

Kenrick-Glennon Seminary

Racism in the Catholic Parish: Who is My Neighbor?

*A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the Kenrick School of Theology in Partial  
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts*

By Rev. Mr. Robert Paul Lawson  
Archdiocese of St. Louis

Adviser: Msgr. Michael Witt

Reader: Dr. David Morris

St. Louis, Missouri

December 13, 2023

## **Abstract**

Growing up in a multicultural parish, I was privileged to witness the universal Church in a unique light. However, this light also cast a shadow, revealing the challenges faced by a priest. It was disheartening to see some members, despite their goodness and holiness, harboring disdain for diversity and different cultures. How does a priest, a guardian of all souls, including those with racist tendencies, minister to such individuals? The Church's response to racism has been limited. Therefore, it is crucial to establish a clear definition of racism to enhance our ability to address it effectively. Equally important is a retrospective examination of the community's racial history, such as the complex history of the city and Archdiocese of St. Louis. This understanding will help us comprehend the origins and persistence of modern racial issues. Addressing racism in the parish requires the priest to pursue three key goals: education, rehabilitation, and relationship building. When pursued creatively, these objectives can effectively counteract racism's divisive effects. It is crucial, however, that these efforts are guided by the virtues of unity and diversity as exemplified in the Church's marks of One and Catholic. The Virgin Mary, a model for human and Catholic unity, serves as a beacon for these virtues.

*Dedicated to the people of Holy Trinity in St. Ann, my first love and my forever home.  
Though we may be physically separated, may we always be united in our Eucharistic  
Lord.*

## Table of Contents

### Contents

<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Chapter 1: The Church’s Statements on Racism .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Chapter 2: What <i>is</i> Racism? .....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Chapter 3: Snapshots of the History of St. Louis Catholics and Race Relations.....</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>Chapter 4: What to do about Racism: Best Practices on the Parish Level .....</b>	<b>42</b>
<b>Conclusion: Mary as the Model for Human and Catholic Unity .....</b>	<b>51</b>
<b>Bibliography .....</b>	<b>57</b>

## **Introduction**

Holy Trinity Parish in St. Ann, Missouri prided itself on the many countries from which its parishioners came. One shirt, given out to those who worked at the parish carnival, claimed over seventy countries of origin for the people of Holy Trinity Parish. Most of these people can be divided into three groups. The first is the Hispanic population: most first- or second-generation immigrants from Mexico, with some from South American countries. The second is the African immigrant population: first-generation immigrants from various African countries, not to be confused with African Americans. The third is the “Anglo” population: the “white” community that had lived in the area since its inception in the 1940s and 1950s. Holy Trinity prided itself on its multilingual Masses for holidays and various events to share cultures and traditions. One such tradition was the May Crowning, at which the people of the parish would gather for a multilingual, multicultural Mass and then process around the parish grounds to a small grotto dedicated to the Virgin Mary. Upon arriving at the grotto, each group would dress the statue of Mary with something from their culture, a sign of the unity within the parish, as well as Mary’s queenship over all peoples. It was indeed a beautiful sign of the Catholic faith. The procession and crowning would be accompanied by traditional Marian hymns sung in multiple languages (sometimes at the same time!), beautiful cultural dances and performances before the statue, and a sense of common love for our common Mother.

But within this community, built on many cultures and races, festered a hidden sin that was often overlooked and left unaddressed. While many in the community embraced the presence of the Hispanic and African populations, some of the original Anglo population quietly objected. These objections would not be outright stated but shown actively or passively. For example, it was common for different ministries to take turns ministering at Mass. The first Sunday of every month was set aside for the African population to serve, lector, and take up the collection. About one-third of the Anglo population that would typically go to that Mass would not attend the first Sunday of the month and would instead go to Mass down the street. When asked why, they would state that the African dance at the collection made them uncomfortable, and so the pastor omitted it. Then, they could not understand the reader, so pastor ensured that it was someone who did not have a heavy accent. Finally, upon confronting one of the parishioners about his absence, he simply stated, “I don’t like that they get a Sunday when they do not contribute anything to the parish.” Similarly, when Holy Trinity closed due to lack of funding, a common complaint was to blame—albeit falsely—the Hispanic and African populations for never donating anything while they took all the resources.<sup>1</sup>

The people who held these resentments in their hearts were otherwise good, holy men and women, but these resentments led them to sin. They were not the monsters that are imagined when “racists” are brought up. They were not wearing white hoods and burning crosses. They were fathers and mothers, leaders of bible studies, members of the Knights of Columbus, and part of various committees and groups within the parish

---

<sup>1</sup> This is a first-hand account from the author as a parishioner of Holy Trinity Parish, intending to protect the anonymity of all concerned parties.

community. They strongly advocated for the pro-life movement and were devoted to the Sacred Heart and Our Lady of Perpetual Help. How could these people, otherwise imbued with the Catholic faith, be so against other races?

Sadly, this situation is not unique to Holy Trinity but is a common problem throughout the country to varying degrees. The subject of racism is a hot-topic issue and has lamentably become politically charged. Priests who speak on it are labeled “social-justice priests” and are pigeonholed in with movements such as Black Lives Matter. Many American Catholics would rather pretend that racism was done away with after the end of segregation and will not even acknowledge that it exists, except in the most extreme and isolated cases. Thus, it becomes difficult to address the topic of race without losing the people who need to hear the message the most. As with the case of Holy Trinity, how can a priest speak about people leaving the first Sunday of the month without having them leave the rest of the month?

This difficulty in addressing the topic of race seems to be caused by three obstacles. First, we do not have a common understanding of what is meant by racism. With mentalities that vary from seeing racism in seemingly everything to insisting that racism no longer exists, it is hard to find even the most basic of common ground to begin to speak on the problems that do actually exist. A good, comprehensive definition of racism is needed. Second, we do not know how to talk about racism. Racism is not talked about in the open. Instead, it is spoken of in coded terms, with only trusted individuals, and thus, the conversations that need to happen in a broader community do

not happen. Finally, far too few Catholics want to talk about racism. It is that festering wound that we ignore, hoping it will clear itself out.<sup>2</sup>

Therefore, the goal of this thesis is to address these three obstacles. It does so by understanding what the Church has taught about racism and arriving at a definition. The thesis then discusses race relations in the local church since its founding to see how it can affect the contemporary situation. Finally, it explores how to have these conversations within the parish setting through workshops, meetings, other parish events, and the Sunday homily.

---

<sup>2</sup> Massingale. *Racial Justice*, p. xi.

## Chapter 1: The Church's Statements on Racism

Direct and authoritative teaching on racism from the Magisterium has been vague and scarce, often seemingly appearing as an afterthought in much larger documents. This apparent lack of authoritative teaching could partially be because racism, and more broadly discrimination on any level, is one of the only remaining universal evils of our time and thus does not need to be fully addressed as much as more contested issues like sexual morals or life decisions. Most mentions tend to follow the same pattern: racism is evil because it goes against the human dignity. These comments often neglect to say what should be done about it or even offer a definition of what racism is, and a coherent explanation as to *why* it is evil. In many cases, direct and meaningful statements and teachings on racism do not come from the pope, a council, or a bishop's conference, but from individual bishops responding to issues within their diocese.

It is essential to know what has and has not been said by the Church in terms of the sin of racism; thus, it would serve well to discuss and outline the documents that have touched on the issue, particularly in the United States. One of the earliest documents to make mention of racism in the universal Church is *Gaudium et Spes* in 1965. In paragraph 60, directed at the removal of ignorance, the council fathers urge all Christians to work tirelessly to ensure a person's rights based on their human dignity, without discrimination based on race, sex, nation, religion, or social circumstances.<sup>3</sup>

*Gaudium et Spes* was followed six years later in 1971 by *Octogesima Adveniens*, which provides a call to action against the problems faced in the modern world. One

---

<sup>3</sup> Paul VI, *Gaudium et Spes*, 60.

such contemporary issue, according to Pope Paul VI, is racial discrimination, which goes against the common rights and duties of all mankind.<sup>4</sup>

While the Church as a whole made slow mention of the sin of racism, the American bishops slowly but surely grew bolder in their speaking out against it. In 1943, the bishops released a statement detailing the need and obligation to ensure the rights of the black population as fellow citizens and fellow men. Fifteen years later, in 1958, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops released a short statement entitled “Discrimination and Christian Conscience,” which describes the progress that had been made while also detailing the work that still needs to be done, namely the question of enforced segregation. They encourage prudence in finding a solution to the problem and remind us that the issues faced at the time had been rooted in decades of customs. The bishops urge: “For the welfare of our nation, we call upon all to root out from their hearts bitterness and hatred. The tasks we face are indeed difficult. But hearts inspired by Christian love will surmount these difficulties.”<sup>5</sup> Five years after this pastoral letter was released, it was reaffirmed by the memo, “On Racial Harmony.” This document, written by the National Catholic Welfare Conference, reiterates the message of the previous letter but also explicitly mentions steps to achieve racial harmony: first, by openly discussing the problem of racism in our everyday life and to work with God.

In 1968, on the tenth anniversary of “Discrimination and the Christian Conscience,” the USCCB issued another statement, simply titled, “Statement on National Race Crisis.” This short document mentions the successes over the previous ten years but

---

<sup>4</sup> Paul VI, *Octogesima adveniens*, 16.

<sup>5</sup> USCCB, *Discrimination and Christian Conscience*, 24.

also bluntly realizes that even these advances were not sufficient and that more could have been done.<sup>6</sup> The statement then outlines the need to equalize access to education, employment, affordable housing, and welfare. This document was not meant to be a comprehensive pastoral letter but a check-in between letters.

Eleven years later, in 1979, the USCCB released the pastoral letter, “Brothers and Sisters to Us.” This landmark letter notes that racism has evolved in the United States: what it was in the 1940s and 50s has changed, partly due to the end of legal segregation. The bishops note,

We do not deny that the ugly external features of racism which marred our society have in part been eliminated. But neither can it be denied that too often, what has happened has only been a covering over, not a fundamental change. Today the sense of urgency has yielded to an apparent acceptance of the status quo. The climate of crisis engendered by demonstrations, protest, and confrontation has given way to a mood of indifference.<sup>7</sup>

Because the issue of racism was no longer a part of every American’s day-to-day life, because it had moved to a more passive sin, it became harder to address and easier to ignore.

It is also in “Brothers and Sisters to Us” that racism receives its first significant definition:

Racism is a sin: a sin that divides the human family blots out the image of God among specific members of that family, and violates the fundamental human dignity of those called to be children of the same Father. Racism is the sin that says some human beings are inherently superior and others essentially inferior because of race. It is the sin that makes racial characteristics the determining factor for the exercise of human rights. It mocks the words of Jesus: “Treat others the way you would have them treat you.” Indeed, racism is more than a disregard for the words of Jesus; it is a denial of the truth of the dignity of each human being revealed by the mystery of the Incarnation.<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup>USCCB, *Statement on National Race Crisis*, n. 4.

<sup>7</sup>USCCB, *Brothers and Sisters to Us*.

<sup>8</sup>USCCB, *Brothers and Sisters to Us*.

This lengthy definition discusses the various aspects of racism. First, racism is a sin. It is not a culture, or a way of living. The racist is not “old-fashioned.” It is a sin. Racism divides the human family; that is to say, it works against the unity of all humanity. It goes against the human dignity of those discriminated against as if to say they are not made in the image of God, that they are not children of the Father, and that human dignity is to be found in specific racial characteristics, not in being human. It goes against the dignity given to mankind through the Incarnation as if to say that Christ only was incarnate and died for some and not others. The document then goes further in-depth about the facts of racism at the time, citing unemployment figures, housing patterns, the link between violent crime and poverty, affirmative action, and the effects of generational discrimination. The document closes with a call to action on multiple levels: for the Church as a whole, for the individual person, for the parish, and for society at large.

The landmark letter, *Brothers and Sisters to Us*, was followed in 2018 by the pastoral letter, *Open Wide Our Hearts: The Enduring Call to Love*. This document begins by going over the history of the work of the USCCB in the battle against racism and how it has evolved along with the ever-changing sin of racism. This document was meant to be a “call to arms” for all people to fight racism in every form, whether it be in society, in other individuals, or in oneself. The bishops spell out particular injustices in American history against minority peoples and the aftereffects that still persist today. They call for all people to love what is good, acknowledge past sins, and heal from racism. They state, “[To fight racism] requires a determined effort, but even more so, it

requires humility; it requires each of us to ask for the grace needed to overcome this sin and get rid of this scourge. In what follows, we hope to provide a Christian call for all of us in this country to ‘walk humbly with our God’ so that, by his grace, racism will be eradicated.” It is exceptionally strong-worded. If the previous documents were battle plans on how to defeat specific racist trends, *Open Wide Our Hearts* is the plan to win the war.

While the USCCB has written intermittently on the subject of racism, individual bishops have written extensively on the subject. It is in bishops’ personal writings that we find the most substantive responses to racism. The individual bishops write in response to the situation on the ground in their respective dioceses, either in general consideration or after some crisis draws their attention to the issue. Either way, it is in the individual bishops’ statements that the Church’s most concrete teachings and reactions against racism are found.

A bishop who has always been outspoken against racism is Bishop Edward Braxton, Bishop-Emeritus of the Diocese of Belleville, Illinois. Bishop Braxton grew up in Chicago, Illinois, and at the time of his seminary formation, he was the only seminarian of color in the institution. He recalled seeing the movie *To Kill a Mockingbird* with his classmates and coming out of the theater with a much different take on the film than his white brother seminarians<sup>9</sup>. Bishop Braxton’s seminal work was “The Racial Divide in the United States: A Reflection for the World Day of Peace 2015.” This document, written as a pastoral letter but including, at various points, a study guide

---

<sup>9</sup> Braxton. *The Church and the Racial Divide*, p. xxxviii.

to lead reflections on each chapter, not only spells out the problems with racism today but also the problems in addressing it. For example, Braxton attacks many of the terms used in modern racial debates, claiming that they only cause further division. One such case is the use of the term “minority” to refer to people of color, while the term is never used to refer to people from typical “white” heritage (always the black minority or Hispanic minority or Asian minority, but never the German minority or the French minority). Bishop Braxton states, “At times, these expressions seem to be used as code words with subtle negative connotations (poor, uneducated, unemployed, broken family structures). They also beg the question: Who among the American citizens are the ‘majority’ group?”<sup>10</sup> He continues that it would better serve to speak as if every United States citizen is equally and fully American and dismiss the talk of “minority” or “majority” as unhelpful and even hurtful.

Another bishop who has written and worked extensively to fight racism in the United States is Bishop Mark Seitz, bishop of El Paso, Texas. In his pastoral letter, “Night Will be No More,” written in response to the August 2019 El Paso Massacre, an explicitly race-driven shooting in a Walmart that killed twenty-three people, with another twenty-two injured, Bishop Seitz vehemently and emotionally decries the great evils of racism in the United States, even going so far as to say, “Ancient demons have been reawoken and old wounds opened. One of my brother bishops has rightly called racism ‘the ugly, original sin of our country, an illness never fully healed.’”<sup>11</sup> He also states why this illness has never healed: speaking about it and confronting it head-on is

---

<sup>10</sup> Braxton, *The Racial Divide in the United States*, n.72.

<sup>11</sup> Seitz, *Night will be No More*, n.19: Seitz is here quoting Archbishop Charles Chaput.

uncomfortable.<sup>12</sup> What Bishop Seitz does well is to attempt to define what racism is, as well as other terms commonly associated with and used extensively in the debate about race relations. His attempt at finding a shared vocabulary for both sides is laudable, even if it goes unnoticed.

### **Humani Generis Unitas: The Lost Encyclical**

Of all these documents promulgated by the Church over the past 150 years, none have fully defined and attacked the sin of racism as much as one document that was lost for decades: *Humani Generis Unitas*. *Humani Generis Unitas*, not to be confused with *Humani Generis* published by Pius XII in 1950, was an unpublished—and until recently, lost—encyclical draft commissioned by Pope Pius XI. In the summer of 1938, Pope Pius secretly commissioned the Jesuit priest Fr. John LaFarge to write on a topic which the Pope thought the most important at the time: racism and antisemitism.<sup>13</sup> This commission took place one year before World War II broke out and in the aftermath of Hitler taking and centralizing his power.

Fr. Lafarge would be joined by two other priests in Paris to work on the drafts of the document, one in French, one in English, one in Italian, and one in Latin. The document totaled over 100 pages. By September 1938, the official Latin draft was submitted to the Vatican. This draft would then be caught up in bureaucracy at the Vatican, perhaps on purpose, as the tensions between the Italian government rose as Mussolini began enacting race-driven laws. Even by January of 1939, the document was

---

<sup>12</sup> Seitz, *Night will be No More*, n.12.

<sup>13</sup> Passelecq, *The Hidden Encyclical of Pius XI*, 34-38.

lost in the “machine” of the Vatican, despite many letters from Fr. LaFarge and his colleagues. It would be on February 10, 1939 that Pope Pius XI would pass away, never having approved or published the encyclical he had commissioned the year before. Supposedly, a draft of the document was on his desk when he died.<sup>14</sup>

Drafts of the encyclical were effectively rediscovered in the 1990s, and the encyclical and its story were published, first in French and then in English. Though it holds no magisterial authority, *Humani Generis Unitas* still provides a solid theological base for combating racism and will be explored further in the following chapter.

---

<sup>14</sup> Passelecq, *The Hidden Encyclical of Pius XI*, 151.

## Chapter 2: What is Racism?

Racism is a harshly debated subject and, thus, is given various definitions by various groups. It is imperative to arrive at a working understanding of what it is and is not in order to be able to address it in the parish. Racism can take many forms, from small actions, such as a woman holding her purse a little tighter when a black man approaches her, to large, nationwide movements, such as the infamous KKK. It would serve well to categorize these forms to better understand how to address them. At its core, racism is a sin and, as such, has all the characteristics of a sin. For instance, as a sin, racism goes against a virtue and has an opposite sin going against the same virtue in the opposite direction. Yet one may ask, what is the virtue that racism violates? While racism goes against many virtues, such as human dignity, justice, and charity, it is primarily a sin against human unity. Racism goes against the reality of human unity by unjustly creating divisions within the overall human family.

This unity of humanity is found in both the natural law and the divine law. As St. Louis-born civil rights activist and author Maya Angelou states in her famous poem, “Human Family:” “We are more alike, my friends, than we are unlike.”<sup>15</sup> This likeness, common across space, time, and culture, shows a commonality in human thought and action, a common human nature.<sup>16</sup> This common human nature is also supported by revelation. All men find their source in the common ancestor of Adam, and all men suffer from the Original Sin and concupiscence that our common ancestors passed on to us today. Similarly, while through one man, Adam, all men fell, through

---

<sup>15</sup> Angelou, “Human Family.”

<sup>16</sup> LaFarge, *Humani Generis Unitas*, 72.

one man, Jesus, all are restored.<sup>17</sup> Through our common father, Adam, and the Fall we share with him, as well as our common Redeemer, Jesus, all the human race shares an intrinsic bond of unity that should not be explicitly broken.

*Humanis Generis Unitas* lists nine sources for human unity, both natural and supernatural. Specifically, they are: (1) Common Nature, (2) Original Sin, (3) Redemption, (4) Experience, (5) Tradition, (6) History, (7) Trade, (8) Work, and (9) Social Structures. All human beings share in a Common Nature as a “rational animal.” This rational aspect of human nature across all of humanity has each person share in the use of reason and the intellect. As LaFarge states, “In primary impressions and affective states there is a certain general norm of thought, a certain sameness of feeling, a certain commonality in the fundamental tendencies and directions of the will.”<sup>18</sup> That is to say, despite space and time, all who partake in human nature share the same drive and the same motivation to live their lives, seeking the ultimate good and avoiding evil, even if people might be confused or mistaken in their seeking of goodness and avoidance of evil. Whether primitive or modern man, each strives for the good and uses reason to choose various paths to follow. This most integral part of human nature is also the most foundational basis for human unity. When human unity is broken, it suggests that not all human beings share this nature as a “rational animal,” and that some groups are less rational and, therefore, less human than others. In a sense, denying this aspect of unity is to say by implication that other groups are of another nature: not human, not rational.

---

<sup>17</sup> LaFarge, *Humani Generis Unitas*, 73.

<sup>18</sup> LaFarge, *Humani Generis Unitas*, 72.

Another vital sign of human unity is Original Sin. The fact that all men are born with Original Sin reminds us that all men begin life in a fallen state. All begin stalled out at the starting line. All suffer from concupiscence and have been tempted, have sinned, and have fallen away from God's grace. Moreover, we all received Original Sin through our first parents, Adam and Eve. We have all fallen through Adam. To sin against human unity is to say that a group does not suffer from Original Sin—beyond those miraculously saved from it—that they are not descendants of our universal first parents. Similarly, just as all men have fallen in Adam, we all share a Redeemer in Jesus Christ. Christ came to redeem all men and died on the cross for all to fulfill what the Lord said to Abraham, "In your seed, all the nations of the earth shall be blessed because you have obeyed my voice."<sup>19</sup> To deny human unity is to deny the far-reaching redemption that Christ won on the cross. It is to say that Christ did not die for all, but only for some, or to say that some were more worthy of redemption than others.

Man's common experience also speaks to his unity. All have experienced joys and sorrows, love and loss. All have experienced success and failure, surprise and excitement. All have experienced the same sunrise and sunset, the same stars. As LaFarge so eloquently puts it,

Man's joys and sorrow, his successes and defeats, are always borne by the same earth; it constantly offers material energies to the new generation and receives the dead; on it rest and will always rest men's houses and homes; in its own way, it stamps the deepest recesses of men's souls with its own beneficial stability, which as people say, "attaches them to the soil"; it binds men together... All men everywhere show the influence of having lived side by side in space, on the same earth. May we not find therein the basis of a genuine unity in which all men can understand each other?<sup>20</sup>

---

<sup>19</sup> Genesis 22:18.

<sup>20</sup> LaFarge, *Humani Generis Unitas*, 76.

To deny human unity is to say that the other is some sort of alien to the earth, to the shared human experience, to the gambit of emotions that all have experienced.

Men are also united due to our common history. As Lafarge states: “The same is true of time, which also acts to unite men and marks each of them with a seal of unity. Men’s lives, succeeding each other, give rise to tradition; and through them, history comes into being.”<sup>21</sup> To deny this unity is to cut another off from the string of time, to remove them from those who came before or after. We often see this when a group is separated from their history and culture, as the African slaves were in early America.

Another sign of unity is trade and the right to private property. All men are created with the right to own and use the goods of the earth and are entitled to the fair trade of such items. To deny the unity of these common rights would suggest that not everyone is entitled to ownership, but only a select few. To participate in ownership and trade, man must work. This common duty also extends the unity of humanity in that all have—or should have—to experience the sweat of one’s brow, the toil of one’s labor. While this bond of unity is intrinsic to the human race, it does not mean that there cannot be a sense of plurality within this unity. The fact that men tend to form social groups, ranging from families to countries, does not necessarily go against this unity so long as the unity itself is respected by the individual and the group. Fr. LaFarge, in *Humanis Generis Unitas*, gives criteria to judge if a group works for the unity of the human race or against it. He provides three points that make a group work for unity: first, the

---

<sup>21</sup> LaFarge, *Humani Generis Unitas*, 78.

fruitfulness of the group in general for the people who are part of it; second, that the group's own purpose serves humanity's goals and values; third, that the group supports all of humanity in its unity.<sup>22</sup> Fr. LaFarge also gives three negative criteria: first, if the group, by its very nature, goes against the unity of humanity or human freedom; second, if the group's goals and values go against that of humanity; third, if the group claims to be the only source to determine the goals and values of humanity.<sup>23</sup> Thus, to summarize, if a group is not opposed to human unity, it will bear fruit for humanity as a whole, while a group opposed to human unity will try to pull away from the rest of humanity.

Racism opposes human unity by making certain groups, in this case, based on race, intrinsically less than or greater than others. It denies the common experience of all human beings and rejects the notion that people of one race are more similar than different than another. This denial and rejection can take many forms, just like any sin. We often think of racism as something active, a sin of commission, such as slavery, lynching, and segregation, but racism can also be found in sins of omission. When one chooses not to act or do something right because of the race of the other person. This is the case of not giving a homeless man money because he is black, not speaking out when injustices are happening to another because of their race, or denying someone common courtesy because of their race.

The sin of racism can also be divided into sins of thoughts, words, and deeds, which would help differentiate their varying levels of gravity. For example, thinking about killing someone is not as bad as verbalizing that desire, which in turn is not as bad

---

<sup>22</sup>LaFarge, *Humani Generis Unitas*, 98.

<sup>23</sup>LaFarge, *Humani Generis Unitas*, 97.

as actually killing another person. Likewise, *thinking* other people to be unintelligent because of their race is not as bad as *saying* they are unintelligent because of their race, which is not as bad as *treating* them as unintelligent because of their race. The key point is that while one is not as bad as the other, all three are still sins.

Another distinction to be made in the gravity of the sin of racism is its causes. A sin can be committed either due to ignorance or malice. When most people think of racism, they immediately go to the malicious forms, while those of ignorance are often overlooked or ignored as not being genuinely racist. It is important to note that ignorance can excuse or diminish the sinfulness of the action, which is understood by the culture as someone being “old-fashioned” or merely the product of how one was raised.

Another significant part of the sin of racism is the foundation of “structures of sin.” These social or political structures establish a ‘culture of racism’ that leads individuals to commit acts of racism either ignorantly or maliciously. Thus, like a snowball becoming an avalanche, sin begets sin, and racism begets racism. Bishop Seitz addresses these “structures of sin” and uses them to define institutionalized racism. He states, “When this system [of white privilege and advantage based on skin color] begins to shape our public choices, structures our common life together and becomes a tool of class, this is rightly called institutionalized racism.” He further states that actions that lead to such systems and inaction in opposing such systems are “the evil one and father of lies incarnate in our everyday choices and lifestyles, and our laws and institutions.”<sup>24</sup>

---

<sup>24</sup>Seitz, *Night Will be No More*, n.14.

It is easy to see how something like racism is opposed to human unity. What is more challenging to see is the opposed sin on the other side. While racism works to over-separate humanity into different categories, the opposite sin would be to see no difference in the human race at all. This sin, often in today's culture referred to as being "Color-blind," ignores the individuality and plurality that can be found within the unity of the human race. Color-blindness thus cannot be the answer to racism, as it ignores the true diversity in the one human race and instead tries to make all not just equal but the same.

A true answer to racism needs to balance the virtues of unity and diversity at the same time. Very much like in a marriage, the husband and wife are equal in dignity but distinct in their talents and gifts; races are all equal in dignity but distinct in the gifts that not only their genetics provide but also the gifts of their cultures and history. Just as a husband should not dominate his spouse, no one race should dominate the others. Just as a husband and wife should act and be different people but be able to come together and act as a family unit all the same, so too should races be able to express their diversity but still be able to act as one human family.

This call to human unity is even more critical with respect to Catholics and the Catholic Church. This unity in plurality that is ideal when dealing with race can be seen in two of the four marks of the One Holy Catholic Apostolic Church. First, the Church is One. The unity found in the Church flows directly from her essence, which is to have a dual unity, the union of Man with God and the union of humanity with each other.<sup>25</sup> It is of the Church's essence to unite humans with one another. To go against human unity

---

<sup>25</sup> Feingold, *The Church of the Messiah*, p.115.

would be to go against what the Church is. If the Church is indeed to be the Body of Christ, it cannot separate itself out; to say one part is more important or more of Christ than another.

Lawrance Feingold reflects on the importance of unity within the Church, using Christ's High Priestly Prayer found in John 17. He gives four main reasons Christ prays for unity among his people. First, if the Church is to be united with the Trinity, she must first be united in herself. "We cannot participate in the intra-Trinitarian communion in a purely individualistic way, but only in communion with one another and with Christ...As there is no strife in the divine intra-Trinitarian communion, so no strife can enter into it with us, but all must be made one so as to enter into perfect union that is the divine life."<sup>26</sup> Second, if we are to share in God's kingdom, and God is Love, then we must also show love or charity. By its nature, charity calls for unity, and thus, divisions have no place in love and, therefore, no place in the kingdom of God. Third, the Church must imitate Christ, her bridegroom, who is one. As Christ is one body, so the Church should be one body. As Feingold eloquently puts it, "It would be monstrous to think that Christ's life could be perfectly lived and manifested by thousands of religious bodies divided from each other in strife."<sup>27</sup> Finally, the Church must be one to signify to the world that she is founded by Christ to share in the intra-Trinitarian communion and be the Body of Christ in the world. The Church must remain one to show her divine origin, as natural societies tend to divide and separate due to the fall and personal sin; the Church remains and must remain in unity despite the personal sins of her members.

---

<sup>26</sup> Feingold, *The Church of the Messiah*, p.116.

<sup>27</sup> Feingold, *The Church of the Messiah*, p.130.

Besides being One, the Church is also Catholic. To be “Catholic” holds many dimensions, but the two primary meanings refer to the universality of the Church’s content and teaching and her extension, her spread throughout the world.<sup>28</sup> The universality of her extension speaks to the need and end of human unity. The Church is to be present to the whole world, in both space and time. Just as LaFarge uses space and time above as sources for human unity, the Church, with the mandate to spread to the ends of the Earth until the end of time, absorbs and sanctifies this human unity into a Catholic Unity. As Feingold puts it, “This catholic extension is a dynamic reality that comes out of Christ’s missionary mandate and seeks always a greater growth until all nations are brought into her fold. The universality here refers to her members and the cultures of the world to which they belong, and the extension of the earth they fill.”<sup>29</sup> The universality of the Church is an extension of God’s love for all mankind, and the Church is most herself when she exercises this universality. On this thought, the USCCB writes, “The missionaries of the Church have spread throughout the world, visiting with equal impartiality nations such as China and India, whose ancient cultures antedate the coming of the Savior, and the primitive tribes of the Americas. The love of Christ, and the love of the Christian knows no bounds.”<sup>30</sup>

Ultimately, both the oneness and universality of the Church can be summed up with the opening paragraph of the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, which states:

Christ is the Light of nations. Because this is so, this Sacred Synod gathered together in the Holy Spirit eagerly desires, by proclaiming the Gospel to every creature, to

---

<sup>28</sup> Feingold, *The Church of the Messiah*, p.130.

<sup>29</sup> Feingold, *The Church of the Messiah*, p.130.

<sup>30</sup> United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Discrimination and the Christian Conscience*, 8

bring the light of Christ to all men, a light brightly visible on the countenance of the Church. Since the Church is in Christ like a sacrament or as a sign and instrument both of a very closely knit union with God and of the unity of the whole human race, it desires now to unfold more fully to the faithful of the Church and to the whole world its own inner nature and universal mission [...] The present-day conditions of the world add greater urgency to this work of the Church so that all men, joined more closely today by various social, technical and cultural ties, might also attain fuller unity in Christ.<sup>31</sup>

One can parse the deep connectedness between unity and diversity from this opening statement. The Church stands as a supernatural sign of her own mission to unite all things in Christ, as a reestablishment of the original unity lost by our first parents, the twofold unity of God and man, and men with each other. The Church is to live this unity and spread it throughout the world, not negating the diversity of cultures, languages, and races, to “white-wash” the world, but to sanctify the diversity, to consecrate all cultures, languages, races, and all humankind to God the Father, through God the Son, in God the Holy Spirit, the divine diversity in unity and unity in diversity.

This message is echoed by the USCCB in *Brothers and Sisters to Us*, which, borrowing from *Lumen Gentium*, itself states that the Church is a sacrament of unity and is united with people of every state and condition, especially with marginalized people often considered less than others. The bishops powerfully assert, “How great, therefore, is that sin of racism which weakens the Church's witness as the universal sign of unity among all peoples! How great the scandal given by racist Catholics who make the Body of Christ, the Church, a sign of racial oppression!”<sup>32</sup> Pope Francis also speaks on the Church being a unity in diversity in *Evangelii Gaudium*, which states: “The history of the Church shows that Christianity does not have simply one cultural expression [...] In the

---

<sup>31</sup> Pope St. Paul VI, *Lumen Gentium*, 1.

<sup>32</sup> USCCB, *Brothers and Sisters to Us*.

diversity of peoples who experience the gift of God, each in accordance with its own culture, the Church expresses her genuine catholicity and shows forth the ‘beauty of her varied face.’”<sup>33</sup>

Thus, one can see that human unity, beyond being a natural virtue that all men should strive for, is consecrated by the mission of the Church, which desires to unite all mankind to herself, the Body of Christ. If a Catholic, therefore, would work against human unity, he would also be working against the mission of the Church and God’s plan for salvation—a grave sin indeed.

---

<sup>33</sup> Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 116.

### **Chapter 3: Snapshots of the History of St. Louis Catholics and Race Relations**

Race relations, no matter where one looks, have a long and complicated history. It is important for a pastor to understand the history of his area when working to build race relations in his parish and the wider community. Many modern-day wounds in relationships are caused by injustices faced in the past, but it is also just as important to know and promote the successes of the area's history, in order to build off of it and work toward the virtue of human unity in diversity. The Archdiocese of St. Louis has a long and rich history of interethnic and interracial relationships. Whether it was the original founders, such as Pierre Laclede, working in union with the native Missouri tribe, the Sisters of St. Joseph secretly educating black girls, or Cardinal Ritter desegregating Archdiocesan schools, St. Louis has stood as an example of a racial and cultural "melting-pot." But this history is also mired by various events that, while a product of their time, have had a negative impact on interracial and interethnic relations in the Archdiocese. While still part of the Union, Missouri was a slave state, with many citizens, Catholics included, joining both sides of the Civil War. St. Rose Philippine Duchesne, a French nun who ministered in the Archdiocese, struggled with buying slaves to help at her convent. People of the Archdiocese were willing to sue Cardinal Ritter over desegregating the schools. The city is still strongly divided geographically by race and culture.

To understand the current state of race relations in the Archdiocese, this complex history must be account for, explored, and understood. This process of reflection is not an exercise to hold current people responsible for sins of the past but to lay the

groundwork to ensure that complex conversations about race and racism can happen without people feeling shut off or blamed.

### **Early St. Louis**

The city of St. Louis's very founding is intertwined between French fur traders and the native Missouri tribe. Established in 1764 as a trading post by Gilbert Antoine de St. Maxent, Pierre Laclede, and his stepson, Auguste Chouteau, St. Louis stood as a place of refuge and support for the Missouri tribe from its foundation. The Missouri often went to their friends from France to procure support and protection from the more violent tribes, such as the Osage.<sup>34</sup> One such interaction shows the complex interplay of mutual respect and care that the French fur traders and the native Missouri had for each other. In October of 1764, as construction of the first European settlements in St. Louis was fully under way, Auguste Chouteau was left in charge of the work while his stepfather, Pierre Laclede, was away on business. Only fifteen years old at the time, the young Chouteau was approached by the entire Missouri nation, about 150 families, wishing to reside in the newly formed settlement. Chouteau and the other thirty or so Frenchmen in St. Louis were vastly outnumbered, and while the Missouri posed no threat to violence, it was too much of a burden for the young Chouteau to handle, and he sent for Laclede to return home to settle the situation.<sup>35</sup> While he waited for his stepfather to return, Chouteau hired the Missouri to help in the construction effort, paying them with supplies and provisions, including pigments and metal tools, which were highly sought-after goods.

---

<sup>34</sup> Cleary, *The World, the Flesh, and the Devil*, p.41-42.

<sup>35</sup> Cleary, *The World, the Flesh, and the Devil*, p.43.

Thus, the very establishment of St. Louis was a collaboration of the French settlers and the native Missouri nation.

Upon Laclede's return, a more formal meeting was held between Laclede, as head of the settlers, and the chiefs of the Missouri nation. In this meeting, the chiefs formally declared their wish to settle with the French in St. Louis, for they were "Like the ducks and the geese who sought open water."<sup>36</sup> Laclede took the night to consider the offer and the next morning met with the chiefs again. Laclede, summing up the desires of the Missouri people, stated, "You wish to form a village around my house, where we should live together in the greatest friendship."<sup>37</sup> Pierre Laclede did find this attractive but knew that a village inhabited by both the Missouri and the French would pose as a too-alluring target to the Osage, who were currently on a warpath against the English and spoke such to the chiefs, asking that they take time to think about it and return to him with an answer in the evening. The whole Missouri nation gave Laclede their response: they agreed about the threat of the Osage and would leave, and asked for provisions and firearms for their travels, which Laclede happily provided. This relationship between French traders and native tribes would only grow and flourish. Missions to educate the natives in the faith, a true sharing of cultures, as well as even instances of intermarriages, strengthened the ties between the native people and the French settlers for decades.<sup>38</sup>

In 1818, at 49 years old, St. Rose Philippine Duchesne landed in the United States via New Orleans and made her way up to St. Louis to found the first House of the Society

---

<sup>36</sup> Cleary, *The World, the Flesh, and the Devil*, p.45.

<sup>37</sup> Cleary, *The World, the Flesh, and the Devil*, p.45.

<sup>38</sup> Cleary, *The World, the Flesh, and the Devil*, p.48.

of the Sacred Heart in the New World. Duchesne struggled with the enduring institution of slavery, writing to her cousin Josephine in 1821:

This year Missouri has become one the federated states of the Republic. St. Louis is to be the capital for six years [...] At present, the laws of the state are being drawn up. The most disputed point and the one that has caused the greatest conflict concerns the admission of slavery. It seems that all those who now own slaves will be allowed to them, but there can be no more African slave trade. We do not want slaves and we have no money to buy them, yet we scarcely know how to get along without them, especially as we are cloistered and do not go about.<sup>39</sup>

Duchesne first encountered slavery in New Orleans and was dumbfounded that such a practice existed. Within her first week in the Americas, she was already spending time with the slaves and appreciating them as people in need of God's love.

Mother Duchesne often wished to allow children of color into her schools but was warned that many of her white students would be withdrawn if that had happened. She was also willing to allow women of color to join her order but was likewise warned against it. She even at one point considered a compromise, to create a "Third Order" level in the order, below the teaching and working sisters, for the women of color who wanted to join, but this plan never came to fruition. As much as St. Rose Philippine Duchesne wanted to raise up the black population to their full dignity, she had to accept the culture at the time in order to get her community started.<sup>40</sup> By the time slavery was abolished, the Society of the Sacred Heart would have owned 150 slaves between all of their houses.<sup>41</sup>

---

<sup>39</sup> Callan, *Philippine Duchesne*, p.328.

<sup>40</sup> Osiek, *The Complete Writings of St. Rose Philippine Duchesne*.

<sup>41</sup> Swarns, *The Nuns who Bought and Sold Humans*.

It is important to note, however, that slavery in St. Louis, at least in the beginning, looked very different than it did in the southern and eastern parts of the United States. St. Louis, originally a French settlement, was required to follow the *Code Noir*, a set of strict rules concerning slaves and their masters decreed by King Louis XIV. The Code Noir stipulated that all slaves must be catechized and entered into the Catholic faith, given proper Catholic burials, given Sundays and Holy Days off, as well as forbade masters from doing the more heinous acts against slaves that slavery is often associated with, such as rape, mutilation, and severe beatings.<sup>42</sup> Despite its relative leniency, it must be remembered that the Code Noir, while strongly limiting the mistreatment of slaves, still allowed for slavery and also had significant antisemitic rules.

### **Archbishop Kenrick: Slavery and Emancipation**

A strong, albeit reserved, supporter of the enslaved black population of St. Louis was Archbishop Kenrick (1806-1896). In his thesis entitled, "Archbishop Peter Richard Kenrick and the Black Apostolate in St. Louis," Fr. Christopher Rubie goes through the many quiet struggles and battles Archbishop Kenrick fought on behalf of the enslaved population, especially when it came to the education of black children. He would often visit a school for black girls run by the Sisters of St. Joseph on the corner of Third and Poplar Street. One student of the school, speaking on a visit by Kenrick and Bishop Edward Barron, Apostolic Vicar of Liberia to the school, relates:

We felt at home and were happy [at the school], because the time and attention of the sisters was all our own, and there was no one to tease

---

<sup>42</sup> *Le Code Noir*.

us. Archbishop Kenrick often visited us, and when Bishop Barron came to St. Louis, the Archbishop brought him to see us. Fr. Paris, who was the chief organizer of the school, visited it at least once a week. He would listen to our lessons and to our improvement. If he called during sewing class, he looked at each girl's work. When he brought visitors to the school, he never failed to tell them in our presence that we were his children. This pleased us very much.<sup>43</sup>

Kenrick supported the school in silence, but the opposition began to grow ever louder. Many of the white population in the city were afraid of allowing slaves to be educated, fearing that it would lead to them reading abolitionist writings. This opposition grew to the point that the Sisters of St. Joseph were threatened with violence to close the school. After the sisters refused, a group broke into their convent while others gathered outside to show their distaste of the sisters' work. After this attack, Kenrick worried about the well-being of the sisters and officially had to close the school. In February of 1847, Missouri enacted a law to forbid the education of slaves, though this restriction did not stop the Sisters of St. Joseph, as well as other orders, from doing so secretly.<sup>44</sup>

By the 1850s, very few St. Louisans themselves owned slaves, but St. Louis was the site of one the nation's largest slave markets and a hub for the trafficking of slaves to and across the South. "Lynch's Slave Pen," a slave prison owned by its namesake, Bernard M. Lynch, was located next to the old courthouse where slave auctions would take place. It was a block away that one of the greatest supporters of the enslaved population would be assigned: Fr. Patrick Ryan.<sup>45</sup> Fr. Ryan was assigned to what is now the Old Cathedral, down the road from the courthouse and the slave pen. There he would minister the sacraments not only to the slaves confined to Lynch's pen but would also

---

<sup>43</sup> Rubie, *A History of the Black Apostolate in the Archdiocese of St. Louis*, p. 15.

<sup>44</sup> Rubie, *A History of the Black Apostolate in the Archdiocese of St. Louis*, p. 18.

<sup>45</sup> Rubie, *A History of the Black Apostolate in the Archdiocese of St. Louis*, p. 21.

visit Confederate soldiers who were captured, ensuring that they too received the sacramental and pastoral care they needed. Fr. Ryan was an apprentice of sorts to Archbishop Kenrick, and it was assumed that he would take over the Archdiocese after Kenrick passed, but, as one archivist working for the Archdiocese of St. Louis put it, “Archbishop Kenrick was too stubborn to die,” and thus Ryan moved up the ranks, first as auxiliary bishop of St. Louis, and then finally as Archbishop of Philadelphia.

It was not until St. Louis became “The Gateway for the West” and the influence of non-Catholic citizens that slavery in St. Louis began to reflect what it was in the rest of the country. A journal entry by Louis Philip Fusz in August of 1862 describes the funeral of Emilie Anne Chouteau Gratiot, niece of one of the founding fathers of St. Louis, Auguste Chouteau. Fusz writes:

On Tuesday morning the funeral took place; her old slaves were her coffin bearers; with slow and measured steps, their swarthy faces came into view at the entrance of the old Cathedral, a thrill of emotion overpowered me and the tears come streaming through my eyes; vainly I struggled but unavailingly and I had to let nature have her course with me. The scene was so impressive, the funeral toll, always thrilling to me, now had a double effect. In these days of discord, old customs passing away, I felt that in a short time a harsh, unfeeling, egotistical world would have full sway over places rendered dear by sweet recollections.<sup>46</sup>

St. Louis stood at a unique point during the Civil War, officially being part of the Union, while still being in a slave state. Because of this dichotomy, both Confederate and Union soldiers and supporters lived in St. Louis. Many of the local parishes had Union and Confederate supporters in the same pew. One such instance is described in the April

---

<sup>46</sup> Harris, *A Most Unsettled State*, p. 96.

10th, 1864 entry of the journal of Louis Philip Fusz, a devoted secessionist about attending Mass at Annunciation Church. He writes:

I was awakened this morning at an early hour, by Mother, to rise and attend Mass with the St. Vincent de Paul Society at the Annunciation Church. How soft and sweet the bed seemed when I had to leave it. Heavy clouds hung in heaven and uncertain weather seemed to be in for the day. I walked to church. There were about 200 members of the Society present. I here saw for the first time "Rosecranz," the Command of this department. He approached a pew in front of mine, but being locked, he could not enter; he then went around to a side aisle and reverently heard mass and approached Holy Communion with the members. His whole demeanor was attentive, retired, and pious. Can his acts in religion here be sincere or is it policy that moves him, that he makes himself prominent at all Catholic festivals and celebrations and by public acts of piety calls forth the notice of his piety? From his appearance, I judge him to be sincere, even to fanaticism in his faith and his political opinion, yet it is a question whether he does not try to use one for the advancement of the other and vice-versa as the case may be. I can in this instance, only testify that his conduct was most unassuming and becoming a Christian.

From his portraits, I had imagined him to be dark-haired and whiskered, hence but for his strongly marked features and prominent nose would not have known him. When I first noticed him, I saw a fair-haired and ruddy-cheeked gentleman of good mien and thought him an unknown member of the lower conferences. Something military in his dress changed my idea and a close security revealed the true character of the visitor.<sup>47</sup>

During the time of the Civil War, the Archdiocese of St. Louis was run by her first Archbishop, Peter Richard Kenrick. His Excellency held a unique view on race relations, being a slaveholder himself, but also seeing the dignity of the enslaved population. As archbishop of a divided diocese when it came to slavery, Kenrick often played his cards close to his chest. He would keep silent in public on matters in order not to further divide his people. Despite this, Kenrick was very opinionated in private, and if the need called for it, he would speak out. One such case was the ratification of the Constitution of the State of Missouri in 1865. This Constitution banned slavery in the

---

<sup>47</sup> Harris, *A Most Unsettled State*, p. 159.

state of Missouri, but also required all public figures, including clergy, to take the following oath before they could practice their office:

I \_\_\_\_\_ do solemnly swear, that I am well acquainted with the terms of the Third Section of the Second Article of the Constitution of the State of Missouri, adopted in the year 1865, and have carefully considered the same; that I have never, directly or indirectly, done any of the acts in said section specified; that I have always been truly and loyally on the side of the United States against all enemies thereof, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the United States, and will support the Constitution and laws thereof, as the supreme law of the land, any law or ordinance of any State to the contrary notwithstanding; that I will to the best of my ability, protect and defend the Union of the United States, and not allow the same to be broken up and dissolved, or the Government thereof to be destroyed or overthrown, under any circumstances, if in my power to prevent it; that I will support the Constitution of the State of Missouri, and that I make this oath without any mental reservation or evasion, and hold it to be binding on me.<sup>48</sup>

Archbishop Kenrick advised his priests to refuse to take the oath, which could incur a penalty of a \$500 fine and imprisonment for up to six months. Kenrick was not the only vocal opponent of the oath. Fr. Pierre Jean DeSmet, in writing about the oath, stated, “The priests are generally agreed that, on principle, such an oath cannot be taken, because our authority does not emanate from the State, and we cannot, without compromising the ecclesiastical state, consent to take it. No Catholic priest in Missouri will take it.”<sup>49</sup> The debate about the oath came to a head when one of Kenrick’s priests, Fr. John Cummings, refused to take the oath but also refused to pay the fine of \$500, resulting in his arrest.<sup>50</sup> Kenrick counseled Cummings to pay the fine but then financed his case and brought it all the way to the United States Supreme Court, which on January

---

<sup>48</sup> Clark, *Oath of Loyalty Book*.

<sup>49</sup> Meyer, *The Heritage of Missouri*, p. 410.

<sup>50</sup> Rubie, *A History of the Black Apostolate in the Archdiocese of St. Louis*, p. 18.

14, 1867, ruled against the oath and the Drake Constitution, freeing the clergy of Missouri from the oath.<sup>51</sup>

Archbishop Kenrick, having been the archbishop during the Civil War, had an important part to play in race relations, especially between the now-freed black population and the white population that ruled them after the war. His opinions are most strongly conveyed at the Second Plenary Council of Baltimore, called to address the challenge faced in providing spiritually and materially for the now-freed black people. Archbishop Spalding of Baltimore prophetically notes of the council, “It is our most urgent duty to discuss the future status of the negro. For millions of these unfortunate beings are thrown on our charity, and they silently but eloquently appeal to us for help. We have a golden opportunity to reap a harvest of souls, which, neglected, may not return.”<sup>52</sup>

Kenrick, being the ordinary for a city that was bitterly divided during the war, and a slave owner himself, provided a unique opinion to the council. He would argue that the immediate freeing of slaves all at once was not the most suitable plan. He, instead, would have liked to see gradual emancipation, which would give time to provide education and find good jobs and the resources necessary to support the now-freed population. It would also help ease the economic disaster the South faced after the War.<sup>53</sup> Kenrick also opposed any direct decree on the status of the now-freed population. He feared it would make it seem as if the bishops were apologizing. What he did support was the building of new black parishes in the spirit of the various parishes built by

---

<sup>51</sup> Rubie, *A History of the Black Apostolate in the Archdiocese of St. Louis*, p. 19.

<sup>52</sup> Rubie, *A History of the Black Apostolate in the Archdiocese of St. Louis*, p. 33.

<sup>53</sup> Rubie, *A History of the Black Apostolate in the Archdiocese of St. Louis*, p. 34.

European immigrants, such as St. Ambrose by the Italians and St. James by the Irish.<sup>54</sup>

One can see his influence in the final draft of Section XII of the Pastoral Letter of the council, which reads:

We must all feel, beloved, Brethren, that in some manner a new and most extensive field of charity and devotedness has been opened to us, by the emancipation of the immense slave population of the South. We could have wished, that in accordance with the action of the Catholic Church in past ages, in regard to the serfs of Europe, a more gradual system of emancipation could have been adopted so that they might have been in some measure prepared to make better use of their freedom than they are likely to do now. Still, the evils which must necessarily attend upon the sudden liberation of so large a multitude, with their peculiar dispositions and habits, only make the appeal to our Christian charity and zeal, presented by their forlorn condition, the more forcible and imperative.

We urge upon the Clergy and people of our charge the most generous cooperation with the plans which may be adopted by the Bishops of the Diocese in which they are, to extend to them that Christian education and moral restraint which they so much stand in need of. Our only regret in regard to this matter is that our means and opportunity of spreading over them the protecting and salutary influences of our Holy Religion are so restricted.<sup>55</sup>

### **Cardinal Ritter and His Era: Desegregation and Civil Rights**

Cardinal Joseph Ritter, fourth archbishop of St. Louis, led the archdiocese from 1946 until his death in 1967. One of his early actions as archbishop was to desegregate the archdiocesan schools. He was met with widespread resistance from the people of the archdiocese, who even offered to pay for better facilities for black students if it meant that the schools stayed segregated. Due to this backlash, Archbishop Ritter sent a letter to all parishes on September 20, 1947. It states:

To the Reverend Clergy and Beloved Laity of the Archdiocese of Saint Louis

Greetings:

---

<sup>54</sup> Rubie, *A History of the Black Apostolate in the Archdiocese of St. Louis*, p. 36.

<sup>55</sup> Plenary Council of Baltimore, *Pastoral Letter*, p.38-39.

It has come to our attention that a small group of individuals have signified their purpose of taking civil action to restrain us from carrying out a policy which we consider our right and duty as chief pastor of the faithful of this Archdiocese, regardless of race or nationality.

We realize that many of these good people are being gravely misled. Consequently, we take this occasion to remind them of their filial obligation as Catholics to cooperate with their Bishop and Clergy and their Faith, namely, not only the equality of every soul before Almighty God, but also obedience to ecclesiastical authority.

After mature deliberation, and fully confident of the loyalty of the faithful, we now deem it opportune to caution them publicly. By the general law of the Church, there is the serious penalty of excommunication, which can be removed only by the Holy See. This penalty is incurred automatically should an individual or group of individuals, without permission, in violation of Canon 2341, presume (that is, after full knowledge) to interfere in the administrative office of their Bishop by having recourse to any authority outside the Church.

We hereby direct that this letter be read at all the Masses on this the Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost and Feast of Saint Matthew, September 21st.

Faithfully yours in Christ,  
Most Rev. Joseph E. Ritter  
Archbishop of Saint Louis<sup>56</sup>

This letter put a stop to all descent, and the schools of the Archdiocese were desegregated seven years before *Brown v. Board of Education* was issued by the Supreme Court. Yet even after *Brown v. Board of Education*, and the legal end of segregation, St. Louis and the parishes of the Archdiocese of St. Louis still remained de facto segregated for many years.

Archbishop Ritter was not the only advocate of equality in St. Louis at the time. Another was Msgr. John A. Shocklee, who worked to bridge people of differing races and socioeconomic classes at St. Bridget's Parish. He started a high school equivalency program, a trades training program and many other programs in the surrounding

---

<sup>56</sup> Original document courtesy of the Archives of the Archdiocese of St. Louis.

neighborhood, often pressuring Catholics he knew in suburban areas to hire people from his parish and offer scholarships for children.

Msgr. Shocklee is also notable for leading eight buses full of Catholics to march with Martin Luther King Jr. in Selma, Alabama. His brother, Donald Shocklee, also recounted that after Martin Luter King Jr's assassination, Shocklee stopped the riots in St. Louis that terrorized the rest of the country. Another civil activist told a gathered crowd to burn St. Louis and kill all of the "whiteys," while pointing at Msgr. Shocklee. Shocklee simply responded, "You don't have to go any farther, you can start with me." The love for Fr. John by the crowd won out, and the city was spared.<sup>57</sup> Much more could be said of Msgr. Shocklee's later work in the Archdiocese heading social justice groups, but "the whole world could not contain the books that would be written."<sup>58</sup> Nevertheless, Msgr. Shocklee was well known for his courage in standing up against and speaking on racism.<sup>59</sup>

Another contemporary of Msgr. Shocklee was Msgr. Patrick Molloy, who was key to desegregating children's sports in St. Louis. As associate pastor at Visitation Parish in 1946, one of the parishes' CYC teams was refused from playing in the Muny League due to five of the players being black. Molloy was able to convince 60 CYC teams to remove themselves from the Muny League and form their own. He would also help found St. Joseph High School and organize a football game between the black

---

<sup>57</sup> The Springfield News-Leader. *Priest Bridged Race, Classes.*

<sup>58</sup> *John 21:25.*

<sup>59</sup> For more on Msgr. Shocklee's life, see *Only a Priest: A Biography on Msgr. John A. Shocklee* by Harry E. Berndt.

students of St. Joseph and the white students of Christian Brothers College High School.<sup>60</sup>

### **Ferguson and the Contemporary Situation**

On August 9, 2014, an eighteen-year-old, unarmed black man, Michael Brown Jr, was shot and killed by Ferguson Police Officer Darren Wilson. Ferguson, a predominantly black suburb of St. Louis, was already filled with tension. Wilson was responding to a theft at a local gas station and had stopped Brown to question him, as Brown matched the suspect's description. In the following moments a struggle ensued, which ultimately led to Wilson fatally shooting Brown.<sup>61</sup> Sadly, Brown's body lay in the street for hours, uncovered, after the shooting.<sup>62</sup> Following this shooting, the mishandling of Brown's body, and the trial against Officer Wilson, there occurred a mass protest unlike any in recent history. In Ferguson, these protests often turned violent, causing local businesses to be looted, destroyed, or burnt down. One only needs to look up pictures of the Ferguson protests to see how violent they became.

In the midst of this upheaval, Archbishop Carlson, the ninth archbishop of St. Louis, was consistently present to the people of Ferguson, leading prayer services and constantly speaking out for peace and justice. Fr. Robert Roseberough, the pastor of the local parish in Ferguson, went all around the community to check in on his people and the people of the city who were losing places of employment, sources of food, and their own businesses to the violence.

---

<sup>60</sup> The St. Louis American, *Msgr. Patrick Molloy, Pioneer of Integration*.

<sup>61</sup> It is not my intent here to re-try the event, but just to give a basic overview of events.

<sup>62</sup> Braxton, *The Church and the Racial Divide*, p.15.

In the aftermath of these events, on August 18, nine days after the shooting, Carlson wrote the following letter in response to the question, "What are Catholics to do?" One can see his great care to balance the feelings of those who see this as a racial issue and the shooting as a hate crime, and the need for peaceful movement to enact real change:

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

We are all aware of the turmoil and tragedy our St. Louis community is experiencing. The residents of Ferguson, Missouri, are struggling to find peace in the chaos. As people of Christ, we are struggling to find direction in the unrest. I have personally visited Ferguson and Michael Brown's memorial to offer my prayers for everyone affected by this tragedy. As I have been observing this situation and reflecting on it through much prayer, I find strength in the prayer of St. Francis of Assisi: "Lord, make me an instrument of your peace." In all circumstances, but especially in these difficult times, we are all called to be instruments of peace through our words and actions. Pope Francis recently stated that, "All men and women of good will are bound by the task of pursuing peace."

To that end, I invite the Catholic faithful to attend a Mass for Peace and Justice which I will celebrate at the Cathedral Basilica of Saint Louis, on Wednesday, August 20th, at 5 p.m. During the Mass a special collection will be taken to assist food pantries and parishes in the Ferguson area that offer assistance to those who have been affected by the looting and destruction of property. Additionally, I encourage all parishes to offer Masses for peace in our community. The Office of Worship will contact pastors to provide the appropriate resources. Additional parish activities could include Holy Hours, a parish rosary, or a special collection this week to assist in the effort.

Because many Catholic schools are beginning classes both this and in the coming weeks, I have asked our Catholic schools to begin a daily rosary for peace and to offer special intentions during all school Masses. Catholic Family Services, an agency of Catholic Charities, has made counselors available to any Catholic school that requests assistance. Catholic Family Services has also publicized tips for parents and schools when dealing with crisis situations.

Pope Francis has encouraged us again and again to ask Our Lady, the Undoer of Knots, to intercede for us in difficult circumstances. So too, I ask all the faithful in the Archdiocese of St. Louis to join me in praying to Our Blessed Mother and to her son, Our Lord Jesus Christ, for peace and justice in our community.<sup>63</sup>

---

<sup>63</sup> Catholic News Agency, *St. Louis Archbishop Urges Prayer*.

This letter shows a measured response to the crisis at hand. At the time of this letter, it was still unknown if the shooting of Brown was justified or not, and thus Carlson takes great care not to weigh in on that matter. Instead, he focuses on the evils that have transpired since. This letter would be a guide for pastors in addressing the situation as well. Ignore the legality of the shooting and focus on what is known and what is needed in the community: peace.

### **Sister Wilhelmina: A Case Study**

To understand how the history of race relations affects people today, it is important to look at a generational family that has courageously endured all types of racial segregation, derision, and bigotry. A good, Catholic example, with deep ties to the Archdiocese of St. Louis would be Sister Mary Wilhelmina, Foundress of the Benedictines of Mary, Queen of Apostles.

Sister Wilhelmina, when asked about her vocation story, would often start the story three generations back with her great grandparents (the relation to Sr. Wilhelmina will be put in parentheses after each person the first time they are mentioned in order to help with clarity). William Lancaster Sr. (paternal-paternal great-grandfather) was the son of a wealthy white landowner. He ran away with one of the slaves (paternal-paternal great-grandmother) and eloped, leaving behind his family. They had a son, William Lancaster Jr. (paternal grandfather), who while being half black and half white, could pass as completely white, was hated by the white community for marrying a black woman, Henrietta Green (paternal grandmother). They had a son, Oscar (father), who would serve in World War I in the Black Regiment of the Army. Sister Wilhelmina's mother, Ella Theresa (mother) was the daughter of Mary Louis LaRose (maternal

grandmother). Mary Louis was the child of Theodore Granmot LaRose (paternal maternal great-grandfather) who was an overseer on a plantation. He bought a slave, Mary Elizabeth (paternal maternal great-grandmother), had her catechized and entered into the Church, and then married her. Mary Louis LaRose (maternal grandmother) married Charles Madden (maternal grandfather). Charles was the son of two freed slaves. Thus, out of the six great-grandparents she had known about, four of Sister Wilhelmina's great-grandparents were slaves, and two were white.<sup>64</sup>

This family history was ripe with struggles and discrimination due to being black or marrying a black person, but these diversities never stopped them from practicing their faith, which served as an inspiration for Sister Wilhelmina in her journey of founding her order. Sister Wilhelmina was no stranger to discrimination herself. She was baptized and grew up in St. Elizabeth of Hungary Parish, a segregated parish. Her family started the first Catholic High School for African Americans west of the Mississippi. When she decided to enter the convent, she could only enter the all-black community of the Oblate Sisters of Providence. She would later, at seventy years of age, found her own order: the Benedictines of Mary, Queen of the Apostles<sup>65</sup>

In the summer of 2023, four years after her death, her order exhumed her remains to move them to the chapel, as is customary with a foundress. To their surprise, instead of the expected skeletal remains they found a fully intact body. While this news was kept secret at first, news quickly spread, and Sr. Wilhelmina became nationally known.

---

<sup>64</sup> Benedictines of Mary, *God's Will: The Life and Works of Sr. Mary Wilhelmina*.

<sup>65</sup> Kim. *She Was and Is the Ambassador of Peace*.

Being the first African-American Catholic to be found incorrupt immediately attracted attention from people across the spectrum of opinion: some celebrated that an African American was being praised and glorified, such as the local news KSHB, while others were skeptical of the black nun being promoted by the predominantly white traditional Catholic movement. Still others state that Sister Wilhelina's life and beliefs are not representative of Black Catholicism.<sup>66</sup> Ultimately, the sisters of her order put it best, 'Her life ran in parallels, with being Black on one hand, and then being traditional on the other hand, she wanted unity.'

---

<sup>66</sup> Graham, *A Miracle in Missouri?*

## **Chapter 4: What to do about Racism: Best Practices on the Parish Level**

The Church's reaction to racism, even within itself, should spark a movement within the entire Body of Christ, and thus it is the responsibility of all Catholics to respond to this sin against human unity in suitable ways. While this would be the mission for all humanity, as all share in the unity, it is even more so true for those belonging to the One Holy Catholic Apostolic Church, as unity is part of her very nature. Any action taken in regard to race relations and racism in the Church should weigh the two virtues of human unity and diversity in mind. It is only in respecting both that one can ensure one is taking a moral course of action. It is these two virtues that separate the Ethnic Parishes of Segregation from the Personal Parishes of today. For instance, the segregated black parishes of St. Louis (St. Elizabeth of Hungary and St. Ann in Normandy), while respecting the diversity of the people of God, in forbidding the black population to go elsewhere to worship and the white population from worship there did not respect the unity of God's people, and thus was an immoral action. Conversely, Personal Hispanic Parishes, such as Our Lady of Guadalupe, are parishes set aside for a certain people and culture to call home and to shape after their own image. It is a safe place always available to them, but they are not forbidden from going elsewhere, and others are welcome to join them to experience their culture.

Such a response on the parish level should include three major goals: (1) education, (2) Rehabilitation, and (3) relationship building. Many people do not understand much about racism or dismiss it as something of the past, thus any response to racism will require *education* on the Church's social teachings and the sources of unity of

all peoples as well as the history and current state of race relations and racism. Many people are raised with preconceived notions of the various races, ranging from stereotypes to outright prejudice that they have received from their families and cultures. *Rehabilitation* is needed to dismiss any inborn prejudices or learned behavior of these false ideas.<sup>67</sup> Ultimately, to end racism, a change of heart must occur. Many people simply do not have much deep interaction with people of other races. Yes, they might have superficial interactions at work or at the store, but rarely are true friendships struck between people of two different races. *Relationship building* to put what is learned into practice and take the hypothetical into the realm of the practical is thus needed to make these changes of heart. One cannot love what they do not know.

This threefold approach of education, rehabilitation, and relationship building can take many forms. Thus, a pastor must not only know his people well but also be creative in how to address these issues and work on all three approaches. In some cases, working on all three at the same time might be beneficial, but at other times, it may not. For example, a community with a deep-seated, explicitly racist ideology would not immediately be open to building friendships with a person of another race, let alone realize the need for rehabilitation that needs to occur. In such a case, starting with education with the basic principles of human dignity and unity, perhaps even in a general sense, not even mentioning race yet—or including it in a list as one of many—would be the best starting point. From there, once the people know the Church’s teaching, they can begin to see the need to conform their hearts and consciences to it, and then establish friendships. In other cases, where racism might be more culturally driven and be an

---

<sup>67</sup> LaFarge, *Race Relations in the Curriculum*.

afterthought, starting with relationships could be beneficial to show the need for education and rehabilitation.

These approaches will look different and no one method will be perfect, but diversity in the plan of action would be well-suited. A pastor can, and should, preach on the subject throughout the year, though it certainly should not become the only topic he preaches about. Prayer services can and have been developed for racial harmony. The votive Mass for Christian Unity presents many prayers that follow the theme of unity in diversity. Book studies or prayer groups could take place over Bishop Braxton's pastoral letter or Fr. Josh Johnson's book, *On Earth as it is in Heaven*.<sup>68</sup>

### **Homiletic Insights**

A key aspect of any attempt at education, rehabilitation, and relationship-building will be the Sunday homily. It is in the Sunday homily where the pastor can speak directly to the congregation that is already there. In a sense, he has a captive audience. While it might be initially difficult to get people to come to events, listen to other talks, attend prayer services, and book studies, the people of God are already in the pews every Sunday, expecting Father to say something. The distinction that needs to be made, lest one become, "the social justice" priest, is that the preacher should not try to shoehorn in a homily about race relations to readings that have nothing to do with it, unless a major event happens that warrants it. Instead, the topic should be broached where it naturally comes up in the lectionary. Below are some examples of such cases, and what could be said in terms of race relations, racism, or discrimination in general, they are on the tamer

---

<sup>68</sup> This book also can serve a pastor as a guide on this issue in general.

side and should be adapted to the needs and the tolerance level of the people in the pews. This list is by no means exhaustive, and a pastor should be creative in how and when he addresses these issues.

### **The Good Samaritan (15th Week of Ordinary Time, Cycle C)**

The Gospel of the Good Samaritan can quite easily be used to reflect on race relationships today. Given the tumultuous history between the Samaritans and the Jews, along with the centuries-long grudges on both sides, there are many parallels to today. In this reading, one would bring up the constant tension between the Jews of Jesus's time and their northern neighbors, the Samaritans. The Samaritans claimed to be descended from two of the lost northern tribes of the kingdom, Ephraim and Manasseh, but due to their long history of intermarrying with Gentile conquerors, they were no longer ethnically Jewish. On top of the ethnic differences, there were significant liturgical differences, with the Samaritans worshiping God on Mount Gerizim as opposed to the Temple in Jerusalem. The tension did not just stop at uneasy feelings, however, but turned violent. A Jewish ruler destroyed the temple on Mount Gerizim around 111 BC. The Samaritans harbored deep resentment stemming from this event, and a hundred years later, they defiled the Temple in Jerusalem by scattering human bones in it at Passover. We also see this hostility in scripture, as Jesus is denied entry into Samaritan villages because his destination is Jerusalem.<sup>69</sup>

It would thus come as a great surprise that in this Gospel, it is not the Jewish priest or Levite from the temple that aids the Jewish man, but a Samaritan, his sworn

---

<sup>69</sup> Gadenz, *Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture: The Gospel of Luke*, p.212.

enemy. It is this man, the one who showed mercy, that has become synonymous with good works and doing the right thing. The Good Samaritan was able to look past the ethnic and religious differences, and even past centuries of animosity to see a man's suffering. "Moved with compassion at the sight" of a fellow human being's misfortune, the Good Samaritan did everything he could to alleviate that suffering.

Can we look past the ethnic and religious differences in our society, move past centuries of animosity, and see a group of people who are suffering? Are we moved with compassion when we see a person who looks different from us suffering, or do we turn a blind eye like the priest and Levite? The Good Samaritan treated the man with mercy and compassion, uniting himself to the other. Go and do likewise.

### **Pentecost Sunday (Either set of readings)**

The Church provides us with multiple sets of readings to choose from today. In the first options for the first readings, one at the Vigil Mass and one at the morning Mass, we see two mirror images of each other: Babel and Pentecost. In one, the people are separated and stuck unable to understand each other, and in the other the people are united, able to understand the Apostles as if in their own language. A group unified, but for an evil purpose is divided. A group divided, for a good purpose is united. This simple but hidden duality in these readings tells us much about the nature of sin and our world. The consequence of sin is division, this is explicit in the story of Babel: the people's pride led to the divine punishment of a disparity of languages. The consequence of virtue is unity. This truth is explicit in the story of Pentecost: the Apostles, inflamed by the Holy Spirit, brought three thousand people to the faith.

We see this duality most strikingly in the family: a family in union with one another will celebrate differences and bring about a joy that is attractive to others around them. It is one of the greatest blessings that a family be united. On the other hand, a family split by division such as divorce or sins like adultery, form the greatest tragedies. The family serves as a model for the Church: we only are attractive to those who are around us insofar as we are united as one and celebrate our individual differences. It is a great tragedy when divisions have entered the Church. One does not need to think only of the great schisms of the Orthodox Churches or the Protestant Reformation but simply look at our own community. When people, in their pride, try to divide God's people and exclude them based on language barriers, race, social class, wealth, or job status, it harms the Church, which is called to preach the Gospel to all nations. For the Church to fail at this mission would indeed be a great tragedy. So, as we go out into the world at the end of Mass, let us ask ourselves, are we a unifying force, or a dividing force?

### **Solemnity of Christ the King**

The Solemnity of Christ, King of the Universe is always a good opportunity to call the people to further work toward human unity and diversity. All peoples share this same Divine King and thus are all part of His Kingdom. The three-year cycle also gives an opportunity to put different focuses on this call to unity as the scriptures see fit. This solemnity also tends to fall in a favorable time, in that Thanksgiving is typically the Thursday before or after, so the people are already in a reflective and generous mindset. The holiday season also brings families, who might themselves have some forms of disunity, together, and thus a homily on unity would serve well to reflect on for those who might not need to hear one on racism directly. Below are short, starter homilies for

each cycle in the lectionary. while purposely left vague so that a pastor might be able to easily adapt it to his parish and circumstances.

### **Cycle A**

In this Gospel (Mt 25:32-46, the sheep and the goats), Christ does not put any extra stipulations on the acts of charity that the sheep did and the goats did not do. He does not say, “They were hungry, and employed, so you gave them food” or “They were thirsty, and not drug addicts, and you gave them drink” or “A stranger, but also white, so you welcomed me,” or “imprisoned unjustly and you visited me.” He does not add stipulations to these acts of charity, and neither should we. It is not our job to determine, especially based on superficial appearances and assumptions, who deserves food or drink or shelter or companionship, because ultimately, we all have fallen short of God’s grace and do not even deserve what we have!

Instead, we must remember this Gospel, that in that person we are tempted to judge, is Jesus. This is a person whom Jesus loves deeply, that Jesus died for, that Jesus wishes will spend an eternity in Heaven with Him. These are the sheep that in our first reading (Ezekiel 34:11-12, 15-17), Jesus wishes to give rest, to seek out and bring back, to bind up their injuries and heal them. It does not matter if they are rich or poor, guilty or innocent, man or woman, black or white, Christian, Jew, or Muslim, they are all His sheep, and He loves them dearly and wants to fulfill their every desire. If we truly loved Jesus, we would want to be how he fills those needs and desires.

Instead, we try to be sleek and strong, deciding for ourselves who is worthy of our help, and if we continue to live this way, we will be destroyed. We will be stuck with the

goats trying to explain to Christ why we did not help those in need, those whom He loves!

## **Cycle B**

“All peoples, nations, and languages serve him.” (from first reading: Daniel 7:13-14). Christ is the king of all Creation, this is why Christ does not directly answer Pilate’s question in the Gospel of John (18:33b-37), “Are you the King of the Jews?” because He is not just the king of the Jews, but of all peoples: Jew or Gentile, slave or free, woman or man, American, Canadian, Mexican, European, Russian, Chinese, and so on. He is the king of all. The Lord is king, he is robed in majesty and every eye will see him (second reading Revelation 1:5-8), not just the Christian eye or the American eye, but every eye. For we all belong to His Kingdom. If we do all belong to His Kingdom, we should act as such, but instead, we see the world constantly divided. This is why Christ must say His Kingdom is not of this world, for it would be impossible to remove all division in the world ourselves, we need Him. This is why He came into the world, to reconcile the division between us and God, and in doing so unite us together with each other.

Though we cannot do this without Him, it does not mean we should just give up. Instead, we should work to make His Kingdom come alive on Earth as much as possible. This means removing any division we can in our own lives. What does this look like? It means crossing cultural, geographical, political, and racial divides in order to love someone different from us. It means learning about the lives and struggles of people from across the globe and right here in our backyard. It means displacing all fears or preconceived notions about people different from us and opening dialogue with them. It

means building relationships with our fellow citizens of the Kingdom of Jesus Christ, King of the Universe.

### **Cycle C**

We read in our second reading (Colossians 1:12-20) that Christ is the head of the Body, the Church. We are all familiar with this adage, we have heard the many songs, “We are one body, one body in Christ, and we do not stand alone,” “One Bread, One Body, One Lord of all,” “Though we are many parts, we are all one body.” This was a common worship hymn theme in the 80s and 90s, and produced many earworms that are even effective today, but when was the last time we paused and thought about what the implications of this analogy are? The Church—that is to say, all of us—make up the Body of Christ, and He, Himself, is the Head. When a body is hurt, the head responds, it feels the pain, and it sends signals to the various systems of the body to react to the harm in various ways. When the body is healthy, it works in complete accord with the head. Thus it should be with us and Christ: we should work in union with His desires.

But what are Christ’s desires? We again turn to our second reading: it is to reconcile all things and make peace by the blood of His cross. This is why He did not save Himself from the Cross, it is because the Cross is the tool needed to reconcile all things to Himself. The question still remains, however: do we follow this desire for reconciliation, or is there division within Christ’s Body? We hear elsewhere in scripture that the hand cannot say to the foot, “I do not need you,” but is this not what we do every time we separate someone else from ourselves due to their poverty, their way of dress, their accent, their job, or even their race?

## **Conclusion: Mary as the Model for Human and Catholic Unity**

To illustrate how the virtues of unity and diversity are balanced, one need only follow the example of the Blessed Mother. With her countless feast days and universal appeal to all Catholics, to teach and follow her example in the realm of race relations will always be helpful. In his General Audience on September 11, 2013, Pope Francis stated: “What is said of the Church can be said also of Our Lady and what is said of Our Lady can also be said of the Church!”<sup>70</sup> It should come as no surprise then that just as the Church is a great sign of human unity perfected in Christ, so should Mary be seen as the ultimate example of how to bring about unity with respect to all races. If Mary is to be the Mother of the Church, and the Church should be universal, then Mary herself should also be universal. This is exactly what we see: wherever the Church is, across the world, devotion to the Blessed Mother is fostered. On top of this fact, just as the Church “absorbs” and sanctifies the cultures she finds herself in, so does Mary, often being depicted as belonging to the very people who are showing devotion to her.

St. Pope John Paul II, a great lover of Mary writes, “Christianity, while remaining completely true to itself, with unswerving fidelity to the proclamation of the Gospel and the tradition of the Church, will also reflect the different faces of the cultures and peoples in which it is received and takes root.”<sup>71</sup> If the Church reflects the faces of the people it receives then it should come as no surprise that the Blessed Mother, herself, reflects the faces of the people that she receives in her various apparitions.

---

<sup>70</sup>Francis, *General Audience* Sep. 11, 2013.

<sup>71</sup> John Paul II, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 40.

It is often overlooked that in most, if not all, apparitions, Mary appears not only as the race of the people she is revealing herself to, but also as a part of their culture. In these apparitions, often to the poor and marginalized, Mary shares a universal message as the mother of all, not just to the people to whom she appears. The Blessed Mother shows the way to true unity in diversity, the two virtues needed in dealing with race relations. She honors the diversity of the people she appears to by taking on not only their appearance and race, but taking their culture and symbolism onto herself, raising it up and sanctifying it, then using those races, cultures, and symbols to reach the entire world.

For example, Our Lady of La Salette appeared to two French children in the French Alps in 1846. There she appeared as a stereotypical peasant woman from their village. She wore a long dress with an apron, a shawl over her shoulders, and a bonnet. This normal appearance was elevated by the various wreaths of flowers attached to her clothing and the light that shined from her face. She spoke to the children in French, but not the French of Paris, but their local dialect.<sup>72</sup> Our Lady of La Salette's message, while given to two children in a remote part of France was to be heard throughout the world: To convert and be reconciled with God.

Sixteen years before La Salette, Mary secretly appeared in Paris, France to a Vincentian nun, St. Catherine Labore. In a series of apparitions, the Blessed Mother appeared to her, describing the role Catherine would play in spreading devotion to Mary to the world. In the November apparition, Mary appeared, holding a golden globe and lifting it high. She spoke to Catherine, "This globe represents the entire world, including

---

<sup>72</sup> Schlewer, *The Message of La Salette*.

France, and every person.”<sup>73</sup> Mary was in this way telling her that the Blessed Mother is constantly lifting the entire world, each and every person up in prayer. She has revealed herself as Mother of the World.

Another French Marian apparition is Our Lady of Lourdes. In February of 1858, The Blessed Mother appeared to fourteen-year-old Bernadette Soubirous in a small town called Lourdes in the Pyrenees. Bernadette recalls, “I saw a lady dressed in white, she wore a white dress, an equally white veil, a blue belt, and a yellow rose on each foot.”<sup>74</sup> It would be at the end of these apparitions that The Blessed Mother would reveal, “I am the Immaculate Conception,” a message meant for the entire world, sent from a backwater French village and an uneducated peasant girl. Ironically, it was four years prior that Pope Pius IX had made the proclamation on the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception, but it was still hotly debated by theologians. Here we have Mary herself teaching the Marian Dogma.<sup>75</sup>

Of course, Mary does not only appear in France. In 1916 and 1917, Mary appeared to three shepherd children in the small village of Fatima, Portugal. In this time frame, Mary appeared to the children six times. Her appearance, as described by the eldest child, Lucia, was. “A lady, clothed in white, brighter than the sun, radiating a light more clear and intense than a crystal cup filled with sparkling water lit by burning sunlight.” The Blessed Mother imparted many lessons to the shepherd children throughout the months of these apparitions and left them with three “secrets” that had to do with the end of World War I and the beginning of World War II. Again, we see Mary

---

<sup>73</sup> *The Apparitions and the Miraculous Medal.*

<sup>74</sup> Lourdes Volunteers, *The Apparitions.*

<sup>75</sup> Armenio, *The Didache Series: The History of the Church*, p.667-668.

using an otherwise unimportant, forgotten group of people from a town no one had heard of to spread a message and devotion to the entire world.<sup>76</sup>

A more recent Marian apparition was our Lady of Kibeho. Here, Our Lady appeared to three college women in Kibeho, Rwanda in the early 1980s. She was described as being incomparably beautiful and captivating. One of the three women, Mumureke, the first visionary, described Mary's appearance, "She had a seamless white dress and also a white veil on her head...I could not determine the color of her skin, but she was of incomparable beauty."<sup>77</sup> It is interesting to note that they could not determine Mary's skin color, as this could represent the dual purpose of her message, to repent and begin to pray rightly, or a great evil will befall them. This held true, as in ten years, the Rwandan Genocide took place, killing hundreds of thousands of people. But this message was not only for the people of Rwanda but for the entire world.

The most overt Marian apparition pertaining to race, culture, and symbolism, is the Virgin Guadalupe. In this apparition and the miraculous image associated with it, we see the marrying of two cultures, that of the Aztec people and that of their Spanish conquerors. The image, in its layout, with Mary turned forty-five degrees, hands folded in prayer, wearing a gown and veil, immediately calls to mind other European depictions of Mary such as Our Lady of Lourdes or Our Lady of Fatima. This image is then colored in with the symbolism and cultures from the Aztec religion. In the image, Mary wears a black sash above her waist, indicating that she is with child, according to Aztec custom of dress. Below this sash, directly over her womb is a four-petalled flower, the only one in

---

<sup>76</sup> The Blue Army, *The Story of Fatima*.

<sup>77</sup> Pronechen, *Our Lady of Kibeho*.

the design of her dress. This flower was an Aztec symbol of the divine. Together with the sash, this would have informed the Aztec viewer that this woman was pregnant with the divine.<sup>78</sup> The teal color of her mantle would have been reserved for the Aztec royalty. Her royalty is also spoken of by the angel bearing her, as only royalty would be carried by others in such a way. The rays of the sun behind the Virgin, as well as the moon she stands on would have been immediately associated with the two main deities of the Aztec religion, Huitzilopochtli and Quetzalcoatl, respectively. Her standing in front of the sun would suggest that she is more radiant than Huitzilopochtli, eclipsing the sun. Her standing on the moon would suggest she has vanquished the serpent god Quetzalcoatl. Richard Butzacchelli states the symbolism of this vanquishing of Quetzalcoatl is even more explicit: “The Lady’s blue-green mantle and the rose tunic are the colors of the quetzal: lavishly plumed bird after which the plumed serpent Quetzalcoatl is partly named. Together, these two colors are the colors one would associate with the dragon-god of the moon, who now lies naked and cold beneath her feet.”<sup>79</sup>

It is from the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe that two distinct cultures, the Aztecs, who previously had one of the worst death cults in history, and their Spanish conquerors, were able to be unified into one people and culture. It is in Guadalupe that we see a sanctification and a purification of the culture of the people, that Mary takes on herself, to spread her message to the world. It is no wonder that this miraculous image on the tilma, produced by the miraculous apparitions of Mary was able to convert over nine million people in a period of seven years, producing one of the most culturally Catholic

---

<sup>78</sup> Bulzacchelli, “Crushing the Head of the Serpent,” p. 49.

<sup>79</sup> Bulzacchelli, “Crushing the Head of the Serpent,” p. 51.

peoples in the world today. The love for the Virgin of Guadalupe has only spread. One would be hard-pressed to walk into a Catholic church anywhere in the Americas and not find an image of Guadalupe present. She has become a symbol to all peoples, as Bishop Seitz states, “Guadalupe says to our people today, ‘You count, tu vales.’” He continues, “She is the Mestiza, who takes what is noble from each culture, elevates it and points our new ways forward reconciliation... Guadalupe teaches us how we might go about repairing the sin of racism.”<sup>80</sup>

This universal devotion to Mary as well as Mary’s seeming devotion to uniting all peoples across the globe, serves as an example to Catholics of how to approach race relations in a holy, virtuous way. The Catholic must accept the foreign culture, share in its symbolism and meaning, must seek out those of different races, and befriend them as beloved children of God, saved by Christ, loved by Mary. As Bishop Seitz says, “Every race and color and tribe and people and language and culture are threads in the vibrant and diverse tapestry of the Reign of God.” If this is true, then surely it is Our Lady who weaves and ties the tapestry together.

---

<sup>80</sup> Seitz, *Night will be No More*, p. 51-53.

## Bibliography

- Angelou, Maya. "Human Family." allpoetry.com, n.d.  
<https://allpoetry.com/Human-Family>.
- Armenio, Peter V. and James Sociás. *The History of the Church: A Complete Course*. Downers Grove, Illinois: Midwest Theological Forum, 2015.
- Benedictines of Mary. *GOD's Will: The Life and Works of Sr. Mary Wilhelmina Lancaster*, 2020.
- Braxton, Edward K. *The Church and the Racial Divide: Reflections of an African American Catholic Bishop*. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2021.
- Bulzacchelli, Richard H. "Crushing the Head of the Serpent: Our Lady of Guadalupe and the Triumph of Revealed Religion in the Aztec World." *Marian Studies* 62 (2011).  
[https://ecommons.udayton.edu/marian\\_studies/vol62/iss1/7/?utm\\_source=ecommons.udayton.edu%2Fmarian\\_studies%2Fvol62%2Fiss1%2F7&utm\\_medium=PDF&utm\\_campaign=PDFCoverPages](https://ecommons.udayton.edu/marian_studies/vol62/iss1/7/?utm_source=ecommons.udayton.edu%2Fmarian_studies%2Fvol62%2Fiss1%2F7&utm_medium=PDF&utm_campaign=PDFCoverPages).
- Callan, Louise. *Philippine Duchesne*. Newman Press, 1957.
- Catholic News Agency. "St. Louis Archbishop Urges Prayer in Face of Ferguson Violence." Catholic News Agency, August 19, 2014.  
<https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/30323/st-louis-archbishop-urges-prayer-in-face-of-ferguson-violence>.
- Clark, Jennifer. "Oath of Loyalty Book, 1868-1871, Artifact of the Month for September 2011 - Gateway Arch National Park (U.S. National Park Service)." www.nps.gov, September 1, 2011.  
<https://www.nps.gov/jeff/blogs/oath-of-loyalty-book-1868-1871-artifact-of-the-month-for-september-2011.htm>.
- Cleary, Patricia. *The World, the Flesh, and the Devil : A History of Colonial St. Louis*. Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2018.
- Feingold, Lawrence. *The Church of the Messiah Who Unites All in Himself: Ecclesiology Course Notes 2022*, 2022.
- Francis. "Evangelii Gaudium : Apostolic Exhortation on the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today's World (24 November 2013) | Francis." www.vatican.va, November 24, 2013.  
[https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco\\_esortazione-ap\\_20131124\\_evangelii-gaudium.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html).

- \_\_\_\_\_. “General Audience of 11 September 2013: The Church Is Our Mother | Francis.” www.vatican.va, September 11, 2013.  
[https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/audiences/2013/documents/papa-francesco\\_20130911\\_udienza-generale.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/audiences/2013/documents/papa-francesco_20130911_udienza-generale.html).
- Gadenz, Pablo T. *Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture: The Gospel of Luke*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2018.
- Garrigus, John, trans. *Le Code Noir*, 1767.
- Graham, Ruth. “A Miracle in Missouri? The Nun Who Put Her Abby on the Map.” *The New York Times*, September 9, 2023.  
<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/09/09/us/missouri-nun-habit.html>.
- Harris, Eileen Nini. *A Most Unsettled State: First-Person Accounts of St. Louis during the Civil War*. St. Louis, Mo: Reedy Press, 2013.
- John Paul II. “Novo Millennio Ineunte.” www.vatican.va, January 6, 2001.  
[https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost\\_letters/2001/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_apl\\_20010106\\_novo-millennio-ineunte.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_letters/2001/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_20010106_novo-millennio-ineunte.html).
- Kim, JuYeon. “‘She Was and Is the Ambassador of Peace’: The Life and Legacy of Sister Wilhelmina Lancaster.” KSHB 41 Kansas City News, June 7, 2023. <https://www.kshb.com/news/local-news/she-was-and-is-the-ambassador-of-peace-the-life-and-legacy-of-sister-wilhelmina-lancaster>.
- LaFarge, J. “Race Relations in the Curriculum of the Catholic College.” *The American Catholic Sociological Review*, 2:2 (1941), 97–103.  
<https://doi.org/10.2307/3707750>
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Racial Divide in the United States*, 2015.
- LaFarge, John , Gustav Gundlach, and Gustave Desbuquois. *Humani Generis Unitas*, 1938.
- Lourdes Volunteers. “The Apparitions,” December 12, 2014.  
<https://lourdesvolunteers.org/the-apparitions/>.
- Massingale, Bryan N. *Racial Justice and the Catholic Church*. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2010.
- Meyer, Duane. *The Heritage of Missouri*, 1982.
- Osiek, Carolyn. “The Complete Writings of St. Rose Philippine Duchesne: The

Challenges of Transatlantic, Diachronic, and Bilingual Biographical Publication.” Cushwa Center, October 23, 2018.  
<https://cushwa.nd.edu/news/rose-philippine-duchesne/>.

Our Lady’s Blue Army - World Apostolate of Fatima U.S.A. “The Story of Fatima,” 2014. <https://www.bluearmy.com/the-story-of-fatima/>.

Passelecq, Georges, Bernard Suchecky, and Steven Rendall. *The Hidden Encyclical of Pope Pius XI*. New York: Harcourt Brace, 1997.

Plenary Council of Baltimore (2nd : 1866). *Pastoral Letter of the Second Plenary Council of Baltimore*. Internet Archive. Baltimore, Printed by J. Murphy & co., 1866.  
[https://archive.org/details/pastoralletterof00cath\\_1/page/38/mode/2up](https://archive.org/details/pastoralletterof00cath_1/page/38/mode/2up).

Pope Paul VI. “Gaudium et Spes.” www.vatican.va, December 7, 1965.  
[https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19651207\\_gaudium-et-spes\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html).

\_\_\_\_\_. “Lumen Gentium.” Vatican, November 21, 1964.  
[https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19641121\\_lumen-gentium\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html).

\_\_\_\_\_. “Octogesima Adveniens.” www.vatican.va, May 14, 1971.  
[https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/apost\\_letters/documents/hf\\_p-vi\\_apl\\_19710514\\_octogesima-adveniens.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/apost_letters/documents/hf_p-vi_apl_19710514_octogesima-adveniens.html).

Pronechen, Joseph. “Our Lady of Kibeho: ‘an Urgent Appeal to the Repentance and Conversion of Hearts.’” *National Catholic Register*, November 24, 2021. <https://www.ncregister.com/features/our-lady-of-kibeho-an-urgent-appeal-to-the-repentance-and-conversion-of-hearts>.

Rubie, Christopher. “A History of the Black Apostolate in the Archdiocese of St. Louis: The Episcopacy of Archbishop Peter Richard Kenrick.” 2017.

Schlewer, Marcel, and Maurice Sublet. “The Message of La Salette.” www.lasalette.org, n.d. <https://www.lasalette.org/about-la-salette/apparition/the-story/705-the-message-of-la-salette.html>.

Seitz, Mark J. “Night Will Be No More | Pastoral Letter to People of God in El Paso,” 2019. <https://www.hopeborder.org/nightwillbenomore-eng>.

Swarns, Rachel L. “The Nuns Who Bought and Sold Human Beings.” *The New York Times*, August 2, 2019, sec. Sunday Review.  
<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/02/opinion/sunday/nuns-slavery.html>.

The Springfield News-Leader. "Priest Bridged Race, Classes." *The Springfield News-Leaders*, February 9, 2003.  
[https://www.newspapers.com/image/208879505/?clipping\\_id=6547532&cfToken=eyJhbGciOiJIUzI1NiIsInR5cCI6IkpXVCJ9.eyJmcmVlXzZpZXctaWQiOiJwODg3OTUwNSwiaWF0IjoxNzAyNTIxMTc2LCJleHAiOiE3MDI2MDc1NzZ9.1YUorfSMc50JGc3PNL5HhJgPgSFch-kJonJVZURug-8](https://www.newspapers.com/image/208879505/?clipping_id=6547532&cfToken=eyJhbGciOiJIUzI1NiIsInR5cCI6IkpXVCJ9.eyJmcmVlXzZpZXctaWQiOiJwODg3OTUwNSwiaWF0IjoxNzAyNTIxMTc2LCJleHAiOiE3MDI2MDc1NzZ9.1YUorfSMc50JGc3PNL5HhJgPgSFch-kJonJVZURug-8).

The St. Louis American. "Msgr. Patrick Molloy, Pioneer of Integration." *St. Louis American*, March 29, 2007.  
[https://www.stlamerican.com/news/obituaries/msg-r-patrick-molloy-pioneer-of-integration/article\\_ecd8e50b-c87e-5b70-b235-64d37d75cbc1.html](https://www.stlamerican.com/news/obituaries/msg-r-patrick-molloy-pioneer-of-integration/article_ecd8e50b-c87e-5b70-b235-64d37d75cbc1.html).

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. *Brothers and Sisters to Us: U.S. Bishops' Pastoral Letter on Racism in Our Day*. Washington, D.C., 1979.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Discrimination and the Christian Conscience*, 1958.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Statement on National Race Crisis*, 1968.

www.chapellenotredamedelamedaillemiraculeuse.com. "The Apparitions and the Miraculous Medal," n.d.

<https://www.chapellenotredamedelamedaillemiraculeuse.com/langues/english/apparitions-et-la-medaille-miraculeuse-gb/>.