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Q & A: Rev. Anthony Chandler

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Distinctly Catholic

This week, Q & A is asking a variety of people what they made of the Shirley Sherrod episode. Today, we turn to Father Anthony Chandler, an African-American pastor in rural Kentucky. Father Chandler is the pastor of both St. Martin of Tours in Flaherty and St. John the Apostle in Brandenburg.
The question: What does the Shirley Sherrod episode tell us about race and politics in the age of Obama?
Father Chandler:
As an African American, and a Roman Catholic priest presently serving as a pastor in rural central Kentucky, this event became more important to me. Many of my parishioners are farmers and all of them are white people. I would want the best for them just as I would for anyone in the United States. Racism is an evil which still has a very prominent place in our society and culture, but it usually hides until it can be used as a political "firecracker". How many wonderful strides have been made by so many Americans in reducing prejudice, but something like this event comes to light, and well here we go again! The whole event true or not true allows a wonderful stage for the ignorant.

In this case once again we have to call attention to the persistent presence of racism and in particular to the relationship between race and economics. Many know that these two ideas are very distinct, but they are huge forces that at times have been and even now can truly direct the whole of our society. The economic crisis that our country is dealing with at this time in history reveals once again a racism that is still alive and so often finds life in the very structures of our society. Exploitation of any person in the labor market has dire consequences for our nation as a whole. Whether it be my white farmers or the young black college grauduate! All aspects of racism interact. Racism is far more than a narrow economic phenomenon; it truly does have very definite economic consequences.

It is clear by the reactions and the retractions that we have seen in the last few days that perhaps we still are not truly comfortable with one another no matter the color of our skin or our particular station in life. The work of eliminating racism and building economic justice can never stop or take a back seat in our improving the United States. The very persistence of racism in our country certainly lends support to this.

Tomorrow's Interviewee: Jeremy McCarter, senior writer at Newsweek and editor of "Bite the Hand That Feeds You: Essays and Provocations by Henry Fairlie."

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