

Notes on Anti-Racist Work and the Identity and Mission of the Catholic University

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These are notes that could serve as a potential aid for a better understanding of the relationship between the identity and mission of the Catholic University and the struggle for racial justice and equality, especially for Black, Indigenous, other people of colour and people who experience oppression within our contexts. This document comes from the activities of the King's/Brescia Joint Principals' Anti-Racism Working Group.

The Catholic University as a Community in Pursuit of Truth

The identity of Catholic institutions of higher learning has been clearly defined recently by the Pope John Paul II in 1990 in a document called *Ex corde ecclesiae* (ECE), the apostolic constitution on the nature and mission of Catholic universities. The title derives from the first line: "Born from the heart of the Church (*ex corde ecclesiae*), a Catholic University is located in that course of tradition which may be traced back to the very origin of the University as an institution" (ECE 1).

Although ECE does not contain an explicit treatment of the theme of race, it is important for us because it contains a vision of the Catholic University as *a community of scholars, learners and staff united in the pursuit of truth*.

Resources

- *Ex corde ecclesiae* (Vatican website), http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_constitutions/documents/hf_jp-ii_apc_15081990_ex-corde-ecclesiae.html
- Mark Yenson, *Ex corde ecclesiae* and the Mission of a Catholic University: An Introduction and Resource for Conversation (document prepared for the Academic Plan Advisory Group, 2021)
- Neil Ormerod, "Mission-driven and Identity Shaped: *ex corde ecclesiae* Revisited," (available through Western library) <https://journals-sagepub-com.proxy1.lib.uwo.ca/doi/pdf/10.1177/0021140013497441>

An Uncomfortable Truth to Face

One of the uncomfortable truths that has come to the fore as an issue of utmost urgency for us recently is the reality that systemic racism is alive and well in various ways, yes, even in our particular contexts at King's and Brescia. That manifests in forms that range from overt and covert discrimination on the basis of race, to the still largely unacknowledged "white privilege"

and the resultant disadvantaging of people of colour. Concretely, this racism expresses itself in many areas of university life, such as in hiring practices, the lack of presence of people of colour in our various sectors, programs, curriculum, and pedagogy, among other things.

Resources

- Black Catholics: Words Not Enough as Church Decries Racism (Associated Press): <https://www.voanews.com/usa/race-america/black-catholics-words-not-enough-church-decries-racism>
- Catholic university leaders call for their institutions to address systemic racism (National Catholic Reporter): <https://www.ncronline.org/news/justice/catholic-university-leaders-call-their-institutions-address-systemic-racism>
- White Catholics have 'to talk about race and to admit their racism' (America Magazine): https://www.americamagazine.org/politics-society/2016/07/27/white-catholics-have-talk-about-race-and-admit-their-racism?gclid=Cj0KCQiAnb79BRDgARIsAOVbhRpu5NNtOvKkLT3tSdaTV6kmgj5zCSqy5AOp_iGk-mseMo6Y-2k1OLfQaAkE-EALw_wcB
- Fr. Bryan Massingale (a black Catholic priest and outspoken advocate against racism in the Catholic Church,): The assumptions of white privilege and what we can do about it: <https://www.ncronline.org/news/opinion/assumptions-white-privilege-and-what-we-can-do-about-it>

Catholic Social Teaching and Racism

As institutions of higher learning that identify as Catholic, we feel the urgency, in accordance with the vision expressed in *Ex corde ecclesiae*, to face this uncomfortable truth of racism, reflect on it, and act in order to achieve *the social justice and peace* that are, in turn, hallmarks of the social teaching of the Catholic tradition.

Resources

- **IMPORTANT!** List of Catholic Documents on Racism and Discrimination compiled by the Conference of Canadian Bishops: <https://www.cccb.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Racism-and-Discrimination-Catholic-documents-online.pdf>
- **NB!** Catholic 101: Church Teaching and the Anti-Racism Movement: <https://thejesuitpost.org/2020/07/catholic-101-should-a-catholic-be-an-antiracist/>
- **NB!** Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace – *The Church and Racism: Toward a More Fraternal Society*. This is a document from a Vatican council that deals more explicitly with the theme of racism originally written in 1988 and updated in 2001. <https://www.humandevlopment.va/content/dam/sviluppoumano/pubblicazioni-documenti/archivio/diritti-umani/The%20Church%20against%20Racism%202001-1988.pdf>
- Catholic Social Teaching and Racism: <http://www.loyno.edu/jsri/sites/loyno.edu.jsri/files/CSTandRacism-Fall2009jsq.pdf>

- A useful summary of the above document prepared by Boston College:
https://www.bc.edu/content/dam/files/research_sites/cjl/texts/cirelations/resources/documents/catholic/church_Racism.html
- Fr. Bryan Massingale on Catholic institutions of higher learning and racism
<https://www.ncronline.org/news/justice/catholic-college-leaders-must-heal-racial-divides-massingale-says?fbclid=IwAR1TOniXbFPJRnOHhGKOG8M-GBQjYUcalbDJUfaLXWgdkCp4xilxv-iynAs>

The Struggle against Racism in the Wider World

The struggle against racism and the effort to achieve a more just, equitable, and peaceful order in our local contexts and community at King's and Brescia are very much in line with the vision expressed in various wider religious and civic communities.

Resources

- Anti-Racism. Some Resources from the Parliament of the World's Religions:
<https://parliamentofreligions.org/tags/anti-racism>
- Racism - Where do We Go from Here? From the Parliament of the World's Religions:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2wV04rKb1GM>
- Canadian Human Rights Commission on Racial, Ethnic and Religious Rights:
<https://www.chrc-ccdp.gc.ca/eng/content/religious-rights>

Religion / Catholicism and Racism

We must also remember, however, that religion in general and Catholicism in particular have a "mixed" track record with regard to racism. Although they are admirably trying to confront racism in the present through the lens of faith, they also have a dark side: they have been and continue to be complicit with racist practices in some ways. An honest and courageous acknowledgement of this fact is necessary if we are to confront and uproot racism now and in the future.

Resources

- Confronting racism in faith (video presentation):
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qT7KWV1mgcg> / Also:
<https://catholiccharitiesny.org/news/racism-through-lens-faith>
- Fr. Bryan Massingale: How the church can combat racism and white privilege:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ONiie2oYJCQ>
- Fr. Bryan Massingale: If bishops want to face racism, own your own complicity:
<https://cruxnow.com/church-in-the-usa/2017/08/bishops-want-face-racism-complicity-theologian-says/>

Liberation Theology's Methodology as a Possible Guide

A methodology based on liberation theology is arguably one of the best ways to reflect on and act against racism within a religious faith perspective. This framework consists of a tripartite structure which can be described broadly as: **(1)** Starting with life (observation and analysis of concrete human situations where oppression is present; commitment to a liberative praxis inspired by the religious tradition; This is sometimes known as the 'See' Phase); **(2)** Deepening the analysis by correlating the liberative aspects of the tradition with the oppressive human situations just analyzed in Phase 1 and reflecting on how to make the liberating power proclaimed by the tradition bear upon the concrete human situation of oppression; This is known as the 'Judge' Phase); then, **(3)** Returning to life with an enlightened and strengthened liberative praxis (the 'Act' Phase). Classical liberation theology has termed this tripartite structure its 'three mediations': (1) socio-analytical mediation, (2) hermeneutical mediation, and (3) practical mediation.

In that scheme, we can identify racism-white-privilege as the life-situations that we are trying to deal with. We are immersed in that situation. As a concrete step, we plan to conduct interviews with various members of our community as a way of knowing well these oppressive life-situations. As a second step, we engage in reflection on those concrete life situations and correlate them with the various liberative strands in the religious tradition and the wider community. Coming full circle, we return to life with insights gleaned from phase two and with the firm resolve to continue in the struggle to resist oppression and make the community a more wholesome place with true justice and peace for all, especially those who are disadvantaged.

Resources

- Ignacio Ellacuría and Jon Sobrino, eds., *Mysterium Liberationis: Fundamental Concepts of Liberation Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1993), 57-85
- Leonardo Boff and Clodovis Boff, *Introducing Liberation Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1987), 22-42.
- Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1973, 1988)
- Julius-Kei Kato, "Toward an Asian North American Liberationist Hermeneutics," in *The T&T Clark Handbook to Asian American Biblical Hermeneutics*, edited by Uriah Kim and Seung Ai Yang (London: T&T Clark/Bloomsbury, 2019), chapter 13.
