research does not assume these congregations were representative; their stories stand beside others of active resistance to integration that also inhabit our denominational history. Yet, as Williams concludes, it is worth recognizing that "the pursuit of racial righteousness, is part of the 'DNA' of the Evangelical Covenant Church." Moreover, the dedication of a small group within the Covenant during the years of Williams's study laid the groundwork for the pursuit of racial justice to be integrated at the organizational level.

In her case study of North Park Covenant Church, Williams references a 1963 sermon by NPCC pastor Douglas Cedarleaf. The full

text of that powerful sermon follows her article, transcribed and with historical introduction and annotations. Clearly systemic racism is not simply of historical interest. In recognition of this, Cedarleaf's sermon is paired with a 2015 sermon preached by Catherine Gilliard, pastor of New Life Covenant Church in Atlanta, Georgia. Gilliard offered this sermon in the wake of protests to the killing of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, August 9, 2014. The list of names has compounded since her preaching, up to Alton Sterling and Philando Castile, among many less-well known victims.

Cedarleaf's allusion to "black men...shot in the back" echoes in Gilliard's lament that "a response, a look, a walk, or an action taken too quickly could cost a black or brown woman or man their life." That this echo reverberates over half a century later, should convict and embolden the church. This past January, the United Nations declared escalating state violence against African Americans a human rights crisis: "Contemporary police killings and the trauma it creates are reminiscent of the racial terror lynching of the past. Impunity for state violence has resulted in the current human rights crisis and must be addressed as a matter of urgency."¹

Two questions posed to the Covenant in 1963 remain as relevant and urgent fifty years later: "Is it possible for us simply to sit here and hope somehow that maybe we will still be able, double-tongued as we are, to talk about the will of God while we have nothing to say about...a shot in the back?"² asked Cedarleaf; and from a pastoral letter to Covenant congregations, adopted two days later at the 1963 Ministerial meeting: "In this Gethsemane of the church, shall we simply say, 'Let this cup pass,' without also adding 'nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt'? Or shall we cast all our care on him and take council with our faith instead of our fears?"³ And perhaps a third is in order: will these questions remain as relevant and urgent fifty years from now?

The issue closes with a "Statement on Race and the Justice System" by North Park Seminary faculty, released February 2015.

1. [Preliminary report](#) of the United Nations Working Group of Experts on Peoples of African Descent following a visit to the United States, January 19–29, 2016. The full report of the United Nations Human Rights Council is scheduled to be issued September 2016.

2. Douglas Cedarleaf, "Thy Kingdom Come, Thy Will Be Done Sermon," (June 16, 1963), Covenant Archives and Historical Library.

3. "A Pastoral Letter to the Churches of the Evangelical Covenant Church of America," *Covenant Yearbook 1962*, p. 208.