

**Editors' Message**  
*Journal of Presbyterian History, Spring/Summer 2007*

In 1807, the outdoor preaching of John Gloucester, a former slave, resulted in the formation of the First African Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia. To commemorate the bicentennial anniversary of this important event, the editors have solicited essays exploring Presbyterianism and the African American experience.

Bradley J. Gundlach offers a portrait of one white Presbyterian's attitudes toward race in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Benjamin B. Warfield is most often remembered as a defender of biblical inerrancy and conservative orthodoxy, but Gundlach reveals a less familiar side to the Princeton theologian. In the post-Reconstruction era when Jim Crow laws were passed and blacks were subjected to violence and stripped of the vote, Warfield strongly opposed these injustices. Although he found the theology of southern Presbyterians congenial to his own, he balked at formal reunion with them if the price was acceptance of segregation within the house of God. Yet at the end of the day, Warfield was not free of the condescension and paternalism all too common even among those whites most sympathetic to the plight of the freed people. The account of Warfield's mixed attitudes serves as a reminder of one reason that African Americans have sometimes seen in Presbyterianism an ambivalent face.

David W. Wills surveys the brief career of Pierce Butler Thompkins, who founded the St. James Presbyterian Church in New York City in 1895. A representative of a generation of black Presbyterians often forgotten, Thompkins vigorously championed denominational missions to African Americans in northern cities but also participated in ecumenical ventures. During a brief ministry cut short by an untimely death, he engaged in local politics, forthrightly spoke against America's venture in international imperialism, condemned the virulent racism of the Jim Crow era, and helped to build various institutions that addressed the needs of New York's black community. He did so not as a social and political radical but as one who shared middle class values and aspirations.

Gayraud S. Wilmore offers an account of what he calls "the black revolt and the United Presbyterian Church" during the decade between 1963 and 1973. Wilmore appropriately calls his essay "recollections" for he himself, as a distinguished theological scholar and as a denominational leader, played a major role in the events he describes. In the midst of the turbulence of the Civil Rights movement and on the eve of the March on Washington where Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., delivered his famous "I have a dream" speech, the United Presbyterian Church decided to create a Commission of Religion and Race in 1963 and called Wilmore to lead the new organization. As he describes his work amidst the controversies of the 1960s and '70s, Wilmore captures the sense of possibility of the era: "The air in 475 Riverside Drive [the location of his office] was," he writes, "filled with the electricity of a war-time command center. This, we thought, was where 'it was happening.' It was as if we were all on the cusp of a historic breakthrough in interracial and interethnic relations."

Darius Swann and James Reese, black leaders in the denomination during the 1960s and beyond, provide a longer historical perspective. They offer an overview of milestones in the African American Presbyterian experience.

Also in this issue are book reviews, including Andrew S. Moore on *The New Encyclopedia of Southern Culture, Volume I: Religion*, edited by Samuel S. Hill.; James H. Morehead's review of three books on religion and the Civil War: *Upon the Altar of the Nation: A Moral History of the Civil War.* by Harry S. Stout, *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis* by Mark A. Noll and *Reforging the White Republic: Race, Religion, and American Nationalism, 1865-1898* by Edward J. Blum; Rick Nutt on *Sea la Luz: The Making of Mexican Protestantism in the American Southwest, 1829-1900* by Juan Francisco Martínez; E. T. Charry on Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams's *Why Study the Past?: The Quest for the Historical Church*; and Jonathan Seitz on *North American Foreign Mission, 1810-1914: Theology, Theory, and Policy*, edited by Wilbert R. Shenk