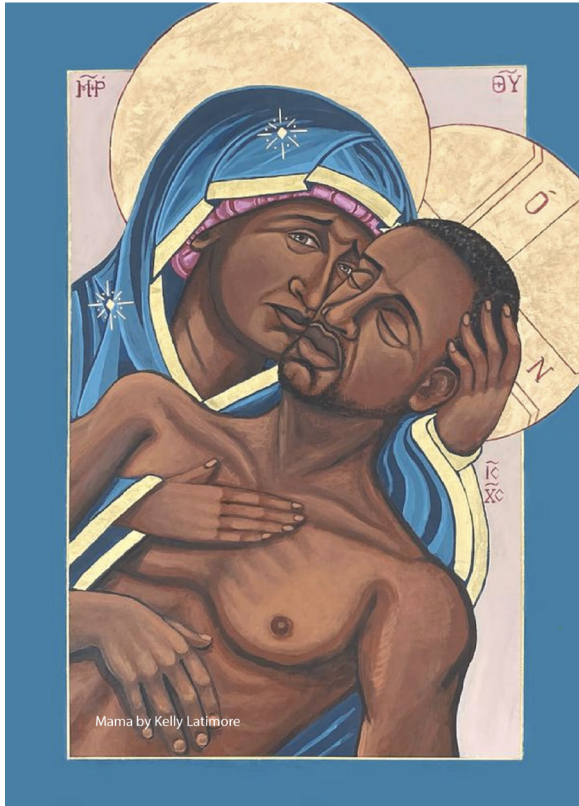


Racial Justice Excerpts from Catholic Social Teaching



Mama by Kelly Latimore

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Christian Conscience

United States Catholic Welfare Conference (1958)

Our nation now stands divided by the problem of compulsory segregation of the races and the opposing demand for racial justice. No region of our land is immune from strife and division resulting from this problem.

In one area, the key issue may concern the schools. In another it may be conflicts over housing. Job discrimination may be the focal point in still other sectors. But all these issues have one main point in common. They reflect the determination of our Negro people, and we hope the overwhelming majority of our white citizens, to see that our colored citizens obtain their full rights as given to them by God, the Creator of all, and guaranteed by the democratic traditions of our nation.

The heart of the race question is moral and religious. It concerns the rights of [all] and our attitude toward our fellow [human beings]. If our attitude is governed by the great Christian law of love thy neighbor and respect for [everyone's] rights, then we can work out harmoniously the techniques for making legal, educational, economic, and social adjustments. But if our hearts are poisoned by hatred, or even by indifference toward the welfare and rights of our fellow [human beings], then our nation faces a grave and internal crisis.

With respect to the fundamental rights of the person, every type of discrimination, whether social or cultural, whether based on sex, race, color, social condition, language or religion, is to be overcome and eradicated as contrary to God's intent.

Gaudium et Spes: Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World

Second Vatican Council (1965)

With respect to the fundamental rights of the person, every type of discrimination, whether social or cultural, whether based on sex, race, color, social condition, language or religion, is to be overcome and eradicated as contrary to God's intent. For in truth it must still be regretted that fundamental personal rights are still not being universally honored...

...excessive economic and social differences between the members of the one human family or population groups cause scandal, and militate against social justice, equity, the dignity of the human person, as well as social and international peace (29).

The National Race Crisis

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (1968)

...it is evident that we did not do enough; we have much more to do. When the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders concluded last month that white racism was a key factor in creating and maintaining the explosive ghettos of our cities, it became clear that we had failed to change the attitudes of many believers (4).

Despite ten years of religious, civic, and governmental action, millions of our fellow Americans continue to be deprived of adequate education, job opportunity, housing, medical care, and welfare assistance, making it difficult, perhaps even impossible, for them to develop and maintain a sense of human dignity (5).

Catholics, like the rest of American society, must recognize their responsibility for allowing these conditions to persist (6).

There are certain tasks which we must acknowledge remain the unfinished business of the Catholic religious community. First among these is the total eradication of any elements of discrimination in our parishes, schools, hospitals, homes for the aged, and similar institutions. Second, there is the Christian duty to use our resources responsibly and generously in view of the urgent needs of the poor (10).

There is no place for complacency and inertia. The hour is late and the need is critical. Let us act while there is still time for collaborative peaceful solutions (27).

Brothers and Sisters to Us

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (1979)

Racism is an evil which endures in our society and in our Church. Despite apparent advances and even significant changes in the last two decades, the reality of racism remains. In large part it is only external appearances which have changed (1).

We do not deny that changes have been made, that laws have been passed, that policies have been implemented. We do not deny that the ugly external features of racism which marred our society have in part been eliminated. But neither can it be denied that too often what has happened has only been a covering over, not a fundamental change. Today the sense of urgency has yielded to an apparent acceptance of the status quo. The climate of crisis engendered by demonstrations, protest, and confrontation has given way to a mood of indifference; and other issues occupy our attention (2).

Racism and economic oppression are distinct but interrelated forces which dehumanize our society. Movement toward authentic justice demands a simultaneous attack on both evils. Our economic structures are undergoing fundamental changes which threaten to intensify social inequalities in our nation. We are entering an era characterized by limited resources, restricted job markets and dwindling revenues. In this atmosphere, the poor and racial minorities are being asked to bear the heaviest burden of the new economic pressures (3).

Racism is a sin: a sin that divides the human family, blots out the image of God among specific members of that family, and violates the fundamental human dignity of those called to be children of the same Father. Racism is the sin that says some human beings are inherently superior and others essentially inferior because of races. It is the sin that makes racial characteristics the determining factor for the exercise of human rights. It mocks the words of Jesus: "Treat others the way you would have them treat you." Indeed, racism is more than a disregard for the words of Jesus; it is a denial of the truth of the dignity of each human being revealed by the mystery of the Incarnation (7).

Each of us as Catholics must acknowledge a share in the mistakes and sins of the past. Many of us have been prisoners of fear and prejudice. We have preached the Gospel while closing our eyes to the racism it condemns. We have allowed conformity to social pressures to replace compliance with social justice. But past mistakes must not hinder the Church's response to the challenges of the present (30-31).

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What We Have Seen and Heard: A Pastoral Letter on Evangelization

Black Catholic Bishops of the United States (1984)

True reconciliation only arises where there is mutually perceived equality. This is what is meant by justice...Without justice, any meaningful reconciliation is impossible. Black Americans are a people rich with spiritual gifts...It is fitting...to present briefly the major characteristics of what can be termed 'Black Spirituality'...Black Spirituality has four major characteristics: It is contemplative. It is holistic. It is joyful. It is communitarian.

Blacks and other minorities still remain absent from many aspects of Catholic life and are only meagerly represented on the decision-making level. Inner-city schools continue to disappear and black vocational recruitment lacks sufficient support. In spite of the fact that Catholics schools are a principal instrument of evangelization, active evangelization is not always a high priority.

Just as the Church in our history was planted by the efforts of the Spaniards, the French and the English, so did she take root among Indians, Black slaves and the various racial mixtures of them all. Blacks – whether Spanish-speaking, French-speaking or English-speaking – built the churches, tilled Church lands, and labored with those who labored in spreading the Gospel. From the earliest period of the Church's history in our land, we have been the hands and arms that helped build the Church from Baltimore to

Bardstown, from New Orleans to Los Angeles, from St. Augustine to St. Louis. Too often neglected and too much betrayed, our faith was witnessed by Black voices and Black tongues – such as Jean-Baptiste Pointe du Sable, Pierre Toussain, Elizabeth Lange, Henriette Delille and Augustus Tolton.

This racism, at once subtle and masked, still festers within our Church as within our society.

It is this racism that in our minds remains the major impediment to evangelization within our community. Some little progress has been made, but success is not yet attained. This stain of racism on the American Church continues to be a source of pain and disappointment to all, both Black and White, who love her and desire her to be the Bride of Christ “without stain or wrinkle” (Ephesians 5:27). This stain of

racism, which is so alien to the Spirit of Christ, is a scandal to many, but for us it must be the opportunity to work for the Church's renewal as a part of our task of evangelization.

Our demand for recognition, our demand for leadership roles in the task of evangelization, is not a call for separatism but a pledge of our commitment to the Church and to share in her witnessing to the love of Christ.

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[The Church] particularly asks pastors, preachers, teachers and catechists to explain the true teaching of Scripture and Tradition about the origin of all people in God, their final common destiny in the Kingdom of God, the value of the precept of fraternal love, and the total incompatibility between racist exclusivism and the universal calling of all to the same salvation in Jesus Christ.

The Church and Racism: Toward a More Fraternal Society

The Pontifical Commission for Justice and Peace (1988)

Racial prejudice or racist behavior continues to trouble relations between persons, human groups and nations. Public opinion is increasingly incensed by it. Moral conscience can by no means accept it (1).

A change of heart cannot occur without strengthening spiritual convictions regarding respect for other races and ethnic groups. The Church, on its part, contributes to forming consciences by clearly presenting the entire Christian doctrine on this subject.

She particularly asks pastors, preachers, teachers and catechists to explain the true teaching of Scripture and Tradition about the origin of all people in God, their final common destiny in the Kingdom of God, the value of the precept of fraternal love, and the total incompatibility between racist exclusivism and the universal calling of all to the same salvation in Jesus Christ. Recourse to the Bible to justify a posteriori any racist prejudice must be firmly denounced. The Church has never authorized any such deformed interpretation of Scripture.

The Church's persuasive task is equally carried out through the witness of life of Christians: respect for foreigners, acceptance of dialogue, sharing, mutual aid and collaboration with other ethnic groups. The world needs to see this parable in action among Christians in order to be convinced by Christ's message.

Of course, Christians themselves must humbly admit that members of the Church, on all levels, have not always coherently lived out this teaching throughout history. Nonetheless, they must continue to proclaim what is right while seeking to "do" the truth (25).

The effort to overcome racism does in fact seem to have become an imperative which is broadly anchored in human consciences. The 1965 U.N. Convention expressed this conviction forcefully: "Any doctrine of superiority based on the difference between races is scientifically false, morally condemnable and socially unjust and dangerous."

The Church's doctrine affirms it with no less vigor all racist theories are contrary to Christian faith and love. And yet, in sharp contrast to this growing awareness of human dignity, racism still exists and continually reappears in different forms (33).

Contribution to World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance

Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace (2001)

As an act of gratuitous love, forgiveness has its own demands: the evil which has been done must be acknowledged and, as far as possible, corrected. The primary demand is therefore respect for truth. Lying, untrustworthiness, corruption, and ideological or political manipulation make it impossible to restore peaceful social relations. Hence the importance of procedures which allow truth to be established (11).

To the requirement of truth there must be added a second: justice. For “forgiveness neither eliminates or lessens the need for the reparation which justice requires, but seeks to reintegrate individuals and groups into society, and States into the community of Nations”. Such justice must respect the fundamental dignity of the human person at all times (11).

From the legal point of view, all persons (individual or corporate) have a right to equitable reparation if personally and directly they have suffered injury (material or moral). The duty to make reparation must be fulfilled in an appropriate way. As far as possible, reparation should erase all the consequences of the illicit action and restore things to the way they would most probably be if that action had not occurred.

When such a restoration is not possible, reparation should be made through compensation (equivalent reparation)... When compensation does not suffice to make reparation for a moral injury, moral reparation can be made, that is satisfaction. An example of this is the offering of an apology or expression of regret to the victim State by the State responsible for the wrong (12).

The international community is aware that the roots of racism, discrimination and intolerance are found in prejudice and ignorance, which are first of all the fruits of sin, but also of faulty and inadequate education (cf. CR, Part IV, n. 28) (13). As part of the general education process, to counteract racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance associated with it, there must be a specific effort to present - especially to the young - certain major values such as the unity of the human race, the dignity of every human being, the solidarity which binds together all the members of the human family. Equally important is an education in respect for human rights and, in this regard, mention should be made of the initiative launched by the United Nations Decade for Education in Human Rights (1995-2004).

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Open Wide Our Hearts: The Enduring Call to Love

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (2018)

Racism occurs because a person ignores the fundamental truth that, because all humans share a common origin, they are all brothers and sisters, all equally made in the image of God.

Racism comes in many forms. It can be seen in deliberate, sinful acts. In recent times, we have seen bold expressions of racism by groups as well as individuals. The re-appearance of symbols of hatred, such as nooses and swastikas in public spaces, is a tragic indicator of rising racial and ethnic animus.

...this attitude of superiority can be seen in how certain groups of people are vilified, called criminals, or are perceived as being unable to contribute to society, even unworthy of its benefits. Racism can also be institutional, when practices or traditions are upheld that treat certain groups of people unjustly. The cumulative effects of personal sins of racism have led to social structures of injustice and violence that makes us all accomplices in racism (3).

We read the headlines that report the killing of unarmed African Americans by law enforcement officials. In our prisons, the number of inmates of color, notably those who are brown and black, is grossly disproportionate (4).

Despite the great blessings of liberty that this country offers, we must admit the plain truth that for many of our fellow citizens, who have done nothing wrong, interactions with the police are often fraught with fear and even danger. At the same time, we reject harsh rhetoric that belittles and dehumanizes law enforcement personnel who labor to keep our communities safe. We also condemn violent attacks against police.

The persistence of the evil of racism is why we are writing this letter now. People are still being harmed, so action is still needed.

What is needed, and what we are calling for, is a genuine conversion of heart, a conversion that will compel change, and the reform of our institutions and society.

To do justice requires an honest acknowledgment of our failures and the restoring of right relationships between us.

Although our nation has moved forward in a number of ways against racial discrimination, we have lost ground in others. Despite significant progress in civil law with regard to racism, societal realities indicate a need for further catechesis to facilitate conversion of hearts. Too many good and faithful Catholics remain unaware of the connection between institutional racism and the continued erosion of the sanctity of life.

We acknowledge with gratitude the religious orders whose charism embodied evangelizing and caring for those who were marginalized and unwelcomed. We recall the bold witness of the Divine Word Missionaries,

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the Oblate Sisters of Providence, Sisters of the Holy Family, the Josephites, the Franciscan Handmaids of Mary, and the Blessed Sacrament Sisters. Likewise, countless individuals—Daniel Rudd, Thomas Wyatt Turner, Sr. Thea Bowman, and Dr. Lena Edwards to name a few—worked tirelessly against the prevailing current of racism to share the Catholic faith with persons of African descent.

Still, to understand how racism works today, we must recognize that generations of African Americans were disadvantaged by slavery, wage theft, “Jim Crow” laws, and by the systematic denial of access to numerous wealth-building opportunities reserved for others. This has left many African Americans without hope, discouraged, disheartened, and feeling unloved. While it is true that some individuals and families have thrived, significant numbers of African Americans are born into economic and social disparity. The poverty experienced by many of these communities has its roots in racist policies that continue to impede the ability of people to find affordable housing, meaningful work, adequate education, and social mobility. The generational effects of slavery, segregation, and the systemic use of violence—including the lynching of more than 4,000 black men, women, and children across 800 different counties throughout the United States between 1877 and 1950 — are realities that must be fully recognized and addressed in any process that hopes to combat racism.

Love compels each of us to resist racism courageously. It requires us to reach out generously to the victims of this evil, to assist the conversion needed in those who still harbor racism, and to begin to change policies and structures that allow racism to persist. Overcoming racism is a demand of justice, but because Christian love transcends justice, the end of racism will mean that our community will bear fruit beyond simply the fair treatment of all.

To press forward without fear also means cooperating with God’s grace by taking direct and deliberate steps for change. It means opening doorways where once only walls stood. As bishops,

we commit ourselves to the following actions with the hope that others, especially those in our spiritual care, will do likewise in their own lives and communities.

Examining our sinfulness—individually, as the Christian community, and as a society—is a humbling experience. Only from a place of humility can we look honestly at past failures, ask for forgiveness, and move toward healing and reconciliation.

This requires us to acknowledge sinful deeds and thoughts, and to ask for forgiveness. The truth is that the sons and daughters of the Catholic Church have been complicit in the evil of racism. In his Papal Bull *Dum Diversas* (1452), Nicholas V granted apostolic permission for the kings of Spain and Portugal to buy and sell Africans, setting the stage for the slave trade. Even though subsequent popes strongly renounced and rejected the international slave trade, much to our shame, many American religious leaders, including Catholic bishops, failed to formally oppose slavery; some even owned slaves.

We also realize the ways that racism has permeated the life of the Church and persists to a degree even today.

Therefore we, the Catholic bishops in the United States, acknowledge the many times when the Church has failed to live as Christ taught—to love our brothers and sisters.

Acts of racism have been committed by leaders and members of the Catholic Church—by bishops, clergy, religious, and laity—and her institutions.

We express deep sorrow and regret for them. We also acknowledge those instances when we have not done enough or stood by silently when grave acts of injustice were committed. We ask for forgiveness from all who have been harmed by these sins committed in the past or in the present.

We affirm that participating in or fostering organizations that are built on racist ideology (for instance, neo-Nazi movements and the Ku Klux Klan) is also sinful—they corrupt individuals and corrode communities. None of these organizations have a place in a just society.

We must speak and never
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21st Century Lynchings in America: Our Red Record

The National Black Sisters' Conference (2020)

In 1895 the activist and Civil Rights icon, Ida B. Wells, wrote a research pamphlet called *The Red Record*. In it Mrs. Wells tabulated the numbers of lynchings in the United States since the Emancipation of African slaves. The conclusion was that little had changed for the Negro in America by the end of the nineteenth century.

America's sensibility is still hardened in the twenty-first century. Black Americans still scream in horror. We still cannot breathe. Black Lives still do not Matter.

One-hundred and twenty-four years later we are still writing the same story! African American men, women, and children are still being lynched, murdered, and executed for playing with a toy gun, watching television in one's own home, and mistaken identity, driving or jogging while black, and being choked to death in cold blood by law enforcement officers, who have sworn to serve and protect. We must speak and never forget their names.

Reason "Sean" Reed shot and killed in Indianapolis; Breonna Taylor, an emergency medical technician in Louisville, KY., shot eight times in her bed; Ahmaud Aubrey killed while out jogging; and George Floyd dying from a police officer's knee on his neck as Mr. Floyd screamed, "I can't breathe!"

The National Black Sisters' Conference (NBSC) condemns the viral disease of systemic racism that America has legitimized and practiced for over 400 years! We will not remain silent! There is more than one pandemic affecting our nation!

If this country is to reclaim its moral stature, we must confess and atone for our original sin, or America will self-destruct as a nation. As Malcolm X once warned the white power structure, "the chickens have come home to roost." Without justice there can be no peace and justice demands that:

- Law Enforcement is held accountable for their willful negligence and compliance in racist activities and actions.
- Choke -holds and other life-threatening forms of physical restraint will not to be used when a suspect is not resisting arrest, and/or is already in custody.
- When justified, as in the death of Mr. George Floyd, law enforcement officers are held accountable for their actions, and when warranted, arrested and prosecuted to the full extent of the law.

Finally, as black Catholic religious women, we call upon Archbishop Bernard A. Hebda, Archbishop of Minneapolis-St. Paul, and all



bishops of good will to speak out on behalf of the church by denouncing these violent acts of hate and racism. As Dr. King told us, “The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice.”

If the most recent pastoral letter on racism, “Open Wide Our Hearts,” written by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, is to have any moral legitimacy, then our episcopal leaders must give more than lip-service to addressing

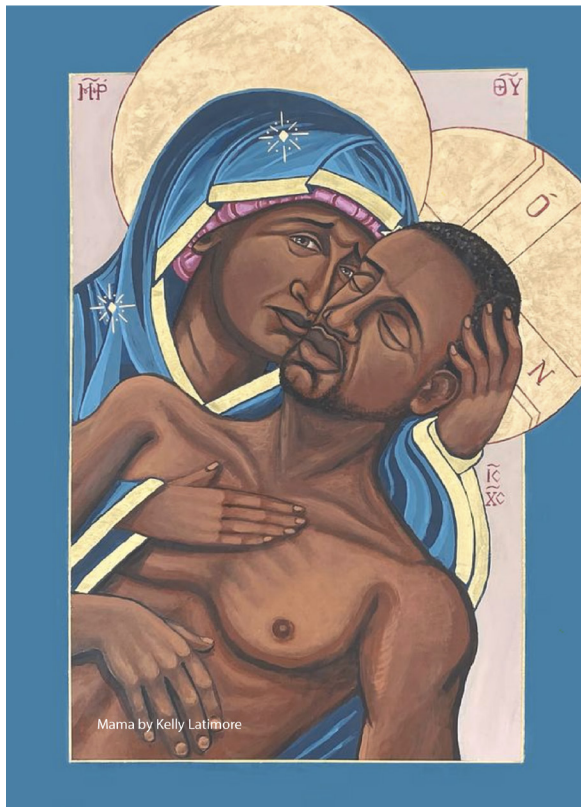
As Christians, as Catholics, as people of faith, we must do more than just pray; we must model Jesus’ message to love one’s neighbor. Our neighbor cannot breathe! Our neighbor is being lynched! Our neighbor is dying! Our Red Record of Hate must end now!

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Reflection Questions

In 1968, the US bishops reflected on the advances the Church had made since its 1958 document, writing, “it is evident that we did not do enough; we have much more to do” and “there are certain tasks which we must acknowledge remain the unfinished business of the Catholic religious community.” In many ways, those words could be written again in 2016.

As you read the document, what do you see as the “unfinished business” of the Catholic community in combatting racism today?

In 1979, the US bishops wrote, “Racism is an evil which endures in our society and in our Church. Despite apparent advances and even significant changes in the last two decades, the reality of racism remains. In large part it is only external appearances which have changed.”

What are the external appearances of racism in our society and Church today?

In 1984, the US Black Catholic Bishops wrote, “Black Americans are a people rich with spiritual gifts...It is fitting...to present briefly the major characteristics of what can be termed ‘Black Spirituality’... Black Spirituality has four major characteristics: It is contemplative. It is holistic. It is joyful. It is communitarian.”

Given your experience of African-American Spirituality -- no matter how limited it may be -- how do you think the Church and our communities could benefit from more fully embracing this spirituality?

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National Black Sisters Conference

Most Catholics
have not heard
a homily on racism
or racial justice

Fr. Bryan Massingale
Racial Justice and the Catholic Church

Reflection Questions (continued)

While the U.S. Bishops have written four statements on racism (1958, 1968, 1979, 2020), black theologian Fr. Bryan Massingale contends that their efforts fall short. For instance, in the 1979 USCCB document, “Brothers and Sisters to Us”, the title itself reveals how the predominantly white episcopal leadership (the “us”) implies that people of color are effectively outside the community. Further, Massingale suggests the bishops developed no formal plan for implementing the teachings and therefore, it has had little or no impact on Catholics since.

Are Massingale’s insights new to you? How do you think you might benefit from reading Catholic social teaching through the lens of black Catholic experience?

While commending the bishops for writing “Open Wide Your Hearts” the National Black Sisters Conference made the powerful claim, “If the most recent pastoral letter on racism, ‘Open Wide Our Hearts,’ written by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, is to have any moral legitimacy, then our episcopal leaders must give more than lip-service to addressing the sin of racism that is destroying communities of color around this nation.

What can you and people in your community do to “give more than lip service” in addressing the sin of racism that is destroying communities of color in this nation?