

RELIGIOUS AND SOCIAL ASPECTS OF ROMAN CATHOLIC AND BLACK AMERICAN RELATIONSHIPS

Wherever one looks today one is made aware of a decreasing attention on the part of Americans to the problems of racism. What was so recently a central and dominant issue in our society is no longer considered worthy of great attention by either liberals or conservatives. The Civil Rights Revolution of Presidents Kennedy and Johnson has been followed by the Nixon period of "benign neglect." I only hope the neglect is benign and that we can look forward to a period when the camaraderie and cooperation of blacks and whites together can be resumed and America can once again set out to achieve the goal of "one nation under God with liberty and justice for all."

As we look back it is well to note that the Civil Rights Revolution took place under the leadership of a Roman Catholic president working in cooperation with a black Baptist pastor, Martin Luther King, Jr. and that it was another Roman Catholic politician and academic entrepreneur, Daniel Patrick Moynihan who told President Nixon to continue doing what he, Nixon, has always done: namely, neglect the Negro. We must not forget either that it was Father Hesburgh of Notre Dame who refused to allow Nixon and Moynihan to hide completely the truth of institutional and personal racism from the public. Moreover, Father Hesburgh changed the racism of Notre Dame and instituted a program there which on the sports field and in the classroom has caused many to enlist in the effort to improve race relations. For good or ill, the fate of the Black American is greatly affected by decisions made by Roman Catholic laymen, churchmen and institutions as well as those of Jews and Catholics.

It is because of this fact that I have accepted this invitation to speak to you and, I hope, forward your willingness to be part of the answer and not the problem in America's confrontation with racism. Because Roman Catholics have always been a part of America, indeed were on these shores before either white Protestants or blacks, they have always been contributors to the amelioration of or the exacerbation of America's racial problem. I speak now not simply of

social-cultural interaction, but religious interaction as well. Warfare between Catholic nations and Protestants, conflicts within America between Catholics and Protestants and even the new period of ecumenical cooperation, all have significant consequences for black-white issues in America.

Greater, more explicit recognition of this fact must occur within Roman Catholicism if it is to bring to this problem the immense resources of talent and understanding that the problem demands and if Roman Catholics are to be responsible participants rather than persons and institutions of expediency and self-interest in racial matters. Nathan Glazer and Daniel Moynihan were reporting accurately the feeling of many Roman Catholics when they wrote some years ago that Catholics see the racial problem as a Protestant problem because so few Catholics are black and therefore take little or no responsibility for attempting to resolve these issues. The comment is for both positive and negative reasons less true today than yesterday, but Roman Catholic assumption of its fair share of responsibility in racial justice has yet to take place. My task is to move you a bit further in that direction, for as doctors of the Church, you bear a peculiar responsibility for its teaching magisterium and through that for the whole life of faith in America. Although I was asked to speak on the topic, "the dimensions of the race problem and its theological challenge to us in the United States," I want to limit my remarks to the relationship of blacks and Roman Catholics in the United States and attempt to illumine for you and myself the problems both communities face in working together for racial and social justice. I place the adjectives in the order I have because without racial justice there can be no social justice in America or the world. At best we can only have what is now called "peace with honor," i.e., a situation where white people enjoy peace and non-whites are armed by whites to kill each other.

The first observation that I would like to make is that Roman Catholics and Jews need to remember that as groups they are constituted upon a different axis than blacks and are not usefully compared to blacks. Blacks represent a racial group, i.e., a group of human individuals identified by the possession of distinctive physical characteristics, not culture or social institutions. Blacks are where they

are in the economy of America because they are black and for no other reason. The possession of other attributes, income, culture, special skills in a chosen field of work, or kinship ties make only minor differences. Ultimately, in America, blacks—even Senator Brooke and Mayor Bradley—will receive less than others equally qualified simply because they are black. What I have in common with most of the folk in Harlem, with the Negro share-cropper in Mississippi and the natives of Nigeria, Rhodesia or South Africa is my skin color and the texture of my hair.

Now, to be sure, these are rather trivial items. And yet all of you know that upon this trivial, but highly visible difference there has been erected myriads of reasons, causes, explanations for dividing arbitrarily the one species, man, into different status, power, and class groupings. It may be true that science and religion affirm man to be one species. Nonetheless, mankind, especially Western man, has spent more thought on dividing mankind into parts than seeking to actualize human unity. I and the other black Americans are one victim of this type of classification. We share in common our skin color and our victimization. Black solidarity then is at base a racial solidarity structured on the affinity that people of a particular racial stock share with each other because of the rejection and oppression received from members of another, white, racial stock.

The desire black Americans have to be related to the black peoples of Africa, Latin America, and the Caribbean is also a matter of skin color, but in addition, it has the quality of common ancestry. Black Americans do not, I think, interact as if they are one people. They are rather individualistic even in their victimization. It is only as they think of their origin that they think of a common family and Africa as the motherland. Therefore, in relation to Africans and the Caribbean people there is a tie not only of skin color, but also ancestry.

Blacks are a people then because of their perception of the differences distinctive physical characteristics make in others' treatment of them. They are, therefore, basically a racial group and unjust treatment of them they prefer to call racism, just as unfair treatment against Jews is not simply called social injustice, but also anti-Semitism.

Just as there is a racial and cultural aspect to anti-Semitism, there is also a racial and cultural aspect to racism. I am quite aware of the fact

that scientifically all black persons do not belong to the same racial category. Yet it seems dishonest to drop, despite the wishes of some whites and blacks, that label race. Blacks are not like Aryans or Nordics or Alpines, nor like Irish, Poles or Slovaks. They are a group forged together because of a history of oppression carried out by European peoples—Catholic and Protestant who came to control both the Americas and Africa. They are a people then because of distinctly physical characteristics but not because there is anything absolutely permanent or innate about those physical characteristics. It is simply that they are present and, because they are present, marriages and associations with other groups are lessened and therefore these physical characteristics persist. Mulattoes have long established the sameness of the human species and the mutability of skin color and the white “afro” suggests continuity in hair texture and condition. The phrase “black is beautiful” attests to this impermanence for it seeks simply by sloganeering to transform much of the pernicious evil associated with blackness to advantageous good.

When then one uses the category of race for the phenomena of black solidarity and “racism” for the particular wrong committed against black people, one needs to assert that the crucial component of this definition is cultural and historical, not biological. Definitions of race are always cultural definitions and are used to serve cultural purposes. From the biological point of view the distinctive physical characteristics of black people are minor and have nothing to do with their classification as man or their ability or inability to adapt to any particular life style. Indeed, there are as many cultures among blacks as there are cultures among Europeans or Asians; and as many similarities among blacks and Europeans, as among Asians and Europeans. Race here does not refer to a biologically or genetically unique subspecies, but rather to a group of individuals labelled as people, upon the basis of a relatively easily perceived difference from white Europeans.

Blacks are a people created by Europeans for the convenience of their political hegemony and their economic profitability. If slavery was a peculiar institution then blacks are a peculiar people for both institution and people were created for the same end, the legitimization of dominance and control by whites. Racism is a problem for Catholics, Jews and Protestants because they are predominantly white, European

in ancestry, and share in a common desire to classify mankind in such a manner as to assign to white skin pigmentation and thereby to themselves a superior value.

Yet what we deal with under the rubric of race is not biology but cultural doctrine that masquerades under the covering of biology. What I have in common with other blacks is neither biology nor culture, but a shared culturally imposed definition of persons whose skin is black and whose hair is kinky or who can, despite white skin and straight hair, be classified as a descendent of one whose skin and hair fit the cultural definition. Because of these distinctive physical characteristics, I and others like me have been deprived of our natural, political, and civic rights and have been labelled inferior.

The first thing it seems then that we must as Americans come to realize is that "black people" is a fiction, a reified concept invented by whites to justify the manner in which they desired to victimize the dark-skinned people whom they conquered during the coming to power of Euro-American—the West. Racism exists—it is very real, but it is nothing more than the practice of injustice by whites against blacks.

To say "black people" is a fiction is not, however, to deny the existence of black peoples and cultures developed by black peoples. There may now be some sort of familial bond between all black Americans. I personally doubt this to be true, but it is a plausible hypothesis worthy of treatment perhaps by genetic statisticians who, one needs urge when they complete their task, should try their statistics on the whole American population, white and black. I don't think we can, however, doubt the existence of several black cultures in America. Let me simplify matters and say there are at least four—a folk culture, a Puritan culture, a pseudo-Islamic culture, and a modern secular culture. Actually, there are many more, and if one adds the black people throughout the African and American nations, that number will be greatly magnified. "Black people" is a fiction, but black peoples and cultures developed by black peoples are vibrant and alive. The problem facing both blacks and whites is the problem of accepting this fact and learning to live with it.

The black problem with black peoples stems from their desire to counter white solidarity with black solidarity. The black's experience of victimization stems primarily from his encounter with the white man.

In every seat of authority sits a white man. In the American Roman Catholic Church, for example, there is no black bishop that possesses power over a diocese or a significant budget, program, or office in the Church. Almost all power and authority is possessed and exercised by whites. What is true in the Roman Church is true in the nation as a whole. Catholics, white Protestants, and Jews can see themselves as good guys and bad guys, as in office and out of office. Jews can have Stein, Weinberger, and Kissinger or Javits, Ribicoff and Garment. Catholics may choose Daniel Moynihan, James Buckley, and Peter Brennan, or Teddy Kennedy, Eugene McCarthy and George Meany. This privilege, however, is denied to the black American. Brooke, Thurgood Marshall and a dozen Congressmen don't go very far—blacks who are about one-half the size of the Roman Catholic population have less power than either Jews or Catholics. This absence of power plus a political and social system that seeks constantly to say to blacks, you are inferior, you deserve to be on the bottom, leads to the conviction that the only way to improve the system is by trusting only in blacks and creating a black solidarity comparable to white solidarity.

The feeling might be understandable, in a sense inevitable, but as a program it is quite impossible. For one thing, Africa, unlike Europe, has never been brought together under one universal empire united by one religious tradition, and at least among the elites understood by one language. In short, Africa has never had a common culture in the sense of Europe, and the American experience of blacks has not been an enlargement of African experience but the learning of a new experience that tended to emaciate all African roots or at least force them to grow in the confines of a Western European experience. Africa was never one people; America never permitted its blacks to become one ethnic community and there cannot be in any near future a single or unified black American or African-American experience. Fate has decreed that black American and African culture be plural—at least during our historical period—and blacks and whites must accept that experience and begin to work with it.

The desire on the part of black Americans to forge in America some normative definition of black culture is highly improbable within the near future. Whites who would love to see their fiction come alive shall be robbed of that joy. Blacks who romanticize black people and

substitute fantasy for fact shall not create any more than did Garvey, namely, rhetoric, ritual, and ruin. Red, black and green tricolors do not make a people although they may be a suitable counter protest to bigotted flag-waving whites and a nation that permits its flag to become a racist symbol. To be sure there shall be some good consequences, but they shall be the unintended fruits of a larger plan that has gone awry. The place to begin is not with some grand design for a single unified racial and cultural group—blacks never were that except in the eyes of whites—and then for the wrong reasons. One begins with the many black peoples and cultures that exist today and need assistance.

A suitable place of beginning for the Catholic Church as represented in this theological society might be the instruction of your students about the differences between the black American and the Irish, Poles, and Slovaks. Even though I have not rehearsed again the evils of slavery, segregation and Jim Crow, the injustices of inner-city ghetto life, and the scores of other discriminations felt by blacks, it should be perfectly clear that "No Irish need apply" and dropping some letters from one's name is not quite equivalent to having one's past completely severed from its roots and having one's personhood destroyed by the superordinate/subordinate social structures polarized around color. My concern that teachers do what they can to tell the true history of group life in America is not based upon any desire to settle the question of ethnicity for the Irish, the Poles, or the Slovaks. These groups are certainly capable of deciding for themselves what of their past they want to preserve and in what form. I want to urge that these groups not seek to perform that task at the expense of or with complete indifference toward the black American. Stepping on the man below is not the most helpful or most Christian task to do whether that step is an intellectual, economic, or social one. As a black American, I quite frequently perceive that many Roman Catholics step on blacks or deliberately diffuse black protest with malice and ill will and not simply indifference. Instead of joining blacks to improve schools, they seek to further weaken the existing schools, instead of joining with blacks to insure modest and low income housing they seek to isolate blacks from better neighborhoods. I have read Greely and Novak, and listened to Baroni. I have lived in predominately Catholic communities for most of my life and even my next door neighbor is a liberated Roman Catholic

real estate agent. Yet I must confess that what Greely and Novak and Baroni say does not ring true in my experience.

Part of the problem is due, of course, to the fact that both Catholics and blacks are victims in a double sense. They are preyed upon by the larger society and in what they consider to be self defense, they have adopted the false statements about each other circulated in the larger society. Nonetheless, it seems to me that we can expect more than blind acceptance of myths, clever end runs around problems, and often sheer dishonesty from the intellectual leadership of the Catholic and black community. The point of beginning is telling the truth about the treatment our several groups have received in America and about what is due to each in terms of social justice. Would that Catholics could continue to speak about the common good, but take the concept of sin a bit more seriously.

One can say this a bit differently. What the Roman Catholic Church needs to do in America is to become more universal and more pluralistic. The genius it has shown in attracting blacks elsewhere and in adapting the Church to those cultures needs to be applied in America. Black Americans need not become either Puritans or Irish. They ought to be able to remain themselves and become Roman Catholic. I am not affirming, here, that the Church should not criticize elements in black life which it discovers to be genuinely harmful or wrong, but rather I am affirming that a universal Church must be more than a Roman, or European, or German, or American Church. It ought to be a universal Church and that means African and black American as well as Mexican-American and Brazilian. Why I ask myself over and over again, do the Catholic Christians who live religiously in organic connection with almost all races and people persist in acting like a nationalistic denomination? Why do Catholics so frequently persist in being the most narrow and parochial of all churches? If one seeks to aid the blacks, this provincialism must come to an end. The Roman/Western Church must become a universal Church representing equally the causes and interests of the non-Euro-American and speaking with candor and truth about the manner in which Western nations often under the banner of the Roman Church exploited and dehumanized countless blacks and myriads of other people.

The task is a difficult one. It calls for a new mind set, a new

theology, and a new flexibility. And yet it is not a wholly new type of challenge. The Church has faced such in its past and has triumphed. It needs to do that once again. As the doctors of the Church the intellectual leadership is yours to seize. You must mine the ideas, kindle the enthusiasm, and set in motion the processes that will cause both bishops and people to act with more human heartedness and more Christian justice and love. They need to resynthesize world culture under the Christian symbol system. Resymbolizing the word Roman means indigenizing the word African. Isn't it strange that the Church has forgotten its African Fathers—Cyprian and Augustine—and has perpetuated the cleavage between Carthage and Rome. Strange, is it not, that the universal Church symbolizes the high culture of the West but not that of Africa or Asia. What has the Church done to cut off the well springs of creativity that exist in African, black American and peoples of non-Western cultures? By spawning only one cultural form, one theology, has not the Church tended to write superior on white culture, theology and persons and inferior on all others?

These questions I leave with you to ponder. I urge you, however, to encourage black Americans in their quest for a viable community as well as a culture and heritage which is in some meaningful sense their own. I have already indicated my hope that you not provide support for those charlatans who seek to imprison the black community within the confines of their own small world. By stating that black culture is many, not one, I seek to enhance its value and spur its development. I invite you to join that quest. Look to Africa and Latin America and see black Catholicism. Encourage black Catholicism's development here. Why I ask, does the Nigerian Church have more black bishops than all of the Americas; why do Catholics care for starving Biafricans but in America does not seek equal care for black infants?

In the black communities in America the Catholic Church is an underdeveloped institution and yet I see no exciting new programs to enlist black clergy and sisters, to use the institutional facilities in ghetto areas as places of outreach, to spur the black concern for Africa and the Caribbean by itinerating in the States leading black Catholic spokesmen, writers, and clergy or sending black American Catholics to those lands for training and dialogue. The Black Catholic Caucus has not been given much help and yet it would appear to me that properly

used it is the Church's best instrument for this task. How is it that the Church can take such grave risks in backing powerful conservative groups of laymen and yet be so cautious about using the few blacks it has in roles of leadership when in the black community this is a significant aspect of legitimization for every group?

The Church, then, if it is going to be meaningful for blacks should not only open itself to the inclusion of black or African cultures; it should also seek to be its patron and sponsor its development just as in a former day it helped to bring into existence some of the greatest achievements of Western civilization. Protestants have in the past criticized the universal claims of the Roman Church by saying among other things that it tended to equate the Church with the Kingdom of God, the pope with God. My criticism is a bit different. I want to suggest that for Roman Catholics and Protestants alike, God is too small. The incarnation does not sacralize one race and one culture. The God who is the Lord of all enters into and transforms all persons and all cultures and the Church needs to be alert to that task and that responsibility.

If the Roman Church is to take more seriously black experience and culture, and encourage blacks to design new cultural and religious forms, and give a larger role to blacks within the Church, then it needs not only to convert and recruit more blacks to holy orders, but also to educate more blacks to be doctors of the Church. While I do not have any figures to quote at this point, my experience tells me that there are few, if any, fully trained black Catholic scholars in America. The most lily-white theological schools that I am acquainted with are Roman Catholic schools. They have neither black teachers nor administrators, neither black lay nor clerical students, neither black men nor black women. Moreover the white men and women students have shown almost no interest in taking courses in black religion or experience that is given in Protestant or secular institutions. In brief, American Catholics are simply not equipping themselves to know or to understand blacks. This is a grave weakness in Church and theological planning and one that needs to be quickly remedied. It is a fault, I think, that results from too much smugness and arrogance about what one knows to be true and too much confidence in the Church's claim to be universal and to embody the highest in cultural expression. Catholics

it appears, have not yet learned that blacks are asking whites to study the neglected aspects of world and Church history and they are making the claim that in order to do this objectively and well, there must be black colleagues of equal sophistication, status, and position. My charge is not that there are no eminent black Catholic scholars within the laity, priesthood, and sisterhood, but the more narrow assertion that those that exist are not fully utilized in theological education and that there seems to be no urgency about creating an adequate cadre of such persons.

Now I don't really know how the Church is going to change for the better its racial stands, and heal its alienation from black life if it does not have a core of black teachers and scholars, a group of sophisticated interpreters of black life. Precisely because of the rootedness of the Church in European cultures and its white biased universalistic way of thinking it needs trained interpreters of black life and black religion. I am personally convinced that there are fully prepared persons ready to assume this responsibility and that there are suitable candidates in the colleges and communities of the nation. What is lacking is an interest on the part of the Church and of faculties to seek out and encourage these persons. Would that we had the zeal of the athletic department or even the wisdom to recruit from the pool of blacks they bring into the university. Why did the Catholics permit Lou Alcindor to become Abdul Kareem Jabar and come to Harvard to study Islam instead of to Weston to study Coptic? My question is rhetorical but my point is serious. Historically the Catholic Church in America has shown almost no interest in creating an articulate group of black priests or apologists for Catholicism. Why is this so? More importantly, what are you as Catholic teachers of religion going to do about it? The key to doing anything about the racial situation is to be found in large measure in the presence of articulate black spokesmen for racial justice. The Protestant Church was stimulated to act because there were black denominations and black leadership of significance in predominantly white churches. The task then, for Catholics, is to develop, even in this day when religious vocations are not exceedingly popular, a group of black persons of high intelligence and devotion who seek to serve this cause and to educate white leadership sympathetic to these problems and issues. Little has been done here and unless it is done soon, the

Church shall lose a splendid opportunity to proclaim its gospel.

One should not wait, however, until one has trained persons before one gets started. What is needed is the immediate revision of curricula, and the incorporation into Roman Catholic education of motifs from black culture and religion and the utilization of inner-city parishes and school facilities to train, learn, and recruit. If every teacher were to say, "I shall not rest easy until I have found and trained one black academic or religious," one would be well on the way to a more open and universal Church. Why not make that pledge this day and begin your search for a black disciple? I eschewed here any specific suggestions about what should be taught. Those suggestions should come from black Catholics who know the Church from the inside and have a better notion than I of where Catholicism and black experience can be best correlated or made to fruitfully interact.

While it is true that Catholics have a lot of work to do to get their own household in order, it should not cause them to neglect their responsibility to the larger household of God. Catholics need to be more sensitive, I would urge, to the impact their participation has upon ecumenical dialogue and decision. I would hope that they would see more clearly that their presence tends most frequently to increase white solidarity and put blacks at a greater disadvantage. Whether this is intended or not is not the question. The question is rather how does a Church which asserts that it is concerned about race relations handle this untoward effect. When white Catholics and Protestants come together either the classical curriculum is reinforced or that of middle and upper class Protestant elites. Thomas Merton Centers for non-violence replace those organized around Martin Luther King, Jr. Liberation for white Latin Americans replaces the concern for black liberation in America, Africa, or Latin America. Medical ethics replaces concern for race relations. Women's liberation and studies is placed above a reorientation of studies toward black religion. Research in European aspects of Church life is strengthened and new inquiry into African religion and forms of Christianity is not pushed. Many more things could be listed. You know as well as I the pressures under which we all work and you know better than I what whites say to each other when they have their white caucuses. If you are serious about these things you must act in the context of the ecumenical movement to

keep a priority on white-black relations.

Since I am not a participant in most of these gatherings, I cannot say much about what Catholics have done to keep alive racial issues. In the areas where I work, however, I can affirm that they have done little that is constructive. One gets at most a show of indifference and at worst such rejoicing at being admitted to the new prestige circle that full acquiescence is given to everything proposed by the older white establishment. I am aware that some ecumenical leaders in the Church and the seminary know this problem and want to do something about it. Nothing will, however, get done until a significant number of Catholics become more sensitive to the white orientation they reinforce every time a group of Western European Christians gather to celebrate the reunification of Europe. The Ecumenical Movement becomes in many instances the religious counterpart to the European Common Market with America, like Britain, buying into the continent and former colonies enjoying a sort of favored-nation status. I fear that on many occasions Catholics have made it more possible for white Protestants to use ecumenicity as an escape from the necessity of good race relations. The cure I would urge is not withdrawal from the ecumenical arena but rather always asking where are the blacks and how are they to be included in this new household of faith.

Faith and order seem always to evolve from life and works. It is not surprising therefore, that in speaking about ecumenical matters I touch upon ethical issues and the difference in priorities that exist in the black and Roman Catholic community. Never has that disparity been more obvious than in past years and no one can doubt that it played a substantial part in bringing the Civil Rights Revolution to a halt. This is due in part to the fact that the poor black Protestant is left in the inner city with the less successful Roman Catholic ethnic. In part, it is due to the fact that the striving black bourgeoisie is competing with the striving Catholic Middle American for status and income as well as a safe suburb. Partly the problem is that of the federal administration's policies. Not simply the shutting off of funds and programs, but also the conscious effort to build a Republican base among Catholics by feeding the fires of racism and bigotry and crassly exploiting sensitive issues like parochial schools and abortion. In addition, conflicts arise because what Catholic conceptions of natural

law assert to be natural are not seen by many Protestant or secular blacks as either natural or desirable. At the grass roots so to speak, a tension exists between blacks and Catholics over bread and butter issues, over what some would define as survival.

Now, it would be nice if I had answers to all these problems, but I don't and neither do most of you. I want to suggest, however, that on all matters of this kind, what needs to be reexamined is the concept of natural law and the traditional list of Roman Catholic ethical problems and methods as well as black life styles. Daniel Patrick Moynihan is, for example, in many ways neither a liberal or conservative, but rather a traditional Catholic social thinker. It is partly because he is a Catholic that he dwells so much upon the thirty per cent of black families that he sees as the crux of black social disorganization. Black unemployment is consequence, not cause, in his reflection partly because of Catholic control of labor unions and Catholic self-interest in ghetto life and institutions. Again his advocacy of the family assistance plan as the ideal welfare reform is due to Catholic stress upon such matters since Leo XIII. His model for black exodus from the ghetto is a little more difficult to translate but let me attempt it. Class harmony would incline black leaders not to talk about what needs to be done but what great strides have been made. The black bourgeoisie would come to recognize that like the lace curtain Irish, they made it because they merited it and that other blacks have not because they are fitted only for dancing, drinking, swinging shillelaghies and riding in paddy wagons: Catholic notions derived from an organic hierarchical conception of society and stressing a doctrine of place.

I don't want to make any one other than the slums of New York City and Daniel Moynihan responsible for Moynihan's social criticism. I do want, however, to demonstrate that, just as in a former day white Protestants under a cloak of secularism imposed their value perspective on society, so today Roman Catholics are engaging in similar practices. It is true not only in welfare policy, but moral, educational, and prison policy as well. One might reply to all this in the fashion of Greely—be patient, your turn will come after we Catholics have gotten adjusted to our place in the sun. But, that in a way is my problem. I don't want to be next and like Martin Luther King, I don't want the black community to be next. I don't want the same damn thing happening over and over

again. I want to find a Christian solution, a means of treating the neighbor as the self. While then I do not hold the Catholic Church responsible for the actions of every Catholic layman or priest, I do want the Church to speak out when its teachings are being misapplied in matters of consequence to issues of racism as well as other social issues.

If we are to have a natural law ethic based upon empirical knowledge then let's base that law on nature and not some form of Euro-American hegemony or white superiority. Let's have Catholics admit just as did white Protestants that religious loyalties, not nature, have often determined the facts and having admitted that, let's engage in a true search for social causes and effects. In a pluralistic society, "natural law" may be the only way to do social ethics, but let's be frank and admit that natural law theories all carry historical deposits of questionable value. They have slept with slavery and racism and some adjustments are needed if they are to oppose racism and support social justice. When the historical deposit tends to determine significantly the law and when it is predominantly white-European-American tradition, then black Americans cannot be very hopeful of getting justice. As Catholics come to be more and more dominant in American social policy-making, I can only urge that you not follow persons like Nixon and Moynihan into a new conservatism thus fulfilling the prophecy of Gerhard Lenski.

I hope I have said at least two things this day. I hope I have planted firmly the idea that black cultures, not a Black Culture exists. The plasticity of black life means blacks can find their place in American Catholicism just as they have done in Africa and it is the task of the Church in America to help develop black cultures and incorporate those cultures and people within the Church. The American Catholic Church should resist every and all attempts to make it the new bulwark of white supremacy whether that pressure comes from blacks, politicians, white Protestants or some of its own members.

Secondly, I hope I have made convincing the notion that a premature universalism is one of the chief reasons why the Catholic Church is so poorly represented in matters of racial justice. This is due to the fact that the conceptions upon which the Church was established embraced only Europe. Because the American Church has been a non-mission Church for a very short period of time, at the same time

that it seeks to be both American and universal it has sought some rapprochement with the European past. The discontinuity, however, between America and Europe has been slight and the task of the American Church is simply the reunification of disparate European groups around a religiously common heritage. This definition of the task applies equally to the abolition of national groups within Catholicism and to ecumenical ventures with Protestants. Small differences may seem large, but there is a shared center of loyalty. Including black Americans in this fellowship calls for a radical tearing down and a radical reordering. The barrier of race must be overcome and the black non-European heritage must be assimilated. This task demands a new conception of the world and a new conception of the Church. To this task I call all of you.

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