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THE SECOND EPIPHANY: PROGRAM DESIGN FOR AFRICAN AMERICAN LEADERSHIP OF CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

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Using the biblical experience of Christ's epiphany as a root metaphor, the author discusses the historical development of African American participation in Catholic schools with a view toward a program design for African American leadership in school administration. Through an analysis of various levels of culture, African American Catholics are shown to be well-suited for emerging leadership roles in Catholic schools and dioceses.

What does it mean to be black and Catholic? It means that I come to my Church fully functioning. That doesn't frighten you, does it? I come to my church fully functioning. I bring my black self, all that I am, all that I have, all that I hope to become, I bring my whole history, my traditions, my experience, my culture, my African-American song and dance and gesture and movement and teaching and preaching and healing and responsibility as gifts to the Church.

Sr. Thea Bowman (Brown, 1996, p. 43)

Commanding and powerful are the words of this prophetess; they jump from the page and share a sacred place of ownership by African American Catholics. The prophetess is an African American Catholic Sister, Thea Bowman. She firmly planted these words in the consciousness of the United States Catholic Bishops at their annual meeting in 1989. For many African American Catholics, this was a time to celebrate a second phase of their life in the Catholic Church of America. In the words of the African American Bishop Joseph A. Francis, "One might say that our African American Catholics are providing heady new wine and have the new wine skins to place that wine" (as cited in Chineworth, 1996, p. vi).

This conceptualization forms the basis of this essay for it critically assesses the forces that shape the present design for African American Catholic school leadership. Geertz (1971) refers to this process as contextualization, which places a group's religious education and mission in historical, political, social, and economic context. Cooper and Guare (1997) further note that the process of contextualization critically assesses the forces that shape or distort the particular mission of religious education. For Catholic educators, Bowman's words are pivotal to the current African American experience in Catholic education. They establish a second Epiphany, a time when African Americans can express their fullness and their faith as they attend Catholic schools. The need for role models and leadership for the African American young people who attend Catholic schools has motivated the design of a unique program, the Program for Leadership in African American Catholic Education (PLACE).

EPIPHANY

Epiphany, as many Christians know, celebrates a Christmas-related liturgical feast, the manifestation of Christ to the Gentile world. Its Greek root, *epiphania*, conveys a sense of making known. An epiphany experience, then, is an eye-opening event, a new realization of truth and purpose.

Epiphany is the word used by African American Jesuit Fr. Joseph A. Brown to describe his own Catholic school experience in an encounter with the Holy Childhood Association pagan baby, a black doll that bobbed as a coin was placed in its hand for the missions. As Fr. Brown donated to the mission cause, he experienced an epiphanic moment of insight into himself. Fr. Brown's experience is mirrored in the portrait of Catholic education at the time, especially for African Americans. Traditionally, Epiphany refers to the coming of the Magi, indicating that Christ came for all people, thus breaking all rules of class, race, and gender. This manifestation was interpreted quite differently in the first phase of African American Catholic education, which operated under a separate but equal status.

Catholic education in the United States, as a subsystem of the Catholic Church, made a pivotal transformation in its alignment to a specific spiritual mission at the close of the Second Vatican Council. Consequently, the United States' account of Catholic education can be divided into two periods: the course formed by the Baltimore Council in 1884 and the post-Vatican II perspective. In the first era, Catholic school goals were directly tied to the mission of the Catholic Church to teach, sanctify, and govern (Grant & Hunt 1992). Fichter's (1958) study closely aligned the choice made by parents in seeking a Catholic education for their children with providing a spiritual education. Most were faithful to the tenets of the Roman Catholic Church. The schools were entrusted with the task of assimilating cultures and educating

for citizenship. Immigrants flocked to them for their service and comfort. To understand the African American experience in Catholic schools, one must recognize the transition taking place in Catholic education in the United States since the Second Vatican Council, that is, its shifting from a purely goal-oriented loose confederation of independent diocesan educational systems to a postmodernist venue.

After the Second Vatican Council, the goals and mission of Catholic schools were no longer clear. The predilection for a separate school system was questioned (Ryan, 1964) and replaced by ambiguity about the purpose and need for Catholic schools. Ethnic groups began to assimilate and no longer needed (or, in some instances valued) the comfort of the familiar. Children of immigrants who moved to the suburbs abandoned the Catholic school system for tax-financed public schools. In light of the Second Vatican Council's call to renewal of religious life, priests, brothers and sisters as well as other workers in the Catholic schools questioned their own purpose and many felt the need to leave religious life. Those who remained believed that the classroom was not a place where they could spend their time most valuably. A loss of consciousness about the "nature and purpose of the Catholic school" (Grant & Hunt, 1992, p. 2) was established.

AFRICAN AMERICAN CATHOLIC ROOTS

Egypt, Numidia, and Ethiopia gave the Church some of its earliest non-Jewish leaders. In fact, religious life as it is known was first lived in Africa. Therefore, the Christian tradition is familiar to the culture of the African American. Large numbers of Catholics settled in what is present day Zaire, Rwanda, and Kenya (Martin, 1996). Accordingly, the mission of the Catholic Church to evangelize was not foreign to black people. Some may view the prescription as an imperialistic mission; others see it as a response to the call to "go forth and teach all nations" (Mat 16:15).

With the witness of early disciples as models, the Church kept true to its mission as the first Catholics arrived on American shores. Their mission was direct: preaching the gospel, baptizing, and teaching the indigenous people they encountered. The first schools set up as mission schools were in fact for the native peoples. Black children were constituents in Catholic education in America from almost the very beginning. For example, we read of Black children attending the Ursuline School in New Orleans as early as 1724 (Buetow, 1970). These early attempts to educate African Americans were Eurocentric in that the teachers were white Europeans.

As part of the continuing evangelization effort of the Black community, the Catholic Church established schools at all levels (Buetow, 1970). Separate Black elementary and secondary schools were developed in cities where segregation was mandated by law, including Baltimore, New Orleans,

Washington, DC, and St. Louis. Northern cities such as Boston, Chicago, New York, and Philadelphia established predominately Black parish schools following desegregation and the migration of Blacks from the South (Franklin & McDonald, 1988).

THE FIRST EPIPHANY

The first epiphany occurred with the establishment of the first African American Catholic school in 1828 (Geredes, 1988). This school was opened by a lay Black woman who, one year after its opening, established her own religious congregation, the Oblate Sisters of Providence. This congregation of African American religious sisters grew slowly and provided Catholic education for African Americans.

As women's religious congregations from Europe were beginning to flourish and assimilate into the United States, the number of religious congregations of African American women established for the teaching ministry also grew but never achieved the numbers of their European counterparts. These included the Sisters of the Holy Family, who concentrated their efforts in Louisiana, and the Franciscan Handmaids of Mary, who established a school in New York's Harlem district. These women's groups became role models for teachers, parents, and students in the process of evangelization. Geredes (1988) credits the sisters with keeping alive the faith of many Black people.

Other congregations that worked with African Americans were the Josephite Fathers, who established schools and eventually admitted young men into their ranks for ordination, and the Blessed Sacrament Sisters, who also worked among the African American and Indian populations. These Sisters established Xavier University as the first and only Catholic co-ed university for African Americans. The doors of higher education were opened to all people of color. It was from this institution that the teachers and administrators graduated and were prepared for ministry in the African American Catholic schools.

Irvine and Foster (1996), in their book, *Growing up African American in Catholic Schools*, depict a hybrid core of organization and independence in the types of Catholic schools provided for African Americans. These schools are based on various governance models: parochial, diocesan, or private. African American youngsters attend one of these types of schools or a mission school based upon the foreign mission model. Jesuit Joseph Brown describes his Catholic school journey which began in the Society of African Missionaries' (the White Fathers) School of St. Augustine. Subsequently he attended a Catholic inner-city school and a Catholic suburban school. He describes the experience of moving from a totally Black school to a school where he and his sister were the only Black children. Fr. Brown vividly

recalls being up to par with the white children, for in those days you were Catholic first and Negro second. This case study evinces what I have termed the first epiphany of the Catholic school: to foster the transcendent and to sanctify the soul.

In this first phase of Catholic African American schooling, evangelization was paramount and there were role models for many students (Brown, 1996). "These mission oriented teachers believed that armed with proper schooling, hard work and of course the Catholic faith, African American children could achieve and overcome the obstacles of a hundred years of segregation" (Irvine & Foster, 1996, p. 90).

THE SECOND EPIPHANY

Building on the efforts of African American Catholic educators, Davis (1996) states:

...A more detailed examination of the spirituality and the type of education of the Black religious sisterhoods during the nineteenth century will go a long way in understanding the spiritual and cultural framework within the Black Catholic community today.

There is every reason to believe that more careful research may reveal that the influence of the Black sisters within the community was far greater than their White counterparts in their respective ethnic communities, precisely because the Black religious were at home, whereas the White priests and sisters were not. (p. 115)

With a different lens to view the manifestation of culture, the second epiphany emerges. Embracing the words of Thea Bowman and the winds of change brought about by the Second Vatican Council, African American Catholic education took on a new journey as the role models of Black religious dwindled. Strong efforts must now be made to fill this gap with Black educational leaders in Catholic schools. This new journey parallels St. Paul's theology regarding the second Adam (Rom 5), that necessitates a step toward incorporation into a new social structure, the Body of Christ, and allows for the bonding of cultural and religious identity.

THE FACE OF AFRICAN AMERICANS IN CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

Studies provide data demonstrating that the largest number of Black students attend Catholic schools in the ten largest urban dioceses (Convey, 1992). Based upon the data gathered in the NCEA/Ganley publication *Catholic Schools in America: Elementary/Secondary* (Fisher, 1997) and a telephone poll of the 10 largest arch/dioceses as determined by school enrollment (the

Big Ten) (Cattaro, 1998), Catholic schools served 216,465 Black students as compared to 1,999,404 white students during the 1996-97 school year. Black students make up 8.3% of the total population of Catholic students. They are the second largest minority group after Hispanics, who comprise 10.5% of the Catholic student population. Unlike the Hispanics, who tend to be Catholic, 80% of Black students who attend Catholic schools are non-Catholic (Favors & Carroll, 1996). In the Big Ten, 112,304 (14%) students of the total 846,012 student population are Black. This percentage is 5.7% higher than that reflected in schools nationwide.

African American students in Catholic schools show significant achievement compared to their public school counterparts as evidenced by Greeley (1982); Cibulka, O'Brien, and Zewe (1982); Coleman, Hoffer, and Kilgore (1982); Bryk, Holland, Lee, and Carriedo (1984); and Coleman and Hoffer (1987). Irvine and Foster (1996) categorize the variables which have impact on African American achievement in Catholic schools under three designations: family background; parental characteristics/student demographic characteristics, and school climate/program/teacher characteristics. Analysis and interpretation of the data and the manipulation of achievement variables have drawn criticism regarding program replication. Greeley and Rossi (1966), and Coleman and Hoffer (1987), however, make the case that well-defined religious values are the crucial element to Catholic education.

Religious values in the contextualization of African American students allow the benefit of a Catholic education for African Americans as a motivation to go beyond existing boundaries. As Bishop James Lyke states:

It is still my joy to remember that St. George's Church and School provided me with inspiration and motivation to rise above my hopelessness that characterizes so many that grow up in poverty. It is my joy that what I have gained there has sustained me throughout life. (as cited in Chineworth, 1996, p. xii)

As Black religious communities suffered from loss of religious, the chances of having positive Black role models as teachers in Catholic schools also declined, creating a setting not unlike that in the public sector where many students had never been instructed by a minority teacher. Hudson and Holmes (1994) state: "...40 years after Brown most U.S. students go through twelve years of schooling without even meeting a minority teacher, and 70% of all minority students continue to attend predominantly or exclusively minority schools" (p. 388).

Ganley (Fisher, 1997) indicated that there are 44,736 teachers in Catholic schools and only 1,893 or 4.2% are African American. In administration, the statistics are even more striking with approximately 32 (1.5%) Black principals in 2,212 schools, assuming each school has one principal. Certainly these numbers call for the development of a program to summon leadership

in the African American Catholic educational community.

Favors and Carroll (1996) make the following assumptions about Catholic education in the African American community which support this research:

- Catholic education still has the potential of reaching the largest number of children and families in the African American community.
- African American people have a deep yearning and love for the Lord and look to Catholic education to satisfy their hunger for a word of hope.
- African American Catholic families are making a deliberately conscious effort to learn and to interpret what they learn in a way that is meaningful in the lives of African Americans.
- Catholic schools can be seen as the garden in which both religious and lay vocations are nurtured and in which devout, articulate African American Catholics are cultivated and grown.
- A demand for Catholic education appears to be growing among African Americans desiring a middle-class status for their children.
- Catholic schools, especially in the Black community, have an important role to play in serving as sources of social outreach, of evangelization, and of community support and development.

Dr. Sandra Noel Smith, superintendent of schools for the Archdiocese of Atlanta, is the only African American Catholic school superintendent in the United States. She serves as chair of the Multicultural Committee of the Chief Administrators of Catholic Education (CACE) and she recently surveyed superintendents of the nation's (arch) dioceses regarding multicultural programs and their integration with the school community. Two mailings were sent to superintendents of Catholic schools in the summer and fall of 1996.

The four categories queried were: (1) agencies which existed on the arch/diocesan level to promote multicultural plurality; (2) strengths and weaknesses of the agency; (3) affiliation with schools; and (4) strategies for increasing cultural and ethnic diversity among educational leaders. The response rate to the two mailings was very poor, with only 47 responses. Of the 47, 15 indicated that information was not available for any of the four categories. Only the Diocese of Spokane, WA, submitted a diocesan school cultural diversity plan.

Coleman and Hoffer (1987) theorized that the good news that Catholic schools enjoyed was what they termed social capital. They relate this concept to the research on effective schools which evinces the power of social capital upon the positive educational results in the schools, specifically inner-city Catholic schools. Traditionally, Catholics rely on the merits of those who live in the community of saints to compose the social capital. Based on the research provided and the contextual value of Catholic schools to the African American community, the problem that emerges is how to encourage and

engage African Americans in leadership roles in Catholic schools as a component of the augmentation of social capital.

PROGRAM FOR LEADERSHIP IN AFRICAN AMERICAN CATHOLIC EDUCATION

At the fall 1997 CACE meeting, Catholic identity and leadership development were listed as the superintendents' highest priorities. The absence of a context for their priorities evinces the need for a program design in African American Catholic school leadership. Pai (1990) addressed the concern by stating:

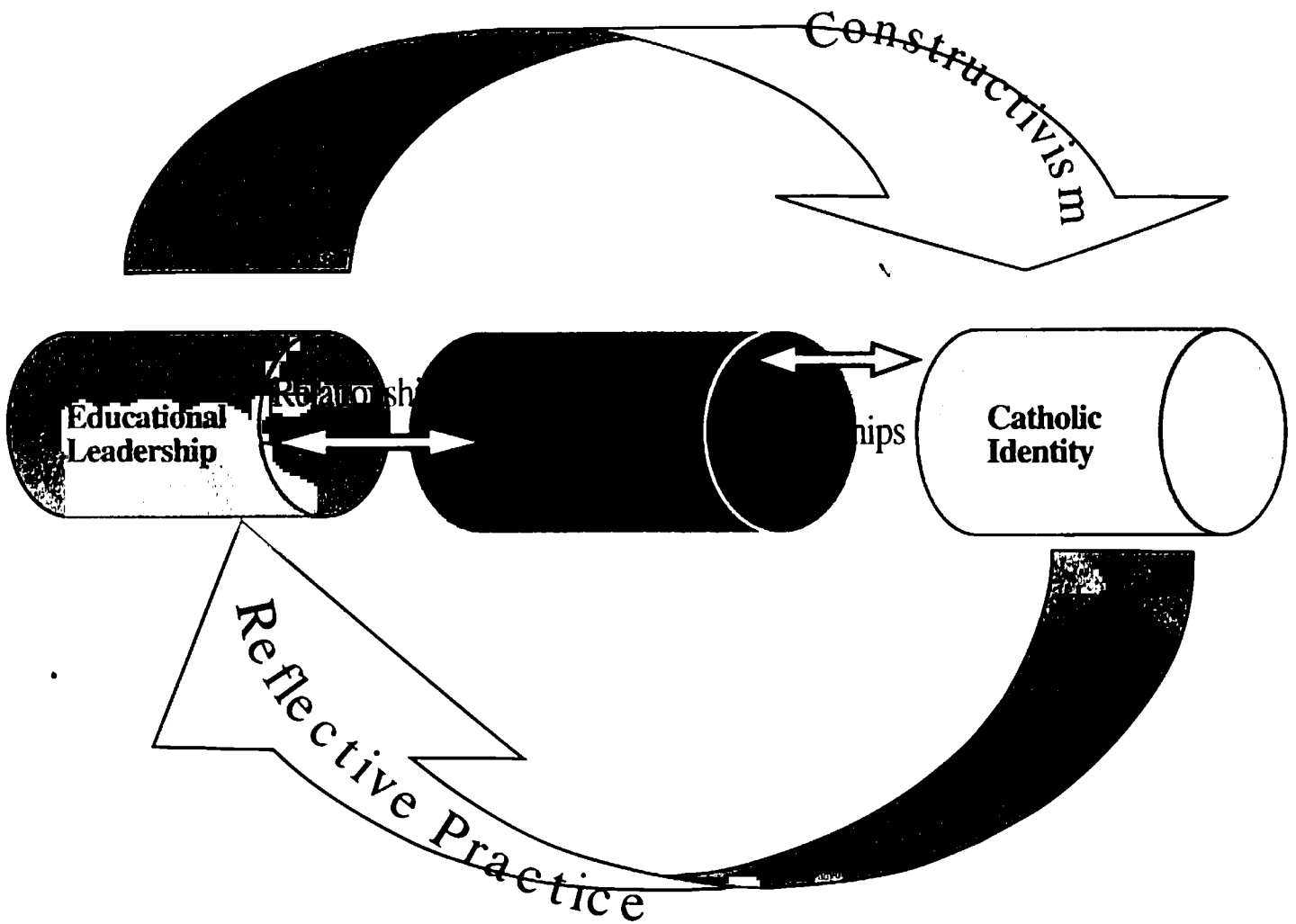
Culture to which one belongs then becomes the root of the individual's identity, because culture gives us a sense of power and confidence by giving us the basis of achieving our goals, determining what is desirable and undesirable and developing the purpose of our life. Accordingly, to reject or demean a person's cultural heritage is to do psychological and moral violence to the dignity and worth of that individual. (p. 20)

The purpose of the Program for Leadership in African American Catholic Education (PLACE) is to augment the leadership element of social capital by respecting the substance of three cultures: African American, Catholic, and educational leadership. The design incorporates the three cultures without devaluing their discriminating integrity. It reflects a solidaristic interdependence, a struggle to provide for the common good (Hollenbach, 1998). It reflects the thinking of Miller (1986) in what he calls "personalist communitarianism." The design, therefore, maintains the integrity of each of the existing cultures but necessitates a covenant which would give prominence to relationships.

The program relies on two underpinning conceptualizations of androgological (or adult constructivist) and reflective practice. Constructivism, as a theoretical frame, addresses knowledge; it scaffolds the learning process in cyclical fashion based upon prior knowledge and places value on the learner (Bettencourt, 1993; Brooks & Brooks, 1993; Tobin, 1993). Creating these meaning systems shapes human experience and gives rise to behavior, organizing thinking, feeling, and acting over a wide range of human functions. While one may think of meaning as idiosyncratic, there are regularities underlying the structure of meaning-making systems, thus providing a normative setting. Constructivism is likewise developmental in that prior knowledge leads to action. Accordingly, Sergiovanni (1985) notes that professionals rely on intuition which is informed by theoretical knowledge and interacts with the context of practice. Thus, when educators use informed intuition they are engaged in reflective practice. When educators are engaged in reflective practice, they develop ideas (Perkins, 1992).

Figure 1 models the conceptual framework for the design of PLACE. For African Americans, a place can be sacred. The ingredients of the PLACE model for educational leadership relies on cultural identity, cultural equity, and cultural relationships, all expressed within constructivism and reflective practice. The success of the program design relies, therefore, on the three relational cultures of educational leadership, African American, and Catholic briefly explained at this point.

Figure 1
Program for Leadership in African American Catholic Education



THE CULTURE OF EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

The culture of educational leadership, like many fields in education and the helping professions, is in a state of constant flux. Educational theorists bombard us with the “re” words. We are called to be reformers who re-engineer, and now even to refocus our efforts. Bridges echoed the voice of many when he wrote: “The research had little practical utility” (1982, p. 25).

In response to similar criticism, the Holmes Group, a consortium of deans of schools of education, has concentrated on teacher education and educational administration programs to articulate knowledge bases. As a rejoinder, the National Policy Board for Educational Administration, a consortium of professors, practitioners, and researchers, in its report *Improving the Preparation of School Administrators: An Agenda for Reform*, specified

seven categories of knowledge as a frame for program development (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 1986):

1. Societal and cultural influences on schooling
2. Teaching and learning processes and school improvement
3. Organizational theory
4. Methodologies of educational studies and policy analysis
5. Leadership and management processes and functions
6. Policy studies and politics of education
7. Moral and ethical dimensions of schooling

The school leader must feel at home in the culture of the school setting, with emphasis on shared power and centering. Leading people from instrumental rationality to empowerment in a transformational manner is both a skill and an art. For the African American, the concept of vision in one's own belief system provides a cultural framework tandem to cultural moorings.

THE CULTURE OF AFRICAN AMERICAN CATHOLICS

Because they are part of the African Diaspora, African American Catholics are beginning to realize how many of the customs and rituals of Judaism and Christianity are rooted in African tradition. Theirs is a distinctive culture, one of resistance and survivability. They have lived in this land through slavery, Jim Crow segregation, the civil rights era, the Black consciousness, Black power movements, as well as the present period of Black empowerment movement (Conwill, 1996). The United States Black Catholic Bishops (1984) indicate that Black spirituality has four major characteristics: (1) it is contemplative and spontaneous; (2) it views every space as sacred; (3) it is holistic; and (4) it is communal.

THE CATHOLIC CULTURE

Very few Catholics...have the opportunity the educator has to accomplish the very purpose of evangelization, the incarnation of the Christian message in the lives of men and women (Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, 1982, p. 31).

Catholic schools are privileged places where youth can respond to the invitation of Jesus Christ to "Come, follow me." These schools are communities of learners and believers (McDermott, 1986).

Theologian Granfield (1983) describes the Catholic Church as a three-fold unity of creed, code, and cult, defining the life of the Church as sacrament, bonds, and worship. Thus, the Catholic school is an integral part of the Church's mission to proclaim the gospel, build faith communities, celebrate through worship, and serve others. The community that shares these beliefs

is the Catholic culture. The community, as Catholic, assembles as pilgrims, saints, sinners, martyrs, baptist, Mary, and Joseph.

Catholic schools have established a long history in the African American community, evolving largely from Catholic education as a pathway to evangelization. But as a consequence, Catholic schools emerged as providing students with a safe learning environment based on the core values of discipline and respect, values which are held in high esteem in the African American community. As Catholic African Americans enter the second epiphany and the new millennium, the Church needs to provide leadership opportunities and opportunities to augment social capital, one of the great resources of Catholic education if we are to be true to our mission and teach as Jesus did.

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