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The Sin of Racism

by

Ray Almanza

A Pastoral Synthesis Project presented to

the Faculty of the Department of
Theological Studies
Loyola Marymount University

In partial fulfillment of the
Requirements for the degree
Master of Arts in Pastoral Theology

December 23, 2020

Dedication

To my wife Elizabeth, without whom I would not have the clarity and ability to find my true path.

To my family who orient and ground me.

To the Most Reverend Bishop Emeritus Gerald R. Barnes who was the catalyst to my pursuing further studies in theology and who supported me along the way.

Responding to the sin of racism in the context of the U.S. Catholic Church

I. Narrative

In midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, the evil of racism has emerged anew in the United States. The killing of George Floyd by Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin, on May 25, 2020, proved to be a breaking point in the buildup of racial violence. The long history of racism in the U.S. has continually been asserted, by some, to have been ‘overcome’ and thus relegated to the problematic past of a now post-racial nation. The national media coverage of egregious acts of police brutality inflicted disproportionately on black people for years, however, has served to continually undercut this claim that racism is no longer a problem in the U.S., or even the weaker formulation that racism is a minor blemish on the overwhelming strides of progress in race relations in the U.S. The ubiquity of smart phones and social media has contributed to an increase in visibility of racist incidents. The constant witness on behalf of black people emerged as a new force in the Black Lives Matter movement (BLM). Starting as a niche social-political movement, the message of BLM culminated in 2020 with the largest mass demonstrations throughout the country, even internationally, to date after the events in Minneapolis.

The response of the U.S. Catholic Church to this, sadly, has been problematic. This raises a pastoral problem of the silence of Catholic leaders in the face of the evils of racism in the U.S. The problem affects the faithful who look to these leaders for moral guidance. The Roman Catholic hierarchy, already suspect as a voice of moral clarity in the aftermath of the sex-abuse scandal, has not responded forcefully to racism, creating a vacuum where there ought to be clear prophetic voices. Unfortunately, this void is readily filled by news pundits and influencers on social media. In the absence of such leadership, the catholic faithful are left vulnerable to the

forces of unchristian political agendas, and in danger of falling prey to the stoking of fear in the forms of xenophobia and tribalism, or at its worst the stoking of violence as seen in El Paso, Texas¹ or Kenosha, Wisconsin².

In the course of my theological studies, I have tended to be attracted to the abstract topics of philosophical theology, but increasingly have found myself becoming more concerned with the realities of the people *to whom* the theological discourse applies, to whom its resulting doctrines or principles are applied, *by whom* they are employed, and finally, to what ends. If I am not capable of discerning the voice of God in the concrete cries for justice which rise up from the crucified people of God, as so much smoke rising up from the flames of a thurible, then I cannot expect to rend it from some gnostic cloud. I find myself unable to do theology while blinded by the smoke of this incense. I have felt myself thrust into the struggle for justice as a source of life-giving hope, to the prophetic vocation. Doing theology from a foundation of abstract principles disconnected from this reality would be to burn a “profane incense”³. In light of these realities, I find that I am unable to pursue other areas of theology until I can work to respond to the urgent crisis racism. In responding to this crisis, ecclesiology plays a critical role, because of the implications involved in an abstract universalizing missiological ecclesiology.

To address racism in the Church of the U.S. is as essential as addressing the bondage of the Israelites in Egypt for Moses, as essential as addressing the Babylonian captivity for the

¹ Eleanor Dearman, “Racism and the Aug. 3 Shooting: One Year Later, El Paso Reflects on the Hate behind the Attack,” [www.elpasotimes.com](https://www.elpasotimes.com/in-depth/news/2020/07/30/el-paso-walmart-shooting-community-reflect-racist-motive-behind-attack/5450331002/) (El Paso Times, August 1, 2020), <https://www.elpasotimes.com/in-depth/news/2020/07/30/el-paso-walmart-shooting-community-reflect-racist-motive-behind-attack/5450331002/>.

² Mark Guarino, Mark Berman, and Jaclyn Peiser, “17-Year-Old Charged with Homicide after Shooting during Kenosha Protests, Authorities Say,” [www.TheWashingtonPost.com](https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2020/08/26/jacob-blake-kenosha-police-protests/) (The Washington Post, August 28, 2020), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2020/08/26/jacob-blake-kenosha-police-protests/>.

³ Exodus 30:9

prophet Isaiah, and as essential as Jesus' messianic mission⁴ "to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord."⁵ If I want to proceed to do ministry in any form, to engage the project of evangelization, I must first clarify what that Gospel means concretely for me in this context. I must work to avoid the pitfalls of perpetuating a system of power relations that deeply entangles institutional Catholicism with the legacy of a multifaceted system of oppression in the forms of sexism, colonialism, and racism.

II. Case Component

On June 20, 2020, I joined a small group of Catholics in the Diocese of San Bernardino to participate in a peace walk organized by the Office for Catholics of African Descent. The walk took place a day after the annual Juneteenth observance. The Inland Catholic Byte reported that "75 people took to the streets of San Bernardino, praying the Rosary and carrying signs as they walked from the Diocesan Pastoral Center down Highland Avenue to Perris Hill Park."⁶ In the turmoil of this moment in our nation, I was experiencing a personal crisis as I saw the apathy of and even justification by many friends and family members in response to the asphyxiation of black lives in our midst.

During this time, I was grasping for any signs of hope, looking for my Church to take bold action and be the salt and light we are called to be in this world. I was proud to hear my Bishop, Most Rev. Gerald Barnes confront the reality of racism in a homily distributed online.

⁴ Albert Vanhoye, "The Jubilee Year in the Gospel of Luke," http://www.vatican.va/jubilee_2000/magazine/documents/ju_mag_01031997_p-22_en.html

⁵ Luke 4:18-19

⁶ "Diocese organizes Peace Walk against racism", Inland Catholic Byte. <http://www.icbyte.org/index.php/news/diocesan-news/87-featured-stories/2486-diocese-organizes-peace-walk-against-racism>

When I learned of the Peace walk which was being organized, I leaped at the opportunity to be a part of this with my wife, my three-year-old son, and my five-year-old daughter to bring my faith to bear on this illness. We went to pray for change and bring awareness to the reality of the deep-rooted sin of racism in our world and even within our church. In addition to the desire to take action, I had the desire to have an encounter with my brothers and sisters in Christ. I was eager to see my faith community walking in solidarity with a marginalized people, especially in those days of grief and mourning which were unfolding, in which the wounds were still bleeding. The encounter proved to be disappointing.

One of the organizers of the procession spoke at the end of the walk saying, “in planning today’s event, I thought, I’ll be happy if twenty people show up, that will be a success.” There were more than 20 people in attendance, but 75 is dismally few in a diocese which boasts numbers in the range of 1.7 million. As far as I am aware, there have been no other events or plans to address racism through pastoral activity since this walk. The departments and offices of the chancery seem to be operating in the mindset of business as usual, within the previously occurring disruption of COVID-19. The Diocesan vision statement for San Bernardino proclaims that “We are a Community of Believers in Jesus, the Christ, called to impact Family, Neighborhood and Society with the Gospel so that People's lives are filled with Hope.” The words of that vision throw the actions of this Church into stark relief.

III. Key Concepts

- Racism in the U.S.- drawing on sociological analysis of race to define specific terms and areas of discourse, the Roman Catholic Church in the U.S. can be understood to fit into the historical development of white supremacy through the legacy of slavery (owning slaves), segregation as a phenomenon in the Church in conjunction with the social

political fabric of the U.S. Drawing on Critical Race Theory (CRT), some of the more pernicious contemporary effects of racism can be understood. CRT provides the framework for analysis of race and racism in its economic, historical, contextual, and psychologically manifestations. CRT provides a critique of ideology to target hidden roots of racism: institutions, values, laws etc.

- Practical mediation- the process of taking the ecclesial activity as the starting point, engaging in critical theological reflection to determine a path towards a new social or ecclesial order through pastoral practices.
- Liberation theology- drawing on Gustavo Gutierrez' theology of liberation to highlight various themes as they apply to the discussion of race in the U.S. Some of these include: Encountering God in History, Political Dimension of the Gospel, Solidarity and Protest.
- Black Liberation Theology- James Cone's condemnation of white Christianity and highlighting the important role of "black agency" in combating racism.
- Imago Dei, universalism- the emphasis on an abstracted imago Dei and Christology, which indirectly prioritize a white racial category in the name of a neutral humanistic one.
- Arthur Fall's view of racism as a heretical understanding of the mystical body as presented by Lincoln Rice.
- Two major doctrines referenced by the USCCB in their approach to responding to racism highlight the limitations of their analysis. A denial of these doctrines, i.e., "the universal Fatherhood of God, and the Incarnation, in which Jesus became the brother of all, with the intention of offering salvation to all humanity", has grounded their understanding of racism. These notions fail to grasp the complexity of insidious nature of racism. The

episcopal documents produced by the USCCB were led by only white scholars, until the 1979 the statement “Brothers and Sisters to Us”, which saw the inclusion of Cyprian Davis a black Benedictine Monk in rewriting a draft of the document.

- The sin of scandal- the effects of racism wound the church in causing those who wish to combat the injustice of racism to question their identity as Roman Catholic in the U.S. as tacit agreement with the status quo.
- Missiological ecclesiology- an understanding of the identity of the Church rooted in the activity of the Church, i.e., its mission. This theological notion can be expanded to include a notion of the essence of the church’s mission as advancing towards liberation.

IV. Context Component

Racism is nebulous, it obfuscates, it is fueled by ignorance, and maneuvers in subterfuge. To combat it an integral, if not exhaustive, understanding of racism is needed. The subject of racism can be discussed in many ways. Some modes of engagement which could be rich for adding nuance to the understanding of racism include historical analysis, political analysis, or psychological analysis. Due to the scope of this paper, I focus on those aspects which I judge are not necessarily more important but more pertinent to my project. First, I will attempt to describe how racism emerged in its modern manifestation. This manifestation is multifaceted, but I argue that a rough sketch accounting for three major dimensions which include the geopolitical, economic, and social, can be useful. After this summary of how the contemporary phenomenon of racism emerged, my approach will center on two general forms of analysis, a cultural analysis and a philosophical one.

History

There are many places one may take up the history of racism as it exists in the U.S. today. For example, the *New York Times* produced the 1619 project as a result of an effort to commemorate the 400th anniversary of the first enslaved people arriving in America. This project retells the story of the U.S. as a counter narrative to the traditional version based in the revolutionary founding which takes as its starting point 1776. Another approach might take the 1960's civil rights era as a starting point because of the significance of the period as defining our contemporary U.S. racial context. The former approach limits the account too narrowly on the U.S., though my project centers on the U.S. context, the phenomenon of racism is global. The latter tends to look at the progress achieved with rose colored lenses. In this paper, I want to contextualize racism's origin in its global reach and critique the progress narrative of the civil

rights era. I will start my historical account in the year 1493. This date is important for two reasons. First, it demonstrates how racism is inexorably tied, not to personal or psychological bias and prejudice, but to global, historical, economic, and political forces i.e., the origin of capitalism, modernity, and colonialism. Second, this date implicates the Roman Catholic Church in the origin of racism. That is, the Church is not just a neutral party in the historical emergence of this phenomenon, but a directly linked cause of its creation, one among others.

Enrique Dussel, Argentine-Mexican philosopher of liberation, historian, and theologian, in his work on the Church in Colonial Latin America traces the development of the three key facets, which I argue undergird the historical emergence of racism. The Eurocentric historical model roots the development of modernity in the Renaissance and Reformation cultural milieu of Europe. The discovery of the ‘new world’ is rooted in the European age of exploration, and the development of capitalism in European mercantilism. “Europe possessed, according to this paradigm, exceptional internal characteristics which permitted it to surpass all other cultures in rationality.”⁷ Dussel offers an alternative paradigm to Eurocentrism which he calls transmodernity. His historical account of modernity begins at the moment of discovery (1492), not from the perspective of Europe but from the perspective of the world project of liberation. From this point of departure, what follows is not development but invasion of the American continent, later Africa and Asia. Concomitantly the economic system that necessitates the exploitation emerges from this context as industrial capitalism. This shift in historical perspective demonstrates how “...modernity justifies an irrational praxis of violence... whether these victims are colonized peoples, African slaves, women, or the ecologically devastated

⁷ Enrique Dussel, *The Invention of the Americas: Eclipse of “the other” and the myth of modernity*, trans. by Michael D. Barber (Continuum Publishing: New York, 1995), 10.

earth.”⁸ For Dussel, modernity is a world phenomenon that begins with the constituting of a world political entity with reference to Amerindia. Under this view the dominance of Europe emerges not because of its superiority over the Arab world, India or China, but because of its colonization and integration of the American Continent which thus positions it to become a global political superpower.

The trajectory of this enterprise is initiated in 1492 by Columbus’ arrival at an Island in the Atlantic which he mistakenly believed to be Asia, but it is sanctioned by the authority of the Roman Catholic Church. In 1493, Pope Alexander VI issued a papal bull that essentially makes licit the colonization and enslavement of peoples and partitions any lands yet to be discovered between Spain and Portugal⁹. Thus, racism originates as a myth of white European superiority and a justification of the subjugation of the people inhabiting the American continent. Pope Alexander writes concerning the motives for this endeavor being “that barbarous nations be overthrown and brought to the faith itself.”¹⁰ Thinly veiled by evangelistic pretense, the mass mobilization of military and economic resources for the colonial project is evidence of the ulterior motives clearly at play. Racism functions as a necessary dynamic of the economic dimension of the colonial extraction of value in both natural resources and slave labor. This racism is not contrary to the Church’s project, but parallel. The view of the non-Christian

⁸ *The Invention of the Americas*, 137.

⁹ “Although the Inter Caetera bulls of 1493 have been the object of intense debate as to their historic significance and interpretation (Mignolo 2002, 457), the relevant fact for this chapter is that they imposed a religious mission upon Spain (Lippy, Choquette and Poole 1992, 18)... it fell within the rationale of the time that the Church had to intervene.”

Valdeón, Roberto A.. *Translation and the Spanish Empire in the Americas*, (John Benjamins Publishing Company: Amsterdam, 2014). ProQuest Ebook Central, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/lmu/detail.action?docID=1825436>. Accessed November 12, 2020.

¹⁰ Pope Alexander VI, *Inter Caetera*, papal bull, 1493.

indigenous people by ecclesiastical authority as uncivilized undergirds the motivation to civilize them and the project of colonization itself.

Racism in the U.S. continues down this Eurocentric trajectory with the British colonies on U.S. soil, through the doctrine of manifest destiny and the plantation economy fueled by the transatlantic slave trade. Even non-slave states benefited from the economic productivity of slavery. As a result of this and other serendipitous factors¹¹, that economy grows to become a world dominating force. Production of cotton in the south, for example, benefited textiles in the north. The first factory in the U.S. was for processing cotton, the major product of slave labor in the late 18th and early 19th century.¹² Because racism is integral to the national ethos it proves to be difficult if not impossible to purge.

When the institution of slavery becomes sufficiently destabilized, the country breaks out into civil war. After the abolition of slavery, the dynamic of racism morphs into alternate forms of subjugation through legal segregation. After this mode of subjugation deteriorates as a result of cultural factors and increasing movements of protest followed by the Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* and the Civil Rights Act of 1964, new forms of resistance emerge which delay the implementation of desegregation. Once the courts fail to suspend desegregation satisfactorily, still new forms emerge including employment discrimination, inequitable access to higher education, redlining practices both on behalf of the private sector as

¹¹ British and French empires are battling with each other and too occupied to concentrate efforts on the U.S. colonies, other European powers are not competing for U.S. soil because they are centered in the lower hemisphere of Africa and Asia, and the indigenous people are embroiled with internal conflicts and simultaneously stricken with European borne disease. This dominance culminates after the decimation of the competing world powers of Europe, Russia, Japan in the post WWII era, leaving the U.S. as the remaining political superpower to fill the power vacuum.

¹² "Textile Industry." In *Gale Encyclopedia of U.S. Economic History*, edited by Thomas Carson and Mary Bonk, 999-1001. Vol. 2. Detroit, MI: Gale, 2000. Gale eBooks (accessed November 7, 2020).

well as by government agencies. This pattern continues to the present. The history of racism in the U.S. is perceived by some as a steady movement of progress towards greater equality. But a closer investigation reveals this history to be more like the mythical hydra, a series of regenerations. One form of oppression is lopped off and two spawn in its place. Some of which are more, while others less effective in achieving their goal. This appears to be the salient feature of racist discourse in the context of the U.S., the securing of advantages, wealth, and power for the white race must be achieved without reference to race itself.

Cultural Analysis

For the cultural analysis of racism, I rely on Fr. Bryan N. Massingale's scholarship on the topic. Massingale is Professor of Theological and Social Ethics at Fordham University, a past convener of the Black Catholic Theological Symposium and a former president of the Catholic Theological Society of America. In his role as an ethicist, he has also been a fierce critic of the Church in its relationship to racism. His book *Racial Justice and the Catholic Church* is an examination of the Church's role in the existence of racism in the U.S., "especially in the so-called 'post racial' society"¹³ that elected its first black president. Massingale begins by distinguishing his view from the common sense understanding of racism. In this commonsense view, racism consists of a negative action by an individual motivated by racial bias. Though that is an element of racism, it is only a surface level manifestation of something which exists underneath and does not explain the more complex phenomena of racism.

Building on Bernard Lonergan's understanding of culture, Massingale argues that racism is a cultural phenomenon. More specifically, racism is a culture. For both Lonergan and

¹³ Bryan N. Massingale, *Racial Justice and the Catholic Church* (Maryknoll, N.Y. : Orbis Books, 2010), 1.

Massingale, culture “...denotes a system of meanings and values, expressed in symbolic form, that conveys and expresses a people’s understanding of life.”¹⁴ This understanding of life reaches deep into the human condition, Lonergan explains these depths as,

Over and above mere living and operating, (humans) have to find a meaning and value in their living and operating. It is the function of culture to discover, express, validate, criticize, correct, develop (and) improve such meaning and value... culture stands to social order as soul to body...¹⁵

This means, Massingale explains, that culture renders intelligible the artifacts of a society, it animates and expresses their meaning.

On the basis of this framework, Massingale argues that the defining feature of the soul of black culture is struggle. The defining feature of the soul of white culture is, on the contrary, “...dominance and entitlement”¹⁶. Consequently, Massingale defines the culture of racism as “this set of meanings and values (which) provide the ideological foundation for a racialized society, where society’s benefits and burdens are inequitably allotted among the various racial groups.”¹⁷ This account of racism posits that racism is formative, communal, learned, shaping identity and consciousness. The cultural account provides a rationalization for the division of people based on arbitrary phenotypic genetic characteristics for the benefit of some over others. The emergence of categories for the organization of these groups under the umbrella or concept of race for the purpose of prioritizing the white race over the others can be described either as racism or white supremacy. The term racism highlights the basis of the division on the category

¹⁴ Bryan N. Massingale, *Racial Justice and the Catholic Church* (Maryknoll, N.Y. : Orbis Books, 2010), 16.

¹⁵ as cited in *Racial Justice and the Catholic Church*, 16.

¹⁶ *Racial Justice and the Catholic Church*, 24.

¹⁷ *Racial Justice and the Catholic Church*, 25.

of race, white supremacy highlights the outcome of this organization the benefits of which prioritize those with light skin over those with darker skin.¹⁸

Though Massingale notes, in this cultural analysis of racism, that culture is more fundamental than social institutions. The meanings and values of the culture of racism become sedimented and exert their power through cultural artifacts such as legal institutions. Critical Race Theory (CRT) emerged in the field of legal studies as a response to the realization in the 1970s “that the heady advances of the civil rights eras of the 1960s had stalled and, in many respects, were being rolled back.”¹⁹ CRT is helpful for understanding some of the more pernicious contemporary effects of racism. CRT provides the framework for analysis of race and racism in its economic, historical, contextual, and psychologically manifestations. For the purposes of this paper, I advert to two major themes in CRT.

First, much of the so-called progress in race relations can be attributed to a theory first elaborated by Derrick Bell called interest convergence. Bell inquires into why the legal system suddenly decides in favor of desegregation after years of failed previous attempts. Bell hypothesizes that returning black military forces having served abroad in the Korean War and World War II in a context where racism was secondary to patriotism, were “unlikely to return to regimes of menial labor and social vilification.”²⁰ Additionally, The U.S. was embroiled in a struggle against the global rise of communism, specifically in black, brown, and Asian countries. The media coverage of how the U.S. treated its own racial minorities did not aid in winning over

¹⁸ The phenotypical characteristics are more nuanced than just skin color, they include facial features, hair type and other cultural features, and geographical ethnic generalizations, but the primary feature seems to center around the feature of skin color above others.

¹⁹ Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, *Critical race Theory: an introduction* (New York : New York University Press, 2017), 4.

²⁰ *Critical race Theory*, 23.

allies. Thus, the interest of Blacks and Elite Whites in the U.S. converged. Interest convergence explains many instances of perceived racial justice progress. Eliminating a system that benefits so many powerful people in society is not easily accomplished and does not occur just to benefit the subjugated groups. But the powerful are willing to yield some small victories to the subjugated for the sake of achieving a competing and greater gain elsewhere.

Second, the struggle for racial justice is rendered a legal quagmire because of various forms of structural determinism. This means overcoming white supremacy involves more than a one-to-one competition regarding a particular issue at hand. The struggle takes place within the very structures which are being fought. For example, law reform necessitates new concepts such as protections against race-based employment discrimination, but emerging categories of discrimination such as intersectional discrimination pose added challenges. “Traditional legal research tools, found in standard law libraries, rely on a series of headnotes, index numbers, and other categories that lawyers use to find precedent.”²¹ Legal precedent will be much harder to establish for such cases because the new categories do not yet exist in the indices. Taken together these two examples illustrate how racism eludes efforts for justice. It is an embedded facet of the historical, cultural, institutional makeup of the U.S.

Philosophical Analysis

A second form of analysis which will be useful in understanding the problem of racism is a philosophical analysis. Sometimes the philosophical avenues for working towards justice and healing are objected to because they are perceived as abstruse. Racism is thought to be a practical problem requiring practical solutions. Yet, as the cultural analysis above demonstrates,

²¹ *Critical race Theory*, 32.

racism is not any one thing, it is many things, and simple is not one of them. What is revealed through tracing the historical development and cultural manifestation of racism is that it is a constitutive element of the soul of a people. It is deeply and essentially a philosophical problem because it is a matter of human self-understanding and human self-organization. Under the philosophical lens, the key insight into racism that I want to highlight is that it operates on the level of discourse. By addressing discourse, I mean to adhere to those aspects of thought and understanding which reveal the relationship between knowledge and power within a society. For this analysis I draw largely on the work of French Philosopher Michel Foucault and post-colonial theory which is largely impacted by his philosophy.

1. The Subject

Foucault provides the foundation for this philosophical analysis. My goal here is to describe the way racism functions as a dynamic of discourse. “For Foucault, knowledge of all sorts is thoroughly enmeshed in the clash of petty dominations, as well as in the larger battles which constitute our world.”²² He traces this power dynamic to the formation of the subject in the genealogy of the modern subject. The formation of the subject takes place in several modes, one of which is governed by the activity of the subject itself on itself, i.e. subjectification. Foucault highlights those practices in which the subject is central, as opposed to those by which the subject is operated on and objectified. Here the subject operates on itself by “a process of self-understanding but one which is mediated by an external authority figure...”²³ The autonomous subject here is the one who forms the dominant group, the one who is self-determining, a meaning-giving self. The authority is the political, legal, institutional powers that sanction it.

²² Michel Foucault, *The Foucault Reader*, ed. by Paul Rabinow (New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 1984), 6.

²³ *The Foucault Reader*, 11.

For Foucault what makes concepts intelligible is the pervading episteme, specifically, the epistemological context that renders racism intelligible. The power arrangements that the racist society deploys to enforce said order is the *dispositif* of bio-power. An essay by Professor Brad E. Stone on Foucault's posthumously published lecture courses "Society must be Defended" and "Abnormal" is helpful in elucidating this point. Here Dr. Stone explains how Foucault moves from the classical "philosophico-juridical" form of historical discourse to the modern historico-political discourse. This means moving from a model that centers on the sovereign to one that centers on war, from sovereign kingdom to nation. In the classical model "...war is the antithesis of politics..."²⁴, in the modern, war is the mode of politics. Stone continues,

This war model allows for the emergence of bio-power, as the war that becomes politics is not the war between one group and another (the Classical notion of races), but between the dominant subgroup within a country against the "inferior" subgroup (the Modern notion of races). Therefore, "society must be defended" from its own inferiorities, the exaggerated result of which is the State racism of the twentieth century.²⁵

Racism understood this way is not necessarily armed warfare but a struggle toward universality. The Hegelian master-slave dialectic illustrates this dynamic of the subject's drive toward self-determination. In the movement to achieve the being-for-self of the universal subject, there emerges an opposition between self-consciousness and "a consciousness in the form of thinghood."²⁶ The master's "nature is to be for itself,"²⁷ and the slave's nature is "to be for another."²⁸ The master's identity is mediated by relation to the slave. This logic necessitates subjugation for survival.

²⁴ Brad E. Stone, "Defending Society from the Abnormal: The Archaeology of Bio-Power," *Foucault Studies* 1 (2014): 79.

²⁵ "Defending Society from the Abnormal," 80.

²⁶ Hegel, G.W.F. *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Translated by A.V. Miller, (Oxford University Press: Oxford, England 1977), 115.

²⁷ *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 115.

²⁸ *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 115.

In this dichotomy the white race posits itself as universal, the standard of normativity, the subject who objectifies and thus determines the other as object. As the standard of norm whiteness is equivalent to personhood, for the white man to say someone is equal to them is to say, “they are like me”, and not “I am like them”. The self-forming subject is the measure by which those designated ‘other’ are rendered as such. “Genocide, colonization, ethnic cleansing, the Holocaust, and institutional racism are some of the catastrophes that receive justification through the discourse of race struggle.”²⁹ Even in this destructive logic, however, there is embedded the seed of liberation. The converse of this epistemological development is knowledge on the object side.

2. The Object

Foucault discusses this side of the subject discourse as dividing practices and as scientific classification, but the operation of these is elucidated well in the developments of postcolonialism. Edward Wadie Said was a Palestinian-American literary theorist, critic, activist, and professor of English and Comparative Literature at Columbia University. He is considered one of the founders of postcolonial studies. One of his major contributions to this field is the epistemological focus of his analysis of colonialism. Said insists that ideas do not exist independently from their material effectiveness in the formation of the epistemic notions that have power over the way concrete reality of life unfolds historically. There are literary, philosophical and historical texts which are selected and raised up as normative and given authority. Such epistemological artifacts are enshrined in canons and cement the power relations established within and by them.

²⁹ “Defending Society from the Abnormal,” 90.

Considered this way, the racial minority is made an object of study and distanced from notions of authority, autonomy, self-determination. The subject who knows, is evolving and expressive as opposed to the object which is known who is static facticity, ontologically stable. In Said's description of how this epistemic task functions in the relationship of colonizer to colonized, he writes,

Knowledge to Balfour means surveying a civilization from its origins to its prime to its decline—and of course, it means being able to do that. Knowledge means rising above immediacy, beyond self, into the foreign and distant. The object of such knowledge is inherently vulnerable to scrutiny; this object is a “fact” which, if it develops, changes, or otherwise transforms itself in the way that civilizations frequently do, nevertheless is fundamentally, even ontologically stable. To have such knowledge of such a thing is to dominate it, to have authority over it. And authority here means for “us” to deny autonomy to “it”—the Oriental country—since we know it and it exists, in a sense, as we know it.³⁰

To know in this way means to conquer, the inherent vulnerability in being an object of study is to be in a position of subjugation even prior to any military occupation. To be a knower of the other in this way is to exert the power of true subjectivity over an other who is a prototypical object. The subject (knower) in this equation is universal and the ground of epistemic objectivity, it constitutes the point of reference for the human, it is the creative genius of the quintessentially human—*homo sapiens*: hominid knowing. The object is inferior, stable, and controlled. Within the dynamic of racism, thus, knowledge is not neutral. On the object side, epistemic agency is revoked. The dominant racial group is the agent in the epistemological task, while the subordinate racial group(s) is the patient. For this reason, one of the tasks in combating racism is carried out by an inversion of this dichotomy. That is, Black Agency.

Present Church

After going through this summary form analysis, it may be asked how the Roman Catholic Church in the U.S. can be understood to fit into the historical development of white

³⁰ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, (New York: Random House, 1978), 32.

supremacy. It may be acknowledged that the Church was a factor in the history of racism, but not any longer in the present. This claim is unfortunately not an accurate representation of the historical record. The Catholic Church participated in the evils of racism through the legacy of slavery (owning slaves), many current black Catholics especially in Maryland and Louisiana trace their heritage to forceful imposition of Catholicism by their slave masters. The Jesuits, Catholic lay persons and Catholic bishops were known to own slaves. Questioning the extent to which this is a phenomenon of complicity with racism, a fact of life in the world but one which religion does not exacerbate, or whether it is a matter of cause, I argue it is closer to the latter.

Robert P. Jones, the CEO and founder of Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI) does a good job of gathering data on this topic. His book *White Too Long*, draws on statistical data to support the claim I build on here. This book uses personal narrative as well as statistical data to tell, “the story of just how intractably white supremacy has become embedded in the DNA of American Christianity...”³¹ His personal perspective centers around the Southern Baptist tradition, but the studies cover all American Christian denominations and includes data on Catholics, of particular interest to this project. Citing a letter written by W.E.B. DuBois in 1884 Jones relays,

The Catholic Church in America stands for color separation and discrimination to a degree equaled by no other church in America, and that is saying a great deal.... The white parochial schools even in the North exclude colored children, the Catholic high schools will not admit them, the Catholic University at Washington invites them elsewhere, and scarcely a Catholic seminary in the country will train a Negro priest.”³²

Jones goes on to document case after case of indicting evidence on the Catholic Church. Parishes were sites of violent white resistance organizing, priests were spokespersons, the Catholic

³¹ Robert P. Jones, *White Too Long: The Legacy of White Supremacy in American Christianity*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2020), location 9.

³² *White Too Long*, location 61.

Church facilitated white flight to the suburbs, Bishops put out statements which by their own admission did little to affect the attitudes of Catholics.³³ In the fifth chapter of this book Jones illustrates with various studies done by PRRI that Catholics are closely aligned with their Evangelical companions when it comes to issues of race. Due to limitations of space, I will refer to two examples, though many others are presented.

In a survey meant to measure attitudes regarding confederate symbols, participants were asked if these were more a symbol of southern pride or racism. 86 percent of white Evangelicals and 70 percent of white Catholics believed it was southern pride. This contrasts with 41 percent of white unaffiliated Americans.³⁴ In another survey 85 percent of white Evangelicals and 80 percent of white Catholics believed confederate monuments were more about southern pride than racism, compared to only 54 percent of white unaffiliated Americans. This trend is consistent, illustrating that Christians in general and Catholics specifically show more markers³⁵ of racism than the general population. Jones concludes, “If you want to predict whether an average person is likely to identify as a white Christian, and you could know only one attribute about that person, you would be better off knowing how racist he or she is than how often he or she attends church.”³⁶

Fr. Massingale makes clear the need for the analysis above, and more of the same writing, “We will never adequately deal with the reality of racial injustice, and its generational effects, unless we name its causes and attack its sources.”³⁷ The analyses I have presented above

³³ *White Too Long*, location 61-63.

³⁴ *White Too Long*, location 135.

³⁵ The studies cannot measure racism directly due to bias in self-reporting and the complexity of measuring such a phenomenon. But they attempt to isolate certain factors which are consistently differentiated among respondents in non-white groups. Jones goes into this in more detail in his discussion of the racism index in location 140.

³⁶ *White Too Long*, location 149.

³⁷ *Racial Justice and the Catholic Church*, 14.

are not meant to be exhaustive but present a more nuanced approach to understanding the phenomenon of racism than the attempts which fail to take seriously the existence and extent of racism today. I have not highlighted these areas based on importance or significance, but because of their pertinence to my theological proposals.

V. Theology Component

Prologue

Bryan Massingale spends the first half of his book *Racial Justice and the Catholic Church* elaborating on the complexity and ubiquity of the cultural facets of racism. Because his book concerns not just racism but racism's relationship with the Catholic Church, his account includes a severe indictment of the Church. Given the "scandalous counterwitness"³⁸ of the Church, 'why do we continue to align ourselves with this flawed institution and people as a source of hope?' The answer to this question is not self-evident, it poses a challenge that every Catholic must answer, especially those who are historically oppressed people. The great spiritual guide to the leaders of the civil rights movement, Howard Thurman, recounts a story wherein he participated in an exchange, as the head of a delegation of Christian students of America to students of South Asia. There he was confronted by the Law School principal at the University of Colombo who challenged him with the question, "What are you doing over here?"³⁹ To summarize, this principal elaborated the history of Africans in America, the role Christians have played in this history, and accused Thurman of being a traitor to "all the darker peoples of the earth... (Their) subsequent conversation lasted for more than five hours."⁴⁰ Thurman's response to this question is penned in his seminal text *Jesus and the Disinherited* and formulated in his concept of 'the religion of Jesus.' Fr. Massingale's response to this same question is his vocation as a Black Catholic Theologian. Massingale sees himself hard pressed as a black Catholic to give an account of the reason for his hope in the Christian faith. My attempt to respond to this

³⁸ Bryan N. Massingale, *Racial Justice and the Catholic Church* (Maryknoll, N.Y. : Orbis Books, 2010), 85.

³⁹ Howard Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited* (Boston, Massachusetts: Beacon Press, 1996), 4.

⁴⁰ Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited*, 5.

challenge takes shape here, first by my presence. Before one can have any impact at all, for better or worse, one must be present in the arena of theological discourse, a place historically dominated by white voices. Second, by my voice. We who form the congregation, versed in the tradition, who love it and study it, have a responsibility to account for its failings, to be our brother's keeper, to realize the hope we profess, to muster the courage to risk being wrong, to proclaim and articulate, to revise and correct, to live out what is confessed, finally to persist.

Way of Proceeding

Guided by this desire to articulate a theological vision that corresponds to our reality, while holding on to the essence of the gift of faith which is received, certain questions arise: How does one do theology from the point of view of the marginalized? Are their lives and concerns central or periphery to theology? Is theological discourse the appropriate mode of engaging these questions? The very questions can be problematic. The questions are ineluctably asked from the perspective of the academy or motivated by either the interests of the Church hierarchy, or the ruling classes. It follows that one asks questions of interest to oneself. One cannot inquire into experience that is not one's own. Thus, what is needed is not a formal distinction of the discipline of theology which seeks to amend the interests of the poor, the marginalized, the racial minority, to theology's center. But to rearticulate what constitutes the center, to enter into the concerns of the oppressed people participatively thus shifting the center.

T. Michael McNulty formulates this challenge succinctly, it is not to address the needs of the 'other' vis-à-vis charity, but "the recognition of the other as fellow human."⁴¹ McNulty cites

⁴¹ T. Michael McNulty, "Taking the Victims' Side," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*, 81, no.1, (2007): 133.

Henry Nouwen who formulates this as challenge as “the existential awareness of the oneness of the human race.”⁴² McNulty also draws on Simone Weil’s conception of justice and solidarity,

... the only true interest I can have... is discoverable through attention to the reality of others, to the perspective on the world which they in their distance from me possess. It is not a matter of negotiating terms, but of a universal relinquishing of the idea of rights upon which the practice of negotiation rests.”⁴³

For McNulty, externalizing our relationship with the marginalized is their effective dehumanization. “Taking the victims’ side, modeling the world from the perspective of the reality that daily oppresses them, transforms both the victims and ourselves.”⁴⁴ Citing the twenty-ninth Superior General of the Jesuits, Peter-Hans Kolvenbach he writes, this is a “... casting of one’s lot with them... What saves is the transcendence the relationship implies: to go out from oneself and arrive respectfully at the other.”⁴⁵ Effectively, ‘them’ is replaced with ‘us’.

This prioritizes the agency of black and brown voices, voices of women, of the poor, and every class which has been historically oppressed. If this is to be done, it cannot be merely a matter of inviting diversity, the concept of diversity being imbedded with the notion of dominant universal center and marginal others. It must emanate from the ‘othered’ people, the concerns at the center of theological discourse must be based not on majoritarianism or meritocracy but on concerns of “the least of these.”⁴⁶ Theology must center the voices of those who are most in need, if it is to articulate a vision which incorporates them at all. Importantly, McNulty writes,

⁴² McNulty, “Taking the Victims’ Side,”: 133.

⁴³ McNulty, “Taking the Victims’ Side,”: 134.

⁴⁴ McNulty, “Taking the Victims’ Side,”: 135.

⁴⁵ McNulty, “Taking the Victims’ Side,”: 135.

⁴⁶ Matthew 25:40

“We cannot simply grant liberation to people who are poor and marginalized—they must take it for themselves.”⁴⁷ The difference in this shift may seem negligible but it is significant to the theological project. Based on this shift different questions emerge, and different responses are given to long disputed issues. The rearticulation of long-standing traditional views takes place. Consequentially, Certain methodological principles emerge.

Liberation theology

Drawing on Gustavo Gutiérrez’ theology of liberation I will highlight various themes as they apply to my methodological approach: Encountering God in History, Political Dimension of the Gospel, Solidarity, Protest, and Faith lived out historically. First, Practical mediation—the process of taking ecclesial activity as the starting point of theological reflection and engaging in critical theological reflection to determine a path towards a new social or ecclesial order through pastoral practices—is fundamental. This means a reversal of the theoretical preoccupations which have been the concern of European philosophical-theological models. I cannot approach divine revelation, ecclesial activity, or theological reflection prior to being that which I am. If I approach these concerns, it is first I who, from my context approaches these questions. It is not an unconditioned ahistorical entity that approaches the altar of knowledge, but a 21st century Latino heterosexual cisgender male, born of Mexican immigrants, in the U.S. and raised in the Roman Catholic tradition who inquires into the mystery of being. Gutiérrez elaborates this task of liberation theology not as a rationalization of political action, but as an attempt to

let ourselves be judged by the word of the Lord, to think through our faith, to strengthen our love, and to give reason for our hope from within a commitment that seeks to become more radical, total, and efficacious... to reconsider the great themes of the Christian life

⁴⁷ McNulty, “Taking the Victims’ Side,”: 136.

within this radically changed perspective and with regard to the new questions posed by this commitment. This is the goal of the so-called theology of liberation.⁴⁸

Concomitantly, Black Liberation Theology as formulated by James Cone and others, condemns white Christianity, and highlights the importance of 'black agency'. For Cone, "there can be no theology of the gospel which does not arise from an oppressed community... because God is revealed in Jesus as a God whose righteousness is inseparable from the weak and helpless in human society."⁴⁹ For Cone, theology takes sides, "It is either identified with those who inflict oppression or with those who are its victims."⁵⁰ He asserts, "Blackness, then, stands for all victims of oppression who realize that the survival of their humanity is bound up with liberation from whiteness."⁵¹ Does this mean, then, that all white theologians must be discounted? In a footnote, Cone clarifies that, "To verify the blackness of a particular perspective, we need only ask, 'For whom was it written, the oppressed or oppressors?' If the former, it is black; if the latter it is white."⁵² Cone explains that revelation is not comprehensible,

without a prior understanding of the concrete manifestation of revelation in the black community as seen in the black experience, black history, and black culture....

Revelation is what Yahweh *did* in the event of the exodus; it is Yahweh tearing down old orders and establishing new ones. ... to know God is to know what God is doing in human history for the oppressed of the land.⁵³

This grounding of Theology means not proceeding with inquiry that is presumably neutral but inquiring into the concrete activity of God in history. This approach is necessarily political

⁴⁸ Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, (Orbis Books Mary Knoll, NY 1988), xii.

⁴⁹ James H. Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, (Maryknoll: New York, 1970), 5.

⁵⁰ Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 6.

⁵¹ Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 8.

⁵² Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 156.

⁵³ Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 31.

because the Gospel is political. As Cone points out, the whole thrust of the Judeo-Christian tradition is rooted in the historical/political action of liberation in the exodus. This narrative can be seen rearticulated in Genesis, in the priestly literature, in the prophetic literature and in the New Testament rearticulation of the Paschal Mystery.

Having discussed these preliminaries about how I choose to do theology and the broad strokes point of departure as embodied theology with liberative intentionality, I now enter the central task of this paper. In what follows I will begin by grounding the project on the theme of community in its positive and negative formulation. Next, I move to specific doctrines that fall within the scope of the theme of community. I do not just expound these as they are found in the tradition but interrogate them and seek to render from them a fuller account according to the demands made in the earlier sections of this paper.

Positive Grounding: Community

In his discussion of what constitutes the vocation of the Catholic Theologian, Massingale articulates one of the driving questions that provokes wonder and acts as a catalyst to the theological project: “What is the fitting human response to the experience of sacred mystery encountered in human existence?”⁵⁴ I stand before the mysteries of the cosmos, my own existence, and the inner life that characterizes my intelligent, rational, responsible search for meaning. But I do not stand alone, I am the product of the love of a caring family. I inhabit a particular historical moment. I am a member of a cultural linguistic community within which any meaningful sense of personal identity must take shape. I am a member of the faith community within which ultimate questions of being (life, death, transcendence) are rendered intelligible,

⁵⁴ Massingale, *Racial Justice*, 158.

e.g., questions about god and faith are only intelligible to one who participates in a linguistic community that has formulated such concepts and wrestled with them historically, specific faith traditions and languages such as a Greek pantheon, a Jewish YHWH, a Muslim Allāh, a Christian trinity. But this questioning is not passive, it has intentionality or conation. It moves in a general direction. How can it be identified?

Gustavo Gutiérrez indicates a way forward, to undertake such theological reflection, he writes, “In the last analysis, the true interpretation of the meaning revealed by theology is achieved only in historical praxis.”⁵⁵ This means that the private realm is not sufficient in scope for theology. The discourse that thematizes human experience takes place in the historical dialectical unfolding of community. Thus, my theological articulation takes this direction towards community as normative. In the following, I will draw upon Bernard Lonergan’s explanation of the intersubjective world as a phenomenological exploration of what I mean by community. Much of Lonergan’s theology is based on a prior account of his cognitional theory which grounds his metaphysics elaborated in his classic work *Insight*.⁵⁶ Due to space limitations, I cannot expand on this area of his thought which partially limits my engagement with his conception of community and intersubjectivity. However, for the purposes of this paper I will generalize these as two dimensions of community rather than as two distinct phenomena.

Intersubjectivity

In *Method in Theology*, Lonergan lays out the eight functional specialties for doing theology. But before entering his discussion of these, he explores the role of the theologian as

⁵⁵ Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, (Orbis Books Mary Knoll, NY 1988), 10.

⁵⁶ Bernard J.F. Lonergan. *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan: Volume 3 Insight*, ed. Frederick E. Crowe and Robert M. Doran (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992).

intelligent subject and of religious experience. The first area he explores is meaning. Lonergan identifies meaning as “embodied or carried in human intersubjectivity.”⁵⁷ Lonergan alludes to the prior unity of subjects. This unity is prior to the division of an “I.” This unity is the intersubjective world of meaning. He provides two contrasting examples to illustrate the two realms of meaning. There is linguistic meaning, for example, which is objective, and then there is a smile which has intersubjective meaning. It is the kind of thing that “supposes the interpersonal situation with its antecedents in previous encounters [...] a meaning with its significance in the context of antecedent and subsequent meanings.”⁵⁸ This reveals the general carrier of meaning which I am calling community, adopting Lonergan’s description of the world of human intersubjectivity. The world of meaning is an elevation from the infants’ world of immediacy to the world mediated by meaning.⁵⁹

For the purposes of this paper, I will employ Lonergan’s term intersubjectivity in a slightly broader sense than he does, to refer to all the carriers of meaning, i.e. intersubjective, artistic, symbolic, linguistic and incarnate, because the latter four presuppose the intersubjective world of meaning. Via these carriers, meaning is communicated to others. If this task is accomplished successfully a common meaning is achieved and this gives rise to community. Lonergan asserts that community is the way to arrive at peace and the only solid foundation for the state. Finding its ground in common meaning, community can only occur where there are “common judgments, areas in which all affirm and deny in the same manner...” That is not to

⁵⁷ Bernard J.F. Lonergan. *Method in Theology*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press 1971), 57.

⁵⁸ Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 60.

⁵⁹ For Lonergan this process is further nuanced by an implied conversion. Due to space limitations, I do not go into his discussion of conversion, but this distinction elucidates the mode in which one moves from self-interest and self-centeredness to an outward orientation characterized by responsibility. Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 10 & 57.

say that everyone agrees about everything, but that certain fundamental agreements are present to ground communication and collaboration. This arena forms the context in which meaning finds its source. Specialist in the thought of Bernard Lonergan, Jim Kanaris, argues that statements with this intersubjective nature are called “pragmatic expressions”, whose meaning eludes the syntactic arrangement and semantic constitution of terms, the only way to settle the meaning of this... is by participating in the context that gives it meaning.”⁶⁰ For the religious dimension, this means theological discourse is only meaningful in its true sense to those who share a commitment to the faith, i.e. the faith community.

This human intersubjective world mediated by meaning is not just one’s enclosed world of immediate experience, neither is it the accumulation of enclosed worlds, but what we intend with our intelligent, rational cognitive operations together. This world transcends the immediate world of experience and is constituted by intelligent subjects. Lonergan writes that this is the “larger world [where] we live out our lives. To it we refer when we speak of the real world.”⁶¹ And this is the field where the need for bridge building is prevalent. In this arena, reconciliation must take place for true collaboration to occur between the community of common sense, the richness of literature, inquiries of historians, scholars, scientists, saints, philosophers and theologians.⁶²

Given this account of community, ‘What is primary? Experience of the community or revelation?’ This question is misleading because revelation presupposes experience. And human experience, insofar as it constitutes God’s creation and exists as a manifestation of the love of

⁶⁰ Jim Kanaris. “The ‘Ins and Outs’ of Religious Love: Bernard Lonergan’s Pragmatics,” *Studies in Religion/ Sciences Religieuses* (Sage Publications, 1998): 295-310.

⁶¹ Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 77.

⁶² Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 77.

God, presupposes what is found in revelation. Although these are two sides of one coin, they can be distinguished theoretically and prioritized methodologically. In his account of the theoretical primacy of experience Cone explains, “I do not think that revelation is comprehensible from a black theological perspective without a prior understanding of the concrete manifestation of revelation in the black community as seen in the black experience, black history, and black culture.”⁶³ Quoting Carl Michaelson Cone writes, “The Christian Gospel is a proclamation which strikes the ear of the world with the force of a hint... The Christian church is that community of persons who ‘got the hint,’ and they thus refuse to be content with human pain and suffering.”⁶⁴ It is, Cone continues, “what Bonhoeffer had in mind when he called the church ‘Christ existing as a community.’”⁶⁵

Jewish diaspora, exilic tradition, and the practices of maintaining the community, amidst these assaults to the integrity of the Jewish community produce the Hebrew scriptures. In establishment of the Holy Nation, God expresses this desire to unite the community in the covenant. Moses is to remind the house of Jacob of God’s salvation, “see how I bore you up on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself.”⁶⁶ This is echoed in the various articulations of the covenant in the Hebrew Scriptures. The Psalmist expresses this desire of God who “gathers the dispersed of Israel”⁶⁷ The book of Ruth uses similar language to express how they return to “the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come...”⁶⁸ Isaiah clarifies that this establishment is for a purpose, not to be kept to itself but as “a light for the nations.”⁶⁹

⁶³ Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 31.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 137.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 140.

⁶⁶ Exodus 19:4.

⁶⁷ Psalm 147:2.

⁶⁸ Ruth 2:12.

⁶⁹ Isaiah 42:6.

The practices of the Jewish community inform Jesus' identity and mission as expressed in the Gospels. He echoes this desire from the Hebrew Scriptures in the lament over Jerusalem "How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings..."⁷⁰ Thus, embodying the faith acts as the glue of the faith community. Massingale, citing M. Shawn Copeland, highlights the importance of community as a practical matter as well as a theological principle,

The most significant, and at the same time perhaps the most perplexing, lesson is that racial healing and reconciliation require a context of shared beliefs and values... (The civil rights movement) eventually lost anchor in the prophetic witness of the black church... This proved devastating because people are by and large not inclined toward radical acts of social relocation, economic redistribution, or racial reconciliation unless they can see their own life-stories as part of a larger theological narrative.⁷¹

If community as explained above serves as the positive grounding for the theological project, the reverse side of this comprises the negative grounding as its opposite—sin.

Negative Grounding: Sin

Thomas Aquinas defines sin in relation to God's law and in terms of disorder. Accordingly, "Sin is not a pure privation but an act deprived of its due order."⁷² This is the essence of sin for Aquinas. Insofar as sin is directed to fellow humans, only the object of sin is different not its essence. The Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC) defines sin as "an offense against reason, truth, and right conscience."⁷³ According to the CCC, there is a similar line of thought wherein sin is defined in relation to divine order. Insofar as sin has consequences, the CCC acknowledges that human solidarity is injured. But this conception of sin falls short when it

⁷⁰ Matthew 23:37.

⁷¹ Massingale, *Racial Justice*, 85.

⁷² Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 2nd, rev. ed., trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (1920; New Advent, 2008): I-II, Q.72, Art.1, <https://www.newadvent.org/summa/2072.htm>.

⁷³ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1849.

comes to the humanity of sin. The concept is abstracted and essentialized according to reason. However, reason offers a second order analysis of sin. This account may be correct for what it is worth. Nevertheless, it fails to capture the essential nature of sin as manifested in human experience. If the good of religion as articulated in the positive grounding is community, then its opposite is the disintegration of community.

The narrative I have been engaged with focused on the contemporary Church in the U.S., the wound of racism presents itself as the locus of sin. Historically, sin is the archetypal failing to account for our brothers and sisters who suffer. Before Moses' encounter with the burning bush, and God's commission, the book of Exodus says Moses "witnessed their forced labor, he saw an Egyptian striking a Hebrew, one of his own kinsmen."⁷⁴ This scene is the catalyst that leads to the liberation of the Israelites. Moses from his high social position, regarded a slave as his brother and was moved to act in his defense.

Sin moves in the opposite direction. It is the damage of self-harm to the body of Christ. The personification of sin in the devil aids in illustrating this point. Etymologically devil, from *diabolos*, means 'one who scatters.' Sin opens a rift between brother and sister. In contrast religion, from the Latin *religio* means to bind, at its most fundamental it draws together. The Danish Philosopher Søren Kierkegaard offers an account of different levels of despair, the most extreme of which he calls the demonic. This parallel to sin as formulated above is illustrative of that movement. For Kierkegaard the demonic takes itself to be evidence against its own goodness and stands in defiance to the eternal that created it. The more it is pressed from the outside to be relieved of this burden, "the more attention it pays with demonic cleverness to

⁷⁴ Exodus 2:11.

keeping despair closed up in inclosing reserve...”⁷⁵ Sin draws us inward, selfishly and scatters us from one another. Kierkegaard’s explanation of the demonic as inward selfish egoism, as pathological concern for self at the cost of the self’s wellbeing is antithetical to the understanding of persons as essentially communal. Our neighbor bids us to return to community through reconciliation. In a later passage Kierkegaard writes, “Sin itself is the struggle of despair.”⁷⁶

Cone offers a concrete definition according to this community dimension. He writes, “Sin is not an abstract idea... it is a religious concept that defines the human condition as separated from the essence of the community.”⁷⁷ He cites the foundational text of Genesis 3 which grounds the meaning of Israel’s existence. The prophets serve to remind Israel of this essence throughout its history. Inheriting this conception, for Christians sin is to “deny the essence of God’s liberating activity as revealed in Jesus Christ.”⁷⁸ Given this account of sin in its communal dimension, certain shortcomings of the traditional view become clear. Various theologians have approached sin from this broader perspective and identified specific limitations.

For example, Massingale highlights how the emphasis on the personal dimension of sin, specifically related to racism has been debilitating. This emphasis leads to redress by personal actions, attention to personal culpability, and personal conversion.⁷⁹ However lofty these intentions are, they fail to meet the demands of the immense social nature of sin. Granted, this mode of intervention is found mostly in the Evangelical tradition, but Massingale also pays attention to the Catholic tradition. Here he cites the historian John Mahoney who “masterfully

⁷⁵ Kierkegaard, Soren. *The Sickness Unto Death*. Edited and Translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, (Princeton University Press: Princeton, N.J. 1980), 73.

⁷⁶ Kierkegaard, *The Sickness Unto Death*, 110.

⁷⁷ Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 110.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 112.

⁷⁹ Massingale, *Racial Justice*, 93.

demonstrated the decisive impact of the discipline of private confession on Catholic moral praxis and reflection.... Among its effects is a lingering privatized understanding of sin.”⁸⁰

Another example is found in the theology Andrew Sung Park. His central thesis in *The Wounded Heart of God* is that Christian theology has focused too much on the sinner and has neglected the recipient of sin, the victim. The experience of suffering and deep pain felt by victims is expressed by the Korean term han. Park provides an in-depth analysis of han. First there is Individual Han. It can either be conscious or unconscious. It can manifest as bitterness when it is not active but passive. It can also be felt as helplessness. When it is active it can be violent and even self-destructive. Han can also be a community phenomenon such as the historical angst felt in a community which has been oppressed or has suffered greatly in common. Here too it can be manifest either consciously and passive as despair. It can also be unconscious and manifest as racial resentment. Actively it can be harmful to communities. In the passive sense it can be experienced as an ethos of lamentations.⁸¹ Ultimately, the focus on the personal dimension of sin as Park finds it throughout the Christian tradition is incapable of responding to han. The privatized emphasis on contrition and absolution ignore the victims of sin and the sufferer of han. Park suggests exchanging the privatized meaning of penance for “Post-Vatican II... communal ones.”⁸² Conversion for Park involves more than contrition and confession, “True repentance is not a cognitive regret alone, but an orthopraxis for the

⁸⁰ Ibid., 103.

⁸¹ Andrew Sung Park, *The Wounded Heart: The Asian Concept of Han and the Christian Doctrine of Sin*, (Abingdon Press: Nashville, 1993), 31-34.

⁸² Park, *The Wounded Heart*, 89.

rectification of the wrong.”⁸³ This highlights the communal dimension of sin while making the sinner responsible for actively transforming the reality of han.

With this perspective, the positive grounding of community and the negative grounding of sin it becomes possible and necessary to revisit the tradition with a critical lens. With this theological grounding as a further normative guide, I can approach a variety of contemporary issues, biblical themes and Christian doctrines. This perspective demands not an abandonment of tradition but a fuller articulation of certain components. Below I offer an example that is illustrative of the potential of this kind of normative heuristic to critically examine the Christian tradition with a teleological aim towards community.

Doctrine

The tradition(s) is(are) multivalent, but it does not remain permanently amorphous. It also crystalizes into capital T traditions. From the dialectic of shared meaning developing from within communities of faith emerge concepts and beliefs. One part of the development is on the side of the community, an ongoing self-discovery in which we construct our world symbolically and reinterpret the tradition be it sacred scripture, sacred histories, or sacred institutions.⁸⁴ On the other side are the objects of our attention, they crystalize and thematize, they form doctrines. They achieve a level of permanence. Some doctrines are important to reconsider and reimagine, they do not become obsolete because they emerged from an authentic self-understanding of the Church. But they can become limited if they do not yield to the demands of the lived faith and dynamic mission of the community. Below I will consider one such doctrine.

⁸³ Park, *The Wounded Heart*, 89.

⁸⁴ Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 319.

Here, I want to draw attention to a central doctrine in the Christian faith, the *Imago Dei*⁸⁵. This doctrine is founded on the creation narrative of Genesis chapter 1: “Then God said: Let us make human beings in our image, after our likeness.”⁸⁶ This doctrine is further strengthened by the dignity granted to humanity in the incarnation of Jesus. Although I acknowledge the importance of this doctrine, I wonder how a faith with such a central doctrine has failed to live it out so often throughout history. In fact, these two major doctrines are what is referenced by the USCCB in their approach to responding to racism. They view racism as a denial of these doctrines, i.e., “the universal Fatherhood of God, and the Incarnation, in which Jesus became the brother of all, with the intention of offering salvation to all humanity.”⁸⁷ These episcopal documents were led by only white scholars, until the 1979 the statement “Brothers and Sisters to Us”, which saw the inclusion of Cyprian Davis a black Benedictine Monk in rewriting a draft of the document. What is evident about the limitations of this doctrine is that it is removed from the reality of the “least of these.”⁸⁸

The *Imago Dei*, has been abstracted and universalized. The emphasis on an abstracted *Imago Dei* and Christology, indirectly prioritizes a white racial category in the name of a neutral humanistic one. As McNulty notes,

... it has been a presupposition of philosophy at least since the eighteenth century that all voices have an equal claim on our attention... It will be my suggestion that this position is untenable, because it excludes the voices of the poor and marginalized, the victims of global economic forces that inflict terrible suffering on them without the possibility of redress.⁸⁹

⁸⁵ Other areas of interest where a similar reconsideration would be fruitful include the doctrines of the mystical body of Christ and the sin of scandal.

⁸⁶ Genesis 1:26.

⁸⁷ Lincoln Rice, *Healing the Racial Divide*, 8.

⁸⁸ Matthew 25:45.

⁸⁹ T. Michael McNulty, “Taking the Victims’ Side,” *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*, 81, no.1, (2007): 127.

Theology that is rendered neutral, ends up being representation of the dominant class. Cone expresses this similarly, “Theology cannot be indifferent to the importance of blackness by making some kind of existential leap beyond blackness to an undefined universalism.”⁹⁰ McNulty highlights the limitations of universalizing to address the poor, Cone highlights its limitations to address racial minorities, but there is a further critique emergent from feminist insights. Jacquelyn Grant, a womanist theologian, writes about the limitations of the abstract universalism in this line of thinking in *White Women’s Christ and Black Women’s Jesus*. She notes that feminist theology “is concerned about exposing this false universalism and reinterpreting the experiences of women.”⁹¹ Citing liberation theologian Jon Sobrino, Grant adopts the historical Jesus as the starting point for doing Christology... (thereby) avoid(ing) abstractionism, and the attendant danger of manipulating the Christ event.”⁹² Finally, citing Mary Daly, Grant expresses how she can synthesize the rejection of Christolatry and acceptance of Jesus writing, “As a model breaker, Jesus enables us to break our idolatrous relationships not only with him, but with other Christian symbols as well.”⁹³ This move illustrates the necessary moving beyond, while retaining, that is required in the process of the doing theology from the perspective of the oppressed.

Conclusion: Vision of Church

Based on the description of the exigence to community described above, a new understanding of Church becomes necessary. The dominant creedal model that associates people

⁹⁰ Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 38.

⁹¹ Jacquelyn Grant, *White Woman’s Christ and Black Women’s Jesus: Feminist Christology and Womanist Response*, (Scholars Press: Atlanta, Georgia, 1989), 13.

⁹² Grant, *White Woman’s Christ and Black Women’s Jesus*, 81.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 187.

according to particular doctrinal beliefs proves to be inadequate. Given the liberative praxis implied in this theological project, a missiological definition of the community is called for. This emphasizes method over matter, or mission over substance. Thurman warns of the pitfall to be aware of in emphasizing mission, "...a very unfortunate corruption of the missionary impulse, which is, in a sense, the very heartbeat of the Christian religion."⁹⁴ This must not be an afterthought, but a central guiding consideration. Missiological ecclesiology is an understanding of the identity of the Church rooted in the activity of the Church, i.e. its mission. However, because of the corruption Thurman warns us about, this definition cannot remain neutral but must be nuanced to include a notion of the essence of the church's mission as advancing towards liberation.

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Stephen Bevans' scholarship centers on missionary ecclesiology and contemporary issues like Pope Francis' thought in this area. Bevans' scholarship is helpful in charting a way forward as to the application of the theology espoused in this paper. In "Missiology as Practical Theology", Stephen Bevans begins by situating mission as emanating from the foundation of God's essence as trinity. He writes that God is practice and we come to know this by the practice of God in history. These practices come to be known by women and men when they "in turn are caught up in trinitarian life, and so participate themselves in the practice of the Trinity."⁹⁵ Bevans illustrates how this concept is deeply embedded in tradition harkening to classical sources including Aquinas, Bonaventure, and Mechtilde who understand God as pure being, self-

⁹⁴ Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited*, xix.

⁹⁵ Stephen Bevans, "Missiology as Practical Theology." In *Invitation to Practical Theology*, edited by Claire E. Wolfteich, (Paulist Press: Mahwah, New Jersey, 2014), 253.

diffusive love, and communion. These views characterize God as verb more accurately than noun.

This activity can be seen in history as God seeking to “draw humanity into communion with Godself and with one another.”⁹⁶ When this communion fails or degrades, and healing is needed, God acts through reconciliation to draw back together what has come asunder as a result of sin. In revelation this activity is articulated into symbolic representation and brings God closer to humanity. Citing Elizabeth Johnson, he identifies this movement as God’s “drawing near and passing by in vivifying, sustaining, renewing, and liberating power in the midst of historical struggle.”⁹⁷ This culminates in the incarnation of Jesus, “God’s embodied practice.”⁹⁸ Jesus’ whole life and ministry situate the spiritual reality, present from the beginning of creation, concretely in history.

The disciples, and later the church, continue this practice through doing as Jesus did. This practice or mission defines what the church is. Although Bevens does not completely whitewash mission, in theory; the historical reality of missionary work in the world of globalization and post-colonial consciousness requires a scrutinizing of the hegemonic missionary proclivity of a dominantly Eurocentric Christianity. Bevens claims to be aware of this trouble, arguing that it spurred the church to purify and renew its notion of mission. Bevens describes the rebirth of missionary practice notably in the Medellin Conference of 1978, the Extraordinary Synod of 1971, and the apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* in which Paul VI gives voice to the

⁹⁶ Bevens, “Missiology as Practical Theology”: 255.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

nascent wisdom in calling for “an expansion of an understanding of mission to include justice issues and identified the ‘evangelization of cultures’ as legitimate missionary practice.”⁹⁹

Describing this type of renewed understanding of mission, Bevans notes two characteristics that must undergird all missionary activity: dialogue and prophecy. Mission as dialogue looks to the divine pedagogy and recognizes that both ‘what’ God reveals and ‘how’ God reveals is dialogic. This recognition causes the missionary to prioritize openness, listening, gentleness and relationship before any attempt to teach. Mission as prophecy proclaims hope in the promises of God and witnesses to the joy of living the Gospel.¹⁰⁰

Bevans provides keen insights into the ecclesiology necessary to take on a practical response to the pastoral problem I set out to address. There are avenues for renewing church structures within parish or diocesan ministry according to this theology of missional priority. The difficulty implied in such an ecclesiological undertaking resides in its concrete application. How do I bring a community which finds its identity in belief systems, doctrines and liturgical practices which are open and meaningful only to the initiated, into the stance of radical openness required to engage in the missiology proposed by Bevans? The institutional structure which gives cohesion to the group seems to be contradictory to the practice of interreligious and secular dialogue, for example. Unfortunately, these questions cannot be answered here. But they do prompt me to limit the scope of my pastoral application in the plan that follows. There are many possible avenues for applying this theological vision comprehensively at the level of chanceries,

⁹⁹ Ibid.: 259.

¹⁰⁰ Although not within the scope of this paper, it may be relevant to future work in seeking further ways the theological project I suggest here can be developed. Bevans goes on to list six kinds of trinitarian practice: 1. Witness and Proclamation 2. Liturgy, Prayer, and Contemplation 3. Justice, Peace, and the Integrity of Creation 4. Interreligious and Secular Dialogue 5. Inculturation 6. Reconciliation.

parishes, and small faith communities. But such comprehensive approaches may prove to be too ambitious. Instead, I will highlight one small but precise route of pastoral intervention which I deem to be more manageable. From this point of departure, other avenues may become apparent.

VI. Plan Component

Racism in Catechetical Ministry

The General Directory for Catechesis offers “the basic criteria which governs the presentation of the Christian message.”¹⁰¹ This function is meant to be specified by the addition of local catechisms. “Local catechisms, prepared or approved by diocesan bishops or episcopal conferences, are invaluable instruments for catechesis.”¹⁰² The task according to the General Directory for Catechesis is for national episcopal conferences to adapt the catechetical directives according to their particular cultures. Given the cultural analysis of racism in the context of the U.S. Catholic Church I have elaborated above, it would be disturbing if the national directory for catechesis did not make extensive reference to the culture of racism in this adaptation. Regrettably, other than vague allusions to cultural diversity, multiculturalism, demographic differences, and a few lines about the history of slavery in the U.S., the National Directory for Catechesis makes no concrete emphasis or mention of racism.

The issue of racism can be addressed partly by taking a page from the current priorities of the USCCB. For example, one priority they have adopted is religious liberty. On this issue the USCCB produces a podcast called “First Freedom Podcast.” It celebrates an annual “First Freedom Week” where they produce materials in English and Spanish to disseminate to

¹⁰¹ *General Directory for Catechesis*, 134.

¹⁰² *General Directory for Catechesis*, 131

Catholics nationally which includes worship aids, prayer services, catholic school resources and promotional bulletin inserts and lectionary notes. Additionally, the USCCB has a dedicated twitter account @USCCBFreedom, YouTube videos, television promotion through ETWN and a dedicated webpage with religious liberty news releases including an archive going back to 2012.¹⁰³

Another stated priority of the USCCB is the commitment to pro-life activism. This has similar support, resources, and social media presence. Additionally, there is a network of local Respect Life Ministries that are supported by USCCB. The bishops have an initiative called “Walking with Moms in Need” to help others understand the circumstances of pregnant and parenting women. USCCB has a Respect for Life Program in which U.S. Bishops produce materials and resources to promote pro-life ministries. This priority is manifested through political activism as seen in the Catholic presence at the March for Life rally and legislative pressures applied by lobbying on behalf of the Catholic Conference.¹⁰⁴

Similar efforts must be made in the area of racism. Since 2018, the USCCB created an ad-hoc committee against racism and some attempts have been made through this committee to address racism. However, nothing as significant or on the same scale as the aforementioned priorities. A good first step at the level of National Episcopal Conference would be to undertake the task, with similar passion as the priorities mentioned, of combating racism and becoming prophetic voices in the major cultural issue of our present day reality.

¹⁰³ <https://www.usccb.org/committees/religious-liberty>

¹⁰⁴ <https://www.usccb.org/prolife>

My professional experiences lend me an inside view of the ministry of catechesis at a more local level. It is here that I have more specific suggestions about catechetical reform. Having served as a parish director for catechetical ministry, I can attest to the lack of reference to racism at all levels of catechetical programming. This includes sacramental preparation for children and youth, adult faith formation and RCIA. In my professional experience as a vicariate coordinator in the ministry of catechesis at the diocesan level, I encountered the same lacuna. The staff in the office of catechetical ministry is responsible for development and executing of formation programs for catechists. It is almost certain that a catechist can complete all the requisites to become certified and not encounter the topic of racism. This is a glaring failure on the issue. To address these shortcomings, efforts must be made at each level to undertake catechetical reform.

Formation programs for catechist certification should complement the NDC's treatment of inculturation in the context of the U.S. This can be done in light of the context component of this project which elaborates the notion of racism as a culture. Catechist Formation must include a social dimension which clearly and boldly specifies issues of racism and age-appropriate modes of engagement in Catechist Specialization Courses. Additionally, at the diocesan level, catechetical formation should integrate the particular historical and geographical dynamics as well as recent demographic changes of the local community. In the Diocese of San Bernardino, a study was done on the San Bernardino and Riverside County that was heavily referenced in establishing the core values, mission and vision statement. Having recently received a Coadjutor Bishop, the Diocese of San Bernardino will be entering a new phase of its existence. This is an opportune moment for undertaking a new study of these dynamics in the Diocese. This is an

opportunity to dialogue with the community about pressing issues like racism and find ways of addressing them.

These formation efforts can be complemented by tapping into the establish networks with catechetical materials publishing houses. These publishers frequently consult with diocesan catechetical ministry directors to provide up-to-date materials that include adapting priorities and appeal to desired resources. These relationships can be levied to lobby for explicit inclusion of these themes in future resources and programs.

Finally, the majority of catechesis received by adults is related through homilies. Massingale is in the habit of informally asking audiences and interlocuters when the last time they heard a homily on racism was, and the overwhelming majority answers never. If racism in the Catholic Church is to be addressed at the highest level of diffusion, it must occupy a place of priority in homilies throughout the year. Homilies are the basis of our encounter with the word of God, the liturgy and the faith community. To overlook such an important topic is negligent and scandalous.

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Biblical Passages

Exodus 30:9

Luke 4:18-19