

Catholics and Anti-Racism

Resources from the Ignatian Solidarity Network

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Quotations from *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* by James H. Cone

"In the "lynching era," between 1880 to 1940, white Christians lynched nearly five thousand black men and women in a manner with obvious echoes of the Roman crucifixion of Jesus. Yet these "Christians" did not see the irony or contradiction in their actions."

"The gospel of Jesus is not a rational concept to be explained in a theory of salvation, but a story about God's presence in Jesus' solidarity with the oppressed, which led to his death on the cross. What is redemptive is the faith that God snatches victory out of defeat, life out of death, and hope out of despair."

"The cross can heal and hurt; it can be empowering and liberating but also enslaving and oppressive. There is no one way in which the cross can be interpreted. I offer my reflections because I believe that the cross placed alongside the lynching tree can help us to see Jesus in America in a new light, and thereby empower people who claim to follow him to take a stand against white supremacy and every kind of injustice."

We invite you to reflect – Where is the irony or contradiction in our actions? How does the redemptive nature of our faith call us to stand against every kind of injustice?



James H. Cone

1938 - 2018

Reflections on Catholic Social Thought and Racism

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By Fr. Fred Kammer, S.J.

The Moral Judgement on Racism

Consideration of racism is grounded in fundamental scriptural beliefs: equal dignity of all people, created in God's image; and Christ's redemption of all.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church spells this out: The equality of men rests essentially on their dignity as persons and the rights that flow from it: *Every form of social or cultural discrimination in fundamental personal rights on the grounds of sex, race, color, social conditions, language, or religion must be curbed and eradicated as incompatible with God's design.*

Moral judgements on racism, based on equality, are consistent: *Any theory or form whatsoever of racism and racial discrimination is morally unacceptable and racism is not merely one sin among many, it is a radical evil dividing the human family.*

Jesus tells the Good Samaritan story – one of his three "great parables" – to answer *Who is my neighbor?* His response addresses entrenched divisions between Jew and Samaritan and sets the stage for the unity of one Lord, one faith, one baptism. This unity admits no inequality on the basis of race, nationality, social condition or sex.

The Many Faces of Racism

Catholic teaching "emphasizes not only the individual conscience, but also the political, legal and economic structures. Racism is about people and about group behaviors and societal organization. Individual racism includes conscious acts, spontaneous attitudes, indifference, and "the triumph of private concern over public responsibility".

Laws such as US segregation or South Africa's apartheid represent blatant systemic racism. More subtle racism treats groups as second-class citizens with regard to education, housing, employment, and public services.

Even more subtle racism is now masked in appeals to equality that guarantee that past inequalities are perpetrated by blocking corrective efforts.

At times protestations claiming that all persons should be treated equally reflect the desire to maintain a status quo that favors one race and social group at the expense of the poor and non-white.

Social, economic, educational, and political advantages from the past are cemented as the often-unconscious privilege of the present. Thus, Racism obscures the evils of the past and denies the burdens that history imposes on people of color today.

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Prayer: Lord of All, we pray that you heal the wounds of racism in our communities, our country, and our world. There has been too much fear of the other, too much violence, and too little recognition that we are all created in Your image, each with human dignity. We pray for conversion of hearts, for peace in our hearts, and peace among all your children. We celebrate the diversity that You have created. Give us the grace to continue the work of "beloved community" where we can all join hands for the common good. Amen.

Excerpt from *How Can the Church Combat Racism and White Privilege*

By Fr. Bryan Massingale, S.J.

What to do next? Nothing. Sit in the discomfort this hard truth brings. Let it become agonizing. Let it move you to tears, to anger, to guilt, to shame, to embarrassment. Over what? Over your ignorance. Over the times you went along with something you knew was wrong. Or when you told a racist joke because you could. Because you knew that your white friends and family would let you get away with it, or even join in. Because you thought it was "just a joke." Or the times you wouldn't hire the person of color because you knew your white employees would have a problem with it and you didn't want the hassle. Or when you knew the person of color was in the right, but it was easier not to upset your white friends. Or wealthy donors, who are almost always white. (By the way, the wealth disparity didn't just happen nor is it due to black and brown folks' laziness. Look at the complexions of our "essential workers" for proof.) Most of all, feel the guilt, the pain, the embarrassment over doing nothing and saying nothing when you witnessed obvious racism.

Stay in the discomfort, the anxiety, the guilt, the shame, the anger. Because only when a critical mass of white folks are outraged, grieved and pained over the status quo — only when white people become upset enough to declare, "This cannot and will not be!" — only then will real change begin to become a possibility.

[Click Here to Read the Full Article from America Magazine](#)



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Fr. Bryan discuss his article with Michael O'Loughlin of America Magazine (25 minutes)

In *The Case for Reparations*, originally published in *the Atlantic*, Ta-Nehisi Coates provides an exceptional history of two hundred fifty years of slavery, ninety years of Jim Crow, sixty years of separate but equal, and thirty-five years of racist housing policy. Until we reckon with our compounding moral debts, America will never be whole. He opens his article, which you can access by clicking here, with this passage from Deuteronomy. As you read, reflect. How can we achieve restorative justice?

And if thy brother, a Hebrew man, or a Hebrew woman, be sold unto thee, and serve thee six years; then in the seventh year thou shalt let him go free from thee. And when thou sendest him out free from thee, thou shalt not let him go away empty: thou shalt furnish him liberally out of thy flock, and out of thy floor, and out of thy winepress: of that wherewith the LORD thy God hath blessed thee thou shalt give unto him. And thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman in the land of Egypt, and the LORD thy God redeemed thee: therefore I command thee this thing today.

— DEUTERONOMY 15: 12–15

Prayer for Racial Healing in Our Land from the US Conference of Catholic Bishops

God of Heaven and Earth, you created the one human family and endowed each person with great dignity. Aid us, we pray, in overcoming the sin of racism. Grant us your grace in eliminating this blight from our hearts, our communities, our social and civil institutions. Fill our hearts with love for you and our neighbor so that we may work with you in healing our land from racial injustice. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. We have prayed and now, with changed hearts, let us move our feet to action. Amen.