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Eyes Focused On The Light

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My people will abide in a peaceful habitation, in secure dwellings, and in quiet resting places. (Isaiah 32:18)

In Isaiah 32, one kingdom, where leaders rule with justice, is juxtaposed with another, where the poor and weak are deceived and abused. In the just kingdom, homes are safe and secure. Our homes should be places of refuge, where our people are cherished and loved, where the weak and vulnerable are protected and kept safe from harm, and where we know that we matter. Homes may not be perfect, but they should always be places where we can find shelter from the dangers of the outside world. This ought to be true for “home”, writ small and large – our neighborhoods, our cities, and even our country.

Lately, though, it’s becoming harder to think of this nation as our home. Messages pervade the media about the diminished worth and dehumanization of immigrants, women, people of color, people who identify as LGBTQ or who are non-Christian, and the poor. Gun violence continues to take the lives of the innocent. Laws are being created that undermine the rights of the most vulnerable in our country.

The US was never a perfect nation. Far from it, in fact. Until recently, however, it seemed as though we were on the right trajectory, that we were moving, however slowly, in the direction of justice. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s dream was slowly beginning to feel viable. But then we regressed.

*¹ By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept
 when we remembered Zion.*

*² There on the poplars
 we hung our harps,*

*³ for there our captors asked us for songs,
 our tormentors demanded songs of joy;
 they said, “Sing us one of the songs of Zion!”*

*⁴ How can we sing the songs of the LORD
 while in a foreign land? (Psalm 137:1-4)*

It’s hard not to weep when we think of all the ways our people have been wronged.

The normal rhythms of a system in transition can be erratic. It advances, then retreats, maybe many times over, before it takes its final form. We've lived through worse times than these – slavery, public lynchings, segregation, and more. With vision, perseverance, and resolve, we can get through these days and help bend the long arc of the universe back towards justice. It is at times like this when the passion, resourcefulness, courage, and genius of the scholars and ministers of the BCTS are all the more urgently needed. We need to remind ourselves of our ancestors whose vision and creativity helped to make a way out of no way. For example, in this year's *Journal*, Diane Batts Morrow describes how the Oblate Sisters of Providence challenged the Church's restriction on black women entering Catholic colleges and universities during the Jim Crow era in her paper, "Making a Way Out of No Way': The Oblate Sisters of Providence Pursue Higher Education Under Jim Crow."

Raising awareness about the dangers of climate change and the need to create networks of allies, the work of Nathaniel Holmes, Jr. addresses the vital need for black churches, including the black Catholics, to engage pro-actively with issues surrounding environmental justice and climate change in his paper, "Let's Be Friends: Black Theology, Climate Change, and Trust."

The sex abuse crisis has plagued the Church and impacted the lives of thousands of survivors and their families. How can we move intentionally forward toward viewing all those in the human family as worthy of dignity? A critical examination of the educational and formation processes for seminarians and their affect in the Church's sexual abuse crisis, with special reference to the Nigerian Church, are explored by Simonmary Ahiokhai in "Priestly Formation and Sexual Abuse in the Roman Catholic Church: In Dialogue with the Nigerian Church."

Working and worshipping together can lend us insight and strength. Kathleen Dorsey Bellow describes the ways that the daily commitments of black Catholics to community life can connect to our participation in Sunday Eucharist in her paper, "Full, Conscious, and Active Participation: Sunday Eucharist, Black Life and Theological Considerations."

Advocating for greater agency among African American Catholics, Ken Hamilton critiques the recent changes in the Roman rite through an Africentric and postcolonial lens, offering an argument for an African

American Catholic rite in his paper, “Regrouping in the Clearing: Resisting *Liturgiam Authenticam* and Considering an African American Rite.”

timone davis advocates for greater attention to the needs of our youth. She explores the role that culture plays in our approach to God and faith as we consider the need to bring more young adults into the Church in her paper, “Cultural Colonization and Young Adult Liturgical Experience.”

Our members have also reviewed six books this year. Simonmary Aikiokhai provides a review of *Jezebel Unhinged. Loosing the Black Female Body in Religion & Culture* (2018) by Tamara Lomax. Anna Perkins reviews *Womanist Sass and Talk Back: Social (In)Justice, Intersectionality and Biblical Interpretation* (2018) by Mitzi Smith. Addie Walker, SSND, reviews James Cone’s *Said I Wasn’t Gonna Tell Nobody* (2018). Kimberly Lymore provides a review of *Perseverance in the Parish?: Religious Attitudes from a Black Catholic Perspective* (2018) by Darren W. Davis and Donald B. Pope-Davis. Claudine Pannell-Goodlett reviews *Black Madonna: A Womanist Look at Mary of Nazareth* (2017) by Courtney Lee Hall. Finally, C. Vanessa White reviews *Authentically Black and Truly Catholic: The Rise of Black Catholicism in the Great Migration* (2017) by Matthew J. Cressler.

The work of the BCTS is like a paving stone on the path toward a just world. Working together, not losing heart, and keeping our eyes focused on the light, we will get through these difficult times.

But the noble make noble plans, and by noble deeds they stand. (Isaiah 32:8)

