NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (http://ncronline.org)

I am George Zimmerman

Nicole Sotelo | Jul. 25, 2013 Young Voices

I have a confession to make. After the verdict in the case of George Zimmerman, I have seen a few articles or postings stating, "I am Trayvon Martin." People want to put a face to the ongoing and very personal consequences of racism in our times. If I were to write something, I would also have to say, "I am George Zimmerman."

I don't own a gun. I don't live in a subdivision. I don't stalk people or profess to be an armed neighborhood watch, trailing someone solely because I am suspicious of his or her appearance. But at times, I perpetuate systems of racism.

Nearly every one of us living in the United States has grown up in a stratified country where systemic racism permeates our everyday lives and, whether we want to or not, we unconsciously inherit racism.

As someone who is biracial, I resonate with some aspects of both men -- Trayvon and George -- who were involved in what has become a national story. None of us are truly Trayvon or George, but no matter our racial background, I imagine many in the United States identify in some small way with one or both of these men because of our inherited racism. We recognize the times we have been labeled or treated unfairly. We recognize the times we label or mistreat others, too.

It was not just growing up in Arizona that I witnessed racism walking through segregated streets or school systems or among interpersonal dynamics. Nor is it just here in Chicago, where I live. I also know racism because I am Catholic.

Vatican officials continue to reflect a Eurocentric majority despite the global reach of the church. Church officials in the United States remain fixated on theological issues that revolve around the pelvis rather than the fullness of the people of God. Simply ask yourself, When was the last time I heard a bishop or cardinal speak about abortion or contraception? Then think about the last time you heard a bishop speak out against racism or any of its intersecting issues, including sexism, militarism or colonialism, to name a few? The gap is wide.

This coming from a faith built around a person who embodied racial diversity. The Gospel of Matthew begins with a genealogical listing of Jesus' ancestors. Among those listed are, quite obviously, those whose heritage was not Jewish; it included "foreigners" and mixed-race people. The Gospel, not only in message but in the very embodiment of Jesus, reminds us that the one who came to save us, resplendent in his racial diversity, came also for our unity.

As a Christian, I am called to continue that work of unity among our diversity, whether it is working on my internalized racism or on external societal or ecclesial structures that perpetuate it for generations.

With each step, I not only draw closer to my brothers and sisters; I also draw nearer to Christ.

Along the journey, I pray for the small part of Trayvon that exists inside me. I pray for the small part of George

that does, too. Heal me, Lord, from the times I have suffered. Forgive me, Lord, for the times I have sinned.

[Nicole Sotelo is the author of *Women Healing from Abuse: Meditations for Finding Peace*, published by Paulist Press, and coordinates **WomenHealing.com** [1]. She is a graduate of Harvard Divinity School.]

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