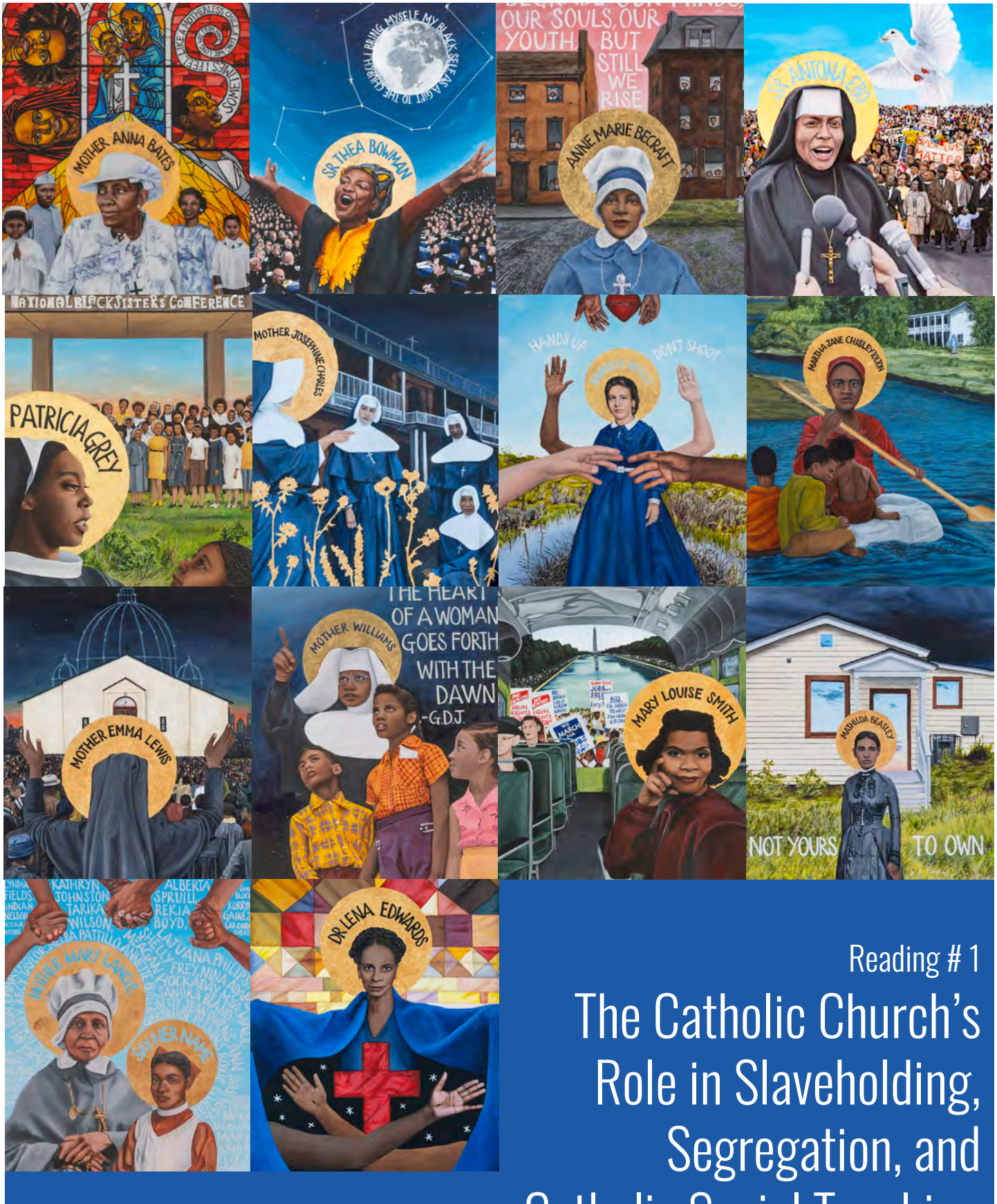

Reading # 1

The Catholic Church's Role in Slaveholding, Segregation, and Catholic Social Teaching

February 2023 Educational Resources

The Catholic Church, Slaveholding, Segregation, and Catholic Social Teaching

Readings

1. Pastoral Letter on Racism by USCCB (in packet).

2. Racial Justice in the Catholic Church, by Brian Massingale, Chapter 2, "An Analysis of Catholic Social Teaching on Racism (in packet).

3. "My Research Into the History of Catholic Slaveholding Transformed My Understanding of My Church," by Rachel Swarns (in packet).

4. Introduction to **Subversive Habits: Black Catholic Nuns in the Long African American Freedom Struggle,** by Shannen Dee Williams (in packet).

Watch/Listen

NPR episode, NPR, "How the Catholic Church Profited from Slavery" https://www.npr.org/2023/06/13/1181767635/the-272-catholic-church-rachel-swarns-slavery-georgetown
The Sisters of Selma: Bearing Witness for Change at https://www.avila.edu/avila-archives/sisters-of-selma/

Reflection Questions

1. In what might feel like a hopeless tradition, the Catholic Church has a definitive stance on the social sin of racism. Was there anything in either the USCCB letter or the Massingale selection that surprised you? Any sources of hope? Of despair?

2. In the New York Times article by Rachel Swarns, Swarns speaks about how her research and deep understanding of the Catholic slave trade (specifically at Georgetown) influenced her faith. How has your knowledge of racism/slavery in the Catholic Church shaped your own spirituality? How might the history influence our institution going forward?

3. 2. Shannen Dee Williams' research, "Subversive Habits," exposed the dark and largely unknown history of segregation and the exclusion of Black Catholic women from religious communities of white nuns. The Sisters of Selma points this painful history and also relates the story of Catholic women of courage. What stood out for you? How did you react when you learned about this history? What inspired you? Grieved you?

When we gather for our first online meeting, we will share our reflections with one another.

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Pastoral Letter on Racism

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. In 1958 we spoke out against the blatant forms of racism that divided people through discriminatory laws and enforced segregation. We pointed out the moral evil that denied human persons their dignity as children of God and their God-given rights. (1) A decade later in a second pastoral letter we again underscored the continuing scandal of racism called for decisive action to eradicate it from our society.(2) We recognize and applaud the readiness of many Americans to make new strides forward in reducing and eliminating prejudice against minorities. We are convinced that the majority of Americans realize that racial discrimination is both unjust and unworthy of this nation.

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.

In response to this mood, we wish to call attention to the persistent presence of racism and in particular to the relationship between racial and economic justice. 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.

This new economic crisis reveals an unresolved racism that permeates our society's structures and resides in the hearts of many among the majority. Because it is less blatant, this subtle form of racism is in some respects even more dangerous -- harder to combat and easier to ignore. Major segments of the population are being pushed to the margins of society in our nation. As economic pressures tighten, those people who are often black, Hispanic, Native American and Asian -- and always poor -- slip further into the unending cycle of poverty, deprivation, ignorance, disease, and crime. Racial identity is for them an iron curtain barring the way to a decent life and livelihood. The economic pressures exacerbate racism, particularly where poor white people are competing with minorities for limited job opportunities. The Church must not be unmindful of these economic pressures. We must be sensitive to the unfortunate and unnecessary racial tension that results from this kind of economic need.

Mindful of its duty to be the advocate for whose who hunger and thirst for justice's sake, the Church cannot remain silent about the racial injustices in society and its own structures. Our concern over racism follows, as well, from our strong commitment to evangelization. Pope John Paul II has defined evangelization as bringing consciences, both individual and social, into conformity with the Gospel.(3) We would betray our commitment to evangelize ourselves and our society were we not to strongly voice our condemnation of attitudes and practices so contrary to the Gospel. Therefore, as the bishops of the United States, we once again address our pastoral reflections on racism to our brothers and sisters of all races.

We do this, conscious of the fact that racism is only one form of discrimination that infects our society. Such discrimination belies both our civil and religious traditions. The United States of America rests on a constitutional heritage that recognizes the equality, dignity, and inalienable rights of all its citizens. Further, we are heirs of a religious teaching which

proclaims that all men and women, as children of God, are brothers and sisters. Every form of discrimination against individuals and groups--whether because of race, ethnicity, religion, gender, economic status, or national or cultural origin--is a serious injustice which has severely weakened our social fabric and deprived our country of the unique contributions of many of our citizens. While cognizant of these broader concerns, we wish to draw attention here to the particular form of discrimination that is based on race.

The Sin of Racism

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." (4) 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.

In order to find the strength to overcome the evil of racism, we must look to Christ. In Christ Jesus "there does not exist among you Jew or Greek, slave or freedom, male or female. All are one in Christ Jesus." (5) As Pope John Paul II has said so clearly, "Our spirit is set in one direction, the only direction for our intellect, will and heart is -- toward Christ our Redeemer, toward Christ the Redeemer of [humanity.]"(6) It is in Christ, then, that the Church finds the central cause for its commitment to justice, and to the struggle for the human rights and dignity of all persons.

When we give in to our fears of the other because he or she is of a race different from ourselves, when we prejudge the motives of others precisely because they are of a different color, when we stereotype or ridicule the other because of racial characteristics and heritage, we fail to heed the command of the Prophet Amos: "Seek good and not evil, that you may live; then truly will the Lord... be with you as you claim!... Then let justice surge like water, and goodness like an unfailing stream." (7)

Today in our country men, women, and children are being denied opportunities for full participation and advancement in our society because of their race. The educational, legal, and financial systems, along with other structures and sectors of our society, impede people's progress and narrow their access because they are black, Hispanic, Native American or Asian.

The structures of our society are subtly racist, for these structures reflect the values which society upholds. They are geared to the success of the majority and the failure of the minority. Members of both groups give unwitting approval by accepting things as they are. Perhaps no single individual is to blame. The sinfulness is often anonymous but nonetheless real. The sin is social in nature in that each of us, in varying degrees, is responsible. All of us in some measure are accomplices. As our recent pastoral letter on moral values states: "The absence of personal fault for an evil does not absolve one of all responsibility. We must seek to resist and undo injustices we have not ceased, least we become bystanders who tacitly endorse evil and so share in guilt in it."(8)

Racism is a Fact

Because the Courts have eliminated statutory racial discrimination and Congress has enacted civil rights legislation, and because some minority people have achieved some measure of success, many people believe that racism is no longer a problem in American life. The continuing existence of racism becomes apparent, however, when we look beneath the surface of our national life: as, for example, in the case of unemployment figures. In the second quarter of 1979, 4.9% of white Americans were unemployed; but for blacks the figure was 11.6%; for Hispanics, 8.3%; and for Native Americans on reservations, as high as 40%. The situation is even more disturbing when one realizes that 35% of black youth, 19.1% of Hispanic youth, and an estimated 60% of Native American youth are unemployed. (9) Quite simply, this means that an alarming proportion of tomorrow's adults are cut off from gainful employment-an essential prerequisite of responsible adulthood. These same youths presently suffer the crippling effects of a segregated educational system which in many cases fails to enlighten the mind and free the spirit, which too often inculcates a conviction of inferiority and which frequently graduates persons who are ill prepared and inadequately trained. In addition, racism raises its ugly head in the violence that frequently surrounds attempts to achieve racial balance in education and housing.

With respect to family life, we recognize that decades of denied access to opportunities have been for minority families a crushing burden. Racial discrimination has only exacerbated the harmful relationship between poverty and family instability.

Racism is only too apparent in housing patterns in our major cities and suburbs. Witness the deterioration of inner cities and the segregation of many suburban areas by means of unjust practices of social steering and blockbusting. Witness also the high proportion of Hispanics, blacks, and Indians on welfare and the fact that the median income of nonwhite families is only 63% of the average white family income. Moreover, the gap between the rich and the poor is widening, not decreasing.(10)

Racism is apparent when we note that the population is our prisons consists disproportionately of minorities; that violent crime is the daily companion of a life of poverty and deprivation; and that the victims of such crimes are also disproportionately nonwhite and poor. Racism is also apparent in the attitudes and behavior of some law enforcement officials and in the unequal availability of legal assistance.

Finally, racism is sometimes apparent in the growing sentiment that too much is being given to racial minorities by way of affirmative action programs or allocations to redress long-standing imbalances in minority representation and government-funded programs for the disadvantaged. At times, protestations claiming that all persons should be treated equally reflect the desire to maintain a *status quo* that favors one race and social group at the expense of the poor and the nonwhite.

Racism obscures the evils of the past and denies the burdens that history has placed upon the shoulders of our black, Hispanic, Native American, and Asian brothers and sisters. An honest look at the past makes plain the need for restitution wherever possible - makes evident the justice of restoration and redistribution.

A Look at the Past

Racism has been part of the social fabric of America since its European colonization. Whether it be the tragic past of the Native Americans, the Mexicans, the Puerto Ricans, or the blacks, the story is one of slavery, peonage, economic exploration, brutal repression, and cultural neglect. All have suffered indignity; most have been uprooted, defrauded or dispossessed of their lands; and none have escaped one or another form of collective degradation by a powerful majority. Our history is littered with the debris of broken promises and treaties, as well as lynchings and massacres that almost destroyed the Indians, humiliated the Hispanics, and crushed the blacks.

But despite this tragic history, the racial minorities of our country have survived and increased. Each racial group has sunk its roots deep in the soil of our culture, thus helping to give to the United States its unique character and its diverse coloration. The contribution of each racial minority is distinctive and rich; each is a source of internal strength for our nation. The history of all gives a witness to a truth absorbed by now into the collective consciousness of Americans: their struggle has been a pledge of liberty and a challenge to future greatness.

Racism Today

Crude and blatant expression of racist sentiment, though they occasionally exist, are today considered bad form. Yet racism itself persists in convert ways. Under the guise of other motives, it is manifest in the tendency to stereotype and marginalize whole segments of the population whose presence perceived as a threat. It is manifest also in the indifference that replaces open hatred. The minority poor are seen as the dross of a post-industrial society -- without skills, without motivation, without incentive. They are expendable. Many times the new face of racism is the computer print-out, the graph of profits and losses, the pink slip, the nameless statistic. Today's racism flourishes in the triumph of private concern over public responsibility, individual success over social commitment, and personal fulfillment over authentic compassion. Then too, we recognize that racism also exists in the attitude and behavior of some who are themselves members of minority groups. Christian ideals of justice must be brought to bear in both the private and the public sector in order that covert racism be eliminated wherever it exists.

The new forms of racism must be brought face-to-face with the figure of Christ. It is Christ's word that is the judgment on this world; it is Christ's cross that is the measure of our response; and it is Christ's face that is the composite of all persons but in a most significant way of today's poor, today's marginal people, today's minorities.

God's Judgment and Promise

The Voice of Scripture

The Christian response to the challenges of our times is to be found in the Good News of Jesus. The words that signaled the start of His public ministry must be the watchword for every Christian response to injustice, "He unrolled the scroll and found the passage where it was written: The spirit of the Lord is upon me; therefore, he has anointed me. He has sent me to bring glad tidings to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives, recovery of sight to the blind and release to prisoners, to announce a year of favor from the Lord. Rolling up the scroll he gave it back ...and sat down...'Today this Scripture passage is fulfilling in your hearing'." (11)

God's word proclaims the oneness of the human family -- from the first words of Genesis, to the "Come, Lord Jesus" of the Book of Revelation. God's word in Genesis announces that all men and women are created in God's image; not just some races and racial types, but all bear the imprint of the Creator and are enlivened by the breath of His one Spirit.

In proclaiming the liberation of Israel, God's word proclaims the liberation of all people from slavery. God's word further proclaims that all people are accountable to and for each other.

This is the message of that great parable of the Final Judgment: "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, escorted by all the angels of heaven. . . all the nations will be assembled before him. Then he will separate them into two groups. . . The king will say to those on his right: 'Come. You have my Father's blessing! . . . For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink. I was a stranger and you welcomed me. . . . I assure you, as often as you did it for one of my least brothers, you did it for me.(12)

God's word proclaims that the person "who listens to God's word but does not put it into practice is like a man who looks into a mirror at the face he was born with . . . then goes off and promptly forgets what he looked like."(13) We have forgotten that we "are strangers and aliens no longer . . . . [We] are fellow citizens of the saints and members of the household of God. [We] form a building which rises on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the capstone."(14)

The Voice of the Church

This is the mystery of our Church, that all men and women are brothers and sisters, all one in Christ, all bear the image of the Eternal God. The Church is truly universal, embracing all races, for it is "the visible sacrament of this saving unity.(15) The Church, moreover, follows the example of its founder and, "through its children, is one with [people] of every condition, but especially with the poor and the afflicted."(16)

This Church has a duty to proclaim the truth about the human being as disclosed in the truth about Jesus Christ. As our Holy Father Pope John Paul II has written: "On account of the mystery of the Redemption [every human being] is entrusted to the solicitude of the Church." The human being is "the primary and fundamental way for the Church."(17)

It is important to realize in the case racism that deal we are dealing with a distortion at the very heart of human nature. The ultimate remedy against evils such as this will not come solely from human effort. What is needed is the recreation of the human being according to the image revealed in Jesus Christ. For He reveals in himself what each human being can and must become.

How great, therefore, is that sin of racism which weakens the Church's witness as the universal sign of unity among all peoples! How great the scandal given by racist Catholics who make the Body of Christ, the Church, a sign of racial oppression! Yet all too often the Church in our country has been for many a "white Church," a racist institution.

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. Worldwide, the Church today is not just European and American; it is also African, Asian, Indian, and Oceanic. It is western, eastern, northern, and southern, black and also brown, white and also red and yellow. In our country, one quarter of the Catholics are Spanish speaking. A million blacks make Catholicism one of the largest denominations among black Americans today. Among our nation's original inhabitants, the Native Americans, the Church's presence is increasingly becoming developed and expressed within the cultures of the various Native American tribes.

It is a fact that Catholic dioceses and religious communities across the country for years have committed selected personnel and substantial funds to relieve oppression and to correct injustices and have striven to bring the Gospel to the diverse racial groups in our land. The Church has sought to aid the poor and downtrodden, who for the most part are also the victims of racial oppression. But this relationship has been and remains two-sided and reciprocal; for the initiative of racial minorities, clinging to their Catholic faith, has helped the Church to grow, adapt, and become truly Catholic and remarkably diverse. Today in our own land the face of Catholicism is the face of all humanity--a face of many colors, a countenance of many cultural forms.

Yet more is needed. The prophetic voice of the Church, which is to be heard in every generation and even to the ends of the earth, must not be muted -- especially not by the counter witness of some of its own people. Let the Church speak out, not only in the assemblies of the bishops, but in every diocese and parish in the land, in every chapel and religious house, in every school, in every social service agency, and in every institution that bears the name Catholic. As Pope John Paul II has proclaimed, the Church must be aware of the threats to humanity and of all that opposes the endeavor to make life itself more human. The Church must strive to make every element of human life correspond to the true dignity of the human person.(18) And during his recent visit to this country, Pope John Paul II discussed the direct implications of this for the Church in the United States:

"It will always remain one of the glorious achievements of this nation that, when people looked toward America, they received together with freedom also a chance for their own advancement. This tradition must be honored also today. The freedom that was gained must be ratified each day by the firm rejection of whatever wounds, weakens or dishonors human life. And so I appeal to all who love freedom and justice to give a chance to all in need, to the poor and the powerless. Break open the hopeless cycles poverty and ignorance that are

still the lot of too many of our brothers and sisters; the hopeless cycles of prejudices that linger on despite enormous progress toward effective equality in education and employment; the cycles of despair in which are imprisoned all those that lack decent food, shelter or employment. . . ." (19)

Therefore, let the Church proclaim to all that the sin of racism defiles the image of God and degrades the sacred dignity of humankind which has been revealed by the mystery of the Incarnation. Let all know that it is a terrible sin that mocks the cross of Christ and ridicules the Incarnation. For the brother and sister of our Brother Jesus Christ are brother and sister to us.

The Voice of the World

We find God's will for us not only in the word of Scripture and in the teaching of his Church but also in the issues and events of secular society. "The Church...recognizes that worthy elements are found in today's social movements, especially an evolution toward unity, a process of wholesome socialization and of association in civic and economic realms." (20) Thus spoke the Church in the Second Vatican Council. That same Council urged the Church, especially the laity, to work in the temporal sphere on behalf of justice and the unity of human kind.(21)

With this in mind, we pay special tribute to those who have struggled and struggle today for civil rights and economic justice in our own country. Nor do we overlook the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights which still speaks to the conscience of the entire world and the several international covenants which demand the elimination of discrimination based on race. None of these, unfortunately, have been ratified by our country, whereas we in America should have been the first to do so. All have a duty to heed the voice of God speaking in these documents.

Our Response

Racism is not merely one sin among many; it is a radical evil that divides the human family and denies the new creation of a redeemed world. To struggle against it demands an equally radical transformation, in our own minds and hearts as well as in the structure of our society.

Conversion is the ever present task of each Christian. In offering certain guidelines for this change of heart as it pertains to racism, we note that these are only first steps in what ought to be a continuing dialogue throughout the Catholic community and the nation at large. In

this context we would urge that existing programs and plans, such as those dealing with family ministry, parish renewal, and evangelization, be used as vehicles for implementing the measures addressed here.

Our Personal Lives

To the extent that racial bias affects our personal attitudes and judgments, to the extent that we allow another's race to influence our relationship and limit our openness, to the extent that we see yet close our hearts to our brothers and sisters in need, (22) - to that extent we are called to conversion and renewal in love and justice.

As individuals we should try to influence the attitudes of others by expressly rejecting racial stereotypes, racial slurs and racial jokes. We should influence the members of our families, especially our children, to be sensitive to the authentic human values and cultural contributions of each racial grouping in our country.

We should become more sensitive ourselves and thereby sensitize our acquaintances by learning more about how social structures inhibit the economic, educational, and social advancement of the poor. We should make a personal commitment to join with others in political efforts to bring about justice for the victims of such deprivation.

Our Community Church

The church must be constantly attentive to the Lord's voice as He calls on His people daily not to harden their hearts.(23) We urge that on all levels the Catholic Church in the United States examine it's conscience regarding attitudes and behavior towards blacks, Hispanics, Native Americans, and Asians. We urge consideration of the evil of racism as it exists in the local Church and reflection upon the means of combating it. We urge scrupulous attention at every level to insure that minority representation goes beyond mere tokenism and involves authentic sharing in responsibility and decision making.

We encourage Catholics to join hands with members of other religious groups in the spirit of ecumenism to achieve the common objectives of justice and peace. During the struggle for legal recognition of racial justice, an important chapter in American history was written as religious groups, Jewish, Protestants, and Catholic, joined in support of civil rights movement which found much of it's initiative and inspiration within the black Protestant Churches. This cooperation should continue to serve as a model for our times.

All too often in the very places where blacks, Hispanics, Native Americans, and Asians are numerous, the Church's officials and representatives, both clerical and lay, are predominantly white. Efforts to achieve racial balance in government, the media, the armed services, and other crucial areas of secular life should not only be supported but surpassed in the institutions and the programs of the Catholic Church.

Particular care should be taken to foster vocations among minority groups.(24) Training for the priesthood, the permanent diaconate, and religious life should not entail an abandonment of culture and traditions or a loss of racial identity but should seek ways in which such culture and traditions might contribute to that training. Special attention is required whenever it is necessary to correct racist attitudes or behaviors among seminary staff and seminarians. Seminary education ought to include an awareness of the history and the contributions of minorities as well as an appreciation of the enrichment of the liturgical expression, especially at the local parish level, which can be found in their respective cultures.

We affirm the teachings of Vatican II on the liturgy by noting that "the liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed." (25) The Church must "respect and foster the spiritual . . . gifts of the various races and peoples" (26) and encourage the incorporation of these gifts into the liturgy.

We see the value of fostering greater diversity of racial and minority group representation in the hierarchy. Furthermore, we call for the adoption of an effective affirmative action program in every diocese and religious institution.

We strongly urge that special attention be directed to the plight of undocumented workers and that every effort be made to remove the fear and prejudice of which they are victims.

We ask in particular that Catholic institutions such as schools, universities, social service agencies, and hospitals, where members of racial minorities are often employed in large numbers, review their policies to see that they faithfully conform to the Church's teaching on justice for workers and respect for their rights. We recommend that investment portfolios be examined in order to determine whether racist institutions and policies are inadvertently being supported; and that, wherever possible, the capital of religious groups be made available for new forms of alternative investment, such as cooperatives, land trusts, and housing for the poor. We further recommend that Catholic institutions avoid the services of agencies and industries which refuse to take affirmative action to achieve equal opportunity and that the Church itself always be a model as an equal opportunity employer.

We recommend that leadership training programs be established on the local level in order to encourage effective leadership among racial minorities on all levels of the Church, local as well as national.

In particular, we recommend the active spiritual and financial support of associations and institutions organized by Catholic blacks, Hispanics, Native Americans, and Asians within the Church for the promotion of ministry to and by their respective communities. There is also a need for more attention to finding ways in which minorities can work together across racial and cultural lines to avoid duplication and competition among themselves. There is also a need for cooperative efforts between racial minorities and other social action groups, such as labor and the women's movement.

Finally, we urgently recommend the continuation and expansion of Catholic schools in the inner cities and other disadvantaged areas. No other form of Christian ministry has been more widely acclaimed or desperately sought by leaders of various racial communities. For a century and a half the Church in the United States has been distinguished by its efforts to educate the poor and disadvantaged, many of whom are not of the Catholic faith. That tradition continues today in - among other places - Catholic schools, where so many blacks, Hispanics, Native Americans, and Asians receive a form of education and formation which constitutes a key to greater freedom and dignity. It would be tragic if today, in the face of acute need and even near despair, the Church, for centuries the teacher and the guardian of civilization, should withdraw from this work in our own society. No sacrifice can be so great, no price can be so high, no short-range goals can be so important as to warrant the lessening of our commitment to Catholic education in minority neighborhoods. More affluent parishes should be made aware of this need and of their opportunity to share resources with the poor and needy in a way that recognizes the dignity of both giver and receiver.

Society at Large

Individuals move on many levels in our complex society: each of us is called to speak and act in many different settings. In each case may we speak and act according to our competence and as the Gospel bids us. With this as our prayer, we refrain from giving detailed answers to complex questions on which we ourselves have no special competence. Instead, we propose several guidelines of a general nature.

The difficulties of these new times demand a new vision and a renewed courage to transform our society and achieve justice for all. We must fight for the dual goals of racial and economic justice with determination and creativity. Domestically, justice demands that we strive for authentic full employment, recognizing the special need for employment of

those who, whether men or women, carry the principal responsibility for support of a family. Justice also demands that we strive for decent working conditions, adequate income, housing, education, and health care for all. Government at the national and local levels must be held accountable by all citizens for the essential services which all are entitled to receive. The private sector should work with various racial communities to insure that they receive a just share of the profits they have helped to create.

Globally, we live in an interdependent community of nations, some rich, some poor. Some are high consumers of the world's resources; some eke out an existence on a near starvation level. As it happens, most of the rich, consuming nations are white and Christian; most of the world's poor are of other races and religions.

Concerning our relationship to other nations, our Christian faith suggests several principles. First, racial difference should not interfere with our dealing justly and peacefully with all other nations. Secondly, those nations which possess more of the world's riches must, in justice, share with those who are in serious need. Finally, the private sector should be aware of its responsibility to promote racial justice, not subordination or exploitation, to promote genuine development in poor societies, not mere consumerism and materialism.

Conclusion

Our words here are an initial response to one of the major concerns which emerged during the consultation on social justice entitled "a Call to Action," which was part of the US Catholic participation in the national bicentennial. The dialogue must continue among the Catholics of our country. We have proposed guidelines and principles and as the bishops of the Catholic Conference in the United States, we must give the leadership to this effort by a commitment of our time, of personnel and of significant financial resources. Others must develop the programs and plan operations. There must be no turning back along the road of justice, no sighing for bygone times of privilege, no nostalgia for simple solutions from another age. For we are children of the age to come, when the first shall be last and the last shall be first, when blessed are they who serve Christ the Lord in all His brothers and sisters, especially those who are poor and suffer injustice.

Endnotes

1. 1. 1. Discrimination and Christian Conscience. National Catholic Welfare Conference. 1958.

2. National Race Crisis. National Conference of Catholic Bishops. 1968.

3. Pope John Paul II Address at the Third General Assembly of The Latin American Bishops, Puebla, Mexico, January 28, 1979. p. 1.2

4. Matthew, 7:12.

5. Galatians, 3:28.

6. Redemptor Hominis, 7. Pope John Paul II. 1979.

7. Amos, 5:14, 24.

8. Live in Christ Jesus, p. 25. National Conference of Catholic Bishops. 1976.

9. Employment and Earnings, Vol. 26, No. 10, Dept. of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, October, 1979. Precise data on youth unemployment among Native Americans are not available. The 60% unemployment figure is an estimate by the U.S. Dept. of Labor.

10. Widening Economic Gap, National Urban League, Research Dept., 1979. See also "Consumer Income," Current Population Report, Series P60 #118,1979.

11. Luke, 4:17-21.

12. Matthew, 25:31-40

13. James, 1:23-24

14. Ephesians, 2;19-20.

15. Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, 9.

16. Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity, 12.

17. Redemptor Hominis, 13, 14.

18. Redemptor Hominis, 14.

19. Homily at Battery Park, New York. Pope John Paul II. October, 1979.

20. Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, 42.
21. Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, 43.
22. I John, 3:17.
23. Psalms, 94:8.
24. Concern for vocations from minority groups and the preparation of priests to serve in a multi-cultural and multi-racial society has been previously expressed in The Program for Priestly Formation, which was developed and approved by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1976.
25. Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, 10.
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over a sprawling Maryland plantation controlled by his Cath

Chapter Two

An Analysis of Catholic Social Teaching on Racism

In the previous chapter, I argued for a more cultural and systemic understanding of racism. I contend that racism is a deeply entrenched symbol system of meanings and values attached to skin color that provides group identity, shapes personal consciousness, and justifies the existence of race-based economic, social, and political disparities. This approach better accounts for its various manifestations in contemporary U.S. society. We now turn to the task of analyzing Catholic engagement and reflection on racial justice in light of this cultural understanding.

Perhaps the most remarkable thing to note concerning U.S. Catholic social teaching on racism is how little there is to note. Since the beginning of the modern civil rights movement with the 1954 *Brown* school desegregation decision, the U.S. Bishops' Conference has issued only three statements solely devoted to racial justice in the name of the entire body of bishops (1958, 1968, and 1979). None of these is marked by the depth or rigor of social analysis that one finds in many of their other social justice statements (for example, the landmark pastoral letters on the challenge of peace and economic justice). During this time, the church's universal magisterium, specifically the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, has developed only two documents that are devoted to this topic (1988 and 2001).

All of these statements are rather "thin," both in their length and the theological reflection and analysis they offer. Furthermore, since the publication of the 1979 document, *Brothers and Sisters to Us*, fewer than 18 percent of U.S. archbishops and bishops have issued individual or collective statements concerning the sin of racism.[1]

Other than these few documents, what the bishops themselves call the "radical evil" of racism is mentioned only in incidental and passing ways in official Catholic social teaching, including relatively recent resources such as the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*. To say that racial injustice is not a major concern of Catholic social teaching would be an understatement. In the words of the foremost proponent of black theology, James H. Cone, "It is amazing that racism could be so prevalent and violent in American life and yet so absent in white theological discourse."[2]

In what follows, I will offer an exposition and analysis of the three major pastoral statements issued by the U.S. Roman Catholic hierarchy in the last half of the twentieth century, roughly corresponding to the beginning of the modern civil rights movement. These constitute the official response and position of the Catholic Church in America to the presence of racism and the evils that it causes. The historical milieu and ecclesial context of each statement will be sketched, the main features of the document's content summarized, and the aftermath and effects of the statement will be noted.

I will also examine more recent statements issued by individual bishops in the United States, showing the principal characteristics and moral analysis found within them. Finally, I will offer a critique of these documents in the light of the understanding of racism presented in the previous chapter, a black liberationist hermeneutic, and the experience of black Catholic membership.

PROLOGUE: A CONTEXT FOR THIS DISCUSSION

To situate this body of teaching, I will discuss some historical markers that illustrate the importance of this topic and some recurring dynamics in the Catholic approach to racial injustice.

The Browning of the Catholic Church

Along with the rest of the nation, the Catholic Church in the United States is undergoing a dramatic shift in its demographic composition. At least 46 percent of its members are people of color.[3] In many dioceses, Hispanics constitute the largest single group of Catholics — if not an outright majority. Every Sunday in this country, Mass is celebrated in dozens of languages; among these are English, Spanish, Italian, Chinese, Korean, Hmong, Vietnamese, and Polish. U.S. Catholics are increasingly diverse in our racial and ethnic heritages, in our languages and skin colors, in our ways of perceiving life and celebrating our faith. By God's grace, the church in the United States is rapidly becoming a microcosm of the world's peoples.

Yet the diversity of the Catholic Christian community is not always seen as a cause for celebration; too often it is a source of tension and discomfort. The enduring residential segregation of U.S. society is mirrored in the racial and ethnic composition of Catholic parishes, which are often geographically based and thus reflect the racial and economic disparities of our nation's neighborhoods. Many persons of color can tell stories of how they received a rude welcome when visiting a so-called "white" parish. Some even report they were refused the "sign of peace" as the community prepared to approach the altar to receive the Eucharist.[4] In addition, many Catholics are uneasy when they are asked to worship in multicultural or multilingual ways. So often one hears complaints such as, "Why do we have to sing in Spanish?" "Don't they have their own church?" "Gospel music isn't really Catholic, is it?" Rather than rejoicing in the God-given diversity of the human family, too often Catholics reflect the racial attitudes and divisions of U.S. society.

Moreover, even though almost half of its members are persons of color, this reality is not reflected in the church's leadership. The conference of bishops, the members of diocesan staffs, the senior executives of Catholic agencies and organizations, the major superiors of religious orders, and the faculties of Catholic seminaries and educational institutions are still predominately — even overwhelmingly — white.

Sadly, the words of the few Catholic African American bishops, stated over twenty years ago, remain too relevant today: "Blacks and other minorities still remain absent from many aspects of Catholic life and are only meagerly represented on the decision-making level.... 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 in our community."[5]

Pope John Paul's Challenge and Its Reception

The next historical marker is the bold summons that Pope John Paul II gave to our country during his last pastoral visit to the United States in January of 1999. In St. Louis, while challenging Catholics to be "unconditionally pro-life," he declared:

> As the new millennium approaches, there remains another great challenge facing this community... [and] the whole country: *to put an end to every form of racism, a plague which ... [is] one of the most persistent and destructive evils of the nation.*[6]

Thus spoke the Holy Father in 1999. However, the pontiff's prophetic call was not universally embraced by the Catholic faithful. Indeed, a major Catholic commentator speaking on EWTN, the Catholic cable network program, immediately after the pope's address, lauded John Paul's uncompromising stances concerning the death penalty and euthanasia but noted that the pope's "curious remarks about racism" demonstrated "how ill-served the Holy Father is by his advisors, since racism is no longer a pressing social issue in the United States."

This moment is important for two reasons. First, this particular cable network (EWTN) is the self-styled "media presence" of the U.S. Catholic Church. That such statements could be aired on a network renowned for its orthodoxy, and that they were not officially repudiated or challenged, suggests that standing against racism is not a major marker of Catholic identity or orthodoxy. Second, this

event illustrates a recurring dynamic in the U.S. Catholic engagement with racism, namely, that the church of Rome has been more vigilant, solicitous, concerned, and forthright regarding racial injustice and the plight of racial minorities in the United States than have U.S. Catholics and their leaders. Rome has shown a willingness to confront racial inequality in a way that the U.S. church has yet to muster.[7]

The Controversy over the Federated Colored Catholics

The final historical marker concerns the controversy over the existence of the Federated Colored Catholics, a group founded by the black Catholic layman Thomas Wyatt Turner in 1924. One of the group's major concerns was to develop a black voice for the concerns of black Catholics within their church. As Turner declared, "Too often issues related to the colored are discussed without any contribution from the people themselves."[8] In a series of conventions held between 1924 and 1932, this group pressed for an end to Negro exclusion "from the normal life of the Catholic Church in America"[9] manifested in racially segregated churches and barriers to admission to Catholic schools, organizations, and hospitals.

At its 1930 convention in Detroit, the Federated Colored Catholics articulated these aspirations in the following declaration:

> We wish to earn a decent livelihood; free from interference based upon merely racial attitudes.
>
> We desire to educate all our boys and girls in Catholic schools, from the primary school to the university, according to each one's native ability.
>
> We desire admission to Catholic institutions, [such as hospitals, parishes, and the Knights of Columbus],... to which, as Catholics and human beings, we may legitimately lay claim.
>
> We wish as Catholics to insist upon the sacredness of human life. We condemn every violation of law in the taking of life, no matter what the crime. [This is a reference to the

> widespread practice of brutal and sadistic lynching of blacks, principally men].
>
> We wish to enjoy the full rights of citizenship, in direct proportion to the duties and sacrifices expected of our group, and cheerfully rendered by us to our country in peace and in war.
>
> We wish all our fellow citizens... to be freed from the obsession that Negroes' progress is harmful to American civilization; and to recognize... that the good of one group is the good of all.
>
> We do not wish to be treated as "a problem," but as a multitude of human beings, sharing a common destiny and the common privilege of the Redemption with all humankind.[10]

However, this program — indeed the organization itself — ran into stiff opposition from the leading white Catholic "liberals" of the time. The most prominent among them, Father John LaFarge, gave voice to a major objection, namely, the attempt to bring "unified, mass pressure to bear upon the Church in order to obtain recognition of their rights." For LaFarge (who, I hasten to note, was among the most progressive white voices on racial matters of this period) and other white liberal Catholics, the tone of demand found in the black leaders' statement made them equate a group dedicated to Negro solidarity with a "separatist organization." The controversy centered over two questions. First, whether it was better to fight for the rights of Negroes in the church through activism, or to promote better race relations through discussion and education? Second, what was the role of white clergy in this black organization: to encourage black leadership or be a force for white paternalism? LaFarge's position is quite clear. He wrote, "Although the Negro is the victim of discrimination, he does not necessarily know the answer or the cure."[11]

LaFarge did more than just write. In 1932, he orchestrated a constitutional revision, led by a group called the Clergy Conference on Negro Welfare, which changed the organization's name from the Federated Colored Catholics to the Catholic Interracial Council. Turner

was removed as the head of this new group. The new group's leadership was effectively decided and controlled by white clergy. LaFarge then articulated the group's new approach: "Direct assault will not dislodge [racial] customs and taboos. The idols will bow out only when people have become sufficiently enlightened to wish to remove them of themselves. Hence, basic to the situation is a program of education, in the sense of public relations for the truth."[12]

Indicative of this new approach is a manifesto issued by a group of twelve white New York college students in 1933. LaFarge gave extensive presentation and enthusiastic praise to their resolutions:

> To maintain that the Negro as a human being and as a citizen is entitled to the rights of life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness and to the essential opportunities of life and the full measure of social justice.
>
> To be kind and courteous to every colored person, remembering the heavy yoke of injustice and discrimination he is bearing.
>
> To say a kind word for him on every proper occasion.
>
> Not to speak slightingly or use nicknames which tend to humiliate, offend, or discourage him.
>
> To remember that the Catholic Church and the Catholic program of social justice have been called "the greatest hope of the colored race."
>
> To recognize that the Negro shares my membership in the Mystical Body of Christ and the privileges that flow therefrom and to conduct myself in accordance therewith.
>
> To give liberally on the Sundays of the year when the collections are devoted to the heroic missionaries laboring among the Negro group.
>
> To become increasingly interested in the welfare of the Negro; to engage actively in some form of Catholic Action looking to the betterment of his condition, spiritually and materially.[13]

Comparing the two sets of resolutions, one cannot help noticing the stunning contrast. The second reflects an attitude of benign paternalism, seeing blacks as a group in need of white sympathy and services. They are considered to be a "missioned to" people who are not acknowledged to have a sense of agency or initiative. Indeed, as we saw in the deliberations of the white clergy, there is a real suspicion—if not fear—of black leadership or initiative. To anticipate a contrast to be developed later, these white liberals evidence great *sympathy* for the plight of the victims of social injustice, but little real *compassion.*

Most important, the first manifesto from the black Catholic leaders calls for systemic changes. It critiques the institution of racial segregation and advocates genuine racial equality with whites. The white resolutions have no call for systemic change. Rather they focus on treating black individuals with courtesy, decency, and respect. The contrast could not be more glaring: one approach advocates social transformation; the other calls for good manners. One presses for justice; the other counsels kindness.

Understanding this dynamic is key for appreciating what is to follow. For LaFarge's approach of combating racism through good manners, education, reason, and interracial dialogue becomes the dominant approach of the U.S. Catholic Church, an approach that endures even until today. This orientation is a constant in the history of Catholic engagement with racism, and it is important to note that it represents the thinking of the most progressive or enlightened white Catholics, until very recently.

With this context, let us now examine the various statements of the collective body of Catholic bishops.

DISCRIMINATION AND THE CHRISTIAN CONSCIENCE (1958)[14]

Perhaps the watershed event in the history of twentieth-century American race relations is the landmark decision of the Supreme Court in 1954, *Brown v. Topeka Board of Education.* In this decision, the Court rejected the doctrine of "separate but equal" in

the area of education. It declared that segregated facilities of their very nature are "inherently inferior" and called upon educational facilities to be integrated "with all deliberate speed."

This Supreme Court decision is indicative of the historical and social climate of the 1958 bishops' statement. Racism, as evidenced in prejudicial and discriminatory attitudes, customs, and behaviors, enjoyed the protection and favor of the law. Especially — though not exclusively — in the South, unequal treatment between blacks and whites was mandated even in the most ordinary circumstances of life such as eating meals in a restaurant, visiting a public park, or traveling on a bus.

The overt racism of daily social interactions was also manifest in the political and economic spheres. Fear of reprisals and physical violence from the Ku Klux Klan and White Citizens Councils kept all but a small fraction of the eligible black population from registering to vote. Black representation in the major professions of law and medicine was woefully inadequate and in some states virtually nonexistent — and these few persons were severely limited as to their clientele and the places where they could practice. Segregated housing patterns were the norm. While housing and neighborhood patterns were not always regulated by law, the effective use of "block busting" and racial steering techniques resulted in a de facto segregation almost as rigid and blatant as a de jure system.

With the 1954 Supreme Court decision, an era of attempts to crack this system of hard-core segregation began in earnest. Martin Luther King Jr.'s nonviolent methods of economic boycotts and peaceful demonstrations achieved the desegregation of Montgomery's buses. Efforts were made to desegregate school systems; often these were met with violence, as in the case of Little Rock in 1957.

It was in this context of a nation attempting to come to grips with the challenge of desegregation and the upsetting of longstanding cultural customs that the American bishops issued their 1958 statement. In this document, the bishops voiced their concern that the "transcendent moral issues" involved in the quest for racial justice

and equality had been forgotten or obscured. Noting that this was a multifaceted problem that had been analyzed from the disciplines of law, history, economics, and sociology, the bishops declared that "the time has come... to cut through the maze of secondary or less essential issues and to come to the heart of the problem. The heart of the race question is moral and religious" (187–88). Thus the bishops' intention was to address the moral and religious aspects of the question, in particular the need for an individual conversion or change of "poisoned attitudes" toward our fellow men (188).

There are four doctrinal bases upon which the bishops based their moral judgment of compulsory segregation: (1) the "universal love of God for all mankind" revealed especially in the expiatory death of Jesus for all; (2) Jesus' mandates to love one's neighbor and "to teach all nations," implying that all men are brothers and sisters and neighbors to one another; (3) the intrinsic universality of the Christian faith, which "knows not the distinctions of race, color, or nationhood"; and (4) the natural moral law "that God has implanted in the souls of all men," which teaches that each human being "has an equal right to life, to justice before the law, to marry and rear a family under human conditions, and to an equitable opportunity to use the goods of this earth for his needs and those of his family" (188–89).

Upon these foundations the bishops established two principles to govern the behavior and attitudes of Christians in the realms of race relations: (1) the equality of all peoples in the sight of God, rooted in the fact of humanity's common creation, redemption, and eternal destiny; and (2) the obligation to love our fellow human beings. This Christian love, the bishops stated, was not "a matter of emotional likes or dislikes... but a firm purpose to do good to all men..." (189).

In light of the above reasoning, the bishops reached the main conclusion of their statement. It was their judgment that enforced segregation could not be reconciled with the Christian view of the human person. For segregation "in itself and by its very nature imposes a stigma of inferiority upon the segregated people" and

as a matter of historical fact it "has led to oppressive conditions and the denial of basic human rights for the Negro" (190).

In this document, the bishops made no specific recommendations or proposals for action. They merely called upon all to "act quietly, courageously, and prayerfully" and urged that any concrete plans for action be based on "prudence," which was defined as that virtue "that inclines us to view problems in their proper perspective" (191–92). They deplored both "gradualism" and the "rash impetuosity" that leads to "ill-timed and ill-considered ventures" (192). They commended instead a "method of quiet conciliation" (187). Clearly the bishops had no intention of making this document a bold clarion call to action. Catholics were not being urged to become proactive agents of racial justice. Rather, the bishops hoped that the faithful would "seize the mantle of leadership from both the agitator and the racist." While they stated their position firmly and clearly, a calm, balanced, reasoned tone pervades the document. It is a cautious and deliberately crafted statement of the policy and position of the Catholic Church on the matter of racism and especially mandatory segregation.

In general, the immediate response of the Catholic press to this statement was positive. Words such as "strong," "impressive," and "historic" were used to describe it. But the document had little secular significance or influence. There are at least two reasons for this. A major reason lies in the tardiness of the Catholic response — over four years *after* the Supreme Court's decision — as compared with the earlier statements of twenty-one other major American Christian denominations. The Catholic Church was the only religious body whose national assembly first issued a statement on the topic as late as 1958; all the other major Christian bodies had issued statements by early 1957, with some having done so as soon as 1954. To put it bluntly, the Catholic Church was very "late to the party."

The second reason stems from the lack of specificity in the Catholic response as compared to similar documents by Protestant bodies. The Protestant statements tended to be more concrete, calling for support of the Supreme Court decision, the integration of church facilities, and the effective extension of the Negro's right to

vote. Many contained explicit condemnations of the Ku Klux Klan, White Citizens Councils, and violent, lawless attacks on integration efforts. None of these realities are even mentioned in the Catholic document. Despite their judgment that compulsory segregation was incompatible with Christian belief, there was no call to desegregate Catholic facilities or fraternal organizations. In contrast to the Protestant statements, the Catholic response could only be seen as general and vague; consequently it was easily dismissed as being merely a pious exhortation.[15]

A possible — indeed probable — explanation for both this tardiness and lack of specificity is that this statement was issued reluctantly under pressure from Rome and over the objections of leading U.S. church authorities. John Cronin, a priest then working at the National Catholic Welfare Conference, was the principal drafter of the statement. Years later, he published an account of the circumstances surrounding the document's genesis. He relates how Rome was insistent that the bishops issue a letter on racism, and indeed Cronin had one ready in draft form. But the chair of the Conference's Administrative Board resisted, fearing "it would create division among the bishops." The day before he died, Pope Pius XII sent a cablegram to the apostolic delegate in the United States, "ordering the American bishops to issue the statement at once." After Pius's death, the delegate held an emergency meeting with the American cardinals preparing for the conclave to elect a new pope. Cronin states, "They decided to suppress the cablegram as unofficial, since it lacked the papal seal." Cronin relates that if it were not for the forceful interventions of Cardinal O'Boyle of Washington, D.C., prevailing over the lingering recalcitrance and obstructions of other American cardinals, the statement in all likelihood would not have been issued.[16]

One should also note that the statement apparently had little impact upon efforts to deal with racism within the church itself. William Osborne describes his 1967 work, *The Segregated Covenant,* as "the story of the slow and unsteady implementation of the bishops' declaration" of 1958.[17] Osborne based this conviction upon the following observations: the membership lists of civil

rights groups (for example, CORE and the NAACP) were underrepresentative of the Catholic population; Catholic youth were "notoriously absent" from the sit-ins and freedom rides of the civil rights movement; Negro Catholics were refused admission to Catholic schools and even hospitals; a separate Negro Catholic Church "existed in every major city in the United States"; there was a serious scarcity of Negro priests; and the rank and file of Catholic people "exhibited no distinguishable attitudes or practices vis-à-vis civil rights" from the rest of the population. The strong impression one has is that the average Catholic had not read the 1958 statement — much less agreed with it.[18] Thus at the end of his study, Osborne concludes:

> The position of the Catholic Church on discrimination in employment, housing, and access to public accommodations is clear and convincing. But this is the policy statement of an organization: it is not to be mistaken for the response of the Catholic people, nor even of the bishops or clergy. As this study reveals, there are still several large dioceses where these problems receive only marginal attention, if any at all.[19]

Such were the effects and aftermath of the Catholic bishops' 1958 statement.

THE NATIONAL RACE CRISIS (1968)[20]

> Now — ten years later — it is evident that we did not do enough; we have much more to do.... It became clear that we failed to change the attitudes of many believers. (175)

Ten years later, the Catholic bishops again found it necessary to address themselves to the racial problems and tensions of the United States. As the quote above indicates, there was the realization that their previous statement did not do what was intended. American Catholics did not respond to the nuanced, careful, and reasoned articulation of church teaching on matters of race. What events

moved the bishops to this realization and caused them to address the racial situation one more time?

There are perhaps three factors that are essential components of the historical and social context of this statement. The first is the "long, hot summer" of 1967 when racially motivated rioting and civil disturbances rocked many major urban centers. Newark, Detroit, and Washington, D.C., were among the hardest hit. These urban rebellions stoked fears of racial insurrection in the nation. In the wake of these disturbances, the Presidential Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders (popularly called the Kerner Commission) was formed to discover why the rioting occurred and what could be done to avoid future racial disturbances.

The release of the Kerner Commission's report in March of 1968 is the second significant event leading up to the publication of the 1968 Catholic statement.[21] The Kerner Report was a devastatingly direct, honest, and dire exposé and assessment of the explosive and volatile nature of the nation's racial situation. The major findings of the Kerner Commission were:

> This is our basic conclusion: Our nation is moving toward two societies, one black, one white—separate and unequal.
>
> Discrimination and segregation have long permeated much of American life; they now threaten the future of every American.
>
> To pursue our present course will involve the continuing polarization of the American community and, ultimately, the destruction of basic democratic values.
>
> ...White society is deeply implicated in the ghetto. White institutions created it, white institutions maintain it, and white society condones it.
>
> White racism is essentially responsible for the explosive mixture which has been accumulating in our cities since the end of World War II.
>
> The most fundamental [cause of the mood of violence in 1967] is the racial attitude and behavior of white Americans toward black Americans.

The Kerner Commission's report is given extensive presentation because of its impact upon the bishops' deliberations on the matter of race. It established in an undeniable and irrefutable fashion the pervasiveness and urgent seriousness of the country's race problem.

A third component of the social-historical matrix of this statement was the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. on April 4, 1968. The killing of this civil rights figure was a clear sign to many of how deeply rooted racial tensions were in America and the distance the country had yet to travel toward achieving a solution to its racial problems. His death triggered another wave of rioting and civil disturbances in over sixty-two cities, which raised the fear that the country would have to endure another "long, hot summer." Furthermore, his death opened the possibility that more militant "Black Power" advocates would seize the leadership of the civil rights movement.

Not only is the historical context important for understanding this document; there was also a significant development within the U.S. church itself: the publication of a statement from the National Black Catholic Clergy Caucus (NBCCC) in April of 1968. This inaugural meeting of the NBCCC was the first national gathering of the country's black Catholic clergy and marked the first attempt in many decades of black Catholics to speak to their church from the perspective of their black experience. Joseph A. Francis, a participant in that 1968 meeting, who later served as auxiliary bishop of Newark, describes the mood of this convocation:

> We had been told for such a long time and in so many ways by so many persons that we were second rate, that we were less than equal and would never amount to anything in society and in the church.... We were determined to set out on a course of self-determination which would not only prove our detractors and oppressors wrong and benefit all of our people, including our oppressors, but would impress the Catholic Church, in which we believed and which we loved, to take us seriously and begin to place [us] in our rightful positions of leadership and ministry.[22]

This historic assembly approved a statement that shocked the Catholic community. In perhaps its most famous phrase, the black clergy described the Catholic Church as "a white racist institution." They called upon the church to recognize that a profound change had occurred in the attitude of the black community, manifested in the demand that "black people control their own affairs and make decisions for themselves." (Note the echoes of Thomas Wyatt Turner!) The black priests also described the increasing alienation and estrangement that was taking place between the black community and the Catholic Church due to the church's "past complicity with and active support of [the] prevailing attitudes and institutions of America." The statement concluded with this warning:

> ...unless the Church, by an immediate, effective and total reversing of its present practices, rejects and denounces *all* forms of racism within its ranks and institutions and in the society of which she is a part, she will become unacceptable in the black community.[23]

Thus the bishops, meeting in late April of 1968, were faced with a societal and ecclesial context that they could not ignore. Because of the critical situation of the nation, something more than the cautious approach used in 1958 would be necessary. As an article published in the *National Catholic Reporter* on the eve of their gathering put it: "The essential decision facing the bishops is: 'Shall words be supplemented with action?' "[24]

One of the most striking differences between the 1958 and 1968 statements is their tone. The tenor of the latter document is strong and urgent; it is readily apparent that this statement was written in an atmosphere of *crisis*. (Hence, even the title of the statement, *The National Race Crisis*, is significant). There is a strong undercurrent of fear present — fear of social upheaval and destruction:

> When will we realize the degree of alienation and polarization that prevails in the nation today? When will we understand that civil protests could easily erupt into civil war? ... 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. (178)

Another noticeable difference between the two documents is the negligible doctrinal base or theoretical justification found in the 1968 statement for its conclusions. The bishops in 1968 were not so much concerned with giving a highly reasoned articulation of their position as they were with making their flocks aware of the dire need to act decisively. What little doctrinal justification that is present is mentioned in an almost offhand way: the eradication of racism would enable people to "live with equal opportunity to fulfill the promise of their creation in the image and likeness of God" (176) and enable Christians to demonstrate that "love of neighbor which is the proof of love of God" (177).

In two very noteworthy ways, this document advances the positions taken in the previous one. First, it contains an explicit acknowledgment of Catholic culpability in the genesis of the current race crisis. The document states: "Catholics, like the rest of American society, must recognize their responsibility for allowing these conditions to persist.... In varying degree, we all share the guilt" (175). Second, this statement takes a much broader view of the problem of racism. It recognizes that racist attitudes and behaviors "exist, not only in the hearts of men but in the fabric of their institutions" (175). Thus a concern is shown not just for individual race prejudice but for institutional racism as well. Indeed, as will be seen, most of the bishops' recommendations concern the institutional manifestations of racism.

The bishops' understanding and analysis of the race problem amount to a virtual endorsement of the findings of the Kerner Report. In fact, explicit reference to the Commission occurs four times in the document. They accept the Commission's views that the nation is becoming rapidly polarized into two separate and unequal societies and that white racism is essentially responsible for the "current social crisis" (175, 176). Thus the bishops conclude that the national race crisis "is of a magnitude and peril far

transcending any which the Church in America or the nation has previously confronted" (177).

Unlike its predecessor, this document makes several concrete and strongly urgent recommendations for action. Within the Catholic community, the bishops first called for the "total eradication of any elements of discrimination in our parishes, schools, hospitals, [and] homes for the aged" (176). Second, an Urban Task Force was established within the United States Catholic Conference to direct and coordinate all Catholic efforts in this field. Dioceses were strongly urged to establish similar programs on the local level (176–77). In the wider societal arena, the bishops stated that quality education for the poor was "a moral imperative"; called upon the private sector to provide employment for Negroes, stating that should it fail to do so "it becomes the duty of the government to intervene"; and strongly urged the "strict implementation . . . of both the letter and the spirit" of the federal Open Housing Act to advance integrated and fair housing.

Despite the significant advances that this statement made over that of 1958, it nonetheless did not receive unqualified approval and acceptance. In an editorial entitled "B Plus for Effort," the *National Catholic Reporter* called the bishops' priorities "dubious" in light of the fact that the Urban Task Force was allotted only $28,000 — as compared to several hundred thousand for a study of clerical concerns (namely, priestly celibacy) and $2.2 million for the Catholic University of America. Yet it commended the bishops for treating not just ecclesiastical problems but social issues as well. The editorial concluded:

> Most of all, it was heartening to learn that the greatest part of the bishops' discussion was on race and poverty. The announced result was not instantly impressive. . . . But it seems to us that a new direction is being set.[25]

Newsweek provided detailed coverage of the document's proposals. It also reported the "strong dissatisfaction" of "militant Negro priests" with the document's recommendations. A spokesman was quoted as saying: "the Catholic Church is primarily a white racist

institution. There's a fantastic gap between our thinking and the thinking of the bishops." The spokesman is further reported as saying that the only way to bridge the gap was to recruit more Negro priests and increase black representation in the church's hierarchy.[26]

Indeed, perhaps the most significant development of this era was the creation of several black-identified groups within the Catholic Church. In addition to the NBCCC, the National Black Sisters' Conference, the National Black Lay Caucus, and the National Black Seminarians' Association came into existence during this time. In fact, within two years after the publication of the black clergy statement, the National Office for Black Catholics (NOBC) was established. Headquartered in Washington, D.C., this office functioned as the coordinating agency for the various black groups and institutionalized black reflection, advocacy, and presence within the U.S. Catholic experience.[27]

In summary, the 1968 race statement advances in several ways the position of 1958. It was a much more comprehensive and timely response to the social-historical context, evidenced an understanding of the institutional aspects of racism, showed an appreciation for the findings of the social sciences in its analysis of the racial situation, and addressed itself to the racism within the Catholic community. Yet note how it took a strong external stimulus in the form of several urgent social and ecclesial crises to compel the bishops to act. While further research is needed to confirm this hypothesis, my studies thus far lead me to believe that the U.S. bishops act corporately on racism only in response to external pressure from Rome and/or grave crises in church or society. Perhaps the main weaknesses of the document are its lack of doctrinal foundation and theological reflection and the absence of sufficient financial commitment for its successful implementation.

BROTHERS AND SISTERS TO US (1979)[28]

> 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. (381)

In these opening words of this response to America's racial dilemma, the Catholic bishops state their reason for yet another pastoral letter: the fact that racism still remains a major human rights challenge. Despite changes in the nation's laws, the granting of voting rights, and the elimination of enforced segregation, the bishops were forced to conclude that "too often what has happened has been only a covering over, not a fundamental change" (383).

What was the historical and social situation that moved the bishops to make these observations regarding the presence of racism in America and to issue a third pastoral letter? In the late 1970s the nation entered a new phase in its history of race relations. Having overcome the problem of de jure, or legally sanctioned, discrimination and segregation, it now had to come to grips with the far more difficult matter of de facto discrimination, in other words, the racism that results from the very operation of social institutions and systems (such as education, finance, and justice) and from the accumulated effects of a history of racial oppression. De facto segregation cannot be eradicated simply by passing a law against it; overcoming it requires positive actions and innovative programs.

Thus the late 1970s were a time of school desegregation controversies. Busing often met organized and violent resistance, especially in Boston and Louisville. This was an era of affirmative action plans that were efforts to extend preferential treatment to minorities in order to compensate for deficiencies caused by past racial discrimination. This was also a time of intense legal debates over the use of quota systems designed to achieve this goal and the existence of so-called "reverse discrimination." Moreover, this was a time of economic recession, with the poor — who were disproportionately black, Hispanic, and Native American — being the hardest hit. Finally, the 1970s saw the rise of right-wing extremist groups such as the Ku Klux Klan and the neo-Nazis. Through demonstrations, vocal opposition to desegregation efforts, and mass distribution of hate literature, they increased the level of racial tension throughout the South and in several northern urban centers. *U.S. News & World Report* attributed the rise of these groups to (1) a backlash at the steady gains in the South by blacks since the 1960s; (2) a widespread

dissatisfaction with busing and affirmative action programs; and (3) mounting anxiety over the nation's economic troubles, especially inflation and unemployment, which caused poor and lower-class whites to perceive black gains as a threat.[29]

Ecclesial developments within the Catholic community provided another impetus to reexamine and rearticulate the church's racial teachings. As part of the Catholic contribution to the celebration of America's bicentennial, the bishops initiated a process of nationwide consultation on issues of justice in the country. Regional hearings solicited testimony that would be used by delegates at a national gathering (held in Detroit in 1976) as the basis for a five-year action plan for the Catholic Church in the United States. Black Catholics were an integral part of this "Call to Action" process. For example, at a regional hearing held in Newark in 1975, Brother Joseph Davis, then executive director of the National Office for Black Catholics, gave a powerful, eloquent, and blunt assessment of the Catholic Church and race relations:

> In analyzing the church's own documents, it is obvious that the church has always perceived . . . its primary constituency as the white, European immigrant community. On several significant occasions, when the Catholic Church had the opportunity to depart from the structures of racism so rigidly imposed by the dominant society [and] to affirm the humanity and dignity of black people . . . it has invariably backed off in deference to the sensitivities of the white Catholic community.
>
> There are no complex, unfathomable, complicated reasons why there are so few black Catholics in this country. . . . It does not take a great deal of analysis to understand why the church has had such a minimal response by black people to its initiatives.
>
> Documentable history does not demonstrate the *credibility* of the institution, especially if interpreted in the light of the gospel. Among the Christian institutions of this nation, the Roman Catholic Church has the poorest record of promoting indigenous leadership among blacks, or allowing the

cultural adaptation which could produce the greatest harmony between the church and the people.[30]

Based upon such testimony, the delegates at the Detroit conference in 1976 adopted a resolution on "Ethnicity and Race." Formulated by a coalition of blacks, Hispanics, Native Americans, and whites, it was presented by Eugene Marino, then the black auxiliary bishop from Washington, D.C. — and one of only four black men who were members of the American hierarchy. This statement noted that while church teaching on racial equality was clear, the response of the American Catholic community "is in fact a mockery of this teaching." It strongly recommended the appointment of more racial and ethnic minority bishops. Moreover this assembly specifically urged the national body of bishops to recognize the persistent reality of racism within society and the church by issuing "a pastoral letter on the sin of racism in both its personal and social dimensions" within two years.[31] The bishops of the United States accepted this recommendation and incorporated it into their five-year plan. Joseph Francis, the newest black member of the conference of bishops, was assigned to chair the drafting committee.

Some of the main themes of this pastoral letter are:

1. *The persistence of racism despite statutory changes.* The bishops challenged the popular view that racism was no longer a problem in American life, a view that caused the sense of urgency of the 1960s to yield to "an apparent acceptance of the status quo" (383, 384). They declared that "too often what has happened has been only a covering over, not a fundamental change," for an "unresolved racism" still permeated social structures and individual attitudes.

2. *The covert existence and subtle nature of contemporary racism.* In several places, the document pointed out that racism existed "beneath the surface" of American life, manifested in racially disparate unemployment figures, prison populations, and housing patterns. While noting that "crude and blatant" expressions of racial prejudice were now socially unacceptable, they nevertheless

maintained that racism was still evidenced in "the indifference that replaces open hatred" (384, 385).

3. *The link of racism to economic injustice.* The bishops held that racism and economic oppression were "distinct but interrelated forces." Their analysis of the situation found that racial minorities were being asked to bear a disproportionate share of the burden of a changing economy characterized by "limited resources, restricted job markets, and dwindling revenues." Furthermore, the bishops stated that economic pressures "exacerbate" latent racial tensions, especially when poor whites are forced into competition with racial minorities for limited job opportunities (383).

4. *The institutional character of racism.* This pastoral letter continued the approach of its predecessor in noting not only the personal but also the structural dimensions of the race question. It furthered and strengthened the previous position by being more specific as to the meaning of institutional racism:

> The structures of our society are subtly racist, for these structures reflect the values which society upholds. They are geared to the success of the majority and the failure of the minority. ...Perhaps no single individual is to blame. The sinfulness is often anonymous, but nonetheless real. The sin is social in nature in that each of us, in varying degrees, is responsible. All of us in some measure are accomplices.... The absence of personal fault for evil does not absolve one of all responsibility. We must resist and undo injustices we have not caused, lest we become bystanders who tacitly endorse evil and so share in guilt for it. (384)

5. *Ecclesial racism.* While not going into specifics, the bishops did acknowledge that the Catholic Church had often been perceived as a racist institution and needed to confess a share in the sins of the past: "Many of us have preached the Gospel while closing our eyes to the racism it condemned. We have allowed conformity to social pressures to replace compliance with social justice" (386).

6. *Doctrinal bases for the Catholic stance.* The bishops based their condemnation of racism on four tenets of Christianity: (1) the

commitment to evangelization, which was defined as "bringing consciences, both individual and social, into conformity with the Gospel" (383); (2) the doctrine of creation, which proclaims that all men and women bear the imprint of the Creator and as children of God are brothers and sisters to one another (383, 385); (3) the mystery of the incarnation, which reveals the truth of the dignity of each human being (383); and (4) the teaching of scripture that "all people are accountable to and for each other" (Mt 25:31–41) (385).

Because of these tenets, the bishops reached definitive and unambiguous ethical conclusions: "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 dignity of those called to be children of the same Father." And again: "Racism is not merely one sin among many; it is a radical evil that divides the human family and denies the new creation of a redeemed world" (387). This is the first time the body of bishops forthrightly declared that racism is sinful.

7. *Recommendations for action.* Like the 1968 statement, this pastoral letter gave specific guidelines for action and even went beyond its predecessor by making its suggestions more concrete and detailed. The bishops saw the need for action on three fronts — the personal, ecclesial, and societal. The bishops exhorted *individuals* not only to reject racial stereotypes, slurs, and jokes, but also to learn how social structures inhibited the economic, educational, and social advance of the poor. The *church* itself was called to a comprehensive self-examination and renewal by: (1) insuring that its parishes became places of welcome and inclusion for people of all races; (2) developing liturgies that respected, fostered, and incorporated the gifts of the various races; (3) recruiting, training, and promoting ordained, religious, and lay leaders of color; (4) continuing and expanding Catholic schools in the nation's inner cities; and (5) implementing in every diocese and religious institution an effective affirmative action program that would surpass the efforts of secular institutions.

Concerning *social change,* the bishops issued guidelines of only a general nature, calling for a fight to achieve the dual goals of

racial and economic justice (387–88). Finally, these church leaders exhorted *all* to confront the "irrational fear" at the base of racial hostility and animosity (387–88). Through such measures, the bishops hoped to alleviate and curtail the "unresolved racism" that continued to plague American life.

Thus *Brothers and Sisters to Us* is a strongly worded document that forcefully and unequivocally condemns racism in its contemporary manifestations as an evil and a sin. As such, it offered great promise of a new beginning in the Catholic story of race relations. Indeed, shortly after the issuance of this statement, Bishop Marino commented: "By stating clearly the mandate of Christ for those dispossessed because of race, the pastoral of the American bishops offers a splendid foundation on which to build an agenda for the 1980s."[32] Some strides were made: more black men were ordained to the episcopacy, and many dioceses and religious communities increased their efforts to recruit women and men into the priesthood and religious life. Efforts were made to encourage liturgical adaptation and inculturation with black cultural heritage.[33] Many dioceses established offices for black Catholic concerns and ministry.

However, the publicity given this document was very limited. Most media and ecclesial attention given to the 1979 assembly of bishops did not highlight the pastoral letter on racism, but rather the bishops' failure to endorse inclusive language in the liturgy. Thus, many — if not most — Catholics were (and still are) unaware of the document's existence. In 1984, Father Edward Braxton (currently bishop of Bellville, Illinois), a prominent African American Catholic theologian, noted that the pastoral letter "is not implemented, preached, studied or even printed in many places."[34] And on the fifth anniversary of *Brothers and Sisters to Us*, Bishop Joseph Francis addressed the American bishops' annual assembly and said:

> It would be comforting to millions of people of all races if I could relate that the pastoral on racism has made a significant difference in the racial attitudes and practices of sisters and brothers in the Catholic Church in the United States of

> America. I fear that it has not. In fact, I have often called it the "best-kept secret in the U.S. church."
>
> Had our words been taken seriously by clergy, religious, and laity, millions of blacks and other racial minorities in our country... would really have something to celebrate on this fifth anniversary. How encouraged we would be if this pastoral on racism had received the same kind of publicity and acceptance as the pastoral on war and peace.[35]

The passing of the years has only deepened the disappointment of the black Catholic community with the reception of this statement. In a reflection issued on the tenth anniversary of *Brothers and Sisters to Us*, the Bishops' Committee on Black Catholics concluded:

> The promulgation of the pastoral on racism was soon forgotten by all but a few. A survey... revealed a *pathetic, anemic* response from archdioceses and dioceses around the country. ...The pastoral on racism had made little or no impact on the majority of Catholics in the United States.... In spite of all that has been said and written about racism in the last twenty years, very little — if anything at all — has been done in Catholic education; such as it was yesterday, it is today.[36]

To mark the twenty-fifth anniversary of *Brothers and Sisters to Us,* the Catholic bishops commissioned a study to discern its implementation and reception.[37] While it is written in official language and strives to put the best face on the situation, one cannot but discern that it paints a disheartening, if not dismal, picture of the Catholic community's relationship with African Americans. Among the findings are the following:

- Since the publication of *Brothers and Sisters to Us,* only 18 percent of the nation's bishops have issued statements condemning the sins of racism. (Moreover, my own research reveals that most of these statements were written by only a handful of bishops. Furthermore, most deal only with personal attitudes of deliberate racial malice and not with systemic racism or white privilege).[38]

- Most Catholics (64 percent) had not heard a homily on racism or racial justice in the past three years. That is, it was not preached on even once over the entire three-year cycle of the Sunday lectionary.
- The report notes the lack of black representation among the church's leadership on all levels: bishops, priests, sisters, deacons, lay pastoral ministers, and diocesan directors of religious education. African Americans are less than 3 percent of the total in every category of leadership (that is, less than their proportion of the U.S. Catholic population)... and less than 1 percent in many (for example, priests, sisters, and seminarians). Thus, despite the clear commitment of *Brothers and Sisters to Us* to vocational recruitment and retention, twenty-five years later the leadership of the church's chanceries, diocesan offices, parish staffs, schools, institutions of higher education, and Catholic organizations is still overwhelming white.
- The document notes that "many diocesan seminaries and ministry formation programs are inadequate in terms of their incorporation of the history, culture, and traditions of black Americans."
- Only 44 (or 33 percent) of dioceses have Offices for Black Ministry (OBMs). (It is unclear if this number includes Multicultural Offices that are mergers of various racial and ethnic groups under one umbrella.) Furthermore, in 2009, that number is certainly reduced due to additional closures and mergers since the report was issued.
- Over half of these OBMs report that they lack the financial resources needed for effective ministry in the black community.
- One-third of the OBMs report that the black laity are either "never" or "hardly ever" involved in planning or decision making for black Catholics.
- Most disturbing, the report notes that "White Catholics over the last twenty-five years exhibit diminished — rather than

increased—support for government policies aimed at reducing racial inequality."

Thus this official investigation details the significant lack of compliance with the church's own recommendations for action contained in *Brothers and Sisters to Us*. It concludes that the "Church's statements condemning racism have not had their intended effect of reducing the pervasiveness of racist attitudes over the last twenty-five years." Hence, the promise of *Brothers and Sisters to Us* is still largely a "dream deferred."

ANALYSIS OF RECENT STATEMENTS BY INDIVIDUAL BISHOPS

At the chapter's beginning, I noted how in addition to these three pastoral letters on racism issued by the entire Catholic episcopal conference, a small number of bishops have issued their own statements addressing this social evil. In a previous work, I extensively presented and analyzed these documents.[39] For the sake of completeness, I will summarize that work here and then briefly will consider three more recent statements by individual Catholic prelates.

In looking at statements issued by the few bishops who addressed this matter since the publication of *Brothers and Sisters to Us,* one notes the following characteristics:

1. The substantive concerns of these bishops lie with the more obvious and visible actions of racial hatred and exclusion. Even when they articulate an awareness of covert and systemic forms of racism, their attention is primarily focused upon the voluntary, conscious, and deliberate actions of individuals. What one does not find is an examination or critique of the underlying cultural beliefs or myths that facilitate, engender, and legitimate these racist behaviors.[40] Racist beliefs are seen as commonly held personal stereotypes; they are not examined as reflections of endemic cultural patterns. Thus these episcopal statements implicitly convey an understanding that reduces racism to demonstrable manifestations

of personal racial prejudice. The bishops' understanding of racism privileges personal and interpersonal manifestations of racial bias over those that are systemic and structural.

2. They are primarily moral exhortations and appeals to conscience. They employ a parenetic style of argumentation; in other words, the basis for the moral appeal or duty proposed is often presupposed and left implicit.[41] These episcopal interventions are admonitions rooted in faith convictions that are assumed to be intuitively obvious and shared by those being addressed. Thus the warrants for the bishops' stance on racism are seldom argued for or explained in detail. In addition, the bishops employ a strategy of moral suasion in their ethical argumentation. That is, they assume their audience's goodwill and acceptance of the basic faith tenets that they delineate. They also direct their appeals principally to individuals. Thus the bishops presume that if the incompatibility of racist behaviors with Christian faith is pointed out, this will lead to personal conversion, which will result in social transformation. But the inherent limitations and constraints imposed on an individual's freedom, knowledge, and moral agency by what one prelate admits is an "enormity" of "cultural entrenchment" are neither acknowledged nor addressed.[42]

3. In keeping with their understanding of racism and policy of moral suasion, almost all recommend some form of self-examination akin to the traditional examination of conscience, that is, an honest inventory and acknowledgment of the racial prejudices and fears that all too often motivate the behavior of Catholics. The faithful are to avoid using racial slurs and telling racial jokes; they also are to challenge such behaviors among their family members, friends, and co-workers. Parents are asked to instill in their children the values of racial tolerance and an appreciation for ethnic diversity. Individuals are asked to cultivate interracial and cross-cultural friendships. Catholic schools and teachers are invited to develop curricula that foster cultural respect and toleration. Priests are asked to preach regularly about the issue of racism. Churches should offer liturgies of racial reconciliation; prayers for racial justice should be a regular part of Sunday worship. Catholic parishes are to be "safe places"

for interracial dialogue and open sharing; they also are to offer hospitality to those who are racially and ethnically different. One has the impression that the basic summons is for Catholics to treat those who are racially different with respect, decency, and civility. This is consistent with the view that racism, being primarily a manifestation of personal prejudice, can be eradicated by practices that foster individual conversion and interpersonal goodwill.

This is the dominant perspective found in the documents of the few church leaders who chose to address this issue in the latter part of the twentieth century. Since that time, three other bishops have issued statements on racial justice in the early part of this century: Cardinal Francis George (Chicago, 2001), Bishop Dale Melczek (Gary, Indiana, 2003), and Archbishop Alfred Hughes (New Orleans, 2006).[43] The following are among the principal characteristics of these statements:

1. All of these statements, without slighting the personal manifestations of racial bias, stress a more structural understanding of racism. Hughes teaches that racism "involves not only individual prejudice but also the use of religious, social, political, economic or historical power to keep one race privileged." George speaks of "patterns of social and racial superiority" that are created "consciously or unconsciously" to "privilege people like themselves." Melczek's analysis is particularly masterful, rooting individual manifestations of racial animus in the influence of a pervasive culture — "shaped by those who represent the dominant power" — that forms a "racialized self."[44]

2. These statements explicitly name and address the reality of white privilege. That is, they focus not only upon the harms suffered by people of color by this social evil, but the benefits and advantages that whites gain because of society's endemic racial bias. They also note how this systemic advantage and benefit is largely invisible to white Americans. George goes so far as to note how white privilege "often goes undetected because it has become internalized and integrated as part of one's outlook on the world by custom, habit and tradition." Hughes states that for white people "everything is

normal because white people often do not see the advantages inherent in simply being born into society with physical characteristics valued by that society."[45]

3. These documents acknowledge in forthright and direct ways this faith community's complicity in the racism of U.S. society. Hughes laments that the Catholic Church's response to racial injustice has been "uneven" and "not a high priority." Melczek and George highlight Catholic complicity in "white flight" from urban areas and how racial fears have shaped the current realities faced by our nation's cities. George relates how "Catholics mixed parish loyalty with racial prejudice in a desperate, always unsuccessful, effort to 'save' particular neighborhoods by preventing the entrance of black people." These events and the mass exodus of whites out of integrated neighborhoods set the stage for the current reality of what George calls "spatial racism," that is, the visible chasm of isolation in segregated housing patterns that fuels social neglect and indifference.[46]

4. Finally, these statements espouse a wider range of responses to combat the social evil of racism. Without omitting calls for dialogue, education, and cross-cultural awareness, they also call for strategies such as proactive hiring to insure that the religious workforce and its management reflect the racial and ethnic diversity of the community; advocacy of fair wage, housing, and employment practices; working with other social agencies to provide low-cost housing; and continuing participation in antipoverty programs.

Thus from this presentation of the statements of individual Catholic prelates we can form three conclusions: (1) the vast majority of U.S. bishops have not addressed this issue since the issuance of *Brothers and Sisters to Us* in 1979; (2) the few who have mainly continue the dominant trend of approaching racism as conscious and deliberate acts of omission and commission performed by individuals; and (3) the contributions of George, Melczek, and Hughes show that more adequate systemic approaches to the malady of racism — while a minority view among church hierarchs — are consistent with Catholic faith convictions.

CRITICAL OBSERVATIONS CONCERNING CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING ON RACISM

No presentation of the position and teaching of the Catholic Church on race and racial justice would be complete without taking note of the deficits that affect its adequacy and effectiveness. Awareness of the limitations present in the tradition will set the stage for making proposals for future action and reflection.

First, unlike other major pastoral letters on social justice issues, including *The Challenge of Peace* (1983) and *Economic Justice for All* (1986), *Brothers and Sisters to Us* is not informed by sustained social analysis. There is no evidence of a formal investigation of the phenomenon of racism. The church's teaching on racism is uninformed by current social science. The evidence given for its claims is often more impressionist or anecdotal, and its conclusions are thus too often pious exhortations that do not persuade critical readers — especially those who do not share our faith presuppositions.

Second, the teaching lacks an extended theological or ethical reflection upon racism. While the bishops clearly believe that racism is contrary to Christian conviction and practice — and such a conclusion may be intuitively obvious — the theological warrants for this stance are not well articulated. A coherent presentation of why, *in the light of faith,* racism is contrary to the Gospel is missing. The faith reflection on this social evil is theologically thin, at best.

Third, the bishops developed no formal plan for implementing the teachings and exhortations of *Brothers and Sisters to Us* unlike the other two pastoral letters referred to above. There was a lack of initial publicity and no plan for ongoing catechesis. Because of this oversight, the pastoral letter on racism has had little impact upon the consciousness and practices of the vast majority of American Catholics. One can safely assert that even the existence of this document and its teachings are unknown to most Catholics. Research detailed above notes that the church's stance on racism is rarely taught or studied in our seminaries, formation programs, and catechetical institutions. Thus the bold words and conclusions

of *Brothers and Sisters to Us* are unknown because they are often unspoken and unstudied.

These lacunae are serious enough. But there are more substantial deficits in the Catholic approach that must be considered.

First, Catholic teaching on race in America has neglected or slighted an essential step in social reflection, namely, listening to the voices of the victims and examining the situation from their perspective. Not only is this teaching uninformed by sustained social analysis; it also manifests a subtle but pervasive paternalism. Note the title of the latest collective statement: *Brothers and Sisters to Us*. This begs the question: Who's the "us"? The very title indicates that this is a document written for white Catholics and addressed to white Catholics. The Catholic racial justice tradition tends to speak *about* and *for* aggrieved African Americans; but it does not support or acknowledge black agency, meaning independent thought, action, and leadership.[47] There is no indication that African Americans themselves have a contribution to make toward either understanding or changing the climate of racial injustice. The American Catholic approach has been far more willing to prompt whites to concede rights to blacks than to encourage blacks to press for social justice. This cannot but render Catholic ethical reflection on racial matters inadequate and impoverished, if not even erroneous.[48]

The lack of a sustained social analysis of racism leads to another inadequacy or deficit: an *overly optimistic perspective* that fails to account for how deeply entrenched racial bias is in American culture. American Catholic teaching on race often presumes that it is addressing a rational audience of well-intentioned people, and thus assumes that racism can be overcome principally by education, dialogue, and moral persuasion.[49] Such assumptions are naive. They fail to take into account the insights of the social sciences regarding the depth of racism. Racism is not merely or primarily a sin of ignorance, but one of advantage and privilege. Privileged groups seldom relinquish their advantages voluntarily because of dialogue and education.

To put this another way, the church's past efforts have been impeded due to a fundamental misunderstanding of racism. Racism has never been principally about insults, slurs, or exclusion, as demeaning and harmful as these are. Racism entails more than conscious, deliberate, and intentional ill will or acts of avoidance, exclusion, or malice perpetrated by individuals. Individual bias and personal bigotry are real, but a limited slice of reality. Racism is an underlying cultural set of meanings and values, that is, a way of interpreting skin color differences so that white Americans enjoy a privileged social status with access to advantages and benefits to the detriment, disadvantage, and burden of persons of color. Racism, at its core, is a defense of racially based white social privilege.

The Catholic perspective on racial justice is inadequate because it fails to attend to the formative power of a racist cultural symbol system and consistently downplays the structural dimensions of racism. The cultivation of mutual interracial relationships, based upon courtesy and respect, is admirable and even necessary. However, such relationships are insufficient. Interracial courtesy, decency, and respect cannot overturn and dismantle the cultural stigmatization and structural disadvantage that lie at the core of America's racial quagmire. Authentic loving relationships can exist even in the midst of a socially unjust situation. Again, the major shortcoming of the Catholic approach to racial justice is that it is insufficiently attentive — if not blind — to the nexus of race and cultural power and social privilege, and the need to sever this linkage.

Thus to the extent that the Catholic approach to racial justice focuses upon deliberate, conscious, and intentional acts of individuals directed against persons because of their race or ethnicity and seeks to address them by moral appeals and suasion, to that extent it is inadequate to deal with what the bishops acknowledge is a "radical evil" and a "distortion at the heart of human nature." Such strategies do not take account of what theologian Bernard Lonergan calls "the flight from understanding" — the refusal of unwanted insight when such insight would entail changes that are costly, painful, or demanding.[50] And they do not give due recognition to the power of human sin. As St. Thomas Aquinas teaches, sin

is fundamentally *unreasonable* — an "act against right reason" — and cannot be ameliorated by appeals to reason alone.[51]

Finally, and most significantly, American Catholic social teaching on race suffers from a *lack of passion.* As a corporate body and as individuals, Catholics espouse a number of beliefs, but not all of these are held passionately. For example, no one can doubt the passion with which the Catholic Church opposes abortion. If others know anything about Catholicism, they certainly know that the Catholic Church is against abortion. This position is articulated repeatedly, forcefully, and uncompromisingly. It is a position held fervently and passionately, even in the face of significant opposition and disagreement. Opposition to abortion is a major public marker of Catholic identity. Contrast this with the Catholic teaching on indulgences, which, though without doubt "official," is held dispassionately. For most, it is a belief of little commitment, priority, or importance.

My point is this: despite the bold words of *Brothers and Sisters to Us,* we must conclude that racial justice is not now — and never has been[52] — a passionate matter for most American Catholics. Indeed, the U.S. Bishops' Committee on Black Catholics noted how *Brothers and Sisters to Us* aroused a "pathetic, anemic response" from most Catholics.[53] The pastoral on racism has had little impact upon the consciousness and behavior of the vast majority of American Catholics. It is difficult *not* to conclude that Catholic engagement with racism is a matter of low institutional commitment, priority, and importance. If "passion" connotes commitment, involvement, and fervor, the Catholic stance on racism, in contrast, can be characterized as tepid, lukewarm, and half-hearted. Standing against racism is not a core component of Catholic corporate identity.

Hence, when viewed from the perspective of the black experience — that is, the perspective of those who most immediately endure the injustice of racism — there are serious shortcomings and deficits in the dominant approach in U.S. Catholic social teaching on racial injustice. This teaching is superficial in its social analysis of racism, naïve in its reliance upon rational persuasion, and blind to how the church's complicity in and bondage to a racialized culture

compromises its teaching and identity. In short, Catholic reflection on racism is not radical enough to do justice to what the bishops themselves call a "radical evil."

A CONCLUDING BLACK CATHOLIC REFLECTION: "SOMETIMES I FEEL LIKE A MOTHERLESS CHILD"

If standing against racism is not a priority for the Catholic Church and its approach to and engagement with this social evil is inadequate and ineffective, where does that leave a black Catholic believer? Such a question cannot be evaded by invoking the pretense of academic objectivity or intellectual neutrality.

I begin my response by invoking the memory of Sister Thea Bowman, a powerful preacher and charismatic teacher who was a mentor for many of us who are leaders in the black Catholic community today. In 1989, she stood before the bishops of the United States to address them about what it meant to be black and Catholic in America. She began her presentation by singing the slave spiritual: "Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child."

> Sometimes I feel like a motherless child,
> Sometimes I feel like a motherless child,
> Sometimes I feel like a motherless child,
> A long ways from home. A long ways from home.
> True believer, a long ways from home, a long ways from home.[54]

We do not know the names of the enslaved Africans who composed this song. But their feelings — unbearable pain, unspeakable grief, heartbreaking loneliness, and inconsolable sadness — have been immortalized and preserved in searing words and haunting melody. The experience of being uprooted from "home," and of being an alien in a land that yet is mockingly familiar, is what it means to be a "motherless child." One attempts to make one's way

the best one can in a hostile world where one's family, experience, opinion, and very life simply do not matter. The plaintive and haunting moan, "Sometimes I feel like a motherless child," has become a classic vehicle for expressing an aching loneliness and estrangement too deep for words.

Sister Thea's insight as she began her presentation with this song was that the experience of black Catholics in this church is like that of a "motherless child." We are a part of a body of believers that oftentimes is called "Holy Mother Church." Yet if truth be told, this church has been less than a nourishing and supportive mother for many, if not most, black Catholic believers at some time or another. For us, this song of our ancestors conveys the pain, grief, hurt, and disappointment of belonging to a church wherein we too often feel orphaned and abandoned.

This is the existential import of the historical and theological analysis of Catholic engagement (or lack thereof) with racism rehearsed in this chapter. Beneath the intellectual articulation lies a sense of rupture, estrangement, and alienation. This fractured relationship stems from the realization, as articulated by the Black Catholic Clergy Caucus in 1968, that the U.S. Catholic Church is a "white racist institution." In light of what has gone before in this book, we can now better understand the significance of this insight.

Recall that I argued that the key component of black culture is "the expectation of struggle," and that a core element of white culture is the presumption of dominance, that is, the presumption of being the norm or standard to which all "others" should conform. Now we can better understand the phrase "white church culture" and what black Catholics mean when we say that the Catholic Church is a "white institution." It entails more than the obvious fact that a Western European culture has shaped the culture of the Catholic Church in the United States.[55] What makes this a "white" church culture is deeper than the cultural roots of its liturgical music and rubrics. It is the presumption that these — and *only* these — particular cultural expressions are standard, normative, universal, and thus really "Catholic."

Furthermore, it cannot be disputed that the U.S. Catholic Church has acted by omission and commission in ways that decisively allied it with the culture of racial domination and cause it to be identified as "white." It has done this explicitly (for example, the practice of slaveholding and refusing to admit persons of African descent to positions of church leadership and authority) and implicitly (such as its tacit acceptance of legal segregation and refusal to actively evangelize African Americans).[56] Thus the Catholic Church in the United States is a "white" institution, insofar as it promotes, defends, and partakes — however unwittingly — of the culture of dominance.

What makes the U.S. Catholic Church a "white racist institution," then, is not the fact that the majority of its members are of European descent (especially since in many places, they no longer are), nor the fact that many of its members engage in acts of malice or bigotry. What makes it "white" and "racist" is the pervasive belief that European aesthetics, music, theology, and persons — and only these — are standard, normative, universal, and truly "Catholic."

Let me make this point plain by considering two comments offered by church leaders during a meeting to discuss a proposed pastoral letter on racism:

- "If we say what you want us to say, our people will get mad."
- "My people won't understand *white privilege.*"

Others in attendance nodded their heads in agreement with these sentiments. I took notes on the observations offered, and then responded in this vein: "Thank you for your comments. They are more helpful than you realize. But I need some clarification. When you say, 'your people' will get mad, or 'your people' won't understand, who do you mean? After all, I'm sure that there are many black, Latino, and American Indian parishioners in your dioceses who not only will welcome this document, but also understand exactly what is meant. So, who are 'your people'?"

Silence. Because through their comments, these church leaders and officials inadvertently revealed a core reality of the U.S. Catholic

Church, that is, what they really believe yet seldom make explicit. Namely, that *"Catholic"="white."*

Consider some further examples. Several priests complained after an ordination where most of the ordinands were foreign-born Hispanics: "When are we going to get some more of our priests?" (Despite the fact that these were "their" priests, ordained for lifelong service to their diocese.) Or a bishop of a major urban see who commented, referring to the broad cultural diversity of his flock and its presbyterate: "I told the Nuncio that for my next diocese, I want to be assigned to one in the United States." Or a noted Catholic commentator who remarked during Pope Benedict's recent (2008) Mass in Washington, D.C., after a Prayer of the Faithful and Presentation of the Gifts marked by diverse languages and spirited Gospel and Spanish singing: "We have just been subjected to an overpreening display of multicultural chatter. And now, the Holy Father will begin the sacred part of the Mass."[57]

We must resist the temptation to see these as "isolated incidents," as nothing more than the utterances of flawed individuals. Such comments are more typical and widespread than many are willing to acknowledge. They illustrate the fundamental insight that in a white racist church, "Catholic" means "white." In U.S. Catholicism, only European aesthetics and cultural products are truly Catholic — regardless of the church's rhetorical commitment to universality.

Thus the U.S. Catholic Church is a white church not only by numbers (though this is changing), but also in its cultural self-identity. This is the deepest reason for why it has failed to undertake the actions and changes needed to effectively challenge or fundamentally alter the marginalization of its members of color. To do so would mean its self-destruction as a white institution. A white church will not — indeed *cannot* — be responsive to the existential concerns of African Americans and other groups of color, if by "white church" we mean a church identified with and complicitous in racial privilege and dominance. Recall that it is the essence of "whiteness" to be the arbiter of what is considered "real," and thus worthy of study, consideration, and attention. To the extent

that the Catholic Church in the United States is a "white institution," it cannot adequately respond to the existential passions and religious questions of African Americans. It must deem such concerns as unimportant, irrelevant, insignificant, impertinent, or even dangerous, for they are a threat to the presumption of dominance. The U.S. Catholic Church has to remain "white" or undergo a radical conversion. This will not be easy. The church's "whiteness" is more deeply entrenched than we would like to believe.

"Sometimes I feel like a motherless child." How do black Catholics affirm the real experience of God found in a church still practically committed to white racial privilege? How do we sing of the Lord in a foreign land, that is, in a church that seldom affirms our full humanity? What in Catholicism resonates with the heartaches, groans, and cries of black peoples? What resources are available to the Catholic faith community to ground a more adequate and effective engagement with the evil of racism? These are the questions that will occupy — and haunt — us in this work's remaining chapters.

79. The discussion of this and the following two items is indebted to Katznelson's study, *When Affirmative Action Was White*, 53–79 and 113–41.

80. See also my observations on the current thinking of James Cone in Bryan N. Massingale, "James Cone and Recent Catholic Episcopal Teaching on Racism," *Theological Studies* 61 (December 2000): 716.

81. David T. Wellman, *Portraits of White Racism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), xi, 4.

2: An Analysis of Catholic Social Teaching on Racism

1. I analyze these statements in Bryan N. Massingale, "James Cone and Recent Catholic Episcopal Teaching on Racism," *Theological Studies* 61 (December 2000): 700–730.

2. James H. Cone, *Risks of Faith: The Emergence of a Black Theology of Liberation, 1968–1998* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2000), 133.

3. This figure is obtained from a review of several USCCB websites, including those for African American and Hispanic Catholics. See *www.usccb.org*.

4. M. Shawn Copeland, "Guest Editorial," *Theological Studies* 61 (December 2000): 605.

5. *"What We Have Seen and Heard": A Pastoral Letter on Evangelization from the Black Bishops of the United States* (Cincinnati: St. Anthony Messenger Press, 1984), 20.

6. Pope John Paul II, "Homily in the Trans World Dome," *Origins* 28 (February 11, 1999): 601; emphasis added.

7. See the seminal study of Cyprian Davis, *The History of Black Catholics in the United States* (New York: Crossroad, 1995), and Stephen J. Ochs, *Desegregating the Altar: The Josephites and the Struggle for Black Priests, 1971–1960* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1993).

8. Davis, *The History of Black Catholics in the United States*, 217–19.

9. John LaFarge, *The Catholic Viewpoint on Race Relations* (Garden City, N.Y.: Hanover House, 1956), 61.

10. Ibid., 62–63.

11. Ibid., 73.

12. Ibid., 71.

13. Ibid., 66–67.

14. The complete text of this document can be found in John LaFarge, *The Catholic Viewpoint on Race Relations*, rev. ed. (New York: Hanover House, 1960), 186–92. All references to this document are taken from this work; page numbers are indicated parenthetically in the text.

15. The above comparisons were drawn from a representative sampling of the statements of major national assemblies as presented in Thomas F.

Pettigrew and Ernest Q. Campbell, *Christians in Racial Crisis* (Washington, D.C.: Public Affairs Press, 1959), 137–70.

16. John F. Cronin, "Religion and Race," *America,* June 23–30, 1984. See also the M.A. thesis of Rory T. Conley, "*All Are One in Christ:* Patrick Cardinal O'Boyle, the Church of Washington and the Struggle for Racial Justice, 1948–1973," Catholic University of America, 1992, 99–100.

17. William Osborne,*The Segregated Covenant: Race Relations and American Catholics* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1967), 14.

18. Ibid., 13–18.

19. Ibid., 234.

20. The complete text of this document can be found in *The Pope Speaks* 13 (Spring 1968): 175–79. All references to this document are taken from this work and page numbers are indicated parenthetically in the text.

21. Extensive selections of the Kerner Report can be found in Leon Friedman, ed., *The Civil Rights Reader* (New York: Walker & Company, 1986), 346–57.

22. Joseph A. Francis, "The Debilitating Virus of Racism," *Origins* 11 (1982): 743.

23. The complete text of this statement can be found in Gayraud S. Wilmore and James H. Cone, eds., *Black Theology: A Documentary History, 1966–1979* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1979), 322–24.

24. *National Catholic Reporter,* April 24, 1968, 1.

25. *National Catholic Reporter,* May 1, 1968, 3.

26. *Newsweek,* May 6, 1968, 66.

27. Davis, *History of Black Catholics in the United States.*

28. The complete text of this document can be found in *Origins* 9 (1979): 381–89. All references to this document are taken from this work and page numbers are indicated parenthetically in the text.

29. *U.S. News & World Report,* November 19, 1979, 59. Note the striking parallels to our own times, as noted in chapter 1.

30. Joseph Davis, "Black Catholics and the Bicentennial," *Origins* 5 (1975): 413. See also the testimony of Sr. Jamie Phelps, "Black Catholics/ Strangers in a Strange Land," *Origins 5* (1975): 417–19.

31. The entire text can be found in *Origins* 6 (1976): 333–37.

32. Eugene Marino, "Black and Catholic," *America* 142 (1980): 273.

33. Here we need to note the pioneering efforts of Father Clarence Rivers and Bishop James Lyke, who spearheaded the development of the black Catholic hymnal, *Lead Me, Guide Me.*

34. Edward Braxton, "The Key Role of Black Catholic Laity," *Origins* 14 (1984): 39.

35. Joseph Francis, "Pastoral on Racism Called Church's Best-Kept Secret," *Origins* 14 (1984): 393.

36. Bishops' Committee on Black Catholics, *For the Love of One Another: A Special Message on the Occasion of the Tenth Anniversary of* Brothers and Sisters to Us (Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference of Bishops, 1989); emphasis added.

37. *We Walk by Faith and Not by Sight: The Church's Response to Racism in the Years Following* Brothers and Sisters to Us: *A Research Report Commemorating the 25th Anniversary of* Brothers and Sisters to Us (Washington, D.C.: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2004). An executive summary of this report is available at the Conference's Committee on African American Catholics website, *www.usccb.org/saac.*

38. Massingale, "James Cone and Recent Catholic Teaching on Racism," 704–12.

39. Ibid.

40. For example, there is no extended critique of media representations or depictions of African Americans that reflect deeply embedded cultural myths about black sexuality. For an example of extended critique of cultural representations of blackness and their role in the maintenance of white social dominance, see bell hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Boston: South End Press, 1992). For a description of the cultural myths surrounding black sexuality and their contemporary impact upon public policy, see Kelly Brown Douglas, *Sexuality and the Black Church: A Womanist Perspective* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1999).

41. S.v. "Parenesis" in *The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Ethics*, ed. James F. Childress and John Macquarrie (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1986), 448.

42. Cardinal Anthony Bevilacqua, "Healing Racism through Faith and Truth," *Origins* 27 (January 22, 1998).

43. Cardinal Francis George, *Dwell in My Love: A Pastoral Letter on Racism* (Chicago: Archdiocese of Chicago, April 4, 2001). I am working from the booklet produced by the Archdiocese of Chicago. This document can also be found online at *www.dwellinmylove.org.* Bishop Dale Melczek, "Created in God's Image: The Sin of Racism and a Call to Conversion," *Origins* 33 (September 25, 2003): 264–72. I am working from this version. This document is also available online at *www.dcgary.org/bishop/CreatedInGodsImage.pdf.* Archbishop Alfred Hughes, *"Made in the Image of God": A Pastoral Letter on Racial Harmony* (December 2006). Online at *www.arch-no.org/12.15_pastoral_final .pdf.*

44. Hughes, *"Made in the Image of God,"* 6; George, *Dwell in My Love,* 13; Melczek, "Created in God's Image," 266.

45. George, *Dwell in My Love,* 13; Hughes, *"Made in the Image of God,"* 12.

46. Hughes, *"Made in the Image of God,"* 11; Melczek, "Created in God's Image," 265; George, *Dwell in My Love*, 9, 12.

47. Indeed, one finds even among the well-intentioned a profound discomfort, even anxiety, in the face of creative and independent black initiatives for racial justice. For example, the moralist John Ford worried that encouraging such activity on the part of blacks would lead to violence. And the Catholic racial pioneer John LaFarge espoused a distrust of black racial activism. On these points see Bryan Massingale, "The African American Experience and U.S. Roman Catholic Ethics: Strangers and Aliens No Longer?" in *Black and Catholic: The Challenge and Gift of Black Folk*, ed. Jamie Phelps (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1997); and David W. Southern, *John LaFarge and the Limits of Catholic Interracialism 1911–1963* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1996), 360–62.

48. It should be noted that this hesitancy is probably due not only to the personal prejudices of American Catholic moralists, but also to the Catholic Church's commitment to an "organic model of society" in its social thought. Such an "organic" understanding of society leads to a stress upon harmony and social stability, especially if reform or justice efforts compromise social order or peace.

49. Because of its commitment to a natural law methodology, Catholic social thought demonstrates an overconfidence in the ability of human reason to know the good and motivate others to do the good.

50. Bernard J. F. Lonergan, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1970), xi, 191–206.

51. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I-II, q. 71, a. 2; q. 73, a. 1.

52. See Osborne, *The Segregated Covenant*. Osborne describes his book as "the story of the slow and unsteady implementation of the bishops' [1958] declaration" (14).

53. Bishops' Committee on Black Catholics, *For Love of One Another: A Special Message on the Tenth Anniversary of* Brothers and Sisters to Us (September 1989).

54. Lyrics printed in John Lovell Jr., *Black Song: The Forge and the Flame* (New York: Paragon House Publishers, 1972), 298–99.

55. Bishop Braxton, "Evangelization: Crossing the Cultural Divide," *Origins* 27 (October 2, 1998): 275.

56. See the following historical studies for support of this contention: Davis, *The History of Black Catholics in the United States*; Stephen J. Ochs, *Desegregating the Altar: The Josephites and the Struggle for Black Priests 1871–1960* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990); and John T. McGreevy, *Parish Boundaries: The Catholic Encounter with Race*

in the Twentieth Century Urban North (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

57. Why is this important? As explained previously, EWTN is the "media presence" of the Catholic Church and, for many, the public voice of U.S. Catholicism. That such a statement could be aired on a network renowned for its orthodoxy, that it was not officially repudiated or challenged, and that it could be made without fear of official rebuke or sanction not only illustrate how standing against racism is not a major component of Catholic identity or orthodoxy. It also shows how cultural expressions other than European ones are not considered really "Catholic" — or even "sacred!" — by influential elites in this church.

3: Toward a More Adequate Catholic Engagement

1. Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 100; cited in Gary L. Chamberlain, "A Model to Combat Racism," *Theology Today* 32 (January 1976): 363.

2. Chamberlain, "A Model to Combat Racism," 356.

3. John Paul II, *Tertio millennio adveniente*, 33.

4. Charles Marsh, "The Beloved Community: An American Search," in *Religion, Race, and Justice in a Changing America* (New York: Century Foundation Press, 1999), 63; emphasis added.

5. So avows Christian ethicist Donald W. Shriver Jr., who calls anti-black racism "the oldest American civic injustice" in his *An Ethic for Enemies: Forgiveness in Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 171.

6. Philip S. Keane, *Christian Ethics and Imagination* (Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1984), 81.

7. Harlon L. Dalton, *Racial Healing: Confronting the Fear between Blacks and Whites* (New York: Anchor Books, 1995), 213.

8. Ibid., 215.

9. In one place, Dalton opines that Beigia is like a world populated only with generic "birds," rather than starlings and cardinals (ibid., 218).

10. Ibid., 219.

11. Ibid.

12. I note that Dalton's text and the racial distribution he considers were based upon the then existing demographics of U.S. society. His point, however, remains relevant and instructive.

13. "Corps of Clerks Lacking in Diversity," *USA Today*, March 13, 1998, 12A.

14. Dalton, *Racial Healing*, 221.

RACE/RELATED

My Research Into the History of Catholic Slaveholding Transformed My Understanding of My Church.

I have spent years poring over archives to illuminate the lives of those bought and sold by a prominent order of Jesuit priests.

By Rachel L. Swarns

Published March 16, 2021 Updated June 21, 2021

[Race/Related is available as a newsletter. Sign up here to get it delivered to your inbox.]

In 1717, a prominent Jesuit priest handed over a sprawling Maryland plantation controlled by his Catholic order to a new owner. Amid the hogs and milk cows, candlesticks and chalices were 15 enslaved men, women and children.

The Jesuits soon regained control of the estate and their human property. But the handwritten deed, the oldest known record of Jesuit slaveholding in Maryland, made plain what some settlers already knew: The Jesuits had turned to the enslavement of human beings to help fuel the growth of the early Catholic Church.

Father Tim Kesicki holds a document of slave sales recorded in 1832 inside of St. Ignatius Catholic Church in Port Tobacco, Md. Michael A. McCoy for The New York Times

By 1838, the Jesuit order owned about 300 people. Forced labor and the profits derived from the sales of people helped to sustain the clergy and to finance the construction and the day-to-day operations of churches and schools, including the nation's first Catholic institution of higher learning, the college known today as Georgetown University.

The enslaved people — the Black men, women and children who sustained the Jesuits and helped to drive the church's expansion — are invisible in the origin story traditionally told about the Catholic Church in the United States. But, as scholars, journalists, genealogists and Jesuit researchers dig deeper into this history, that is beginning to change.

I have spent nearly five years poring over 18th and 19th-century records scattered in archives, courthouses and historical societies in Washington, D.C., Maryland and Louisiana to illuminate the lives of these families. I am Black and I am Catholic. And my research has completely transformed my understanding of my church.

Mary Elizabeth Gough, born 1853. Erin Brown, via Jesuits Slavery, History, Memory, and Reconciliation Project

We often view the Catholic Church as a northern church, an immigrant church. But in the early decades of the American republic, the church established its foothold in the South, relying on plantations and enslaved laborers for its survival and expansion, according to historians and archival documents.

The Jesuits, who built the foundations of the early Catholic Church, believed that the enslaved had souls. But they also viewed Black people as assets to be bought and sold. At the time, the Catholic Church did not view slaveholding as immoral.

So priests baptized the children of the enslaved, blessed their marriages and required the people they owned to attend Mass, Jesuit records show. But the records also describe whippings, harsh plantation conditions, families torn apart by slave sales and hardships experienced by people shipped far from home as the church expanded.

The forced labor of enslaved people like Frank Campbell, Peter Hawkins and the parents of Mary Elizabeth Gough supported Jesuit missions, churches and schools all across the country, in Maryland, Pennsylvania, Missouri, Kentucky, Louisiana, Alabama, Illinois and Kansas, Jesuit records show.

Peter Hawkins at Saint Stanislaus, circa 1905. William Grace, SJ., via Jesuits Slavery, History, Memory, and Reconciliation Project

"We live at present in rotten logg house so old & decayed that at every blast of wind we are afraid of our lives," Thomas Brown, an enslaved man who was forced from Maryland to Missouri to serve Jesuit priests establishing a mission there, wrote in a letter to the Jesuit leadership in 1833.

In the letter, Mr. Brown said that he and his wife were poorly treated by the Jesuit priest who served as president of Saint Louis University. He begged them to allow him to buy himself and his wife out of bondage.

There is no indication that he received a response.

Now, nearly two centuries after the Maryland Jesuits sold off most of their human property, the Jesuit conference of priests in the United States has reached an agreement with the descendants of the people they once owned, promising to raise $100 million to benefit descendants and to promote racial healing initiatives across the nation.

My hope is that the news will inspire us to take a closer look at our history. The records and photos emerging from the archives and from the family albums of descendants are revealing fuller and richer portraits of the enslaved people who helped to build the Catholic Church.

[Read my story about the order's pledge to raise $100 million.]

Georgetown University campus last week. Kevin Lamarque/Reuters

Rachel L. Swarns is a journalist and author who covers race and race relations as a contributing writer for The New York Times. Her articles about Georgetown University's roots in slavery touched off a national conversation about American universities and their ties to this painful period of history. More about Rachel L. Swarns

Subversive Habits: Black Catholic Nuns in the Long African American Freedom Struggle
by Shannen Dee Williams
Duke University Press (2022)

Introduction

AMERICA'S FORGOTTEN BLACK FREEDOM FIGHTERS

There is no agony like bearing an untold story inside you.

—ZORA NEALE HURSTON, *Dust Tracks on a Road*

In June 1968, Sister Mary Antona Ebo had every reason to be fed up. One month earlier, a twenty-five-year-old Black nun in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, backed by her local bishop and the leader of the Conference of Major Superiors of Women, had called for a weeklong gathering of the nation's Black Catholic sisters to discuss their role in solving America's "racial problem."[1] The invitation—made in the wake of the assassination of the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and the historic organization of the nation's Black Catholic priests soon thereafter—had been extended to Black sisters through their female congregational leaders (then called superiors). Yet Ebo—pronounced Ēbo like the West African ethnic group to which her enslaved ancestors belonged—learned about the meeting only by chance from a white priest.[2] One year earlier, the leaders of Ebo's nearly all-white order of nursing sisters had run similar interference. In 1967, Ebo, then forty-three years old, had been unable to accept an assignment with the National Catholic Conference for Interracial Justice, the nation's most prominent Catholic civil rights organization, because her congregational superiors had refused to grant her a short-term release from her regular duties.[3] When she wrote Sister Mary Peter (Margaret) Traxler, the highest-ranking nun in the conference, in May 1967, Ebo bluntly criticized how the long-standing culture and practices of white supremacy in US female religious life had circumscribed the opportunities of Black sisters seeking to become more active in the secular fight for Black freedom. "Perhaps you can use this as a reply to some of the people who criticize you for not having Negro sisters on the team," Ebo wrote, "not only the lack of generosity of those orders who may have a sister to contribute … but also the

orders who have for so long taken a 'lily white' attitude toward God-given vocations. Perhaps, some of the rest would have Negro sisters to contribute if the attitude would have been different."[4] In an act of protest, Ebo also sent a copy of her response to Traxler to her superior general to make known her willingness to expose the congregation's hypocrisy on racial issues and their desire to silence *her* voice. Thus, Ebo did not hesitate to confront her congregational leaders again in 1968. Nor did the forty-four-year-old African American nun fail to secure a place as a speaker at the inaugural meeting of the National Black Sisters' Conference (NBSC) that August.[5]

In 1965, Ebo shocked the world when she arrived in Selma, Alabama, with five other nuns from St. Louis, Missouri, to protest the police violence of Bloody Sunday and rally national support for Black voting rights. As the only African American member in the inaugural delegation of Catholic sisters to join the Selma protests, Ebo not only garnered the lion's share of attention from civil rights leaders but also explained to reporters why she took the risk to join the march. "I am here today because I am a Negro, a nun, a Catholic, and because I want to bear witness," Ebo proclaimed. She also declared that she had voted in the previous day's election in St. Louis and that she believed every person should have the right to vote.[6] On the following morning, images of Ebo, whom local leaders strategically placed on the front lines of an interracial group of marchers, graced the front pages of newspapers across the country (figure Intro.1).[7] In the days and weeks that followed, that image and the participation of hundreds of additional nuns in the Selma protests helped to awaken hundreds of white Catholic sisters to the moral righteousness of the African American fight for racial justice. As National Catholic Conference for Interracial Justice leader Sister Mary Peter Traxler (who traveled to Selma after Ebo) wrote in an editorial in June 1965, "Like the faithful women of the Gospel, Sisters must follow Christ into the world ministering to His needs in the person of the poor, the sick, the persecuted. When people are in crisis, they are particularly disposed to look inward to evaluate themselves in relation to God. This is one reason why Sisters have a place at the other Selmas."[8] Yet many of the white sisters who publicly marched for civil rights on the streets were not as committed to principles of racial justice and desegregation as they proclaimed they were, especially when it came to confronting

anti-Black racism in the Church. And no one knew this better than African American Catholic sisters.

FIGURE INTRO.1. Sister Mary Antona (Elizabeth Louise) Ebo led voting rights marchers in Selma, Alabama, on March 10, 1965. Courtesy of the Associated Press.

Indeed, in the decades before Selma, the battles that Sister Ebo had waged to gain access to a Catholic education and enter religious life had revealed that her church and its most visible labor force—white Catholic nuns—were among the most dedicated practitioners of racial segregation and exclusion. For example, in 1942, shortly after her conversion to Catholicism, eighteen-year-old Elizabeth Louise Ebo had to desegregate Holy Trinity High School in her hometown of Bloomington, Illinois, in order to secure a Catholic education.[9] In 1944, after being denied admission to Catholic nursing schools in Illinois, which were led by white sisters, solely on the basis of race, Ebo moved to St. Louis, Missouri, to enroll as a US nurse cadet in St. Mary's Infirmary School, the nation's

only Black Catholic nursing school.[10] Two years later, she made headlines when she became one of the first three Black women admitted into the historically German Sisters of St. Mary (SSM), the order of her nursing educators, later known as the Franciscan Sisters of Mary.[11] Two more Black candidates were admitted later in the year. While Catholic proponents of racial equality heralded the SSM's admission of five Black women as a monumental step against racial segregation and exclusion in the Church, Ebo and her Black counterparts quickly learned that their congregational leaders' commitment to racial equality literally stopped at the doors of their motherhouse.[12] White SSM leaders not only initially barred the first five Black postulants from entering the order's administrative headquarters but also enforced strict segregation in dining, training, and social interactions. In 1947, white SSM leaders even forced the new Black members to profess their first vows in a segregated ceremony.[13]

While Ebo opted to remain in religious life and push back against the order's most egregious mandates of segregation, the depths of the SSM's commitment to white supremacy forever changed her. Shortly after Ebo took her first vows, a white member of her order denied her father admission to the community's all-white St. Mary's Hospital in the St. Louis suburbs. Although the order allowed the immediate family members of any sister to be treated at their hospitals, a white nun invoked segregation to refuse the ambulance carrying Ebo's father, Daniel. Ebo later learned that her dying father even pleaded with the nun, proclaiming that his daughter was also a Sister of St. Mary. The death of her father shortly thereafter and her superiors' unwillingness to rebuke the offending white sister almost proved too much for Ebo to bear.[14] As she later explained, "I made up my mind at that time that nobody is ever going to forget I'm a black woman ... my father's daughter."[15]

Ebo's example of "uncommon faithfulness" and unyielding resistance to anti-Black racism is not exceptional in the history of the US Catholic Church.[16] Neither are instances in which white Catholics proved willing to put race before faith in order to maintain white supremacy and exclusion in American society and a church that considered itself universal. The Catholic Church not only inaugurated African slavery in the sixteenth century in the land area that became the United States but also served as the nation's largest Christian practitioner of racial segregation through the Jim Crow

era. Minimal attention, however, has been paid to the leading roles that white Catholics played in the sociocultural, political, and spiritual propagation of white supremacy.[17] Histories of Black Catholic resistance to white racism are also rare. This is especially true of battles waged in women's religious life.

In recent decades, scholars have brought the lives and labors of white Catholic sisters from the margins to the center of both US and Catholic history. As a result, few would deny the visible and often essential roles that white nuns played in expanding and sustaining the Church from the colonial era through its greatest decades of growth.[18] Yet few have considered what it meant that most of the sisters to minister in the United States before 1850, including the nation's earliest female saints and sainthood candidates, were slaveholders or people who relied on the labor, sale, and brutal mistreatment of enslaved people—and the economic benefits of whiteness and racial segregation—to establish and secure the financial futures of their orders and celebrated social service institutions.[19] Historians have paid even less attention to the fact that most white sisterhoods—including those led by saints and others under consideration for canonization—enforced racial exclusion and institutionalized ideas of white superiority and Black and Brown inferiority in their ranks and social service ministries for most of their histories in the United States.[20]

The few narratives that acknowledge sisters' slaveholding and/or segregated pasts have usually presented these realities as inconsequential to white sisters' ministries and as footnotes in their assessments of white sisters' moral leadership. Stories about white sisterhoods that nobly ministered to African Americans free of concern for color during slavery—some, if not all, of which may be fictional—have regularly been offered to counter documentation of these sisters' discriminatory practices.[21] Many scholars also routinely cite select white sisterhoods' willingness to teach African American children during the Jim Crow era and the relatively small number of white sisters who marched for racial justice in the 1960s as evidence of their pioneering racial justice activism in the Church.[22] These contentions, however, are possible only because the history of US Black Catholic sisters remains largely untold and misrepresented. This is true of the first generations of Black sisters, who ministered amid the nation's and Church's slaveholding elite in the nineteenth century, as well as those who waged pivotal battles to

break down segregation in the Church and wider society in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. That most white US sisterhoods steadfastly refused to admit African-descended people—on equal terms or otherwise—for most of their histories remains one of the Church's best-kept secrets.[23] Moreover, as Black sisters' testimonies reveal, when white sisterhoods did admit African Americans into their novitiates and convents, this rarely translated into integration—let alone sincere inclusion—without intense Black struggle and suffering.[24]

Subversive Habits takes white Catholic racism and the brutal histories of Catholic colonialism, slavery, and segregation seriously. Using race and gender as essential categories of historical analysis, this book not only tells the stories of African American Catholic sisters and their diverse struggles against discrimination but also demonstrates how their history fundamentally reshapes and revises narratives of the US Church and its relationship to the African American community. It also turns critical attention to women's religious life in the Roman Catholic Church as one of the fiercest strongholds of white supremacy and one of the most consequential battlegrounds of the African American freedom struggle.

This book contends that the photograph of Sister Mary Antona Ebo marching with her Black counterparts to a segregated altar in a segregated profession ceremony in a segregated church in 1947 (figure Intro.2) offers a far more honest representation of the story of Catholic nuns in the Black freedom struggle than any of the now-iconic and widely accessible images of her or mostly white sisters marching for racial justice in the 1960s. The 1947 image captures the extraordinary efforts that white sisters—even those considered racially progressive—engaged in to enforce Black subjugation in their communities. It also illustrates that the earliest and most committed proponents of racial equality in women's religious life—those who were willing to suffer greatly in the face of unrelenting discrimination in order to lay bare and contest the evil of white supremacy—were Black Catholic sisters. Beyond the five pioneer Black Sisters of St. Mary, whose complaints about their racist mistreatment eventually forced SSM leaders to agree to fuller integration in 1950, the photograph documents the presence of two members of the Oblate Sisters of Providence (OSP), the modern world's first successful Black Roman Catholic sisterhood.[25]

Long before the legal and legislative victories achieved by the civil rights movement in the 1950s and 1960s, members of the nation's African American Catholic sisterhoods initiated and served as foot soldiers in some of the earliest campaigns aimed at dismantling racial segregation and exclusion within Catholic boundaries. Decades before the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, for example, the leadership councils of the Black sisterhoods pried open the doors of Catholic higher education to secure the accreditation of the Black-administered Catholic educational system.[26] Since the early nineteenth century, the Black orders had also preserved the vocations of scores of devout Black Catholic women and girls denied admission into white sisterhoods in the United States, Canada, Latin America, and the Caribbean solely on the basis of race. Even Ebo had been preparing to enter the historically Black OSP upon her graduation from nursing school before white SSM leaders finally lifted their ban on Black members in 1946.[27]

FIGURE INTRO.2. On June 9, 1947, Elizabeth Louise Ebo of Bloomington, Illinois; Hilda Rita Brickus of Brooklyn, New York; Pauline Catherine Townsend of Washington, DC; Mary Antonette Gale of Pine Bluff, Arkansas; and Bessie Lee Hardy of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, professed their first vows as members of the Sisters of Saint Mary (now the Franciscan Sisters of Mary) in St. Louis, Missouri. Two members of the historically Black Oblate Sisters of Providence, whose order had served in St. Louis since 1881 and had broken some of the earliest racial barriers in the archdiocese can be seen seated on the right. Members of the Oblate Sisters of Providence regularly attended the investiture and profession ceremonies of pioneering Black sisters in white congregations in a show of solidarity and support. Courtesy of the American Catholic History Research Center and University Archives at Catholic University of America.

In narrating the history of racial segregation and exclusion in female religious life and the wider Church, this book recovers the story of Black Catholic sisters as vanguard antiracist educators, desegregation pioneers, and champions of Black women's leadership. Without knowledge of this largely suppressed history, one cannot begin to under-

stand why Ebo and scores of Black nuns like her began appearing in civil rights marches and clamoring to participate in the Church's white-led racial justice initiatives both before and after Bloody Sunday.[28] Nor can one fully appreciate why many of these same Black sisters (who like Ebo had desegregated their white orders and/or a host of other Catholic and secular institutions in the decades before Selma) finally came together in Pittsburgh to form the NBSC in 1968 and fought so hard to tell the stories of their lived experiences in public venues afterward.[29] Rather than being politically neutral or significantly late to the fight for racial justice, as many have argued, these Black sisters were already veterans of a long and tenuous freedom struggle within the Church. One need only shift the focus to the boundaries of Roman Catholicism, the nation's oldest, largest, and arguably most influential Christian denomination, to bear witness to this history. *Subversive Habits* finally offers the lens. In so doing, this book makes visible a long and sustained tradition of Black Catholic women's resistance to white supremacy. It also reveals an equally long and strident history of white Catholic resistance to racial equality, one that has gone unexamined—and in far too many cases has been explicitly denied.

Recasting the History of the African American Freedom Struggle

Subversive Habits broadens understandings of the long fight for African American freedom by turning attention to the social, educational, and political struggles waged by Black Roman Catholic sisters from their fiercely contested beginnings in the nineteenth-century slave South to the present day. Charting these battles upends one of the most enduring myths about African American Catholics, religious and lay, namely, that they were largely absent from or indifferent to the campaigns against institutionalized white supremacy. Despite copious evidence to the contrary, a seminal monograph on the early US Church inexplicably argued that "Catholicism rarely touched Black slaves" in the United States, "left no legacy of resistance" among enslaved Black people, and "built no solid foundation for future Black social and political activity."[30] Influential studies by historians John T. McGreevy and Father Cyprian Davis also contributed to the myth of Black Catholic political conservatism and complacency about white racism. Citing a

white Jesuit priest who in 1961 "publicly wished for a Catholic version of Martin Luther King, Jr.," McGreevy wrote, "To the disappointment of liberals, few African American Catholics—clergy or laity—took leadership positions in the civil rights movement." He also characterized Black Catholics as "culturally conservative" during the 1950s and 1960s.[31] A decade before, Davis had concurred. While Davis pointed to the near exclusion of Black men from the priesthood from the period of slavery through the 1950s to explain why there were no Catholic Kings in the 1960s, he still wrote, "By and large Catholics, either black or white, were not in the forefront of the civil rights movement [of the 1950s and 1960s] or among the leadership of protest organizations."[32] However, Davis initially missed that many Black lay Catholics had initiated, spearheaded, and sustained formal and informal assaults on legal segregation from the earliest appearance of Jim Crow laws through to America's civil rights years. Davis and McGreevy also overlooked a more extensive history of Black Catholic activism against racism within Church boundaries spearheaded by Black women, religious and lay.[33]

In the past two decades, new scholarship has brought greater attention to the role of Catholicism in early American slave resistance and demonstrated how free Black Catholics, especially women and girls, used their faithfulness and membership in the Church to challenge anti-Blackness and carve out greater autonomy and mobility in their lives before the federal abolition of slavery.[34] Sustained attention to the brutal conditions of Catholic slavery and the abolitionism of individuals like Lydia Hamilton Smith, the longtime partner of radical Republican Thaddeus Stevens, has revealed how enslaved and free Black Catholic women and girls also fought to dismantle slavery.[35] Recent studies on the Catholic interracial and long civil rights movements have retrieved from the margins the stories of scores of Black lay Catholics who were local and national leaders in postemancipation freedom struggles. Their names include early South Carolina civil rights activists and suffragists, the famed Rollin sisters; early public transportation boycott leaders Aristide Mary and Homer Plessy; Chicago Catholic Worker founder Dr. Arthur Falls; A. P. Tureaud, Sr., an influential attorney for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP); Montgomery bus boycott plaintiff Mary Louise Smith; Freedom Summer martyr James Chaney; and Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee leaders Lawrence Guyot and Diane Nash.[36]

Attention has also been paid to the long fight to develop a substantial African American Catholic clergy and to the story of Black priests and Black Power.[37] Nevertheless, scholarly analyses of Black Catholic activism are still hindered by a desire to address the lack of a Catholic King. As one scholar of the Black Catholic movement in the 1960s and 1970s concluded in 2018, "Although there may not have been any Black Catholic equivalent of Martin Luther King, soon enough there were Black Catholic Malcolm Xs, Stokely Carmichaels, and Angela Davises."[38]

Because King—a minister born and shaped in the independent Black Baptist tradition—was not the only civil rights leader of significance, *Subversive Habits* moves beyond the futile search for his equivalent in the white-dominated Catholic Church. Instead, it builds on scholarship that has recovered the activism of African American women and girls who initiated, led, and sustained many local and national struggles for Black freedom and equal rights. Long before there were Black priests in the United States, there were Black sisters, who waged many of the first successful struggles against white supremacy and racial segregation in the Church, struggles that preceded and enabled the Black Catholic revolt of the late 1960s and early 1970s.[39] Indeed, this book reveals that before there were Catholic Angela Davises, there were plenty of Catholic Elizabeth Eckfords, Ruby Bridgeses, and Vivian Malones—Black Catholic women and girls who desegregated all-white Catholic parochial schools and academies, colleges, hospitals, and convents. In fact, many of the Black sisters who came of age politically in the 1960s and 1970s had desegregated their public and Catholic elementary and high schools and colleges as well as participated in the secular fight for civil rights before entering religious life.[40]

In recovering Black sisters' educational and political activism, *Subversive Habits* offers important new insights into the history of Black Catholic protest and the role of Black women's traditions of Catholicism in Black resistance to white supremacy. Since the late 1960s, scholars have generally identified three waves of Black Catholic activism: the rise and fall of the Colored Catholic Congresses, which layman Daniel Arthur Rudd led from 1889 to 1894; the rise and fall of the Federated Colored Catholics of the United States, which early NAACP leader and layman Dr. Thomas Wyatt Turner led from 1924 to 1933; and the Black Catholic revolt of the late 1960s, which led to the separate organization of

the nation's Black priests, sisters, and laity and the establishment of the National Office for Black Catholics in 1970.[41] Scholarship on these movements reveals that African Americans have always desired to participate fully and equally in Church life, especially in the areas of worship, education, hospital care, and the clergy. But scholarly works have usually considered only the fight to develop an African American clergy to be synonymous with the Black Catholic fight for equality and justice in the Church.[42] Unlike their Protestant, Muslim, and non-Western counterparts, African American Catholics were long denied formal male religious leaders from their own communities.[43] Historians have argued that the racist exclusion of African American men from the Catholic priesthood and the US episcopacy into the twentieth century robbed Black Catholics of legitimate spokesmen and effective racial justice advocates within the Church.[44] This assertion, however, recognizes only men as agents of historical change and fails to acknowledge that Black sisters had important roles as Black Catholic spiritual leaders and as some of the earliest champions and educators of Black priests.

To expand understandings of Black Catholic resistance and illuminate how often it intersected with secular Black freedom campaigns, this book also turns critical attention to the leadership of Black sisters in the long struggle for Black Catholic education. The fight for literacy and quality education has long been a cornerstone of the African American struggle for freedom and justice. Yet the African American pursuit of Catholic education (and white resistance to it) remains largely neglected in histories of the civil rights movement and the broader struggle for Black liberation. While the Black Catholic population remained relatively low, hundreds of thousands of Black parents, Catholic and non-Catholic alike, regularly sought out Catholic schools as potential safe havens for their children to escape nonexistent, underfunded, and/or overcrowded public schools, from slavery through the Jim Crow era. During the desegregation era and even today, Catholic schools, especially those led by Black nuns and other Catholics committed to quality Black education, remained attractive to African Americans in large part because of their relative affordability and the hostile receptions that many Black youth received in white-led integrated schools, both public and private. Indeed, Black sisters' vanguard struggles for educational equality and dignity, combined with their pioneering commitments to teaching Black history and training "race leaders," demon-

strate that they were formidable prophets of American Catholicism and democracy long before they began marching for racial justice in the 1960s and 1970s.

Subversive Habits also illuminates the emancipatory dimensions of Black female celibacy within religious life. Scholars of race and sex have long documented how white denial of Black female virtue was central to the social construction, maintenance, and defense of white supremacy in secular and religious realms.[45] Unrelenting and systematic attacks on the moral character of Black women and girls not only helped to justify centuries of unprosecuted racial and sexual violence visited on Black bodies and communities but also profoundly shaped the protest strategies that Black women and girls developed to survive.[46] However, the entries of Black women and girls into the consecrated ranks of religious life in the Roman Catholic Church have been widely overlooked as political and arguably feminist acts of bodily liberation and respectability.[47] While records offering insights into the inner thoughts of Black sisters from the nineteenth century are rare, the vehemence with which white Catholics opposed the very idea of Black sisters and characterized them as morally suspect is abundantly documented. Indeed, in a white-dominated and patriarchal society and Church that often opposed interracial marriage in law and custom, the very idea of a Black bride of a Christ imagined as white was nothing short of insurrectionary. In the early 1970s, NBSC members also wrote and spoke extensively about the radical dimensions of their vows of chastity. Many went so far as to link their celibacy to Black liberation and explicitly challenge the masculinist ethos of many Black Power advocates, who sought to allow Black women to contribute to the movement only through motherhood.[48] Black sisters' oral testimonies also underscore the liberatory and "radical," as one sister put it, dimensions of rejecting the traditional confines of motherhood and marriage through embracing the celibate religious state.[49] While those I asked why they had entered religious life always replied they had felt the call and desire to serve God, the women interviewed for this study also often noted the limited employment opportunities available to them before the civil rights movement. "I could only have been a teacher, a nurse, or a maid" was a common remark. Moreover, the current and former Black sisters interviewed often alluded (without prompting) to the "perils" they faced as Black women in the secular world. One former sister mentioned the frequent rape of Black domestic workers in white house-

holds.[50] This book, then, encourages historians of the Black freedom struggle to take seriously the spiritual, intellectual, and political activism of Black nuns as they navigated and challenged the racist and sexist contours of their church and wider society.

Rethinking the US Catholic Experience and the "Black Church"

Surveying the lives and struggles of African American nuns reveals that Black Catholics have never been footnotes in the history of the US Church or the wider nation. As such, *Subversive Habits* calls on scholars to expand their understandings of the US Catholic experience and turn more attention to the great diversity of the Black religious experience. Like in Latin America and the Caribbean, Catholicism was the first Black articulation of Christianity in the land area that became the United States. In fact, much of early African American history (which includes the first recorded Christian marriage in what became the United States) and Black resistance to slavery and white supremacy took place within Catholic boundaries.[51] That hundreds of thousands of African American parents, Catholic and non-Catholic alike, seeking to overcome racial inequalities in the public school system, consistently turned to the US Catholic Church to educate their children over the centuries is also significant. Yet the story of Black religion and Black protest, like US Black religious history, is primarily narrated as a Protestant story, while US Catholic history is still overwhelmingly framed as a story of European immigrants, beginning in the antebellum urban North.[52] This book specifically builds on a new wave of scholarship seeking to foreground the African foundations of American Catholicism, center Black Catholic experiences, and move beyond the limited framing of the US Black Catholic community as "a minority within a minority."[53] It also takes a direct cue from a 2014 roundtable discussion published in the *Journal of Africana Religions*, which reminded scholars that "most of the people who have lived their lives under the sign of Catholicism [in the Americas, including the Caribbean] have been Native American and African descended, not European."[54]

Black women's religious life in the United States dates back only to the early nineteenth century. However, African American sisters were among the nation's pioneering nuns and led some of earliest US congregations of women, Black and white. Moreover,

scores of the over 2,500 African American women and girls known to have entered religious life can trace their lineage to earliest days of the North American Church and the free and enslaved Black Catholics whose labor, suffering, and faithfulness built it.[55] Some Black sisters also have direct and even biological connections to the earliest European Catholic families in North America, including the famed Carrolls and Spaldings, who supplied the US Church with three of its earliest bishops and a pioneering white female congregational leader.[56]

The stories of Black sisters who converted to the faith also offer invaluable insights into the leading roles that African American women and girls often played in the making of US Catholicism. This is especially true of those who participated in the great migrations of Black southerners and Caribbean natives to the industrial North, Midwest, and West in the twentieth century. Many of these women's lives also intersect with the larger story of African American political and cultural protest in notable ways. Sister Francesca (Edeve) Thompson, the second African American Sister of St. Francis of Oldenburg in Indiana, for example, was the child of pioneer African American stage and screen actors Edward and Evelyn (née Preer) Thompson.[57] Sister Mary Reginalda (Barbara) Polk, an Alabama native who entered the Sinsinawa Dominicans in Wisconsin in 1948, was the daughter of famed Black photographer and Tuskegee Institute professor Prentice Herman Polk.[58] Boston native and early Black Sister of Notre Dame de Namur William Virginia (Dolores) Harrall was a maternal cousin of civil rights leader and National Council of Negro Women founder Mary McLeod Bethune.[59]

Much of the scholarship on the growth of the African American Catholic population outside of the South in the twentieth century has centered the efforts of the relatively small number of white priests and sisters who expanded their ministries to the Black migrant and immigrant arrivals. However, this study reminds scholars that Black sisterhoods, Black laywomen, and, later, individual Black sisters in white congregations were also leading participants in this great missionary and evangelization endeavor. The general councils of Black sisterhoods regularly received and, when able, answered requests from sympathetic white priests and often desperate Black laywomen ministering in communities that had endured decades of neglect and racist mistreatment in their respective dioceses. In one remarkable example from the 1940s, the archdiocese of

Detroit invited the OSP to staff a storefront Catholic mission called Our Lady of Victory, which had been established by a Black laywoman named Anna Bates in 1943. In the previous decades, Bates had walked five miles to and from St. James Catholic Church, the only white parish in her community that would not violently turn away the Black faithful. For more than ten years, Bates had repeatedly petitioned the archdiocese to create a parish open to Black Catholics in the northwest area of the city, to no avail, but eventually persuaded the white Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary to offer instruction to the Black youth in her community. However, it took the Detroit Massacre of 1943 and the much-celebrated arrival of the OSP from Baltimore, Maryland, in 1948 before Bates's dreams of a safe and welcoming Catholic Church and school for Black Detroiters would be fully realized.[60]

Also, the plethora of written and oral history sources consulted for this study rarely credited the missionary labors of white sisters and priests with Black conversions to Catholicism in the twentieth century. Instead, the vast majority of Black converts in these sources noted that they followed the leads of family members, Black neighborhood friends who were cradle Catholics, or devout Black laywomen ministering in their communities. When asked who modeled the life of prayer and service to which they had been called, almost all my interviewees cited the faithfulness, selflessness, and deep spirituality of family members, male and female, not white religious. Several Black nuns or their family members also championed pious Black laywomen who recognized and nurtured Black vocations to religious life.[61] For example, Washington, DC, native Angela White, who in 1956 desegregated the Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati in Ohio, fondly recalled how a devout Black laywoman and teacher at her public elementary school named Dr. Armeta Leach took her to daily Mass during the lunch hour and regularly wrote her letters of encouragement after White entered religious life.[62] In another poignant example from the historically Black Hill District of Pittsburgh, a Black laywoman and day care operator named Sarah Degree singlehandedly brought scores of Black people to the faith after World War II. Among them was Freda Kittel, who in 1958 became the first African American known to be admitted into a white sisterhood in Pittsburgh.[63] Shortly after Degree's death in the 1980s, Kittel's brother, Pulitzer Prize–winning playwright August Wilson, lambasted the diocese of Pittsburgh for failing to

honor Degree's legacy of service and evangelization. "Every Catholic I knew that lived in the Hill District was a Catholic because of Miss Sarah," Wilson recalled. "If there was ever a saint, it was Miss Sarah.... If she was white, they'd have a Miss Sarah Degree Child Care Center or something." Such recollections underscore the vital roles that Black laywomen always played as evangelizers and spiritual and educational leaders in Black communities, roles too often overlooked, misrepresented, or altogether omitted from histories of US Catholicism.[64]

At its core, then, this book is a work of historical recovery and correction. So many forces have willfully conspired to silence the history of nation's Black sisters and their many struggles within and outside of the Catholic Church. Several documented examples show white sisters and others individually and collectively working to erase Black sisters' lives and labors from the historical record in the name of white supremacy.[65] The best-known cases involve white sisters, including members of leadership councils, blocking access to and even destroying archival materials documenting the Black heritage of their order's earliest members. Leaders of the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, for example, colluded for nearly a century to suppress knowledge about the order's two African American foundresses, former OSP members who passed for white.[66] In 1928, one Immaculate Heart of Mary leader in Michigan wrote, "We are convinced that silence is the fairest, wisest, and most agreeable way of committing to oblivion this subject."[67] In the 1930s, the order's leaders even undermined an attempt launched by Father Leonard DiFalco, a Brooklyn priest, to have their chief foundress canonized, out of fear that her racial heritage would be rediscovered.[68]

White sisters and others have also grossly misrepresented the origins and (in some cases) the continued existence of formal and informal anti-Black admissions policies in white sisterhoods, usually in favor of narratives of white Catholic saviorism.[69] One illustration of this deliberate erasure involves the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament (SBS), established by Saint Katharine Drexel, ironically the Catholic patron saint of racial justice. For much of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the SBS—organized after the nation's first five self-identified African American sisterhoods—operated the nation's largest network of Catholic elementary and high schools designated for African Americans and Native Americans. The well-resourced order, which relied heavily on

Drexel's trust left to her by her financier father, also established Xavier University of Louisiana, the nation's first historically Black and Catholic institution of higher education.[70] However, from the order's founding in 1891 to 1950, the SBS systematically excluded African American and Native Americans from its ranks, with the exception of one Native American woman admitted to a lesser rank in 1893.[71] For decades, white SBS members tracked their Native American pupils with vocations to other white orders, and they told their Black American pupils, whom they tracked to the Black sisterhoods, that they could not admit them to the SBS, at the request of the leaders of the Black orders and/or because of the racial segregation laws of the South.[72] During Drexel's canonization process, SBS members and their supporters publicly maintained that the community's exclusionary admission policies were not rooted in racism but rather in a sincere desire not to draw from the ranks of the Black sisterhoods.[73] However, the record is clear. There is no archival or other credible documentation that the Black superiors ever made such a request to Drexel. Instead, in 1893, the racially derogatory views of the SBS's founding white members and their unwillingness to live with Black women on equal terms were central factors in the order's vote to exclude Black and Native American candidates.[74] Moreover, when the order finally voted to accept Black members in 1949, pressure from white priests, not from the SBS's white members, forced their governing council to take the historic vote. Even then, the council initially voted to accept only two or three Black candidates at a time, seemingly to ensure that a Black majority did not develop.[75] Such realities underscore just how much white supremacy and the color of Christ's brides mattered to white sisters, even those professing a commitment to racial and educational justice.

Ultimately, *Subversive Habits* is an intentional exercise in African American women's historical truth telling. Most of my subjects and the struggles they waged are unknown outside of small Catholic circles. As such, I have opted to present this history in narrative form, using Black sisters' stories to frame my analysis of their lives and struggles for justice, equality, and democracy. Because so many people have never seen an African American nun, I have also included several photographs. Many of these images have been hidden away in Church archives or preserved in the private collections of the sisters and their families. Like the written and oral evidence, the visual record of Black sis-

ters has been essential in documenting their lives and the history of racial segregation and exclusion in female religious life. In a few cases, photographs are the only surviving documentation of a Black sister's existence accessible to researchers, especially when a congregation has not maintained a formal archive or has blocked research access to the archive or a specific sister's file.

America's Real Sister Act

Despite Black sisters' nearly two-hundred-year history in the United States, Whoopi Goldberg's performance as Dolores Van Cartier/Sister Mary Clarence in the *Sister Act* film franchise remains the dominant interpretation of an African American Catholic sister and the desegregation of a white congregation in the nation. That the morally ambiguous fictional character of Mary Clarence is very loosely based on an actual African American nun and sainthood candidate who desegregated her order is perhaps the best testament to how Black sisters' history has been disfigured and erased in national memory.[76] In the pages ahead, I provide an essential counternarrative, what the historical record reveals to be the real sister act: the story of how generations of Black women and girls called to the sacred life of poverty, chastity, and obedience navigated and fought against racism, sexism, and exclusion to become and minister as consecrated women of God. In the face of often unrelenting discrimination, Black sisters overcame unimaginable obstacles and broke some of the nation's most difficult racial and gender barriers. At various points in their history, many also made gut-wrenching compromises and accommodations to white racism that contemporary readers may find unacceptable. One must understand that Black sisters—like other Black Catholics who refuse to abandon the faith—never wanted to surrender *their* church to racists and others who could not fully affirm Black humanity and dignity. Like other African American activists fighting for justice, Black sisters who stayed in hostile congregations and endured pernicious discrimination in their church understood their sufferings as a necessary sacrifice in the fight to serve their communities and ultimately defeat the sin of white supremacy. African American sisters also took their sacred vows, especially obedience, seriously. However, as Sister Rose Martin (Kathryn) Glenn, the only African American woman to

enter and remain in the Missionary Sisters, Servants of the Holy Spirit in Techny, Illinois, explained in 2011, "My vow was to God, not them. They were going to have to put me out" and seemingly disgrace God in the process.[77]

Because it is impossible to narrate this history without confronting the centrality of white racism in the American Catholic experience, white Catholics are also an integral part of this study. During and after slavery, white Catholics, religious and lay, were some of the bitterest and most violent opponents of racial equality and Black self-determination. Others served as some of the sincerest and most important allies that Black sisters and the larger Black Catholic community had in their fight for freedom, justice, and equity. Depending on the time, region, and circumstance, white Catholics were often an uneasy and complicated mixture of both.

Subversive Habits unfolds chronologically in seven chapters. More than two and a half centuries after the Roman Catholic Church introduced African slavery and ninety-seven years after the first European nuns arrived to minister in what became the United States, European and white American ecclesiastical authorities finally permitted African-descended women and girls called to religious life to profess vows as nuns. For these pioneering Black sisters, embracing the consecrated celibate state constituted a radical act of resistance to white supremacy and the sexual terrorism built into the nation's systems of chattel slavery and segregation. Chapter 1 chronicles their fiercely contested entries into the nation's pioneering Black sisterhoods and a small handful of white congregations during slavery and the early years of Jim Crow. This chapter not only foregrounds the white supremacist commitments of the nation's earliest European and white American bishops, priests, and sisters but also demonstrates how Black sisters and their supporters navigated this opposition to establish many of the nation's earliest Catholic schools, orphanages, and nursing homes open to Black people. In seeking to embrace the celibate religious state, devout Black Catholic women and girls dared white Catholics to live up to a core teaching of the Church: that all lives mattered and were equal in the eyes of God. They also seeded antiracist sentiments in the Church, formalized Black Catholic women's resistance to white domination, and challenged one of the most insidious tenets of white (Catholic) supremacy: the idea that Black people, and women and girls especially, were inherently evil, immoral, and sexually promiscuous.

Chapter 2 examines Black sisters' first explicit and successful challenges to racial segregation and exclusion. As in the secular domain, the struggle for Black education within Catholic boundaries was never politically neutral or divorced from the larger struggle for Black freedom and rights. In 1916, for example, the nation's seventh Black Catholic sisterhood formed, prompted by impending state legislation that sought to ban white teachers from instructing African American children, and vice versa, in Georgia. After World War I, laws across the country began mandating state accreditation of private schools. Like their white counterparts, the leadership councils of the Black sisterhoods were faced with the monumental task of obtaining higher education for their members to secure the certification of their schools and ensure that Black Catholic parents could uphold their canonical duties to provide a Christian education for their children. Yet most of the nation's Catholic colleges and universities explicitly barred US-born Black people, even Black religious, from admission, solely based on race. This chapter examines the hidden struggles waged by the African American teaching sisterhoods to desegregate Catholic colleges and universities to secure the accreditation of the Black-administered Catholic educational system and to preserve African American access to quality Catholic education in the decades before the *Brown* decision.

The struggle for Black Catholic education was deeply connected to the Black Catholic fight to enjoy all the rights and privileges of their church, including entering religious life. Catholic schools not only served as the primary vehicles of evangelization in the African American community but also constituted some of the most important spaces in which priests, sisters, and members of the laity identified and nurtured prospective Black candidates for religious life. Because white nuns made up the majority of sisters ministering in Black Catholic schools by the turn of the twentieth century and outnumbered white priests by significant margins in most locales, they exerted enormous influence on the growth of the national Black sister population and the culture of the larger Church. Many white sisters and priests teaching Black youth not only regularly enforced ideas of white superiority and Black inferiority in their interactions with their Black pupils and their parents but also actively discouraged Black vocations. However, after World War II, the formal and unwritten anti-Black admissions policies of white sisterhoods increasingly came under attack as changing racial attitudes and the ex-

plosive growth of the Black Catholic population outside of the South led to a marked increase in applications to white orders. Chapter 3 examines the often behind-the-scenes battles waged to desegregate the historically white and white ethnic Catholic sisterhoods. Drawing on previously sealed Church records as well as the oral and written testimonies of pioneering Black sisters in white orders, this chapter documents the measures white leadership councils and individual white sisters took to keep African Americans out of their congregations or prevent them from staying after admission. It also documents the extraordinary measures that Black candidates and a growing number of white Catholics committed to the principles of social equality took to break these barriers down.

As the nation entered the classical era of the civil rights movement (1954–68), not only did African American entries into white orders increase, but the secular Black freedom struggle greatly influenced many who entered. Many early Black sisters in white congregations understood their admissions and ministries to white Catholic communities as inherently connected to the broader freedom struggle. Unlike their secular counterparts, though, Black sisters who desegregated previously white congregations usually did so away from the protection of news cameras, their families, and the faith communities that had nurtured their vocations. They were usually also required to desegregate the faculties or staffs of their orders' schools and hospitals as well as the all-white neighborhoods, parishes, and sundown towns where their orders' convents and ministries were often located. Chapter 4 recovers the history of this hidden activism, charts Black sisters' overlooked participation in local and national marches for civil rights, and explores how some Black sisters brought some of the ideas, methods, strategies, and idealism of the movement into the Church before and after the reforms and activist-oriented mandates of the Second Vatican Council. It also documents the challenges that many African American sisters encountered as they tried to move into secular and Church-sponsored campaigns for the racial justice.

Chapter 5 examines the watershed formation of the NBSC in 1968 and the early story of Black nuns and Black Power. The inaugural NBSC meeting marked the first time that members of Black and white US sisterhoods gathered on a national stage to discuss racism in the Church and wider society. The NBSC's creation not only gave Black sisters

an independent platform to initiate a national campaign of racial justice reform but also facilitated an outpouring of public testimonies from Black sisters documenting their experiences of racism and sexism in the Church. This chapter pays special attention to the NBSC's efforts to confront long-standing anti-Black racism in women's religious life and stop the increasing numbers of Black sisters departing religious life as a result. It also charts Black sisters' entries into secular campaigns aimed at dismantling institutional racism during America's Black Power years.

Chapter 6 chronicles the diverse ways Black sisters responded to the crises of Black Catholic education and vocational losses in the 1970s. As in secular society, white-directed desegregation in the Church often resulted in the closing of long-standing high-performing Black and Black-majority Catholic schools. Those led by the Black sisterhoods and located in inner-city and historically Black communities were especially vulnerable to closure despite ever-increasing Black demands for Catholic schools. By 1970, halting the mass closings of Black Catholic schools and the Black vocational losses that partially contributed to this crisis became the chief priority of Black sisters and the larger African American Catholic community. This chapter pays particular attention to Black sisters' involvement in the struggle for community-controlled schools, their efforts to radically transform Black Catholic educational curricula to reflect the changing times, and the efforts to keep Black sisters—most of whom were educators—in religious life.

Despite the NBSC's many achievements, the steady departures of Black sisters from their orders and the increasing successes of massive white resistance to equal rights legislation in the 1970s signaled an important new turning point. For the first time, the African American sister population, like the wider populations of priests and sisters, was clearly declining, with no immediate solutions to reverse the trend. Chapter 7 takes Black sisters through the crucible of the last quarter of the twentieth century and into the first decades of the twenty-first. It focuses on their continued efforts to preserve African American female religious life and Black Catholic education as well as their efforts to support the development of Black women's religious life in sub-Saharan Africa, outside the cultural domination of European and white American sisterhoods. This chapter also briefly examines the revolutionary ministry of Sister Thea Bowman,

the first and only Black Franciscan Sister of Perpetual Adoration of La Crosse, Wisconsin, who in the 1980s emerged as one of the Church's most visible and beloved critics of enduring racism and sexism; the overlooked activism of Black sisters in the struggle for women's ordination; and the implications of the growing numbers of African sisters in the nation.

Charting African American sisters' freedom struggles reminds us that there has always been an articulation of US Catholicism that understood that the lives and souls of Black people mattered. For most of their history in the nation, Black sisters never made up more than 1 percent of the national population of Catholic sisters.[78] Yet they have been more than consequential figures in the story of American Catholicism and the fight against racism, sexism, and exclusion in the Church and wider society. Indeed, when one considers the kinds of barriers that African American sisters routinely broke over the years, many of the women whose stories fill the pages ahead deserve to be not only known but also championed as we champion the nation's most famous Black freedom fighters. Black sisters' epic journey in the United States is a remarkable story of Black resilience, faithfulness, and possibility. It also serves as another cautionary tale about ignoring and underestimating the prevalence of anti-Black racism in religious communities. It is my greatest hope that I have done justice to African American sisters' stories. Any mistakes are my own.