



Editors' Introduction

Three days after George Floyd died under the knee of a Minneapolis police officer, the board of *Word & World* met for its regularly scheduled annual planning meeting. With our hearts raw and our Twin Cities communities roiled by unrest, we wondered together what we, in our capacity as the stewards of an academic journal serving the church, could contribute toward justice in this transformational moment of racial reckoning. After much deliberation, we decided to stick to what the journal does best: long-form, academically sound articles that are useful for and accessible to pastors and other faith leaders.

That sort of work does not, however, lend itself to a quick turnaround. *Word & World* plans its issues two years in advance; at that May 2020 meeting we were outlining the quarterly themes for 2022. Yet the moment demanded urgency: *Listen! Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground!* (Genesis 4:10). We decided to put together a special fifth issue for the coming year, to be published as early in 2021 as possible and to be guest-edited by two Luther Seminary faculty members who also serve on the *Word & World* board: Joy Moore and Cameron Howard.

As we sought articles for this issue, we, the editors—a black woman and a white woman—held together multiple points of tension. On the one hand, we very much wanted to amplify the work of scholars of color; on the other hand, the labor of educating people—and especially white people—about racism often falls disproportionately on people of color. We knew we needed white scholars to share in this work, and especially to speak directly to predominantly white faith communities about finding new ways forward.

Another tension we held is reflected in the title of the issue, “Racial Justice Now.” Depending on one’s inflection, the phrase can be a demand, a plea, or a matter-of-fact analysis of a state of affairs. We hear all three of these emphases reflected across different articles in the issue. For some readers, an edition so titled suggests desired material to inform a welcome conversation in the church. For some, under the weight of the past year, the title—however one reads it—feels like yet another stressor. The questions linger: Why is it always about race? When can

I speak and not be labeled? Many are weary with rants on racism, discussions of diversity, and pleas for political correctness. We suspect some who continue reading are, like us, no less weary. We, too, are fatigued, because the familiar sound bites remain incomplete testimonies to what remains a disruption our world. Many Christians recognize the cultural deterioration and genuinely desire change that moves us forward.

Finally, we also have held together the tension between the academy and the church, a tension that *Word & World* always strives to navigate. Our contributors include academics, parish pastors, professors, and practitioners. In addition to traditional academic articles, we have included a dialogue and the transcription of a podcast. We have sought to offer some of the best biblical and theological analysis available that leads directly into work for positive change in the church and in the world. Our hope is that the pastors, faith leaders, and congregations who value the work of the journal will all find something in this issue that helps them to take ever bolder steps toward racial justice in their communities.

We have been deliberate in our focus on the experiences of black people in the United States, as George Floyd's death has put the Twin Cities at the epicenter of the current movement for black lives. As this issue goes to print, the Twin Cities are again grieving the death of an unarmed black man, Daunte Wright, at the hands of law enforcement. At the same time, the recent murders of six Asian American women in Atlanta are a terrible reminder that racism and white supremacy are wide-ranging, multifaceted scourges. Whispers of concerns regarding immigration and echoes of the experience of Native Americans underscore every conversation. Continued acts of violence—pronounced or performed—expose the haunting divide among us.

We are divided because of a narrative that has formed our imagination. This particular narrative does not divide by age, class, gender, sexuality, or profession of faith. It divides by an idea: race. Eventually, we must find a way to examine the very idea of race and what that idea has done to the idea of being human. Political platforms to take back our country and racialized populism motivate many to vote. And yet, such rhetoric maintains communities segregated by race and ethnicity in the suburbs and the sanctuary, neither of which address the real decay of our society. Not to examine how the racialization of people-groups influences these realities is to relax in the melting pot that has exceeded the point of boiling over. We offer this issue of *Word & World* as one very small—but, we pray, important—contribution to the long and difficult journey toward racial justice.

We thank you for reading this edition. The past year has been challenging for everyone. Many urgent obligations seized our routines, assaulted our confidences, and captured our imaginations. We are deeply grateful to all of the contributors for their excellent articles, their quick turnaround (in a pandemic, no less!), and their patience as we have put this issue together at a somewhat slower pace than we had initially hoped. We also offer a word of thanks to the *Word & World* staff for their unflinching support as we developed this special issue.

A note about style: After consulting multiple style sheets that vary widely in their guidance on discussing race, we have decided not to capitalize racial identifiers such as *black* and *white*, unless those words are already capitalized in a direct quotation. We have strived to be consistent across all of the articles, though there are surely some places where different editors would have made different decisions.

Joy J. Moore and Cameron B. R. Howard