

CATHOLIC SOCIAL THOUGHT AND THE ISSUES OF POVERTY, RACISM, AND INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

POVERTY

But all agree, and there can be no question whatever, that some remedy must be found, and quickly found, for the misery and wretchedness which press so heavily at this moment on the large majority of the very poor... Public institutions and the laws have repudiated the ancient religion. Hence by degrees, it has come to pass that working men have been given over, isolated and defenseless, to the callousness of employers and the greed of unrestrained competition. The evil has been increased by rapacious usury, which, although more than once condemned by the Church, is nevertheless, under a different form but with the same guilt, still practiced by avaricious and grasping men. And to this must be added the custom of working by contract, and the concentration of so many branches of trade in the hands of a few individuals, so that a small number of very rich men have been able to lay upon the masses of the poor a yoke little better than slavery itself. ***RERUM NOVARUM: The Condition of Labor 2***

The Church's desire is that the poor... should rise above poverty and wretchedness, and should better their condition in life; and for this it strives... Moreover, the Church intervenes directly in the interest of the poor, by setting on foot and keeping up many things which it sees to be efficacious in the relief of poverty... Such was the ardor of brotherly love among the earliest Christians that numbers of those who were better off deprived themselves of their possessions in order to relieve their brethren; whence "neither was there any one needy among them."

RERUM NOVARUM: The Condition of Labor, 23-24

"If someone who has the riches of this world sees his brother in need and closes his heart to him, how does the love of God abide in him?" It is well known how strong were the words used by the Fathers of the Church to describe the proper attitude of persons who possess anything towards persons in need. To quote Saint Ambrose: "You are not making a gift of your possessions to the poor person. You are handing over to him what is his. For what has been given in common for the use of all, you have arrogated to yourself. The world is given to all, and not only to the rich..." No one is justified in keeping for his exclusive use what he does not need, when others lack necessities.

POPULORUM PROGRESSIO: On the Development of Peoples, 23

"If a brother or a sister be naked," says Saint James, "if they lack their daily nourishment, and one of you says to them: "Go in peace, be warmed and be filled, without giving them what is necessary for the body, what good does it do?" Today no one can be ignorant any longer of the fact that in whole continents countless men and women are ravaged by hunger, countless numbers of children are undernourished, so that many of them die in infancy, while the physical growth and mental development of many others are retarded and as a result whole regions are condemned to the most depressing dependency.

POPULORUM PROGRESSIO: On the Development of Peoples, 45

Development cannot be limited to mere economic growth. In order to be authentic, it must be complete: integral, that is, it has to promote the good of every man and of the whole man... Indeed hunger for education is no less debasing than hunger for food: an illiterate person is a person with an undernourished mind... Personal and communal development would be threatened if the true scale of values were undermined. The desire for necessities is legitimate and work undertaken to obtain them is a duty: If any man will not work, neither let him eat. But the acquiring of temporal goods can lead to greed, to the insatiable desire for more, and can make increased power a tempting objective. Individuals, families, nations, can be overcome by avarice, be they poor or rich and all can fall victim to a stifling materialism.

POPULORUM PROGRESSIO: On the Development of Peoples, 14, 35, 18

Increased possession is not the ultimate goal of all nations nor of individuals. All growth is ambivalent. It is essential if man is to develop as a man, but in a way it imprisons man if he considers it the supreme good, and it restricts his vision. Then we see hearts harden and minds close, and men no longer gather together in friendship but out of self-interest, which soon leads to opposition and disunity. The exclusive pursuit of possessions thus becomes an obstacle to individual fulfillment and to man's true greatness. Both for nations and for individual men, avarice is the most evident form of moral underdevelopment.

POPULORUM PROGRESSIO: On the Development of Peoples, 19

Less human conditions: the lack of material necessities for those who are without the minimum essentials for life, the moral deficiencies of those who are mutilated by selfishness. Less human conditions: oppressive social structures, whether due to the abuses of ownership or to the abuses of power, to the exploitation of workers or to unjust transactions. Conditions that are more human: the passage from misery toward possession of necessities, victory over social scourges, the growth of knowledge, the acquisition of culture. Additional conditions that are more human: increased esteem for the dignity of others, the turning toward the spirit of poverty, cooperation for the common good, the will and desire for peace. Conditions that are still more human: the acknowledgment by man of supreme values, and of God their source and their finality. Conditions that, finally and above all, are more human: faith, a gift of God accepted by the good will of man, and unity in the charity of Christ, who calls us to share as sons in the life of the living God, the Father of all men.

POPULORUM PROGRESSIO: On the Development of Peoples, 21

Many nations, poorer in economic goods, are quite rich in wisdom and able to offer noteworthy advantages to others. Rich or poor, each country possesses a civilization handed down by its ancestors: institutions called for by life in this world, and higher manifestations of the life of the spirit, manifestations of an artistic, intellectual, and religious character. When the latter possess true human values, it would be grave error to sacrifice them for the former. A people that would act in this way would thereby lose the best of its patrimony; in order to live, it would be sacrificing its reasons for living.

POPULORUM PROGRESSIO: On the Development of Peoples, 40

Less well off people can never be sufficiently on their guard against this temptation which comes to them from wealthy nations. For these nations all too often set as an example of success in a highly technical and culturally developed civilization; they also provide the model for a way of acting that is principally aimed at the conquest of material prosperity. Not that material prosperity of itself precludes the activity of the human spirit. On the contrary, the human spirit, “increasingly free of its bondage to creatures, can be more easily drawn to the worship and contemplation of the Creator. However, modern civilization itself often complicates the approach to God, not for any essential reason, but because it is excessively engrossed in earthly affairs. Developing nations must know how to discriminate among those things that are held out to them; they must be able to assess critically, and to eliminate those deceptive goods which would only bring about a lowering of the human ideal, and to accept those values that are sound and beneficial, in order to develop them alongside their own, in accordance with their genius.

POPULORUM PROGRESSIO: On the Development of Peoples, 41

What must be aimed at is complete humanism. And what is that if not the fully rounded development of the whole man and of all men? Humanism closed in on itself, and not open to the values of the spirit and to God who is their source could achieve apparent success. True, man can organize the world apart from God, but “without God man can organize it in the end only to man’s detriment. An isolated humanism is an inhuman humanism.” There is no true humanism but that which is open to the Absolute and is conscious of a vocation which gives human life its true meaning. Far from being the ultimate meaning of all things, man can only realize himself by reaching beyond himself. As Pascal has said so well, “Man infinitely surpasses man.”

POPULORUM PROGRESSIO: On the Development of Peoples, 42

Let each one examine his conscience, a conscience that conveys a new message of our times. Is he prepared to support out of his own pocket works and undertakings organized in favor of the most destitute? Is he ready to pay higher taxes so that the public authorities can intensify their efforts in favor of development? Is he ready to pay a higher price for imported goods so that the producer may be more justly rewarded?

POPULORUM PROGRESSIO: On the Development of Peoples, 47

... the superfluous wealth of rich countries should be placed at the service of poor nations. The rule, which up to now held good for the benefit of those nearest to us, must today be applied to all the needy of this world. Besides, the rich will be the first to benefit as a result. Otherwise their continued greed will certainly call down upon them the judgment of God and the wrath of the poor, with consequences no one can foretell.

POPULORUM PROGRESSIO: On the Development of Peoples, 49

Therefore everyone has the right to possess a sufficient amount of the earth’s goods for themselves and their family. This has been the opinion of the Fathers and Doctors of the church, who taught that people are bound to come to the aid of the poor and to do so not merely out of their superfluous goods. Persons in extreme necessity are entitled to take what they need from the riches of others.

Faced with a world today where so many people are suffering from want, the council asks individuals and governments to remember the saying of the Fathers: “Feed the people dying of hunger, because if you do not feed them, you are killing them,” and urges them according to their ability, to undertake a genuine sharing of their goods. Let them use these goods especially to provide individuals and nations with the means for helping and developing themselves.

GAUDIUM ET SPES: Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern, 69

Listening to the cry of those who suffer violence and are oppressed by unjust systems and structures, and hearing the appeal of a world that by its perversity contradicts the plan of its Creator, we have shared our awareness of the Church’s vocation to be present in the heart of the world by proclaiming the Good News to the poor, freedom to the oppressed, and joy to the afflicted.

JUSTICE IN THE WORLD, 5

Those who are more influential, because they have a greater share of goods and common services should feel *responsible* for the weaker and be ready to share with them all they possess. Those who are weaker, for their part, in the same spirit of *solidarity*, should not adopt a purely *passive* attitude or one that is *destructive* of the social fabric, but, while claiming their legitimate rights, should do what they can for the good of all...Positive signs in the contemporary world are the *growing awareness* of the solidarity of the poor among themselves, their *efforts to support one another*, and their *public demonstrations* on the social scene which, without recourse to violence, present their own needs and rights in the face of the inefficiency of corruption of the public authorities...the Church feels called to take her stand beside the poor, to discern the justice of their requests, and to help satisfy them, without losing sight of the good of groups in the context of the common good.

SOLLICITUDO REI SOCIALIS: On Social Concern, 39

Today, given the worldwide dimension which the social question has assumed, this love of preference for the poor, and the decisions which it inspires in us, cannot but embrace the immense multitudes of the hungry, the needy, the homeless, those without medical care and, above all, those without hope of a better future.

SOLLICITUDO REI SOCIALIS: On Social Concern, 42

Love for others, and in the same place love for the poor, in whom the church sees Christ himself, is made concrete in the promotion of justice. Justice will never be fully attained unless people see in the poor person, who is asking for help in order to survive, not an annoyance or a burden, but an opportunity for showing kindness and a chance for greater enrichment. Only such an awareness can give the courage needed to face the risk and the change involved in every authentic attempt to come to the aid of another.

It is not merely a matter of “giving from one’s surplus,” but of helping entire peoples which are presently excluded or marginalized to enter into the sphere of economic and human development. For this to happen, it is not enough to draw on the surplus goods which in fact our world abundantly produces; it requires above all a change of lifestyles,

of models of production and consumption, and of the established structures of power which today govern societies.

CENTISIMUS ANNUS: On the Hundredth Anniversary of Rerum Novarum, 58

Harsh poverty plagues our country despite its great wealth. More than 33 million Americans are poor; by any reasonable standard another 20 to 30 million are needy. Poverty is increasing in the United States, not decreasing. For a people who believe in “progress,” this should be cause for alarm. These burdens fall most heavily on blacks, Hispanics, and Native Americans. Even more disturbing is the large increase in the number of women and children living in poverty. Today children are the largest singly group among the poor. This tragic fact seriously threatens the nation’s future. That so many people are poor in a nation as rich as ours is a social and moral scandal that we cannot ignore. ***ECONOMIC JUSTICE FOR ALL, 16***

Many working people and middle-class Americans live dangerously close to poverty. A rising number of families must rely on the wages of two or even three members just to get by. From 1968 to 1978 nearly a quarter of the U.S. population was in poverty part of the time and received welfare benefits in at least one year. The loss of a job, illness, or the breakup of a marriage may all it takes to push people to poverty.

ECONOMIC JUSTICE FOR ALL, 17

The past twenty years have witnessed a dramatic increase in the number of women in poverty. This includes women raising children alone as well as women with inadequate income following divorce, widowhood, or retirement. More than one third of all female-headed families are poor. Among minority families headed by women the poverty rate is over 50 percent. ***ECONOMIC JUSTICE FOR ALL, 179***

Wage discrimination against women is a major factor behind these high rates of poverty. Many women are employed but remain poor because their wages are too low. Women who work outside their homes full-time and year-round earn only 61 percent of what men earn. Thus, being employed full-time is not by itself a remedy for poverty among women. Hundreds of thousands of women hold full-time jobs but are still poor. Sixty percent of all women work in only ten occupations, and most new jobs for women are in areas with low pay and limited chances of advancement. Many women suffer discrimination in wages, salaries, job classifications, promotions, and other areas. As a result, they find themselves in jobs that have low status, little security, weak unionization, and few fringe benefits. Such discrimination is immoral and efforts must be made to overcome the effects of sexism in our society. ***ECONOMIC JUSTICE FOR ALL, 179***

Women’s responsibilities for childbearing are another important factor to be considered. Despite the many changes in marriage and family life in recent decades, women continue to have primary responsibility in this area. When marriages break up, mothers typically take custody of the children and bear the major financial responsibility for supporting them. Women often anticipate that they will leave the labor force to have and raise children, and often make job and career choices accordingly. In other cases they are not hired or promoted to higher paying jobs because of their childbearing responsibilities. In

addition, most divorced or separated mothers do not get child support payments. In 1983, less than half of women raising children alone had been awarded child support, and of those, only half received the full amount to which they were entitled. Even fewer women (14%) are awarded alimony, and many older women are left in poverty after a lifetime of homemaking and childbearing. Such women have great difficulty finding jobs and securing health insurance. ***ECONOMIC JUSTICE FOR ALL, 180***

The lack of a mutually supportive relation between family life and economic life is one of the most serious problems facing the United States today. The economic and cultural strength of the nation is directly linked to the stability and health of its families. When families thrive, spouses contribute to the common good through their work at home, in the community, and in their jobs; and children develop a sense of their own worth and of their responsibility to serve others. When families are weak or break down entirely, the dignity of parents and children is threatened. High cultural and economic costs are inflicted on society at large. ***ECONOMIC JUSTICE FOR ALL, 18***

The investment of human creativity and material resources in the production of the weapons of war makes these economic problems even more difficult to solve. Defense Department expenditures in the United States are almost \$300 billion per year. The rivalry and mutual fear between superpowers divert into projects that threaten death, minds and money that could better human life. Developing countries engage in arms race they can ill afford, often with the encouragement of the superpowers. Some of the poorest countries of the world use scarce resources to buy planes, guns, and other weapons when they lack food, education, and health care their people need. ***ECONOMIC JUSTICE FOR ALL, 20***

As individuals and as a nation, therefore, we are called to make a fundamental “option to the poor”. The obligation to evaluate social and economic activity from the viewpoint of the poor and the powerless arises from the radical command to love one’s neighbor as one’s self. Those who are marginalized and whose rights are denied have privileged claims if society is to provide justice for *all*. This obligation is deeply rooted in Christian belief. As Paul VI stated: “In teaching us charity, the Gospel instructs us in the preferential respect due the poor and the special situation they have in society: the more fortunate should renounce some of their rights so as to place their goods more generously at the service of others.”

ECONOMIC JUSTICE FOR ALL, 87

Catholic social teaching does not require absolute equality in the distribution of income and wealth. Some degree of inequality not only is acceptable, but also may be considered desirable for economic and social reasons, such as the need for incentives and the provision of greater rewards for greater risks. However, unequal distribution should be evaluated in terms of several moral principles we have enunciated: the priority of meeting the basic needs of the poor and the importance of increasing the level of participation by all members of society in the economic life of the nation. These norms establish a strong presumption against extreme inequality of income and wealth as long as there are poor, hungry, and homeless people in our midst. They also suggest that extreme inequalities are

detrimental to the development of social solidarity and community. In view of these norms we find the disparities of income and wealth in the United States to be unacceptable. Justice requires that all members of our society work for economic, political, and social reforms that will decrease these inequities.

ECONOMIC JUSTICE FOR ALL, 185

“The needs of the poor take priority over the desires of the rich; the rights of workers over the maximization of profits; the preservation of the environment over uncontrolled industrial expansion; production to meet social needs over protection for military purposes.”

ECONOMIC JUSTICE FOR ALL, 94

The obligation to provide justice for all means that the poor have the single most urgent economic claim on the conscience of the nation. Poverty can take many forms, spiritual as well as material. All people face struggles of the spirit as they ask deep questions about their purpose in life. Many have serious problems in marriage and family life at some time in their lives, and all of us face the certain reality of sickness and death. The Gospel of Christ proclaims that God’s love is stronger than all these forms of diminishment. Material deprivation, however, seriously compounds such sufferings of the spirit and obtaining health care is worse. To face family problems, such as death of a spouse or a divorce, can be devastating, but to have these lead to the loss of one’s home and end with living on the streets is something no one should have to endure in a country as rich as ours. In developing countries these human problems are even more greatly intensified by extreme material deprivation. This form of human suffering can be reduced if our country, so rich in resources, chooses to increase its assistance.

ECONOMIC JUSTICE FOR ALL, 86

The primer purpose of this special commitment to the poor is to enable them to become active participants in the life of society. It is to enable all persons to share in and contribute to the common good. The “option for the poor,” therefore, is not an adversarial slogan that pits one group or class against another. Rather, it states that the deprivation and powerlessness of the poor wounds the whole community. The extent of their suffering is a measure of how far we are from being a true community of persons. These wounds will be healed only by greater solidarity with the poor and among the poor themselves.

ECONOMIC JUSTICE FOR ALL, 88

The quality of the national discussion about our economic future will affect the poor most of all, in this country and throughout the world. The life and dignity of millions of men, women, and children hang in the balance. Decisions must be judged in light of what they do *for* the poor, what they do *to* the poor, and what they enable the poor to do *for themselves*. The fundamental moral criterion for all economic decisions, policies, and institutions is this: They must be at the service of *all people, especially the poor*.

ECONOMIC JUSTICE FOR ALL, 24

As followers of Christ, we are challenged to make a fundamental “option for the poor”—to speak for the voiceless, to defend the defenseless, to assess life styles, policies, and social institutions in terms of their impact on the poor. This “option for the poor” does not mean pitting one group against another, but rather, strengthening the whole community by assisting those who are the most vulnerable. As Christians, we are called to respond to the needs of all our brothers and sisters, but those with the greatest needs require the greatest response.

ECONOMIC JUSTICE FOR ALL, 16

Basic justice demands the establishment of minimum levels of participation in the life of the human community for all persons. The ultimate injustice is for a person or group to be treated actively or abandoned passively as if they were nonmembers of the human race. To treat people this way is effectively to say that they simply do not count as human beings. This can take many forms, all of which can be described as varieties of marginalization, or exclusion from social life.

ECONOMIC JUSTICE FOR ALL, 77

The way society responds to the needs of the poor through its public policies is the litmus test of its justice or injustice.

ECONOMIC JUSTICE FOR ALL, 123

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ECONOMIC JUSTICE FOR ALL, 88

The international economic order, like many aspects of our own economy, is in crisis; the gap between rich and poor countries and between rich and poor people within countries is widening. The United States represents the most powerful single factor in the international economic equation. . . . The United States cannot be the sole savior of the developing world, nor are the Third World countries entirely innocent with respect to their own failures or totally helpless to achieve their own destinies. Many of these countries will need to initiate positive steps to promote and sustain development and economic growth—streamline bureaucracies, account for funds, plan reasonable programs, and take further steps toward empowering their people. Progress toward development will surely require them to take some tough remedial measures as well: prevent the flight of capital, reduce borrowing, modify price discrimination against rural areas, eliminate corruption in the use of funds and other resources, and curtail spending on inefficient public enterprises. The pervasive U.S. presence in many parts of our interdependent world, however, also creates a responsibility for us to increase the use of

U.S. economic power—not just aid—in the service of human dignity and human rights, both political and economic.

ECONOMIC JUSTICE FOR ALL, 288, 290

...most of the policy issues generally called economic are, at root, moral and therefore require the application of moral principles derived from Scriptures and from the evolving social teaching of the Church and other traditions... These perspectives constitute a call for fundamental reform in the international economic order... Catholic social teaching emphasizes not only the individual conscience, but also the political, legal, and economic structures through which policy is determined and issues are adjudicated... *Here, as elsewhere, the preferential option for the poor is the central priority for policy choice.* It offers a unique perspective on foreign policy in whose light U.S. relationships, especially with developing countries, can be reassessed. Standard foreign policy analysis deals with calculations of power and definitions of national interest; but the poor are, by definition, not powerful. If we are to give appropriate weight to their concerns, their needs, and their interests, we have to go beyond economic gain or national security as a starting point for policy dialogue. We want to stand with the poor everywhere, and we believe that relations between the U.S. and developing nations should be determined in the first place by the concern for basic human needs and respect for cultural traditions.

ECONOMIC JUSTICE FOR ALL, 259,260, 291,292.

RACISM

First among the rules governing the relations between states is that of truth. This calls, above all, for the elimination of every trace of racism, and the consequent recognition of the principle that all states are by nature equal in dignity.

PACEM IN TERRIS: Peace on Earth, 86

But any kind of social or cultural discrimination in basic personal rights on the grounds of sex, race, color, social conditions, language or religion, must be curbed and eradicated as incompatible with God's design.

THE CHURCH IN THE MODERN WORLD, 29

Despite the gains which have been made toward racial equality, prejudice and discrimination in our own time as well as the effects of past discrimination continue to exclude many members of racial minorities from the mainstream of American life. Discriminatory practices in labor markets, in educational systems, and in electoral politics create major obstacles for blacks, Hispanics, Native Americans, and other racial minorities in their struggle to improve their economic status. Such discrimination is evidence of the continuing presence of racism in our midst. In our pastoral letter, *Brothers and Sisters to Us*, we have described this racism as 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."

ECONOMIC JUSTICE FOR ALL, 182

Access to employment and to professions must be open to all without unjust discrimination: men and women, healthy and disabled, natives and immigrants. For its part society should, according to circumstances, help citizens find work and employment.
CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH, 2433

The structures of our society are subtly racist, for these structures reflect the values which society upholds. They are geared to the success of the majority and the failure of the minority. Members of both groups give unwitting approval by accepting things as they are. Perhaps no single individual is to blame. The sinfulness is often anonymous but nonetheless real. The sin is social in nature in that each of us, in varying degrees, is responsible. All of us in some measure are accomplices. “The absence of personal fault for an evil does not absolve one of all responsibility. We must seek to resist and undo injustices we have not ceased, least we become bystanders who tacitly endorse evil and so share in guilt in it.”

BROTHERS AND SISTERS TO US, U.S. BISHOPS, 1979

Racism is the sin that says some human beings are inherently superior and others essentially inferior because of races. It is the sin that makes racial characteristics the determining factor for the exercise of human rights.

BROTHERS AND SISTERS TO US, U.S. BISHOPS, 1979

Racism and economic oppression are distinct but interrelated forces which dehumanize our society. Movement toward authentic justice demands a simultaneous attack on both evils.

BROTHERS AND SISTERS TO US, U.S. BISHOPS, 1979

Crude and blatant expression of racist sentiment, though they occasionally exist, are today considered bad form. Yet racism itself persists in covert ways. Under the guise of other motives, it is manifest in the tendency to stereotype and marginalize whole segments of the population whose presence is perceived as a threat. It is manifest also in the indifference that replaces open hatred.

BROTHERS AND SISTERS TO US, U.S. BISHOPS, 1979

Each of us Catholics must acknowledge a share in the mistakes and sins of the past. Many of us have been prisoners of fear and prejudice. We have preached the Gospel while closing our eyes to the racism it condemns. We have allowed conformity to social pressures to replace compliance with social justice.

BROTHERS AND SISTERS TO US, U.S. BISHOPS, 1979

Let the Church proclaim to all that the sin of racism defiles the image of God and degrades the sacred dignity of humankind which has been revealed by the mystery of the Incarnation. Let all know that it is a terrible sin that mocks the cross of Christ and ridicules the Incarnation. For the brother and sister of our Brother Jesus Christ are brother and sister to us.

BROTHERS AND SISTERS TO US, U.S. BISHOPS, 1979

Racism is not merely one sin among many; it is a radical evil that divides the human family and denies the new creation of a redeemed world. To struggle against it demands an equally radical transformation, in our own minds and hearts as well as in the structure of our society.

BROTHERS AND SISTERS TO US, U.S. BISHOPS, 1979

Equality does not mean uniformity. It is important to recognize the diversity and complementarity of one another's cultural riches and moral qualities. Equality of treatment therefore implies a certain recognition of differences which minorities themselves demand in order to develop according to their specific characteristics, in respect for others and for the common good of society and the world community. No human group, however, can boast of having a natural superiority over others, or of exercising any discrimination that affects the basic rights of the person.

THE CHURCH AND RACISM,

PONTIFICAL COMMISSION ON JUSTICE AND PEACE, 1988, 23

Racism will disappear from legal texts only when it dies in people's hearts. However, there must also be direct action in the legislative field. Wherever discriminatory laws still exist, the citizens who are aware of the perversity of this ideology must assume their responsibilities so that, through democratic processes, legislation will be put in harmony with the moral law. Within a given State, the law must be equal for all citizens without distinction. A dominant group, whether numerically in the majority or minority, can never do as it likes with the basic rights of other groups. It is important for ethnic, linguistic, or religious minorities who live within the borders of the same State, to enjoy recognition of the same inalienable rights as other citizens, including the right to live together according to their specific cultural and religious characteristics. Their choice to be integrated into the surrounding culture must be a free one.

THE CHURCH AND RACISM,

PONTIFICAL COMMISSION ON JUSTICE AND PEACE, 1988, 29

The 1965 U.N. Convention expressed this conviction forcefully: "Any doctrine of superiority based on the difference between races is scientifically false, morally condemnable and socially unjust and dangerous." The Church's doctrine affirms it with no less vigor: all racist theories are contrary to Christian faith and love. And yet, in sharp contrast to this growing awareness of human dignity, racism still exists and continually reappears in different forms. It is a wound in humanity's side that mysteriously remains open. Everyone, therefore, must make efforts to heal it with great firmness and patience.

THE CHURCH AND RACISM,

PONTIFICAL COMMISSION ON JUSTICE AND PEACE, 1988, 33

We must encourage Black leaders in the American Church—clergy, religious and lay. Unhappily, we must acknowledge that the major hindrance to the full development of Black leadership within the Church is still racism. Blacks and other minorities are meagerly represented on the decision-making level. Inner-city schools are disappearing

and Black vocational recruitment lacks support. This subtle racism still festers within our Church as it does in society. Some progress has been made, but much remains to do.

The causes of justice and social concern are an essential part of evangelization. To preach to the powerful without denouncing oppression is to trivialize the Gospel. As Black people we must have concern for those who hunger and thirst for justice throughout the world. We must not ignore those whom others tend to forget, and even contribute our efforts and money. When we share our talents and our possessions with the forgotten ones of this world, we share Christ. This is the essence of evangelization itself.

***WHAT WE HAVE SEEN AND HEARD: A PASTORAL LETTER ON
EVANGELIZATION FROM THE BLACK BISHOPS OF THE UNITED STATES***

I believe that two broad types of racism need to be recognized and resisted: individual and institutional. Individual racism is evident when a person adopts attitudes or takes actions that are based on the assumption of racial superiority. Such attitudes and actions violate the rights and dignity of other people because of race.

A second type of racism is institutional or structural. This type of racism exists where patterns of racial superiority are embedded in the systems and institutions of society. Such racism is less blatant and more complex, but it exists nonetheless. It is present wherever systems and institutions are created and maintained in such a way that they provide privilege or prejudice for one race over others. This type of racism can be seen, to varying degrees, in many of our social, economic, and political structures, including the structures of our Church.

***IN GOD'S IMAGE PERSONAL LETTER ON RACISM, Archbishop Harry Flynn,
2003, 5, 6***

I concur with my predecessor, Archbishop Roach, who said, "An appreciation of racial diversity begins with an understanding of how our own lives are affected by skin color and race. Each of us should examine how our thinking and our actions are influenced by the color of our skin. How has my skin color enhanced my life or hindered me, helped or prevented me from understanding people of other races? How can I enhance my own life by learning more about other races?" (*Reviving the Common Good, 1991*)

***IN GOD'S IMAGE PASTORAL LETTER ON RACISM, Archbishop Harry Flynn,
2003, 35***

INTER-RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

This must be listed among the rights of a human being, to honor God according to the sincere dictates of his own conscience, and therefore the right to practice his religion privately and publicly.

PACEM IN TERRIS: Peace on Earth, 14

This Vatican Council declares that the human person has a right to religious freedom. This freedom means that all men are to be immune from coercion on the part of

individuals or of social groups and of any human power, in such that in religious matters no one is to be forced to act against his conscience, or is, within just limits, to be hindered from acting in conformity with his conscience, whether privately or publicly, whether alone or in association with others. The Council further declares that the right to religious freedom has its foundation in the very dignity of the human person, as this dignity is known through the revealed word of God and by reason itself. This right of the human person to religious freedom must be recognized in the constitutional law governing society in such a way that it becomes a civil right. *Dignitatis Humanae, 2*

To search for methods and ways of opening a suitable dialogue with non-Christians. It should strive, therefore, in order that non-Christians come to be known honestly and esteemed justly by Christians, and that in their turn non-Christians can esteem Christian doctrine and life. **AAS 59, 1967, pp. 919-920**

The Fathers of the Second Vatican Council affirm that in the religious traditions of non-Christians there exist “elements which are true and good” (*Optatam Totius 16*), “precious things, both religious and human” (*Gaudium et Spes 92*), “seeds of contemplation” (*Ad Gentes 18*), “elements of truth and grace” (*Ad Gentes 9*), “seeds of the Word” (*Ad Gentes 11,15*), and “rays of the truth which illumines humankind” (*Nostra Aetate 2*). These values are found preserved in the great religious traditions of humanity. Therefore, they merit the attention and the esteem of Christians, and their spiritual patrimony is a genuine invitation to dialogue (cf. *Nostra Aetate 2, 3; Ad Gentes 11*), not only in those things which unite us, but also in our differences.

There are finally those who have not yet received the Gospel; they too are ordained in various ways to the People of God. In the first place there stands that people to which covenants and promises were given and from which Christ was born according to the flesh (cf. Rom. 9.4-50), a people of election most dear to God because of their Fathers; for the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable (cf. Rom. 11.28-29). The plan of salvation includes those also who acknowledge the Creator; foremost among these are the Muslims: they profess fidelity to the faith of Abraham and, with us, adore the one and merciful God who will judge humankind on the last day. Nor is God far from those who in shadows and images seek the unknown God; for He gives to all men life and breath and all things (cf. Acts 17.25-28), and as Savior desires all men to be saved (cf. 1 Tim. 2.4). For those also can attain eternal salvation who without fault on their part do not know the Gospel of Christ and His Church, but seek God with a sincere heart, and under the influence of grace endeavor to do His will as recognized through the promptings of their conscience.

Nor does divine Providence deny the help necessary for salvation to those who, without fault on their part, have not yet reached an explicit knowledge of God, and yet endeavor, not without divine grace, to live a good life, for whatever goodness or truth is found among them is considered by the Church as a preparation for the Gospel, a gift from Him who enlightens every man that he may finally have life. (*Lumen Gentium, 16*)

The Catholic Church rejects nothing of what is true and holy in these religions. With sincere respect she looks on those ways of conduct and life, those precepts and teachings which, though differing on many points from what she herself holds and teaches, yet not rarely reflect a ray of the Truth which enlightens all men. But she proclaims and must ever proclaim Christ, “the way, the truth and the life” (Jn. 14.6), in whom men find the fullness of religious life, and in whom God has reconciled all things to Himself (cf. 2 Cor. 5.18f). And so the Church has this exhortation: prudently and lovingly, through dialogue and collaboration with the followers of other religions, and in witness to the Christian faith and life, acknowledge, preserve, and promote the spiritual and moral good, as well as the socio-cultural values found among them. (*Nostra Aetate, 2*)

That they may be able to give this witness to Christ fruitfully (Christians) ought to be joined to the people of their time by esteem and love, and acknowledge themselves to be members of the group of people among whom they live. Let them share in cultural and social life by the various exchanges and enterprises of human living. Thus, they ought to know well the religious and cultural traditions of others, happy to discover and ready to respect seeds of the Word which are hidden in them...as Christ himself..., so also his disciples should know the people among whom they live and should establish contact with them, to learn by sincere and patient dialogue what treasures a bountiful God has distributed among the nations of the earth. At the same time, let them try to illumine these treasures with the light of the gospel, to set them free, and to bring them under the dominion of God their Savior.” (*Ad Gentes 11*; cf. *Ad Gentes 41*; *Apostolicam Actuositatem 14, 29*)

Before all else, dialogue is a manner of acting, an attitude and a spirit which guides one’s conduct. It implies concern, respect, and hospitality towards the other. It leaves room for the other person’s identity, his modes of expression, and his values. Dialogue is thus the norm and necessary manner of every form of Christian mission, as well as of every aspect of it, whether one speaks of simple presence and witness, service, or direct proclamation. (**CIC 787 no.1**)

Respect and love ought to be extended also to those who think and act differently from us in social, political, and even religious matters. In fact, the more deeply we come to understand their ways of thinking through sympathy and love, the more easily shall we be able to enter into dialogue with them. Of course, this love and kindness must never make us in any way indifferent to what is good. Rather, love itself impels the disciples of Christ to announce the saving truth to all men. But we must distinguish between the error, which is always to be repudiated, and the man in error who always keeps the dignity of every person, even when he is flawed by false or less accurate religious ideas. God alone is the judge and searcher of hearts; hence He forbids us to make judgment about the interior guilt of anyone. (cf. Lk. 6.37f; Mt.7.1f; Rom.2.1-11;14.10-12). (*Gaudium et Spes, 28*)

This type of relationship indicates a proposal of courteous esteem, of understanding, and of goodness on the part of the one who inaugurates the dialogue; it excludes the *a priori* condemnation, the offensive and time-worn polemic, the emptiness of useless

conversation. If this approach does not aim at effecting the immediate conversion of the interlocutor, inasmuch as it respects both his dignity and his freedom, nevertheless it does aim at helping him, and tries to dispose him for a fuller sharing of sentiments and convictions. (*ECCLESIAM SUAM, III, par. 20*)

Referring in particular to Muslims, the Second Vatican Council exhorts both parties to “forget the past” and to defend and promote together social justice, moral values, peace, and liberty” (*Nostra Aetate* 3; cf. *Ad Gentes* 11, 12, 15, 21). In the same sense there are statements of Pope Paul VI, especially in *ECCLESIAM SUAM* (AAS 56, 1964, p.655), and of John Paul II in numerous meetings with the heads and representatives of various religions. The great problems with which humanity is struggling call on Christians to work together with other believers by virtue of their respective faiths.

We also turn our thoughts to all who acknowledge God and who preserve in their traditions precious elements of religion and humanity. We want open dialogue to compel us all to receive the inspirations of the Spirit faithfully and to measure up to them energetically. The desire for such dialogue, conducted with appropriate discretion and leading to truth by way of love alone, excludes nobody. We include in this those who respect high-minded values without recognizing who the author of those values is, as well as those who oppose the church and persecute it in various ways. Since God the Father is the origin and purpose of humankind, we are all called to be brothers and sisters. Therefore, if we have been summoned to the same destiny, which is both human and divine, we can and should work together without violence and deceit in order to build up genuine peace in the world. (*Gaudium et Spes* 92; cf. also, the messages of Popes Paul VI and John Paul II for the World Day of Peace).

As the Holy Father, Pope John Paul II, said to the representatives of the world religions at the conclusion of the 27 October 1986 World Day of Prayer for Peace at Assisi: “Either we learn to walk together in peace and harmony, or we drift apart and ruin ourselves and others. We hope that this pilgrimage to Assisi has taught us anew to be aware of the common origin and common destiny of humanity. Let us see in it an anticipation of what God would like the developing history of humanity to be: a fraternal journey in which we accompany one another towards the transcendent goal which he sets for us” (*John Paul II: Address at Assisi, n.5, in L’OSSERVATORE ROMANO, 27-28 October 1986, p.4*)

There is only one divine plan for every human being who comes into this world, one single origin and goal... The differences are a less important element, when confronted with the unity which is radical, fundamental and decisive.” (John Paul II: Address to Roman Curia on 22 Dec. 1986, n. 3, in *INSEGNAMENTI DI GIOVANNI PAOLO II, X,2, 1986, p.2021*)

The Assisi World Day of Prayer for Peace captured the attention of the world and delivered an urgent message. As the Holy Father says: “The coming together of so many religious leaders to pray is in itself an invitation today to the world to become more aware that there exists another dimension of peace and another way of promoting it which is not a result of negotiations, political compromises, or economic bargainings. It is the result of

prayer which, in the diversity of religions, expresses a relationship with a supreme power that surpasses our human capacities alone...Our meeting attests only—and this is its real significance for the people of our time—that in the great battle for peace, humanity, in its very diversity, must draw from its deepest and most vivifying sources where its conscience is formed and upon which is founded the moral action of its people.” (**John Paul II: Welcoming Address on 27 October 1986, in L’OSSERVATORE ROMANO, 27-28 October 1986, p. 2)**)

We cannot truly pray to God the Father of all if we treat any people in other than brotherly fashion, for all men are created in God’s image. Man’s relation to God the Father and man’s relation to his fellow-men are so dependent on each other that the Scripture says, “he who does not love, does not know God.” (1Jn.4:8) (**Nostra Aetate,5**)