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Weeping All the Way to Zion: Vatican II, Catholic Social Ethics, and the Black Freedom Struggle in Milwaukee

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WEEPING ALL THE WAY TO ZION: VATICAN II, CATHOLIC SOCIAL ETHICS, AND THE BLACK

FREEDOM STRUGGLE IN MILWAUKEE

by

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ABSTRACT

WEEPING ALL THE WAY TO ZION: VATICAN II, CATHOLIC SOCIAL ETHICS,
AND THE BLACK FREEDOM STRUGGLE IN MILWAUKEE

by

Samuel Cocar

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2022
Under the Supervision of Professor Dr. Joe Austin

The Second Vatican Council convened between October 1962 and December 1965. In the years immediately following, American Catholics, as well as co-religionists the world over, were left to interpret and navigate an event and literary corpus which had fundamentally recalibrated not only the dominant theological method for the Church, but also redefined its posture toward the world and social issues. The established traditions of Catholic Social Teaching (CST) as well as the paroxysms of Vatican II, figured prominently in the Milwaukee iteration of the Civil Rights Movement/Black Freedom Struggle, in which one of the most visible figures was progressive priest Rev. James E. Groppi (1930-1985). Employing nonviolent protest and preaching, Groppi pursued common cause with Milwaukee legislators like Lloyd Barbee and Velvalea "Vel" Phillips.

However, the concept of Catholic thought and praxis as sympathetic to, and even a vehicle for, pro-Black racial activism angered many white Catholics in Milwaukee and often provoked rancor and obfuscation from episcopal authorities. Ultimately, the divergent rhetorical and theological/social deployments of Catholic dogma within the microcosm of Milwaukee point to Roman Catholicism as a massive historical entity unable to speak univocally to racial justice. Rather, the Roman Catholic tradition is complex and ambivalent, lending putative support to polarized social agendas, from the radical and progressive to the conservative and institutional.

Dedicated to Valerie

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The story of the Negro in America is the story of America--or, more precisely, it is the story of Americans…He is a social and not a personal or a human problem; to think of him is to think of statistics, slums, rapes, injustices, remote violence… Our dehumanization of the Negro then is indivisible from our dehumanization of ourselves.
        -James Baldwin, *Notes of a Native Son*[1]

[There] is one evil that makes its way into the world surreptitiously… It begins with an individual whose name history does not bother to record...that evil is slavery. Christianity had destroyed servitude; the Christians of the sixteenth century reinstated it. They never accepted it, however, as anything other than an exception to their social system, and they were careful to restrict it to only one of the races of man. Hence the wound they inflicted on humanity was not as large as it might have been, but infinitely more difficult to heal.
        -Alexis de Tocqueville, ¨Situation of the Black Race in the United States¨

      The chapters that follow lend a particular angle of perspective on the story of Civil Rights activism in Milwaukee--itself one iteration of a movement which unfolded across the United States across several decades. That movement, which historians have tended to locate chronologically in the Fifties, Sixties, and early Seventies, touched all aspects of Black social and political life, including urban, suburban, and rural municipalities in the North and South.

      As one wades through the deep and deepening waters of Civil Rights/Black liberation historiography, some tendencies become clear in the literature. Among other predispositions, the 'Southern' theater of Civil Rights activism--the vanguard of which was indisputably Martin Luther King, Jr. and organizationally, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC)--is regarded as the normative, dominant and generally correct expression. By contrast, urban and northern activism is often treated as inchoate, leaderless, or marred by militancy. Second, the collective role of theology, religious/homiletical rhetoric, and faith communities is under-represented as a substantive shaper of Civil Rights activism. This may seem paradoxical in light of the first axiom. After all, people like King, Vernon Johns, Fannie Lou Hamer and Rosa Parks

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[1] James Baldwin, *Notes of a Native Son* (New York, NY: Bantam Books, 1955), 18-19.

were either in the clergy or well-known for their Christian faith. Nevertheless, this has not prevented religious and theological discourses from often being sidelined as window dressing for the movement, a canvas for King's and other leaders' rhetorical prowess. These are methodological and perspectival deficits to which we shall return. The present story, which broaches 1960s Milwaukee at the intersection of Black liberationism and Roman Catholic dogma and leadership, represents a minor entry in the growing counter-historiography.

<div align="center">♣♣♣</div>

James Baldwin, the late, Harlem-born novelist and social critic, commented that the library shelves were ´creaking under the weight´ of books devoted to explaining and solving the ´race problem´ in the United States. Baldwin himself contributed to much of this creaking. Through a prolific corpus of essays, poems, plays and novels, Baldwin worked to shed light on African American religiosity, the ghetto, neocolonialism and the Black experience in America.[2] Over the last two generations since his death in 1987, critical, scholarly attention to Black activism--and to the adjacent issues of mass incarceration, de facto segregation, anti-poverty policy and the like--has continued apace. It bears asking, earnestly, why ought we to see more contributions to this literary space?

It would seem that there are two broad lines of response to this. First, whether we situate the discipline of history among the social sciences or the humanities, the historian stoutly insists that the knowable past holds value on its own terms and for its own sake. This is to say that

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[2] A good place to approach this body of work is James Baldwin, *Collected Essays* (New York, NY: Library of America, 1998). An important encapsulation of the center of Baldwin's thought is to be found in his longform letter to his nephew: "This innocent country set you down in a ghetto in which, in fact, it intended that you should perish. Let me spell out precisely what I mean by that, [for this is] the root of my dispute with my country. You were born where you were born and faced the future you faced because you were black and *for no other reason...*You were born into a society which spelled out with brutal clarity, and in as many ways as possible, that you were a worthless human being." James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time* (New York, NY: Vintage, 1963), 7.

uncovering some piece of the past, its practices and personages, is intrinsically valuable. If it doesn't contribute directly to our self-knowledge, it can still contribute in a broader sense to our understanding of the human condition. As one of my undergraduate mentors put it, history is the queen of the contextual disciplines: everything has a history, and all of it both forms and informs us, no matter how esoteric it may seem to the uninitiated.[3]

Second, this historiography and critical scholarship is important because, in a more focused way, it exists in dialogue with live problems and policy debates in American civic life. We cannot in any rational way be said to have resolved the race problem in America. As I type these words, Dylann Roof, a white man of 27, stands to face the death penalty for the unprovoked mass murder of nine Black parishioners at a Methodist church in Charleston, South Carolina. Far-right news outlets have also whipped up conservative furor about Critical Race Theory (CRT) being taught in K12 schools--despite those outraged knowing often little about the actual content of CRT. Many white, conservative Americans now react defensively, if not belligerently, to the teaching of such concrete historical realities as antebellum slavery and ´Jim Crow.´[4]

Certain friends have suggested encouragingly that this thesis was written at a lucky, auspicious time for its subject--the long tail of the Black Lives Matter Movement and the George Floyd and Jacob Blake protests. This is both true and untrue. Progressive Black politics seems to

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[3] As with most humanistic disciplines, our understanding is indebted to the classical tradition. Critical history began with Herodotus and Thucydides; later, Plutarch would champion the study of ¨lives¨ (*bioi*) as a morally instructive, didactic exercise. Cf. Plutarch, *Lives* and *Moralia* in various editions. Herodotus, in particular, is considered a patriarch not only for history but for the discipline of ethnography--an important foundation for later racial analyses in social science and cultural studies.

[4] An important, enlightening exploration of the psychosocial dynamics involved in white Americans´ engagement with antiblack racism is Robin DiAngelo, *White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2018).

be having *a moment* in American culture at large, but it is doubtful to this writer that the words herein would reach any reader at any moment of widespread racial harmony in the United States. Racism and white supremacism are journalistic evergreens in American history. As Aldon Morris has written, ¨Race in America...is one of those stubborn social facts that will not disappear.¨[5]

If this sentiment seems biting or cynical, it is not meant to be. Rather, it reflects the historical and sociological observation that racialization and forms of racial order have woven into the American republic from its origin. As Nancy Isenberg explains in her excellent *White Trash*, American civic mythology tends to focus on the Puritans, pious pioneers who left England (and later, the Dutch Republic) to carve out modest homesteads and enjoy religious freedom in the American northeast. Far less frequently do we think of ourselves as descendants of the Chesapeake colonists, among whom were planter-barons whose desire to cultivate and profit from tobacco drove them to purchase enslaved Africans by the score.[6] Power disparities based on class, gender, and race have undercut and belied our aspirational egalitarianism from the very beginning of the American experiment.[7] Confronting our own history can be an ugly affair. It requires intellectual honesty and a jolt of moral courage.

Our discipline remains convicted that the products of historical reflection are not trifles. Every honest inquiry into racism, race relations, and white supremacism yields insights into who we are as a nation and how we might hew a better path forward. Of course, any invocation of

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[5] Morris, in Marlese Durr, ed., *The New Politics of Race: From DuBois to the 21st Century* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2002), 1.

[6] Conservative backlash against the longform journalistic endeavor of the 1619 Project, developed by Nikole Hannah-Jones, highlights the ways in which seemingly established facts about American origins still trigger intense partisan passions.

[7] See Nancy Isenberg, *White Trash: The 400-Year Untold History of Class in America* (New York, NY: Penguin Press, 2017), 5f.

¨progress¨ must be wary and provisional. As a record of human happiness and societal cohesion, history is emphatically illinear. The idea of progress must be assessed as a ´long game´ rather than a kind of quarterly earnings report. This is true of, say, wealth distribution, which has waxed and waned between generations in the United States. It is also emphatically true of race relations and realized Black citizenship: a decade of aggressive activism secures landmark legislation and new freedoms for Black Americans. Following this, a decade of more complacent or unfocused activism sees Black freedoms erode.[8] What's old is new again, but perhaps it is the case that *nothing* is new under the sun.

The schools and movements of years past that too strongly emphasized *progress* have tended ultimately to founder. The essential optimism of historical positivism in the 19th century crumpled under the human cost and enormity of two World Wars. The early conviction among sociologists that ethnic and racial conflicts--and even differentiation--would fade over the course of the 20th century disintegrated in the face of that century´s actual history: ethnoracial conflict and bloodshed on a hitherto unimagined scale.[9]

In any case, when progress unequivocally *does* take place, it manifests unevenly. As a historian and scholar of religion, I maintain an affinity for a kind of historical particularism. For me, the following questions are most operative: in what places, communities, and institutions do we see a disruption or contradiction of the status quo? What are the grounded practices, worldviews, and rhetorical frameworks that sustain these pockets of activity? Andrew Greeley, a

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[8] See Carol Anderson's treatment of the rollback of Civil Rights in the Nixon and Reagan eras. Carol Anderson, *White Rage: The Unspoken Truth of Our Racial Divide* (New York, NY: Bloomsbury, 2016), 98-115f.

[9] For a helpful breakdown of the concept of progress within different philosophies of history, see David Bebbington, *Patterns in History: A Christian Perspective on Historical Thought* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1990), 68-91.

priest and sociologist whose work is significant to the present study, might ask: *what is the new wine? And what are the new wineskins holding it?*[10] To my mind, this kind of historical approach is most keenly attuned to discontinuities and deviations. There is a natural analogy to the adjacent discipline of archaeology, for the archaeologist seeks pockets of exoticity and difference under uniform strata which, by their nature, bury, distort, and erase. Addressing erasure constitutes, in my estimation, a large part of the historical task. In his magisterial *Peasants into Frenchmen,* Romanian-American historian Eugen Weber elucidates the ways in which the French state gradually assimilated millions of ´citizens' with next to no national, political consciousness. Linguistically and culturally, *Frenchness* subsumed the regional identities of Normandy or Brittany or Auvergne.[11]

Another point in this vein ought to be considered. Each historian must make the choice, conditioned by personal style and scope of subject, to work in either small or large strokes. Several years ago, I came across *The History Manifesto,* written by Jo Guldi and David Armitage.[12] The *Manifesto* harpooned specificity. Contemporary historians, the authors argue, are working on overly specific topics and constrained chronological frames. A monograph on Wampanoag basket-weaving over a three-year period might risk esotericism and insularity, a disconnection from broader social concerns. By contrast, an earlier generation of historians, the Durants and Toynbees, as well as contemporary historians like Niall Ferguson, gravitated to

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[10] Cf. Andrew Greeley, *The Catholic Revolution: New Wine, Old Wineskins, and the Second Vatican Council* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2004).

[11] Eugen Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870-1914* (Redwood City, CA: Stanford University Press, 1976).

[12] Jo Guldi and David Armitage, *The History Manifesto* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

system-building; these historians, often deeply concerned about the Western heritage, have tended to write what might be termed civilizational or meta-histories.[13]

Although the choice is not precisely binary, and both approaches present value, my preference lies with the former. Granted, extremely granular monographs ought to display some connection to recognizable historical narratives and trends, and historians ought not to valorize idiosyncrasy for its own sake. Nevertheless, grand system-building presents greater pitfalls. This oeuvre is far too prone to cherry-pick favorable primary sources, silence BIPOC voices and histories, and adopt a kind of occidental triumphalism that conflates progress with capitalism and neocolonial hegemony. History must be made to conform to the philosophical system, and often that system spotlights the rising glories of the West. Smaller stories seem safer. They better respect the epistemological limitations of both the historian and the archive.[14]

This modest thesis is one such small story. It addresses various aspects of the Black Freedom Struggle, the Roman Catholic Church, and the city of Milwaukee. These are all sets or actors in the historical drama. The ways in which ought to think about this story, and the Civil Rights Movement at large which it adumbrates, require some further unpacking. Historical

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[13] See, for example, Niall Ferguson, *Civilization: The West and the Rest* (New York, NY: Penguin, 2018). Similarly, Samuel P. Huntington, in his hypothesis that disparate cultures/civilizations will fuel the conflict (and development) of the global community in the post-Cold War era, construes 'the West' as both unitary and superior to the others. Cf. Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 1996).

[14] In any event, Armitage and Guldi make some incorrect assertions in their critique. For one, it has been shown statistically that the chronological span of historical monographs is not narrowing. That is, historians are not increasingly writing about tighter and tighter timeframes. To another point, it is not necessarily the case that wide-angle historical narratives *in se* do a better job of illuminating and connecting to issues of social concern. Slavery is one example; the authors endorse the idea of a trans-civilizational history of the concept of slavery. Comparative historical analysis is, of course, valid. But the semantic, social, and historical differences between ancient Near Eastern, Greco-Roman, medieval European, and American chattel slavery are formidable. Such a treatise would require a serious investment in prolegomena, qualifications, and cultural translation. For a systematic refutation, see Deborah Cohen and Peter Mandler, ¨The History Manifesto: A Critique,¨ *American Historical Review* 120 (Apr 2015): 530-542.

method is akin to an iceberg: it operates mostly beneath the surface but lends sense and coherence to what is narratively visible.

Periodization

Each historian must locate his/her analysis within some time frame, some span of years or decades. This connects more or less directly to considerations about specificity and generality. Questions of period may seem straightforward, obvious, and quotidian, but they often entail or reflect a certain politics. For example, is it really the case that the French Revolution marked the death knell of feudalism? Did the Middle Ages really end in 1789? In what century do we locate the ´modern´ era? Should it coincide with Renaissance humanism, the Scientific Revolution, or the Industrial Revolution? Historians in the West used to use the appellations AD or BC (Anno Domini; Before Christ); the rather generic BCE/CE (Before Common Era/Common Era) superseded them in time.[15]

The historiography of the Civil Rights Movement is no exception. It, too, invariably reflects the decisions, convictions and assumptions of its shepherding historians (and perhaps activists). Most frequently, the bookends of the movement are given as sometime in the mid-fifties to the late sixties or early seventies. The seminal *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court decision issued in May 1954. Rosa Parks´ famous act of defiance on a Montgomery bus occurred in December 1955.[16] There are likewise a few candidates for the denouement of the movement. Martin Luther King, Jr., beloved, feared, and the de facto leader of the Civil Rights

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[15] These secular designations reflect appropriately that, obviously, great swaths of humanity do not subscribe to the Christian faith. Islamic history uses AH=After Hijra, where AH 1 is 622/623 CE. For a fascinating account of the Islamic view of history and how it diverges from that of the West, see Tamim Ansary, *Destiny Disrupted: A History of the World Through Islamic Eyes* (New York, NY: Perseus, 2009).

[16] On the chronology of the Civil Rights Movement and pedagogy, see Jennifer Frost, ¨Using ´Master Narratives´ to Teach History: The Case of the Civil Rights Movement,¨ *History Teacher* 45 (2012): 437-446.

Movement, died by assassination in 1968 (4 April). Malcolm X was killed several years prior. King´s death robbed the Civil Rights Movement of its most visible leader. The ideology at the fore of the struggle shifted from ´integrationism´ to Black Power. This shift, of course, was not simply the result of the intellectual vacuum left by the assassination of King. Independently, Stokely Carmichael (later Kwame Ture) adapted the nonviolent, interracial philosophy of the SNCC toward Black Power, a phrase he used as early as 1966. This year also saw the creation of the Black Panther Party (BPP) by Huey Newton, Bobby Seale, and Elbert Howard. As threatening as nonviolent interracial integrationism was to the American law enforcement apparatus, the Black Power movement was, predictably, even more so.[17]

The framing of the Civil Rights Movement as taking place in a decade stretched at both ends, an extended Sixties--is not entirely a straightforward affair, and there are at least two significant wrinkles to the historical summary offered above. The first concerns periodization proper, and the second has to do with its animating ideologies. We will consider these in turn.

First, to give the Civil Rights Movement a discrete chronological beginning and ending, frozen on the landscape of American history like immovable Corinthian columns, presents problems. While this kind of chronological curation is understandable, it also deletes significant personages from the historical narrative, and from the historical credit they may have otherwise

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[17] The FBI ran the Counter-Intelligence Program (COINTELPRO) from 1956 to 1971. Ostensibly organized to resolve threats from Communism, it took an intrusive interest in Black politics and religion. An FBI memorandum from 27 September 1968 includes a redacted quote:

¨This is proof that even the great leader of the SCLC is accepting the Honorable ELIJAH MUHAMMAD´S leadership.¨ The FBI director was concerned that Rev. Ralph Abernathy, successor to King at the SCLC, would express sympathy for the radical Black politics of the Nation of Islam; he expected a forthcoming public renunciation of the NOI from Abernathy. The two subject tags of the memorandum are ¨Racial Intelligence¨ and ¨Black Nationalists-Hate Groups.¨

Federal Bureau of Investigation, Counter-Intelligence Program (COINTELPRO), *Memorandum on Black Nationalists-Hate Groups* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1968), 3-6, https://vault.fbi.gov/cointel-pro/cointel-pro-black-extremists/cointelpro-black-extremists-part-05-of/view (accessed October 1, 2021).

accrued. Were there no Black activists in the Forties? The Seventies? Obviously, this cannot be,

and is not, the case. What then are the parameters of inclusion or exclusion? In dialogue with this

issue, some scholars have adopted the notion of a *longue-duree* Civil Rights Movement. This

concept would consider the conventionally recognizable movement of the mid-twentieth century

in essential continuity with Black political and activist efforts of earlier generations, extending to

Reconstruction and indeed, enslavement in the American South. This frame has several positive

effects. It considers the Civil Rights Movement in terms of its forebears and foundations, rather

than a *sui generis* movement which, like Amen-Ra of ancient Egypt, gave birth to itself. It also

imagines enslaved Africans as agents who exercised micro forms of resistance and autonomy,

rather than voiceless, faceless historical victims. Longue-duree might be prone to generate some

issues of its own. If the Civil Rights Movement has no chronological boundaries, what signposts

mark the Movement off from the history of Black Americans generally?

The narrative that follows emphasizes events of the mid-to-late Sixties, and therefore it

sits mostly within the confines of conventional Civil Rights periodization. However, in the

attempt to draw historical causation and repercussion, it extends tendrils into earlier and later

eras. The necessity of sketching African-American religiosity and Black-white race relations--

including the generational impacts of slavery--has compelled some historical recourse to the

early modern/colonial epoch in American history. Dotting the margins of this chronological

frame are occasional reflections from later decades. Positively, this orients us toward the

'American studies' approach, in which historical and cultural analysis should always carry its

insights into the present. Negatively, these incursions remind the reader of entrenched, durable

problems, such as redlining, religious community as racial reactionary, and racist policy.[18]

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[18] Ibram X. Kendi points to "racist policy" as a more concrete phrase that helps ground the more abstract concept of "structural racism." Cf. Ibram X. Kendi, *How to Be An Antiracist* (New York, NY: Penguin,

Second, what of the philosophies of Civil Rights? It is a trope of American and Civil Rights historiography that the 'correct' movement was that of King, the SCLC and whatever legal moves the NAACP was making. Black Power took up the mantle of the movement in the later Sixties, but it was an unworthy successor to earlier integrationism and fizzled out. In fact, reality has somewhat fuzzier edges. King himself had made overtures toward Black autonomy. Malcolm X, a spokesperson of the Nation of Islam (NOI), perceived by American law enforcement as threatening, had converted to a more orthodox Islam toward the end of his life, undertaking a hajj and gesturing more toward racial harmony than Black self-sovereignty. The Black Panther Party, ruthlessly suppressed by the police and FBI, ran a number of community improvement programs in low-income neighborhoods. Some organizations, like CORE and SNCC, straddled integrationism and Black Power, adopting different political postures over time. In deference to this complicated history and its fuzzy edges, the present study has most frequently adopted the terms Black Freedom Struggle or Black Freedom Movement, which are meant to encompass integrationist, separatist, religious, secular and other ideological approaches to the persistent problem of second-class African-American citizenship in the American republic.

Geographical Foundations of Civil Rights

Geography is a crucial if often overlooked aspect of the Civil Rights Movement and its historiography. The tropes noted above carry geographical corollaries. If integrationism represents the orthodox movement and Black Power the abortive anomaly, in translation, Southern activism is correct and urban Northern activism is distorted or flawed. However, fuzzy edges reign; as Jeanne Theoharis and Komozi Woodard have argued in *Freedom North* and *A*

2019), 19, et al. This reality is also emphasized in Daniel Hill, *White Lies: Nine Ways to Expose and Resist the Racial Systems That Divide Us* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2020), 70-74. Hill cites a landmark 2000 study suggesting that even when white evangelicals were concerned about racial justice, they "thought about it in almost exclusively individualistic ways" (72).

More Beautiful and Terrible History, faith-based integrationism operated in the urban North, and

Black armed-resistance movements existed in Tennessee and even Mississippi. [19]

Another kind of geographical construct is important to the Black Freedom Movement: the

ghetto. In our context, ghetto refers to a tightly constrained part of the urban landscape (i.e., the

´inner city´) to which African-Americans were more or less confined by both de jure and de facto

segregation. It was fostered and reinforced by extralegal or illegal real estate practices like

redlining and blockbusting.[20] As such, *ghetto* is as much a verb as a noun.[21] Black Americans

left the rural South in droves during the so-called Great Migration, but found their personal and

spatial freedoms curtailed in Northern cities as well. Like many large American cities, if not

most, Milwaukee reflects the ghettoization of African-Americans. By some measures,

Milwaukee may in fact be the most segregated city in America. By almost any measure, it keeps

close company with Chicago and Detroit in these stubborn and inauspicious metrics. It is

therefore helpful to consider metro Milwaukee, and local Civil Rights/Black Freedom

Movement, as operating within Cazenave´s framework of the Urban Racial State (URS): a

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[19] Jeanne F. Theoharis and Komozi Woodard, eds., *Freedom North: Black Freedom Struggles Outside the South, 1940-1980* (London, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

[20] See Richard Rothstein, *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America* (New York, NY: Liveright, 2017). Another important contribution comes from Andrew Wiese, *Places of Their Own: African American Suburbanization in the Twentieth Century* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2005). On blockbusting in particular, see Wiese, *Places of Their Own,* 389f. See also Ken Wytsma, *The Myth of Equality.* Wytsma quotes Dr. John McKnight: Redlining [is] "the mechanism that ensured the real estate industry would continue to produce the ghetto." Wytsma, *The Myth of Equality: Uncovering the Roots of Injustice and Privilege* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2019), 77.

[21] With his typically acerbic social acumen, Baldwin writes: "Sociologists and historians, having the historical perspective in mind, may conclude that we are moving toward ever-greater democracy; but this is beyond the ken of a Negro growing up in any one of this country's ghettos." Baldwin, *Notes of a Native Son* (New York, NY: Bantam Books, 1955), 62.

racialized urban regime that actively suppresses the autonomy of Black citizens.[22] "Ghetto,"
then, simultaneously represents both a rough unit of delimited urban space as much as it invokes
the array of policies and practices that confine Black (and other nonwhite) citizens to that space.
It is invariably implicated in questions of police surveillance, state violence, mass incarceration,
educational opportunity and access to capital. [23]

Geography as a locus or mode of analysis orients us toward further important
subdivisions in the historical literature on Black-white race relations in the US. The present work
is deeply indebted to works that complicate and enrich our understanding of the physical
geography, social mobility, and relocation patterns of Black Americans. These include Gregory's
Southern Diaspora, Wiese's *Places of Their Own,* Battat's *Ain't Got No Home,* and Adams' *Way
Up North In Louisville.* Related to but distinct from this corpus is work that focuses on the ways
in which Black Americans, in order to survive Jim Crow in North and South, had to create
interior geographies--mental maps of not only where they could be but also how they had to
operate their physical bodies to avoid triggering the anger of whites.

American Catholicism and Vatican II

The other leg of this narrative is the Roman Catholic Church, in its global, national (U.S.
American) and local instantiations. Considered herein are both the historical developments of
American Catholicism as well as the texts and traditions of this institution. How these constitute,
in the Foucauldian sense, a discursive architecture, and how that in turn engages with the
contemporaneous movement for Black racial justice, represents the central inquiry of this thesis.

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[22] Noel Cazenave, *The Urban Racial State: Managing Race Relations in American Cities* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2011).

[23] According to Robert Fried and Francine Rabinowitz, by 1970, American cities were collectively 14% nonwhite. The suburbs were only 6% nonwhite, in contrast to a 22% figure for the central cities. Robert C. Fried and Francine Rabinowitz, *Comparative Urban Politics: A Performance Approach* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1980), 96.

The historiography of American Catholicism orients around the loci of immigration, ethnic community, and assimilation. For instance, Bokenkotter construes Catholicism as signaling foreignness in the American mind, at least in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Emigrant Catholics survive a hostile American landscape through kinship networks and the social connections of the parish. Massa acknowledges the difficult experience of Catholic immigrants to the United States, but treats it more as an episode of cultural misunderstanding; he focuses more on the rising visibility and cultural influence of Catholics in the early to mid-twentieth century.

At the nucleus of Vatican II historiography is the consensus that the Council represented a historic, watershed event. Accounts diverge from there. Greeley views the Council as a transformational event and a positive one, although he believes it has not lived up to its full potential or promise. Sociologists like Varacalli view the Council as transformational and negative, believing it to have exerted a dis-integrative effect on American Catholicism. Cuneo, helpfully, surveys the ultraconservative backlash to Vatican II, in the form of American Catholics who reject the Council as illegitimate and a betrayal of their faith.[24] Several scholars have pointed to the Council´s basic endorsement of closely-held American (and Protestant) ideas, such as freedom of conscience, as indicative of significant shifts in Catholic theology and ethics.

A Note on Disciplines

The role of social science or sociology in the historical account that follows requires a bit of elaboration. Edward Hallett Carr neatly frames the relationship of history and social science as

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[24] Michael W. Cuneo, *The Smoke of Satan: Conservative and Traditionalist Dissent in Contemporary American Catholicism* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 1999).

the avoidance of twin dangers: ¨becoming ultra-empirical¨ and ¨becoming ultra-theoretical.¨[25] Obviously, the ideal is to navigate through Scylla and Charybdis unscathed: specificity and abstraction find a constructive balance. Social science usually enjoys a symbiotic relationship with the discipline of history, and this is even more pronounced in particular historical specializations. What applies to history at large also applies to the Black Freedom Movement: we must attend to unique individuals and events as well as to trends and recurring social patterns.

The analysis of recurring patterns takes on outsize importance in the study of Civil Rights because race, lamprey-like, refuses to relinquish its grip on the American cliodrama. Beyond analytical usefulness, social science figures importantly in the Civil Rights era because that era saw the publication of seminal sociological studies on Black Americans. In terms of theoretical orientation, these studies often subscribed to ´underclass´ theory or focused on the ´cultural deficits´ of Black America. The distortive, incomplete, and misleading perspectives and portraits present in these studies were not guaranteed a spot in the academic waste bin. They often influenced contemporary thinking on race, up to and including legislative policy. [26] Such documents also provide a helpful secular baseline of sorts, against which we can provisionally discern the racial progressivism or conservatism of religious texts.

It is perhaps fair to say that the safest path forward on issues of racial justice is first, to align ourselves with the marginalized--to exercise a ``preferential option'' as Catholic theologians would say--and second, to study deeply our social conditions and the philosophies that arise from within and without. Indeed, so quixotic is the idea of fully realized racial equality

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[25] Edward Hallett Carr, *What is History?* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1961), 83.

[26] For an analysis of the different schools of thought on the nature and origin of the ´underclass,´ see Carole Marks, ¨The Urban Underclass,¨ *Annual Review of Sociology* 17 (1991): 445-466.

in the United States that we ought in fact to relegate declarations of racial utopia to the reactionary sector of the political spectrum, where the notion of postraciality is a convenient bromide.[27] Realistic scholars and good faith participants in American civic life will, by contrast, continue with our tangled skein of historical yarn, carefully unraveling the braided threads of capitalism, political formation, religion, and racism.[28]

This project emerged largely out of doctoral seminars at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. In Jasmine Alinder´s seminar on Digital and Public History, I first encountered the Milwaukee iteration of the Civil Rights saga; it was in this context, too, that I first read the extant sermons of James Edmund Groppi. Joe Austin´s seminar on African-Americans and the City helped me refine my understanding of Black activism and justice-seeking, in its geography,

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[27] One example of whites´ appropriation of postracialism as a route to bypass Black critiques of American culture is found in the white perception of Martin Luther King, Jr., who is now often construed as a proponent of ´colorblindness.´ Patrick Hagopian writes: ¨King´s denunciations of the United States´ racism, hid advocacy of a revolution in values, and his demands for social and economic equality were forgotten, replaced by a vague recollection of King as a progressive figure with a dream of universal fellowship… [a] harmless dreamer of black and white children on the hillside.¨ Patrick Hagopian, ¨The Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial and the Politics of Post-Racialism,¨ *History & Memory* 32 (2020): 37.

[28] Understanding racism in the United States, what it is and how it functions, is a massive endeavor. One worthy synthetic address of the historical roots and social imaginary of ¨Western racism¨ is George Fredrickson, *Racism: A Short History.* Fredrickson deserves credit for drawing the parallels between antiblack racism and European antisemitism. He also offers solid definitions and observations: to wit, racism establishes and maintains a racial order (p. 6); Western racism is conspicuous for having developed in a putatively egalitarian historical context (p. 11). Fredrickson´s account of racism, which is extremely careful to differentiate racism from cultural chauvinism or xenophobia, focuses on *difference* and *power*. But it relies a bit too much on the notion of ontological, ineradicable differences. This does not describe American white supremacist racism precisely. Although racists--especially in earlier generations--might point to cognitive, biological, or ontological differences between whites and Blacks, black phenotype is merely the outward indicator or manifestation of the cultural inferiority projected onto African-Americans (by the white gaze, so to speak). This racial animus can indeed be more notional than concrete; a light-skinned person is ´tainted´ by a ´few drops´ of African blood. Racism certainly ¨creates or reproduces structures of domination based on essentialist categories of race¨ (p. 75), but these are also deeply irrational and self-contradictory. George M. Fredrickson, *Racism: A Short History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002).

On biological essentialism and judicial racism in *Plessy* v. *Ferguson* (1896), see Peter Charles Hoffer, et al, *The Supreme Court: An Essential History* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2007), 176-180. *Plessy* is one example of how the High Court usually accedes to a politics of bleak realism in Civil Rights cases; it protects its limited political capital by siding with and reinforcing the biased racial status quo in its jurisprudence.

chronology, and social dynamics. Conversations with other faculty members, including Chris

Cantwell and Rick Popp, further refined the narrative as an account of religious and cultural

history, respectively. All of these interactions yielded fresh insights, and encounters with robust

and challenging scholarship helped me think about religious rhetoric not as the window dressing

of racial justice activism, but as a substantive dimension and force in the political formation of

Blacks and whites alike.

Chapter 1: Racial Justice & Catholic Social Teaching To The Second Vatican Council

It must not be supposed that the Church so concentrates her energies on caring for souls as to overlook things which pertain to mortal and earthly life.
    -Rerum Novarum, #42

Those who cannot see Christ in the poor are atheists indeed.
    -Dorothy Day, social activist and Catholic convert

One of the paradoxes of American history at large is the recontextualization and repurposing of seminal documents for either the reinforcement of the status quo and boundary maintenance, or conversely as support for marginalized and underprivileged groups. The Constitution has been one such chimera, and the Bible has been another, each proving complex enough and malleable enough to support widely divergent and even polarized social and political perspectives.[29] In the context of the Civil Rights Movement, or what we may term more broadly the Black Freedom Struggle, the Roman Catholic Church and its attendant pastoral, theological, and literary traditions have proven a polyvalent intellectual resource. In this chapter, we shall consider the theological and ethical contours of Roman Catholic theology over the last century, specifically in connection with racial and social justice in the United States. While subsequent chapters will broach more squarely the grounded, embodied praxis of historical actors, this chapter will provide the necessary context for understanding the intellectual resources the Roman Catholic Church and the US episcopacy in particular furnished to later activists, parishioners, and clergy.

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[29] The racial and political bifurcation of the use of the Bible and of religious communities is not entirely unique to the United States. It parallels in some ways the experience of South Africa. Naidoo writes that ¨churches and theological institutions have the potential to draw people out of their private, racially segregated lives into a social space where human interactions are more intimate than in the public arena.¨ However, in practice ¨churches, the presumed agents of reconciliation, are at best impotent and at worst accomplices in strife¨ (quoting Miroslav Volf). M. Naidoo, ¨Liberative Black Theology: A Case Study of Race in Theological Education,¨ *Acta Theologica* 24 (2016): 158.

A salient entry point for this discussion is the pastoral encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, which

Pope Leo XIII issued in May of 1891. In some ways, *Rerum Novarum* itself marked an inflection

point in the theological and social engagement of the Church. Another title suggested for the

encyclical is *On the Condition of the Working Classes. Rerum Novarum* ranks among the first

papal (or even episcopal) documents to engage critically with the modern economic realities of

labor, poverty, and unionism, rather than more parochial ecclesiastical concerns (such as

reaffirmation of churchly authority or the immaculate conception of Mary). These engagements

were particularly relevant to the American Church and to the United States at large, given the

flourishing of aggressive, even predatory, capitalism and the concomitant growth of unions to

defend workers´ rights. The opening lines of the encyclical make clear the general concerns and

broad assessment of the Holy Father; the modern world must now contend with

> the changed relations between masters and workmen; [the] enormous fortunes of some
> few individuals and the poverty of the masses; the increased self-reliance and closer
> mutual combination of the working classes; [and] the prevailing moral degeneracy.[30]

Pope Leo works diligently to carve a clear ideological path which does not result in the Roman

Catholic Church or Catholic teaching becoming subservient to either of the vital economic

philosophies of the day--capitalism or socialism.[31] On the one hand, the pope laments that

workers have become ¨surrendered, isolated and helpless¨ owing to ¨the hardheartedness of

employers and the greed of unchecked competition.¨[32] On the other hand, he is also profoundly

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[30] Pope Leo XII, ¨Rerum Novarum*,*¨ Section I, http://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_15051891_rerum-novarum.html (accessed January 14, 2020).

[31] It must be emphasized that although Pope Leo recognized some of the social difficulties faced by labor, he does not endorse secular economic perspectives or offer philosophical or practical redress beyond the teachings and institutions of the Church. See Michael J. Walsh, ¨The Myth of Rerum Novarum,¨ *New Blackfriars* 93 (2012): 155-162.

[32] ¨Rerum Novarum,¨ section III.

critical of socialism and the soundness of proposed socialist solutions, stating that the abolition of private property would render the laborer ¨among the first so suffer¨ and further contending that this socialist tenet would ¨rob the lawful possessor, distort the functions of the state, and create utter confusion in the community.¨[33] As Mark Warner demonstrates, *Rerum Novarum* was indeed one of the first documents of Catholic Social Teaching (CST) to address the relations of labor and capital with attention to competing ideologies in the zeitgeist.[34] It also shows that the Catholic Church of the late nineteenth century was not simply ¨a via media between liberal individualism and socialist collectivism¨, but rather an independent social philosophy.[35] In this sense, however, *RN* is itself reflective of the intellectual ambiguity referenced above; in its pursuit of intellectual independence, the Vatican articulated for the Church at large a vigorous condemnation of capitalism as well as socialism/communism. This arguably set the Church on a path of assumptively salutary non-intervention.

The encyclical itself does furnish some qualified support for ¨workingmen´s unions¨, which take the place of the guilds from an earlier point in European history and which afforded some protections to labor (as well as supposed advancements to the crafts themselves). Yet it also presents moralistic defenses of a capitalistic status quo. For instance, section 46 assumes rather blithely that the laborer´s wages will ¨be sufficient to enable him comfortably to support himself, his wife, and his children.¨ This theoretical workingperson will furthermore ¨find it easy, if he be a sensible man, to practice thrift, and he will not fail, by cutting down expenses, to

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[33] Ibid., section IV.

[34] Michael Warner, *Changing Witness: Catholic Bishops and Public Policy, 1917-1994* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 21-22f.

[35] Warner, *Changing Witness,* 6.

put by some little savings and thus secure a modest source of income.¨ Ultimately, it is

incumbent upon the government to ensure that private ownership ¨be held sacred and

inviolable.¨[36]

The Catholic Church of this era stood intellectually opposed to the capitalism of the

industrial West, largely unfettered and fueled as it was by Social Darwinist principles.[37] Yet the

Church also shied away from structural or policy-based changes which could either foment

revolutions or lend strength to social upheaval. In practice, this mutual condemnation resulted in

a generalized complacency. To be sure, particular religious orders and Catholic nonprofits

worked to improve conditions, such as the often inharmonious relationship between labor and

ownership. Yet Aubert notes that, collectively, the Catholic Church displayed reticence in the

decades after 1848 to ¨militate for workers´ rights¨ or construe an active role for the Church in

the problems faced by the working class. Often, the solutions imagined and proposed to

problems of labor and poverty revolved around ¨private or ecclesial charity.¨[38]

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[36] ¨Rerum Novarum,¨ section XLVI.

[37] Indeed, roughly contemporaneous papal documents issued by Leo had condemned ¨Americanism¨, including *Testem Benevolentiae.* The chief tenets of ¨Americanism¨ are not only capitalism, but also democratic liberalism and the tenet of separation of church and state. On the long arc of the occasionally uneasy relationship between the Vatican and the United States, see Massimo Franco, *Parallel Empires: The Vatican and the United States--Two Centuries of Alliance and Conflict* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 2008). Franco writes of the appointment of John Carroll, the first Catholic bishop in the United States: ¨The American government's green light for the appointment of a bishop was a small, and in the eyes of the United States harmless, gesture toward this strange, minuscule independent territory that represented all that was contrary to the American concept of liberty, and yet seemed anxious to establish a foothold in a distant Protestant land. The American leadership could, however, see the advantage of establishing a commercial office in Rome¨ (26). Differing ideas about the free market, religious freedom, and institutional authority would color their ensuing historical relationship, which would arguably see the gradual Americanization of Catholicism (and vice versa).

[38] Roger Aubert, *Catholic Social Teaching: An Historical Perspective* (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University, 2003), 77.

While *Rerum Novarum* does not address race relations or racial justice as such, it is highly significant for its analysis of the contemporary social plight and its consideration of economic justice--a major plank of the later Black freedom agenda. [39] The next major papal encyclical that would appear in this oeuvre is *Quadragesimo Anno,* issued by Pope Pius XI in 1931. Quadragesimo is explicitly named for its issuance four decades after *Rerum Novarum*. Like its predecessor, QA takes care to critically assess the looming social and economic problems and disorders of its time. However, whereas Rerum Novarum declares a modest preferential option for labor and seeks the general improvement of laborers´ lives and livelihoods, *Quadragesimo* at the very least considers the fundamental reconstitution of the social and political order.

In Sections 1 through 39, Pius in rather florid language praises the prescient and illustrious character of *Rerum Novarum,* asserting that ¨Our Predecessor¨ Leo was remarkably ahead of his time and recounting in outline the laws and institutions which had arisen in broad conformity to the spirit of the earlier encyclical. In later sections, Pius develops a robust and nuanced vision of economic justice which moves beyond that of his august predecessor. For instance, the pope issues the general mandate that the laborer (assumed to be normatively a male laborer) ¨must be paid a wage sufficient to support him and his family.¨[40] Although the agent responsible for ensuring these conditions is not entirely clear, it is furthermore mandated that

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[39] The Civil Rights Movement is typically periodized between roughly 1954 and 1968. However, Thomas J. Davis has argued forcefully for an essential continuity between this period and the pre-*Brown* epoch of Black liberation/racial justice. See Thomas J. Davis, ¨The Longue Dureé of Black Civil Rights: Understanding Climaxes, Commencements, and Continuities,¨ *Reviews in American History* 41, no. 3 (September 2013): 507-512.

[40] Pope Pius XI, ¨Quadragesimo Anno,¨ Section LXXI, https://www.papalencyclicals.net/pius11/p11quadr.htm (accessed January 14, 2020).

¨the opportunity to work be provided to those who are willing to work.¨[41] Pius further stresses

the human dignity of labor and opposes its commercial commoditization. [42] Pius incisively

criticizes capitalism for its excesses, its potential toll on human morality, and its role in

exploiting and encouraging certain forms of vice. Section 132 reads as follows (excerpted):

> The root and font of this defection in economic and social life from the Christian law, and of the consequent apostasy of great numbers of workers from the Catholic faith, are the disordered passions of the soul, the sad result of original sin which has so destroyed the wonderful harmony of man's faculties that, easily led astray by his evil desires, he is strongly incited to prefer the passing goods of this world to the lasting goods of Heaven. Hence arises that unquenchable thirst for riches and temporal goods, which has at all times impelled men to break God's laws and trample upon the rights of their neighbors, but which, on account of the present system of economic life, is laying far more numerous snares for human frailty….
>
> The easy gains that a market unrestricted by any law opens to everybody attracts large numbers to buying and selling goods, and they, their one aim being to make quick profits with the least expenditure of work, raise or lower prices by their uncontrolled business dealings so rapidly according to their own caprice and greed that they nullify the wisest forecasts of producers. The laws passed to promote corporate business, while dividing and limiting the risk of business, have given occasion to the most sordid license…
>
> [C]onsciences are [unfortunately] little affected by this reduced obligation of accountability; that furthermore, by hiding under the shelter of a joint name, the worst of injustices and frauds are penetrated; and that, too, directors of business companies, forgetful of their trust, betray the rights of those whose savings they have undertaken to administer.
>
> Lastly, We must not omit to mention those crafty men who, wholly unconcerned about any honest usefulness of their work, do not scruple to stimulate the baser human desires and, when they are aroused, use them for their own profit.[43]

Conversely, while Pius does not outright endorse socialism, *QA* does envision a somewhat more

socially equitable and distributionist paradigm for communal economic life, and the pope makes

several references to ¨social reconstruction¨ and the ¨Christian reconstruction of human

society.¨[44] The document as a whole is animated by the theological concepts of subsidiarity,

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[41] Ibid., Section LXXIV.

[42] Ibid., Section LXXXIII.

[43] Ibid., Section CXXXII.

[44] Cf. Sections 97, 147.

whereby responsibilities devolve to the least centralized and most proximate authority; and solidarity, which refers to a practical and personal commitment to the alleviation of injustice in the world. Warner suggests plausibly that these theological emphases, coupled with the letter´s strident censure of free-market capitalism, led to its uneasy reception in the American context. [45]

Of course, the American hierarchy itself also produced original Catholic thinkers prepared to inveigh against capitalism and other features of modern Western culture. A significant voice in the American Church, Monsignor John A. Ryan--nicknamed "the Right Reverend New Deal" for his social justice advocacy--penned the *Bishops' Program of Social Reconstruction* in 1919, just after the conclusion of World War I.[46] Ryan's work shares much of the same spirit as the great encyclicals that precede and follow it: a radical desire to reshape society to humane ends coupled with a somewhat truncated social imaginary.

Ryan engaged in extremely detailed analysis and criticism of American capitalism. His work represents a clear example of how Catholic theologians avoided any perceived alignment with the ideology of socialism, as he does level criticism at socialist schemes of land reform and taxation. Nevertheless, Ryan promotes a progressive economics and saves his most strident critiques for capitalism and the elite classes. In the conclusion to his hefty *Distributive Justice*, he writes:

> Although the attainment of greater justice in distribution is the primary and most urgent need of our time, it is not the only one that is of great importance. No conceivable method of distributing the present national product would provide every family with the means of supporting an automobile, or any equivalent symbol of comfort. Indeed, there are indications that the present amount of product per capita cannot long be maintained without better conservation of our natural resources, the abandonment of our national habits of wastefulness, more scientific methods of soil cultivation, and vastly greater efficiency on the part of both capital and labour...The rich must cease to put their faith in material things…[T]he middle classes and the poor must give up their envy and snobbish imitation of the false and degrading standards of the opulent

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[45] Warner, *Changing Witness,* 37-39.

[46] Chester Gillis, *Roman Catholicism in America* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1999), 72.

classes...For the adoption and pursuit of these ideals, the most necessary requisite is a revival of genuine religion.[47]

Even such ambitious social analyses and manifestos displayed significant gaps and oversights. Race and ethnicity receive essentially no attention in *Distributive Justice*. Women are mentioned precisely once in the *Bishops' Program*, to garner plaudits for filling the vocational vacancies left by men fighting in the Great War:

> One of the most important problems of readjustment is that created by the presence in industry of immense numbers of women who have taken the places of men during the war. Mere justice, to say nothing of chivalry, dictates that these women should not be compelled to suffer any greater loss or inconvenience than is absolutely necessary; for their services to the nation have been second only to the services of the men whose places they were called upon to fill… Women should disappear as quickly as possible from such tasks… which conditions of life and their physique render them unfit.[48]

While the *Program* reads more akin to a policy white paper of the Progressive Era than a work of theological or spiritual inspiration, it lent weight and imprimatur to such ideas as government housing, living wages, vocational training and 'social insurance.' As one iteration of Christian social ethics in the American context, the *Bishops' Program* demonstrated a robust commitment to social justice. At the same time, this commitment exhibited itself in almost exclusively economic terms. [49]

Rerum Novarum and Quadragesimo Anno collectively form the theological backbone of the character of Catholic Social Teaching (CST), a theological corpus which saw significant progress and clarification between 1930 and 1960. Aubert notes that these documents reflect

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[47] John A. Ryan, *Distributive Justice* (New York, NY: Macmillan, 1916; Project Gutenberg, 2013), 434, https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/42759 (accessed October 1, 2021).

[48] John A. Ryan, "Bishops' Program 1919," *American Catholic History Classroom*, https://cuomeka.wrlc.org/items/show/825 (accessed February 13, 2021).

[49] Indeed, the *Program* appears to adopt by and large the conflictual labor-capital relationship modeled in Marx. That American Catholic theology of this period would self-consciously frame itself in contradistinction to the atheism of Soviet Communism is no small irony.

traits and emphases identifiable with CST as a whole, including: life and dignity of the human person; call to family and community; preferential option for the poor and vulnerable; dignity & rights of workers; solidarity; and creation care.[50] While these documents do not directly address race relations or racial injustice as such, they set the stage for later theological and ethical engagements with these by engaging thoughtfully with economic injustice and indicating approved modalities of ecclesial and collective engagement.

While papal pronouncements affected all Catholic adherents--those in the United States as well as the rest of the world--the American Catholic hierarchy itself also produced a significant corpus of pastoral and ethical engagement with social issues in the period between *Quadragesimo Anno* and the Second Vatican Council. The most prominent figure in articulating the pastoral and moral theology of the American Catholic Church undoubtedly remained Father Ryan. As can be discerned in the *Bishops' Program,* Ryan was a progressive Neo-Thomist whose theological method tended towards viewing society as a single organism--an approach which would erode as America became more pluralistic. [51]

American Catholic theology from this period displayed new preoccupations with respect to the ostensible intellectual and moral failures of society, foremost among them secularism and the closely-related Soviet communism.[52] The primary instrument of this collective ethical and theological reflection was the pastoral correspondence of the United States Catholic hierarchy.[53]

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[50] Aubert, *Catholic Social Teaching,* 246, 259.

[51] Warner, *Changing Witness,* 31-32. O´Malley views Neo-Thomas/Neo-scholasticism in early 20th century America as a source of theological and intellectual vitality. See John W. O´Malley, ¨Catholic Church History: One Hundred Years of the Discipline,¨ *Catholic Historical Review* 101 (2016): 19.

[52] The 1960s saw the momentous phenomenon of Vatican II as well as several concomitant shifts in theological method, which will be addressed below.

[53] The first iteration of a collegial body comprising the American Catholic bishops was the National Catholic War Council, later the National Catholic Welfare Council. This body would later split into the

This body, originally the NCWC and later reorganized as the USCCB, issued pastoral statements

on the economic crisis of the Great Depression (1930-31); on the war in Europe (1939); and on

the proper maintenance and disposition of Catholic health care facilities (1954), among other

position papers.

Theological Currents in the Early 20th Century

The trends in American Catholic thought in the early twentieth century certainly

exhibited significant parallels with contemporaneous Protestantism. But discontinuities persisted,

deriving mainly from structural differences and the socioeconomic position of Catholics and

Protestants, respectively. The diffuse, decentralized character of American Protestantism often

rendered 'internal' conflicts more fractious and less of a 'family affair.' [54]

From the latter decades of the nineteenth century through the 1920s, American

Protestants engaged in bitter polemical debates about doctrinal orthodoxy and the notional

infallibility/inerrancy of the Christian Scriptures.[55] Fundamentalists--so called for their

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National Conference of Catholic Bishops (NCCB) and the United States Catholic Conference (USCC).
These entities reunified in 2001 under the banner of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops
(USCCB).

[54] In contrast to American Protestant tendencies toward sectarianism, modern Catholicism is extremely
capacious, keeping within its ranks members who would have quickly disowned, disfellowshipped, and
polemicized each other outside of Rome. Catholic sociologist and novelist Andrew Greeley points to the
potency of "spiritual imagination" as a cohesive, centripetal force. See Andrew Greeley, *The Catholic
Revolution: New Wine, Old Wineskins, and the Second Vatican Council* (Berkeley, CA: University of
California Press, 2004). See also Greeley, *The Catholic Imagination* (Berkeley, CA: University of
California Press, 2000).

Chester Gillis also cites the Culture One/Culture Two framework of Eugene Kennedy with respect to
American Catholicism. He writes: ¨ ´Culture One Catholics´ identify with the traditional institutional
structures of the church; ´Culture Two Catholics,´ though less inclined to follow institutional directives to
the letter, still consider themselves Catholic. These two cultures coexist, sometimes harmoniously,
sometimes not.¨ Chester Gillis, *Roman Catholicism in America* (New York, NY: Columbia University
Press, 1999), 4.

[55] Although Fundamentalism at large would, over time, come to be associated with science denialism and
anti-intellectualism, the earlier generations of the movement included highly educated (typically
Reformed) theologians and apologists, including Charles Hodge and J. Gresham Machen. Although an
opponent of liberalism, Machen is valuable for his personal erudition and his candid framing of the issues

commitment to the 'fundamentals' of Protestant orthodoxy--clashed with theological liberals,

sometimes termed 'modernists.'[56] Modernists adapted their belief systems to the new technical

and scientific advances available to their generation.[57] They accepted the text-critical and

comparative literary disciplines indicating that--shocking many--Genesis as well as the Epic of

Gilgamesh were products of a common ancient Near Eastern oeuvre.[58] The Modernist faction, as

well as many Reformed Christians, grappled with the implications of Charles Darwin's theory of

evolution for divine creation and human uniqueness--rather than simply rejecting the new

paradigm. Germany had already proven both receptive at large to evolutionary theory and also a

cradle of fierce Darwin apologists.[59] It furthermore exported a refined theological liberalism that

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involved. He writes in *Christianity and Liberalism:* …[T]he fact itself is plain--that Christianity during many centuries has consistently appealed for the truth of its claims, not merely and not even primarily to current experience, but to certain ancient books, the most recent of which was written nineteen hundred years ago. It is no wonder that the appeal is being criticized today; for the writers of the books in question were no doubt men of their own age, whose outlook upon the material world, judged by modern standards, must have been of the crudest and most elementary kind. Inevitably the question arises whether the opinions of such men can ever be normative for men of the present day; in other words, whether first-century religion can ever stand in company with modern-day science. However the question may be answered, it presents a serious problem to the modern Church." J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism* (Grand Rapids. MI: Eerdmans, 1923), loc. 124.

[56] A classic treatment of Christian Fundamentalism in U.S. history remains George Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2006). On the antagonisms between Fundamentalism and post-modern morality and aesthetics, see Paul Maltby, *Christian Fundamentalism and the Culture of Disenchantment* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2013).

[57] Modernism was one of the contemporaneous terms, although probably used more often by opponents than adherents. It is not to be confused with the other 'modernisms' in epistemology and aesthetics. Because of the possibility for confusion, Christian liberal/ism is a slightly better term, although one in turn runs the risk of conflating theological and political liberalism(s).

[58] Writes Tikva Frymer-Kensky: "The publication of a Babylonian flood story (Gilgamesh tablet XI) in 1872 and of a creation story (Enuma Elish) several years later made it inevitable that attempts would be made to analyze the Biblical tradition in the light of new material coming from Babylon. The Bible could not be studied in isolation once material became available from the surrounding cultures with unmistakable similarities to biblical motifs and biblical stories… [Friedrich] Delitzsch published three lectures on this topic in which he claimed that everything valuable in the Bible was derived from Babylon…" Frymer-Kensky, *Studies in Biblical and Feminist Criticism* (Philadelphia, PA: Jewish Publication Society, 2006), 37.

[59] Ernst Haeckel was one example. See Gertrude Himmelfarb, *Darwin and the Darwinian Revolution* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1959 [reprinted 1996]), 261f.

cast the New Testament in the mold of a primitive social myth primarily in need of

"demythologizing" rather than personal belief and obedience. This was the position of Rudolf

Bultmann who, in sharp contrast to the fundamentalist orthodoxy of thinkers like Machen or

Barth (with whom he corresponded), famously asserted that "we cannot use electric lights and

radios and in the event of illness, avail ourselves of modern medical and clinical means and at

the same time believe in the spirit and wonder world of the New Testament."[60]

For Catholic leadership, eschewing the Protestant modes of schism and sectarianism was

paramount; the Gresham Machens and Shailer Mathews of the Protestant world had little reason

to share denominational company, since disunity and the formation of new denominations carry

negligible soteriological repercussions. The Roman Catholic church, by contrast, frequently

elected to keep within its ranks heterodox and radical thinkers, like Jesuit priest and speculative

paleontologist Pierre Teilhard de Chardin.[61] Catholic leadership placed a somewhat higher

premium on institutional fealty and cohesion than even doctrinal conformity, which would

become harder to enforce in the years leading up to and especially following the Second Vatican

Council.

Despite the constant clamor of fundamentalist-liberal clashes in the leading decades of

the twentieth century, American Protestantism did occasionally produce encouraging glimpses of

social and racial progress. Some were short-lived. In April 1906, an ecstatic religious revival

swept through Holiness churches in Los Angeles. Sympathetic observers of the 'Azusa Street

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[60] Rudolf Bultmann, *New Testament and Mythology: And Other Basic Writings.* Translated by Schubert M. Ogden. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1984), 4.

[61] The Jesuit order revoked de Chardin's right to teach but did not rebuke or excommunicate him. His works and life have trickled into cultural productions, and some later popes have proven sympathetic to his ideas.

Revival' hailed a new move and outpouring of the Holy Spirit. United by the experience of glossolalia (or 'angelic' tongues), Blacks and whites worshiped together. Within a few years, however, the movement bifurcated and resegregated--into Black Pentecostal churches and white Pentecostal churches.[62] The American genesis of Pentecostalism is relevant to the present historical narrative on two levels. First, Pentecostalism, especially in its denominational expression of the Church of God in Christ (COGIC), boasts a robust presence in Milwaukee and first-ring suburbs.[63] More broadly, it points to a troubling but familiar social pattern: a theological insight--the modern recovery of glossolalia--is at first deployed in support of cross-cultural and racial unity, but later co-opted into established patterns of racial separation and differentiation.

Catholics gradually gained acceptance in American society in the prewar years, and this cultural integration would come to accelerate. Massa writes that Catholics in the two decades after the Second World War ¨entered the mainstream with ease.¨ [64] Several dynamics served as catalysts in Catholic assimilation. First, European immigrants in this era, like the later wave of post-Soviet newcomers, benefited from the de facto social reality of their ¨whiteness.¨ Prominent Catholics were also making inroads in public visibility. Significant figures in this arena include not only activists like Dorothy or clerical figures such as Sheen or Merton, but also politicians

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[62] For a broader account of this event, see Edith Blumhofer, "Azusa Street Revival," *The Christian Century,* March 2006, 20-22. For an academic analysis of the revival´s ideological underpinnings, see Keri L. Day, ¨The Politics of Azusa: Transforming Citizenship at the Margins,¨ *Political Theology* 22 (Nov. 2021): 611-626.

[63] Examples include Eternal Life Church of God in Christ (ZIP 53212), El-Bethel Church (53223), Rehoboth Miracle Temple Church (53210), and Temple of the Holy Spirit (53216), among many others. Pentecostal/Charismatic praxis can also be found in Assembly of God (AG) congregations, in addition to independent charismatic groups. COGIC congregations are primarily Black in the United States.

[64] Mark S. Massa, *Catholics and American Culture: Fulton Sheen, Dorothy Day, and the Notre Dame Football Team* (New York, NY: Crossroad Publishing, 1999), 2.

like Al Smith. Although Smith lost his presidential bid to the hapless Herbert Hoover, his very candidacy and his political advocacy for Irish-Americans and the working class in New York City contributed to normalizing the presence of Catholics in American civic life. Lastly, Catholics worked internally to mitigate intra-religious ethnic tensions and bigotry in Catholic communities, reducing their insularity in the process.

The rising social location of Catholics in the United States amounted to a kind of alloyed blessing. Positively, the nation saw a decline in anti-Catholic bigotry. On the other hand, it also reduced the social analogy between Catholics and marginalized groups in American society, notably Blacks. Tisby writes that, while racial caste in the United States was sustained by the Protestant mainstream, Catholic immigrants "soon adapted to America's biracial system of social segregation and subsumed their ethnic heritage under the label of whiteness."[65] Gaining cultural acceptance and leaving marginality behind could make it gradually easier to produce theology and ethics oriented toward authority and order rather than justice and liberation--a reality that would color the outlook and output of certain Catholic thinkers and bishops.

♣　　♣　　♣

A curious lacuna in the output of the U.S. Bishops at midcentury is any reflection on the seminal case *Brown v. Board of Education*, despite the bishops having issued a statement the same year as that Supreme Court decision (1954). Racial justice as a theological and pastoral issue was slow to wend its way into the agenda of the American episcopacy. Father Bryan Massingale asserts that Catholic ethicists of this period mostly ignored the growing Civil Rights

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[65] Jemar Tisby, *The Color of Compromise: The Truth About the American Church's Complicity in Racism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2019), 113.

Movement. [66] Massingale makes the point that sustained theological reflection on racism is essentially absent from the U.S. Catholic Church; those articles that do appear are timidly argued and appeal to whites´ sense of courtesy rather than the demands of justice.[67]

American Catholic bishops issued their first significant statement on the issue of racial justice in *Discrimination and Christian Conscience,* released 14 November 1958 (DCC). The statement begins by recalling a clause from an earlier pastoral letter from 1943; although the earlier document was concerned primarily with the prosecution of the Second World War, it had a clause stating that ¨We owe to these fellow citizens [i.e., Black Americans, or ¨Negro¨ citizens in the parlance of the letter]...not only political equality, but also fair economic and educational opportunities, a just share in public welfare projects, good housing without exploitation, and a full chance for the social advancement of their race.¨[68] The document then gushes about the progress of the last fifteen years:

> During and after the Second World War, great and even spectacular advances were made in the obtaining of voter rights, good education, better paying jobs, and adequate housing. Through the efforts of men of goodwill, of every race and creed and from all parts of the nation, the barriers of prejudice and discrimination were slowly but inevitably eroded. [69]

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[66] Massingale, in Jamie T. Phelps, ed. *Black and Catholic: The Challenge and Gift of Black Folk: Contributions of African American Experience and Thought to Catholic Theology* (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 1998), 82.

[67] Massingale, in Phelps, *Black and Catholic,* 85. The pastoral statement of 1979 deserves mention: the unfortunate title of that document is *Brothers and Sisters to Us.* Beyond the generally awkward phrasing, Dr. Daniel P. Horan has noted that ¨[i]ts title reveals the perception of people of color by many in the Catholic Church in the United States, especially by its predominantly white leadership (presumably the "us" of the title). Such language implies that people of color are effectively outside the community, which is understood to be, as a rule, white.¨ National Catholic Reporter, Feb. 20, 2019.

[68] Discrimination & Christian Conscience in *Pastoral Letters of the United States Catholic Bishops: Vol. 2: 1941-1961,* 201, https://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/cultural-diversity/african-american/resources/upload/Discrimination-Christian-Conscience-Nov-14-1958.pdf (accessed July 5, 2020).

[69] Discrimination & Christian Conscience, 201.

While the bishops laud these victories for racial equity, on their reading, progress has slowed in

recent times and the ethical center of the issue has become clouded. The statement then offers a

loose sketch of the particular manifestations of racial injustice toward Blacks, although without

any inflection of geography or region:

> Our nation now stands divided by the problem of compulsory segregation of the races
> and the opposing demand for racial justice… In one area, the key issue may concern the
> Schools. In another it may be conflicts over housing. Job discrimination may be the focal
> point in still other sectors. But all these issues have one main point in common. They reflect the
> determination of our Negro people, and we hope the overwhelming majority our white citizens, to see that
> our colored citizens obtain their full rights as given to them by God, the Creator of all, and guaranteed by
> the democratic traditions of our nation. [70]

To this point, the statement maintains a constructive posture, but its analysis is hampered by glib

and tortuous logic. The bishops present several concrete forms of racial injustice--exploitative

housing, reduced wages, and unequal schooling--but they strongly imply that these are simply

static, neutral issues rather than a result of whites actively denying the rights of African-

Americans. These various forms of discrimination supposedly ¨reflect the determination of...our

white citizens, to see that our colored citizens obtain their full rights… ¨ The bishops thereby

construe the practices of white supremacy and domination as indicative of a general desire on the

part of white citizens to see Black American citizenship fully realized.

Stated in this way, the utter illogic of the clause becomes clearer. Confusion might arise

from the generic deployment of ¨conflict" to describe a specific regime of racialized inequity

(e.g., Jim Crow). In this respect, DCC represents the general tendency of episcopal letters to

embrace a tone of modest exhortation and avoid clear condemnation of whites as such. [71] In the

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[70] Discrimination & Christian Conscience, 202.

[71] As we have seen, Catholic Social Teaching on labor and economic justice was better developed than CST on race relations. Concordantly, papal and episcopal documents are much more willing to condemn capitalists/capitalism than ¨whites¨ or ¨European-Americans.¨ This unwillingness to condemn white racism continues to the present:
https://politicaltheology.com/blackface-and-white-comfort-reading-the-bishops-letter-from-charlottesville/.

social imaginary of DCC, racial injustices amount to thorny problems of misunderstanding or cultural (mis)translation, which in turn call for mutual racial cooperation. White supremacy escapes full analysis and abjuration.

Sections 6 through 8 develop a cursory Biblical case for the ethnic universality of the Christian faith and the baselessness of making distinctions based on race or nationality. Section 9 and 10 reinforce these ideas by grounding them in both the Enlightenment tradition and in American founding documents: ¨[W]e must repeat the principle--embodied in our Declaration of Independence--that all men are equal in the sight of God.¨ [72] Sections 11 through 13 develop a rather counterintuitive line of argumentation: it is self-evident that ¨men¨ are unequal in the contingent outcomes of talent, wealth, and so on (§11); therefore, ¨class distinctions are inevitably made¨ on the basis of group similarity and common interests (§13). Yet ¨it is unreasonable and injurious to the rights of others that a factor such as race, by and of itself, should be made a cause of discrimination and a basis for unequal treatment in our mutual relations¨ (§13).

In these clauses, DCC appears to take as its argumentative premise the empirical reality that people present a wide range of contingent differences. It is therefore normal for humans constantly to discern differences amongst people and to make appropriate judgments. However, to include ¨the fact of race or color¨ in the factors integrated into these assessments is ¨injurious¨ to others´ rights¨. DCC further muddies the waters by including the qualifying phrase ¨by and of itself.¨ Rather than clarify, this simply leads to further questions. Perhaps we cannot make assumptions based on race alone; does this mean stereotypes might be acceptable if race is incorporated into a more complete process? Can we discriminate on the basis of race plus

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[72] Discrimination & Christian Conscience, p. 202, section 3.

gender? How about race plus height? It is curious that the American bishops responsible for

DCC chose not to argue primarily from the perspective of essential humanity or

anthropological/ontological unity. There is a kernel of this in sections 6-8, but the statement does

not offer any awareness of the concept of race as a social construction or an identity marker.[73]

Said another way, DCC does not contest the reification of race--a serious oversight for a body

ostensibly committed to racial justice.

While DCC does denounce racism at large, its dubious theoretical grounding and irenic,

concessive language fail to mark it as a politically progressive document. Whatever the

shortcomings of sociologist Gunnar Myrdal's *An American Dilemma*, the author and his team

attempted to examine the agents and the psychosocial causes of antiblack racism in the United

States. For instance, Myrdal writes the following on the Southern practice of lynching and the

culture that abetted it:

> The South gives indications of being afraid of the Negro. I do not mean
> physical fear. It is not a matter of cowardice or bravery; it is something deeper and
> more fundamental. It is a fear of losing grip upon the world. It is an unconscious
> fear of changing status…
>
> It is this feeling which is behind the common saying which a visitor to the South
> will hear even today from lower class whites that ¨a lynching now and then¨ is
> expedient or necessary in keeping Negroes from becoming ¨uppity.¨…
>
> The low level of education and general culture in the white South is another
> important background factor. Allied with it is the prevalence of a narrow-minded
> and intolerant, ¨fundamentalist¨ type of Protestant evangelical religion…
>
> Methodist and Baptist preachers were active in reviving the Ku Klux Klan

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[73] The history of regnant scientific philosophy with respect to ´race´ is complex and fraught. Essentialism, biological realism, and biologism represent ideologies which view race as a biological fact. Such views gained popularity in the nineteenth century and were often linked to the racialist views of, among others, Josiah Nott and Joseph-Arthur, comte de Gobineau. Essentialist views were quite common through the first half of the twentieth century. Social constructivism, the view that ´race´ was mediated by cultural and social realities and was biologically irreal, would later gain sway. The work of Charles Murray and Richard Herrnstein notwithstanding, current critical scholarship does not suggest a strong return to biological/racial essentialism. However, there are concerns that social constructivism theory does not fully capture the importance of the ´raced´ body in physical space. See Stephen E. Cornell and Douglas Hartmann, *Ethnicity and Race: Making Identities in a Changing World* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press, 2007), 41-107.

after the First World War. With but rare exceptions preachers and local religious
leaders have not come out against lynchers…[74]

In this brief passage, Myrdal clearly names white racism, psychologizes its form in the American

South, and even provides its connection to prevalent religious affiliations (i.e., Baptist and

Methodist denominations). The rigor is significant because Myrdal´s study was released in 1944,

a full fourteen years before *Discrimination and Christian Conscience.* This suggests strongly that

the American bishops likely had some awareness of contemporary social-scientific writing on

race and that DCC could have been a more critical, attentive and theoretically robust document.

To be sure, sections 14 through 18 offer a more coherent, if brief, denunciation of racism

and discriminatory practices. The document contends that *de jure* segregation is fundamentally

incompatible with ¨the Christian view of our fellow man¨ (§14) because segregation ¨by its very

nature imposes a stigma of inferiority upon the segregated people¨ (§15). Indeed, even if the

¨separate but equal¨ doctrine were still in effect and realized ¨to the fullest extent¨ in society, so

that public and semi-public facilities were of identical quality, the judgment that one race is unfit

to associate with another would nevertheless transgress the bonds of Christian charity (§15).

Once again, these clauses lend support to the idea of racial justice, but they can hardly be

viewed as socially or politically progressive. Several of these statements might be more

accurately viewed as rearguard concessions. Four years earlier, the U.S. Supreme Court had

already repudiated the ´separate but equal´ doctrine first articulated in the infamous *Plessy v.*

Ferguson case (1896). It took the bishops of the American Catholic Church four years to decide

that what violated the rights of Black Americans legally and constitutionally also violated

Christian ethical norms of compassion and civility.

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[74] Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy,* vol. 2 (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1996), 503.

Section 16 of DCC states that

> It is a matter of historical fact that segregation in our country has led to oppressive conditions and the denial of basic human rights for the Negro. This is evident in the fundamental fields of education, job opportunity, and housing. Flowing from these areas of neglect and discrimination are problems of health and the sordid train of evils so often associated with the consequent slum conditions.[75]

It then quotes Pius XII (1958) to the effect that ¨the excesses [to which] pride of race and racial hate can lead¨ are well known. In terms of rigor, the analysis of the plight of Black Americans does not exceed that of the introduction. Yet the language of oppression and the denial of human rights is more trenchant. In the latter half, the moral evil of discrimination is grounded in the vices attendant to life in the slum. The statement again avoids the issue of culpability and opts to moralize about the ghetto. The language of Pope Pius XII is, similarly, either naive or imprecise. Even more conservative than DCC, he merely demurs that racial hubris often gives rise to ¨excesses¨, not that it is intrinsically a sin or disordered affection.

Finally, in sections 20 through 24, DCC offers thoughts on the application of non-discriminatory justice in society. The enactment of racial justice calls for the virtue of ¨prudence¨ (§20) because ¨the problems we inherit today are rooted in decades, even centuries, of custom and cultural patterns¨ (§21). This observation was of course correct, but the statement conveniently omits that the institutions so inherited are Jim Crow (decades) and chattel slavery (centuries). In closing, the bishops urge Americans of good will to ¨seize the mantle of leadership from the agitator and the racist¨ (§23). This clarion call is rather perplexing because, in conformity with the rest of the statement, the rhetorical deployments are left undefined and ambiguous. Who exactly is the agitator, and who is the racist? Certainly, virtually no one would self-identity with these designations. It seems plausible that the ¨agitator¨ in this context would include African-Americans who chose to practice racial justice activism, such as sit-ins,

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[75] Discrimination & Christian Conscience, 204.

boycotts, and marches. DCC does not state this outright, but its enshrinement of ¨prudence¨ implicitly frames those demanding racial justice in the present as unreasonable radicals.

Discrimination and Christian Conscience, true to its title, does not envision structural, policy-based remedies for antiblack racism in the United Statement. Instead, it points out the historical obstinacy of the problem and devolves much of the putative antidote to the individual conscience--suggesting in turn that racism is a matter of individual ´hardness of heart´ rather than a reality imbricated more deeply in American capitalism and settler colonialism.[76]

Yet despite its logical flaws and at times uncritical character, DCC does exhibit a degree of attention to outlines of American history and to the growing diversity and pluralism of the nation. Certainly, Catholic leaders in the United States recognized that the American Catholic church was an immigrant body--multinationally European, subject to cutting prejudices, and "anxious to prove their loyalty to America."[77] Section 18 notes that the American Negro is simply pursuing those opportunities and outcomes already ¨rightfully¨ attained by immigrants: namely, the ¨Irish, Jewish, Italian, Polish, Hungarian, German [and] Russian¨ newcomers (§17). The statement appears to reflect a kind of denouement for the Neo-Thomistic theology of Ryan; American society was in fact not a homogeneous unity or organic whole, and theologians and ethicists needed to start paying closer attention to the disparate outcomes and opportunities of gender, ethnic and racial groups. These tendencies would take fuller shape in the pontificate of John XXIII (p. 1958-1963) and the momentous Second Vatican Council, which he convened.

Ultimately, one may reasonably conclude that the American Catholic hierarchy engaged superficially both with Black Catholics and with the issues of racial justice in the first half of the

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[76] Cf. Nikhil Pal Singh, *Race and America's Long War* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2017), 74-97.

[77] Chester Gillis, *Roman Catholicism in America* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1999), 68.

twentieth century. The analytical rigor and overall character of *Discrimination and the Christian Conscience* indicates that, as late as 1958, the American episcopacy lacked either the will, interest or critical toolkit to at once assess the deep structures of racial injustice and to repudiate forcefully the complicity of whites and white Catholics in systemic racism. It hardly exercises itself in condemnation and ecclesiastical censure. It bears noting that, in a real sense, Catholic theologians lacked extensive practice in sociocultural analysis, as opposed to technical theology or canon law: *Rerum Novarum* marked the first papal or conciliar document to address secular realities in more formal fashion.

The shortcomings of DCC first underscore the chasm between that document and the pastoral documents produced by the Second Vatican Council. While the latter reflected (and obligated) the global Church, it in fact did bear the authorial imprint of some American bishop-theologians. If it is not surprising that Catholicism at large and American Catholics in particular made significant strides in social analysis between 1958 and 1965, that DCC should have lagged so considerably behind its secular counterparts remains perplexing. The Kerner Commission (1968) and the Moynihan Report (1965) lay in the future, and are more appropriately compared to Vatican II documents. Yet *DCC* sits rather uncomfortably in the shadow of both *Brown v. Board of Education* (May 1954) and Myrdal's *An American Dilemma* (1944). Among other things, *DCC* reflects the ambivalence of an American Catholicism roiling with progressive as well as conservative intellectual forces and traditions.

The following section will address the positions of the encyclicals and CST documents released in the 1960s and close with a discussion of the cultural, pastoral and theological shifts precipitated by John Paul´s pastorate and Vatican II.

Conclusion

In the period leading up to Vatican II, Roman Catholicism represented a minority religious option for Black Americans, and the leadership of the Catholic Church had engaged with issues of racial justice and inclusion only in fits and starts. Yet these connections remain significant. For Black Americans who were also Catholic, and for Americans at large, the American Catholic social ethics articulated over these decades reflected that Catholic Social Teaching was moving in a humanizing direction and showing greater concern for the alienation and economic dispossession of the modern citizen. Moreover, organization and individual efforts towards racial reforms should not be dismissed, for they often represented irruptions in the status quo. Although the term cannot be fully avoided, 'leadership' ought not to be understood as a monolithic reality in Catholicism or American Catholicism. The interests and perspectives of leaders at the different scalar levels of the Church aligned only imperfectly, if at all. As Andrew Greeley notes, for instance, the revolution of Vatican II represents the reformist will of the bishops.

Charting the racial attitudes of the U.S. population in the 1950s is not a simple task, nor can too much be made of a hypothetical aggregate. Mandated desegregation was underway in professional sports (1947, MLB), the Armed Forces (1947/48), and public schools (1954/55), but paroxysms of racial violence remained a reliable part of national life. At any rate, the U.S. and other western states and institutions of this era did not necessarily struggle with denouncing racism and race inequality in the abstract.[78] An educational booklet propagated by UNESCO illustrates this point. The document displays undaunted scientific positivism--despite the horrors of racialist, pro-eugenic Nazi Germany. Nevertheless, the UN and its educational arm do roundly

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[78] Of course, the reaction of individual whites to Black Americans demanding full citizenship was another matter entirely.

denounce racial discrimination (based more on geographical and empirical-biological arguments rather than philosophical *a prioris*).[79] Charted against the secular, human rights-oriented curricula of the UN, the propagation of *DCC* does not set the US Bishops on a path of avant-garde racial progressivism. Instead, *DCC* tracks generally with both UNESCO and postwar sociology. Like them, it condemned racism. But it also ultimately failed to identify modes of culpability and accountability for antiblack racism as a structural evil in white America. Yet shortcomings aside, Roman Catholicism, as both a repository of textual traditions and a mode of religious expression, could be used to good effect by Black Americans and justice-seeking white adherents. Such use would only expand its impact in the 1960s.

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[79] See Jenny Bangham, ¨What is Race? UNESCO, Mass Communication and Human Genetics in the Early 1950s,¨ *History of the Human Sciences* 28 (2015): 94-100.

Chapter 2: The Black Church and the Black Freedom Struggle in Northern Cities

Back then, Black churches were a small piece of peace. Church was a world where, even with its imperfections, the offer of equality and common humanity was the sustenance needed to make it through the rest of the week in a society that deemed them less than human.
        -Janelle Gray, *Echoes of the Struggle*

Eventually I started to notice a few things…I was told that the social gospel had corrupted Black Christianity. Rather than placing my hope there, I should look to the golden age of theology, either at the early years of this country or during the postwar boom of American Protestantism. But the historian in me couldn't help but notice that these apexes of theological faithfulness coincided with nadirs of Black freedom.
        -Dr Esau McCaulley, *Reading While Black*

The Negro church of today is the social centre of Negro life in the United States, and the most characteristic expression of African character.
        -W.E.B DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk*

Having developed some of the background and themes of Catholic Social Teaching in the earlier part of the twentieth century, we now turn our attention to the other major institution in our historical narrative: the Black Church. What ´Black Church´ means precisely in sociological and historical terms, and what its orientation may be in activist and political arenas, are valences that require some elaboration. This chapter will first briefly sketch the historical origins of the Black Church and then survey social-scientific scholarship concerning the political profile of the Black Church and its overall role in the Black Freedom struggle. These sections will serve as a necessary supportive framework for considering Catholic and Protestant versions of Afro-American spirituality in the urban north and in metropolitan Milwaukee in particular.

The historical roots of the Black Church ought to be sought in the American colonial era.[80] Scholars have noted three fundamental factors that shaped the outlook of the enslaved

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[80] On the expansion and growing articulation of slave codes in Virginia and other colonies, see Noel Rae, *The Great Stain: Witnessing American Slavery* (New York, NY: Overlook Press, 2018), 179-186.

Africans who found themselves in the alien surroundings of the North American colonies in the

decades and centuries after 1619, when unfree Angolans first stepped into Virginia: African

(especially West African) religious views and rites; the Protestant Christianity of white

plantation owners; and the condition of involuntary servitude itself.[81] That an enslaved people

should have so wholeheartedly embraced the religious worldview of their captors is itself a

formidable historical quandary. Demographically, the majority of Africans subjected to

enslavement and captivity in the American South came from regions predominated by native,

traditional religions, with Islam and Christianity representing smaller constituencies.[82] Over

several generations, enslaved African-Americans in the slaveholding South accepted the

Christian faith, but not without infusing unique cultural elements that distinguished Black

Christianity from its Anglo-American expressions.[83] Catherine Albanese identifies European

Christianity, the condition of enslavement itself, and the remembered lifeways of West Africa as

the most significant shapers of Afro-American religion.[84] The Christian spirituality of enslaved

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[81] Of course, the transatlantic (or ´middle´) passage and the peculiar institution of American chattel slavery are subjects of large historiographical corpora and lively debates. For an orientation to the literature and the controversies, see: Timothy Breen, Stephen Innes, and A. Leon Higginbotham, Jr., ¨The Atlantic World and the Origins of Slavery: Prejudice or Profit?,¨ in *Interpretations of American History: Patterns and Perspectives*, eds. Francis G. Couvares, Martha Saxton, Gerald N. Grob, and George Athan Billias (New York, NY: The Free Press, 2000), 100-136. In the same collection, cf. Sylvia R. Frey, Betty Wood, and Albert J. Raboteau, ¨Slave Culture: African or American?,¨ 296-338. For a brief introductory essay, see Howard Dodson, ¨The Transatlantic Slave Trade and the Making of the Modern World,¨ in *African Roots/American Cultures: Africa in the Creation of the Americas,* ed. Sheila S. Walker (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001), 118-122.

[82] Albert J. Raboteau, *Canaan Land: A Religious History of African Americans* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2001), kindle loc. 77.

[83] Thomas Kidd notes that the Christianization of enslaved Blacks accelerated between the American Revolution and the Second Great Awakening of the 1830s and 1840s. Thomas S. Kidd, *America's Religious History: Faith, Politics, and the Shaping of a Nation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2019), 111.

[84] Catherine Albanese, *America: Religions and Religion* (Belmont, CA: Thomson, 2013), 194.

African Americans indeed represented a cultural mosaic of many strands, in which no single

cultural gene predominated. Historian Albert J. Raboteau writes:

> Influenced by colonial European and indigenous native American cultures, aspects
> of the African heritage have contributed, in greater or lesser degree, to the formation of
> various Afro-American cultures in the New World. One of the most durable and adaptable constituents of
> the slave´s culture, linking African past with American present, was his religion. It is important to realize,
> however, that in the Americas the religions of Africa have not been preserved as static ¨Africanisms¨ or as
> archaic ¨retentions.¨ [Instead they continued] to develop as living traditions, putting down new roots in new
> soil, bearing new fruit as unique hybrids of American origin.[85]

Methodists and Baptists in particular evangelized Blacks in large numbers in the antebellum US,

and these believers existed alongside smaller constituencies of Black Presbyterians, Anglicans

(Episcopalians) and Catholics, among other denominations.[86] ´Especially in these free church

traditions, Black Christianity was marked in large part by expressive--even ecstatic--worship and

a liberative ethos in preaching. W.E.B DuBois, an astute observer of the Black experience during

his long lifetime and a profoundly relevant interlocutor today, follows anecdotes with analysis in

his commentary on slave revivals:

> And so most striking to me, as I approached the village and the little plain church perched aloft, was the air
> of intense excitement that possessed that mass of black folk. A sort of suppressed terror hung in the air and
> seemed to seize us… The black and massive form of the preacher swayed and quivered as the words
> crowded to his lips and flew at us in singular eloquence. The people moaned and fluttered, and then the
> gaunt-cheeked woman beside me suddenly leaped straight into the air and shrieked like a lost soul, while
> round about came wail and groan and outcry, and a scene of human passion such as I had never conceived
> before…[87]

Ever the careful researcher, DuBois cites census data to show that, in the South, ¨practically

every American Negro is a church member.¨ The 1890 US census indicates 2.5 million Black

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[85] Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The Invisible Institution in the Antebellum South* (Oxford University Press, 2004), 4.

[86] For a broader analysis of the Christianization of the American South, see Christine Leigh Heyrman, *Southern Cross: The Beginnings of the Bible Belt* (New York, NY: Knopf, 1997).

[87] W.E.B. Dubois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York, NY: Dover, 1994 [orig. 1903]), 115-116.

churchgoers, ten church members to every 28 persons, and a Black church to every 40 to 60 families. [88]

Black Church at the Center: The Twentieth Century

Although refined by succeeding generations of historians and sociologists, DuBois´ close analysis of the central, towering character of the Black Church in the experience of African-Americans remains essentially axiomatic and unchallenged. Although scholars disagree about the political and social utility of the Church and church affiliation, a wide consensus acknowledges the indelible cultural significance and historical durability of the Black Church. Lawrence Mamiya and Eric Lincoln, whose research into sociopolitical and praxis distinctions between African-American denominations will be addressed below, assert frankly that ¨Black churches are institutionally at the center of the Black subculture¨ and ¨[t]he Black Church has no challenger as the cultural womb of the Black community.¨ [89] This position boasts quantitative grounding as well; Hans Baer and Merrill Singer have noted that Black church membership in the US at the close of the twentieth century stood at approximately 25 million.[90]

Within the historiography, acceptance of the institutional and cultural importance of the Black Church often accompanies a positive assessment of the Black Church for the Black Freedom Struggle. For instance, historian Mark Noll aligns with many other scholars in contending that ¨African-American religion helped spark the Civil Rights movement.¨[91] Noll

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[88] DuBois, *Souls of Black Folk,* 118.

[89] C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1990), 7-8.

[90] Hans Baer and Merrill Singer, *African American Religion: Varieties of Protest and Accommodation* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 2002), 214.

[91] Mark Noll, *God and Race in American Politics: A Short History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), 2.

writes later in *God and Race* that the ¨impetus provided by Black religion [proved] critical for [the Civil Rights movement´s] emergence and also its success.¨[92] James Lance Taylor notes the Black Church´s ¨latent power to mobilize people´s courage and sense of political efficacy.¨[93]

On the questions of political activism and efficacy, dissent from these rosy portraits does not come primarily from wry academics looking to prod historical orthodoxies. Rather, prominent Black Americans have long harbored disillusionment and issued sharp counterclaims to the value of Black Christianity for Black racial justice. DuBois himself, although he believed ardently in the unique cultural contributions of the Black Church, nevertheless saw the Church as largely ineffective and indecisive as a vehicle of racial justice. Robert M. Franklin argues that, over time, DuBois lost confidence in Christian metaphysics and what he saw as misty, non-verifiable truth claims.[94] The Church, in its preoccupation with these matters, failed to advocate effectively for racial uplift. James Baldwin, who recognized beauty in the Black Christian tradition and who was himself briefly on a trajectory toward entering the clergy, came to rather dismal conclusions about the galvanic power of the Church.

Baldwin wrote voluminously on the plight of Black Americans in general and the hopelessness of life in the urban ghetto in particular. Often his critique of systemic racism and racial inequality took the form of anti-colonial criticism. For Baldwin, the police represent an invading and occupying force. He likens police officers in Harlem to ¨soldiers in a foreign land.¨ Yet the Black citizens of Harlem, for Baldwin, lack hope, lack political consciousness, and lack

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[92] Noll, *God and Race in American Politics,* 105.

[93] James Lance Taylor, ¨The Black Church¨, in Barbara A. McGraw and Jo Renee Formicola, eds., *Taking Religious Pluralism Seriously: Spiritual Politics on America's Sacred Ground* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2005), 151.

[94] Robert Michael Franklin, *Liberating Visions: Human Fulfillment and Social Justice in African-American Thought* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1990), 49-50.

robust institutions to seek and secure justice from this police state. Plaintively, Baldwin singles out the passivity of the Black Church: ¨there are probably more churches in Harlem per square mile than anywhere else in the world.¨

We are left to reconcile the profound dissonance between, on the one hand, those who presume the galvanizing political power of the African-American Church and, on the other hand, those who recognize it as passive and ineffectual for social transformation. This incoherence calls for closer attention. There are valid historical reasons for referring to African-American Christianity in large part as a coherent actor, although some historians may view this as colligation or reification, minor forms of methodological malpractice. Even so, it is also valuable to *deconstruct* the Black Church into its constituent denominational parts, to the degree that careful empirical research allows.

Mamiya and Lincoln suggest that Black denominations might be plotted on three spectrums, namely: universalism vs particularism; charismatic vs bureaucratic; communal vs privatistic.[95] Employing these continuums with reference to Black denominations and sects begins to provide us with more descriptive and predictive clarity about how a churchgoer or local church will comport themselves vis-à-vis racial justice movements. For example, members of a denomination that scores high marks in particularism (i.e., the attitude of confidence that the in-group is elect or saved, and pessimism about the outside world or other churches) and privatism (i.e., a strong focus on individual piety and moral rigor), such as the Church of God in Christ (COGIC) will be predictably reticent about marching in the streets.[96] Churches with high marks on universalism and communal praxis--such as the National Baptist Church or Christian

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[95] Lincoln & Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience,* 13.

[96] Ibid, 82.

Methodist Episcopal denomination--tend to gravitate more readily to concrete social justice efforts. The authors are of course aware of the charge that the Black Church at large is quietistic and apolitical.[97] They argue in response that this only applies to a small number of Black denominations and that the ¨Civil Rights movement was anchored in the Black Church.¨ [98] This positive assessment is seconded by Leonard Gadzekpo, who considers the Black Church ¨the most important Black institution in the United States.¨[99] With respect to Civil Rights, the Black Church ¨provided activists, ministers, laity, and financial support through Black church members…[It] also gave the movement an ideological framework through which passive attitudes were transformed into a collective consciousness supportive of collective action.¨[100]

The analysis of Kelly Brown Douglas and Ronald E. Hopson offers us the start of a path through the thicket--the contradictory binary choice between the Black Church as social vanguard or political opiate for passive, pietistic worshippers. Douglas and Hopson, in now familiar language, call the Black Church ¨one of the most enduring Black institutions¨, but also ¨one of the most enigmatic.¨ [101] The authors surpass the affirmative language seen above, characterizing the Church not only as a reliable vehicle for racial justice efforts, but also a

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[97] Ibid., 198.

[98] Ibid., 165, 198.

[99] Leonard Gadzekpo, ¨The Black Church, the Civil Rights Movement, and the Future,¨ *Journal of Religious Thought* 53 (1997): 95.

[100] Gadzekpo, ¨The Black Church, the Civil Rights Movement, and the Future,¨ 103. The author further notes that many leaders and prominent members of the NAACP, CORE, and SNCC--including the likes of Rosa Parks, James Farmer, and John Lewis--were either ministers, seminarians, or visible churchgoers.

[101] Kelly Brown Douglas and Ronald E, Hopson, ¨Understanding the Black Church: The Dynamics of Change,¨ *Journal of Religious Thought* 56 (2001): 95.

practical support, a social boon for Black Americans in the midst of their marginalization by the dominant white society. They write:

> The black church is...unique as a social institution. As one of the few black institutions to survive slavery, it is the one black social institution that remains virtually free from white control… The black church does not typically differentiate between the sacred And secular realms when meeting the needs of its people. There is no clear line of Demarcation between religious or church concerns and civil or social concerns. [F]or the black church [all] such concerns are integral to what it means to be a church. The black church is engaged in most spheres of black life. [102]

It is in fact eminently arguable that the character of the Black Church in this sense as a broad social resource, a vehicle and shelter for the economic, social, and cultural survival of Black Americans, exists *prior to* a set of political and activist convictions. To be sure, the former informs and catalyzes the latter; but the sequence and priority matter as well. This is the case because the idiosyncrasies of Black Christians´ politics (examined in the aggregate) flow from the primacy of the church as a bastion of cultural survival. Scholars in this space sometimes point to the ardor with which some Black Protestant ministers today inveigh against homosexuality or vocally endorse gender roles that accept or celebrate patriarchy and sexism.

Black churches in the urban north were often cultural liaisons and mediators for African-Americans who relocated during the Great Migration (what James Gregory substantively reframes as ´southern diaspora´). Churches comprised social and kinship networks that could, for instance, find jobs for newcomers or extend monetary benevolence when employment was not forthcoming. In a less tangible but equally important way, the rituals, community, and metanarratives of the local church valorized Black life and dignity.

An important example of this comes from Reverend Albert B. Cleage, founder and pastor of the Shrine of the Black Madonna in Detroit.[103] As might be guessed from the unique name of

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[102] Kelly Brown Douglas and Ronald E. Hopson, ¨Understanding the Black Church,¨ 98.

[103] See Albert B. Cleage, Jr., *The Black Messiah* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1989), 85-86.

this house of worship, Cleage also developed a unique religious ideology which he called Black

Christian Nationalism, expounded at length in an eponymous book. In *Black Christian*

Nationalism, Cleage excoriates the Black church, claiming that traditional Black theology is

¨uninterested in the problems of everyday life.¨[104] Indeed, for Cleage, ¨contemporary Black

churches are mechanisms of [political] pacification.¨[105] Cleage viewed his central clerical tasks

as unraveling Blacks citizens´ negative cultural programming and equipping church members for

the liberation struggle--not providing them a ¨ticket to glory.¨[106] This social and intellectual

project spurred a creative, Afrocentric reconstruction of Biblical characters and themes. Black

Americans are the Israel of God; Jesus is the Black Messiah. The apostle Paul, with his

supposedly more staid, conservative theology, was to be jettisoned from the liberation struggle;

Pauline Christianity was ¨false¨ and Paul himself an ¨Uncle Tom.¨ [107] Indeed, as Alister McGrath

writes, the original message of the Black Jesus "has been perverted by Paul in his attempt to

make it acceptable to Europeans."[108] *Black Christian Nationalism* also sees the pastor engaging

in the kind of social analysis non-churchgoers would find more familiar; he writes that ¨Black

revolution requires a set of counter-institutions.¨[109] Furthermore, Cleage contends that ¨Whites

determine the basic pattern of social life in the US by striving to maintain physical separation

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[104] Albert B. Cleage, Jr., *Black Christian Nationalism: New Directions for the Black Church* (New York, NY: William Morrow, 1972), 48.

[105] Cleage, *Black Christian Nationalism,* 16.

[106] Cleage, *Black Christian Nationalism,* 59.

[107] Ibid., 34.

[108] Alister E. McGrath, ed., *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Modern Christian Thought* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1993), 56.

[109] Cleage, *Black Christian Nationalism*, 173.

from Blacks.¨[110] Nevertheless, despite Cleage´s awareness of more vanguard, contemporary applications of Marx, Fanon, and radical voices in the domestic scene, these ideas and modes of discourse did not displace the centrality of his Christian vision; he was committed overall to ¨reinterpreting the Bible to serve the needs of Blacks.¨[111]

In the Black Christian Nationalist version of the Gospel narratives and the Christian faith, Messiah, nation, church, and *kerygma* are all re-imagined to serve the dual tasks of first valorizing Black individuals in an alienating and prejudicial society; and second, providing an intellectual framework and galvanizing members for Black liberation.[112] The first of these goals certainly animated a wide variety of Black religious institutions, both Christian and non-Christian. Significant scholarly assent supports the idea that, psychologically and sociologically, the social microcosm of the church of could to some extent deflect and dismantle the hierarchies of mainstream (i.e., white-dominated) culture; a modestly paid janitor could transform into a respected elder or deacon on Sunday, and women were frequently important leaders and organizers.

Certainly, this dynamic could and did apply in religious contexts beyond the Christian church; indeed, proponents of the Nation of Islam, an ascendant religious expression in the

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[110] Ibid., 85.

[111] Ibid., 45.

[112] The critique by two systematic theologians leveled at James Cone's Black Power theology certainly applies to Cleage's system as well. Stanley J. Grenz and Roger Olson write:"[B]lack theology was problematic because it was ethnocentric…[It] elevated experience to the status of norm for theology...Its norm was not universal human experience, but the specific experience of the Black community described in terms of oppression. As a result, Black theology became a massive reinterpretation program. The traditional Christian narrative of salvation and the theological categories traditionally used in its articulation...were cast in political-economic-social and specifically ethnic (that is, Black) terms…" Stanley J. Grenz and Roger E. Olson, *20th-Century Theology: God & the World in a Transitional Age* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 209-210. Of course, Cleage and Cone would demur that ethnocentricity was in fact a strength as well as an important corrective emphasis in Black-oriented theologies.

1960s, self-consciously stressed Christianity as the religion of Black oppression and subservience, with NOI the alternative for Black racial uplift and dignification.[113] Indeed, the broad aim of valorizing and dignifying Black Americans animated the ecclesial life of the historically established Black denominations as well as those groups adopting innovative theologies and worldviews--such as Black Power theology, Black Christian Nationalism, or the Nation of Islam.

Within the confines of the more established forms of Black religious expression, Black churches supported members in other ways as well. Especially during the decades of the Great Migration,[114] churches often served as cultural liaisons, acclimating migrating Southerners to northern and urban norms, providing kinship networks, and disseminating news about open jobs and other resources. These functions of social support and uplift by ecclesial bodies are *in se* consequential as well as--for the most part, uncontroversial. How faiths and faith communities envisioned and effectuated liberation--and indeed whether liberation meant the economic self-sufficiency of Booker T. Washington or Black cultural autonomy in the mold of Sixties postcolonialism--remains a complex question.[115] It requires attention to the relationships between

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[113] See Edward E. Curtis IV, *Black Muslim Religion in the Nation of Islam, 1960-1975* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 89. Also, Marth F. Lee, *The Nation of Islam: An American Millenarian Movement* (Lampeter, Wales, UK: Mellen House, 1988). Similar to Black Christian Nationalism, the Nation of Islam promoted an explicitly racialized cosmology. According to Fard and Malcolm X, a Black scientist named Yaqub/Yacub created white people 6,000 years ago through genetic experimentation; these 'white devils' were granted political hegemony by Allah for a long period, despite their intrinsic inferiority and malignancy. Although this concept retains little credibility as a biological or historical fact, that is beside the point. Its function is etiological, as it grounds in religious metanarrative the facts of intrinsic Black superiority as well as the historical subjugation of Blacks.

[114] "Great Migration" remains the common parlance for the phenomenon of Black Americans migrating en masse out of the South between 1916 and 1970 (periodizations differ slightly). However, James N. Gregory makes a strong case for a more complex picture: Blacks and whites migrating, Southerners moving west as well as north, and migrants relocating to cities from rural areas.

[115] Cf. Robert L. Harris, Jr., and Rosalyn Terborg-Penn, *The Columbia Guide to African-American History SInce 1939* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2006), 72.

the noetic world of theology and, on the other hand, concrete ecclesial praxis in specific urban contexts.[116]

Black Catholicism as part of the ´Black Church´

As surveyed above, the Black Church in the United States has reflected a confluence of common (or parallel) historical experiences and resulting worldview among the American descendants of enslaved Africans. Since ¨Black Church¨ as a historical generalization encompasses ecclesial bodies both Black and Protestant, it bears asking how Roman Catholicism fits intelligibly into this framework.

In some ways, the experience of Roman Catholic immigrants mirrored aspects of the Black American experience. The former did not, of course, include chattel slavery or aggressive regimes of racial suppression and violence. They did not experience either the familiar death or ¨social death¨ of enslaved Africans.[117] Their experience did entail a diminishment in economic opportunity, isolation, and the dread of facing constant cultural chauvinism from Anglo Americans´ belief that certain foreigners were poorly suited or equipped for the habits and responsibilities of civic life in a participatory democracy. Yet this potential touchstone of cultural solidarity dissolved steadily over the course of the twentieth century. From a policy standpoint, the range of ethnicities and nationalities that could accede to the ´club´ of whiteness--and therefore to racial hegemony, privilege, and protection--was gradually widened.[118] At the same time, Eastern and Southeastern European immigrants assimilated: they adopted American

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[116] Chapter four will address more specifically the critical resources and frameworks of Black theology.

[117] Orlando Patterson employs a transcivilizational approach in his analysis of slavery as a status of social nullity or ´death.´ See Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018).

[118] See, for instance, Reed Ueda, *Postwar Immigrant America: A Social History* (New York, NY: Bedford St. Martin´s, 1994), 70-75.

cultural modes, aggressively encouraged higher education for their children, learned English, and occasionally suppressed the use of the ´Old World´ language in their households. These kinds of adaptation marked the elision of Catholic otherness in America. In contrast to Black Americans, the *phenotype* of Irish, Italian and Slavic newcomers did not present a durable barrier to social inclusion and acceptance in the United States.

At first blush, of course, Catholic immigrants´ benefiting from white supremacist social praxis in the U.S. does not appear to lay promising, plausible foundations for Catholicism as an ecclesial vehicle for a racial justice agenda. Black theologians reflecting on the potentialities of Catholicism have expressed frank pessimism. James H. Cone writes:

> Racism among white Catholics is similar to the racism among white Protestants: it is sophisticated in that it can best be defined by black invisibility in Catholic theology and history. There are very few white Catholic theologians, priests, and sisters who think that knowledge of black history and culture is indispensable for an adequate understanding of justice in this society and the world… The Catholic hierarchy in the United States is exclusively controlled by whites. Many black Catholics, therefore, find it difficult to challenge structures of authority in their church without enormous limitations being placed on their ministry. [119]

J. Deotis Roberts is measured but similarly critical in his appraisal:

> Black theologians must have a cultural and political hermeneutic. Roman Catholics provide a concern for metaphysics and some freedom of cultural expression, but they do not provide the ´political´ component necessary for a viable Black theology. They are part of a superchurch which is pro-Western.[120]

Such critiques are valid and contain nothing fatal; the same contradictions exist within American Protantism. White, slave-owning planters, overwhelmingly Christian, weaponized their belief system against unfree Blacks. In the hands of interested Southern exegetes, slavery became not a vestigial institution but a divine mandate. In a typical sort of 1850s apologia, Reverend Frederick A. Ross, proud Presbyterian of antebellum Alabama, opined that

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[119] James H. Cone, *Speaking the Truth: Ecumenism, Liberation, and Black Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 55.

[120] James Deotis Roberts, *Black Theology Today: Liberation and Contextualization* (New York, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1983), 24.

> ...whether Southern masters fully know it or not, [they] hold from God, individually and collectively, the highest and noblest responsibility ever given by Him to individual private men on all the face of the earth. For God has intrusted [sic] to them to train millions of the most degraded in form and intellect...And I thank God he has given this great work to that type of the noble family of Japheth best qualified to do it...born to command, and softened and refined under our Southern sky. [121]

Enslaved Africans adopted this religion but transformed it from a faith that condoned their perpetual servitude into one that celebrated their value and promised their liberation.[122] Analogously, while the hierarchy of American Catholicism in the 1950s and 1960s (and perhaps since) has not *sufficiently engaged* with issues of Black rights or the dearth of Black clerical voices, as a rich and complex system, Catholicism has provided an imperfect but frequently powerful vehicle for progressives.

The Roman Catholic church represents a repository of symbols, subtraditions, cultural and intellectual resources that can be deployed towards social and racial justice aims. Black Americans who chose Catholic identity would have to reckon with the sociopolitical ambiguities present in the Church. Moreover, Catholics Black and white, conservative and progressive, were frequently bound by heritage and Greeley´s ¨Catholic imagination¨ to the same church affiliation; rather than interdenominational or interreligious dialogue, their intense disagreements would be intra-denominational conflicts--the shouting matches of a closely-knit, dysfunctional family. Although the initial and majority experience of Christian Blacks in America has been Protestant, "Black Church" is much more intelligible (and more useful) when understood as a mode of political and ecclesial praxis, rather than simply a curated collection of particular denominations. After all, the Black Church does not cease to be operative because its members are exercising political voice from within a majority-white denomination (i.e., United Methodists, rather than

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[121] Frederick Augustus Ross, *Slavery Ordained of God* (New York, NY: Negro Universities Press, repr. 1969), 67-68.

[122] See, for instance, Albert J. Raboteau, *Canaan Land: A Religious History of African Americans* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

the AME or CME). Similarly, as the Martin Luther King, Jr. shrine at St. Veronica´s illustrates, Black Catholicism can potently deploy Christian symbols and practices to dual ends: spiritual devotion as well as the Black social agenda, broadly construed. Despite its separate historical genealogy, Black Catholicism ought to be considered as much a part of the ´Black Church´ as Black Methodists, Baptists, and Pentecostals. *Black Catholic* was and remains a unique, powerful, and mostly overlooked locus of racial and religious identity. Black Protestants as well as Black Catholicism were well positioned to make crucial contributions to the Black Freedom agenda.[123] In other words, in examining the theological or discursive architecture of Black religion, the orientation of a particular religious expression toward liberation and racial justice matters more than denominational label. As J. Deotis Roberts illustrates, there has long been intra-religious debate about the correct hermeneutic (and metaphysics) for liberationist Black religion--Christocentricity and the usefulness of Marx are often touchpoints in this discussion.[124] These are ideological and sociological cleavages encountered *within* the wide respective realms of Protestantism and Roman Catholicism--not between them.

Black Church and Catholicism in Milwaukee

The period of the Great Migration--stretching roughly from the Great War to the denouement of the Vietnam conflict--saw millions of Black southerners (and whites) relocate from the American South to Northern cities.[125] In the aggregate, Black Americans in particular

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[123] Though this identity has been less prominent, Raboteau, for one, reminds us that Black Catholics were active organizers nationally in the Black Freedom Struggle. He writes: "...[B]etween 1968 and 1970, black Catholics organized the Black Catholic Clergy Caucus, the National Black Sisters Conference, the Black Catholic Lay Caucus, and finally the National Office of Black Catholics." Raboteau, *Canaan Land,* loc. 1121.

[124] J. Deotis Roberts, *Black Theology Today: Liberation and Contextualization* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1984), 2-9.

[125] This is perhaps the most visible dynamic. James Gregory makes clear that this dispersal was more complex: it included westward migration as well as migration to Southern cities from the rural South.

strove for higher wages and also nursed hope that Northern cities might maintain racial regimes

more relaxed than those they left behind. An article from the 29 June 1917 edition of the Kansas

City *Advocate* declared that "The State of Alabama has lost 50,000 Negroes Since the Great

Migration Movement." It was apparently "alarming" to white Alabamans to lose from their

region so many African-Americans, although no reason is offered other than the loss of

sharecropping rents and usury. In February 1918, a Black minister corresponded to the *Topeka*

Plaindealer concerning the economic exploitation and inhuman violence Black Americans

regularly faced in the South: "whipping Negroes has become a mere pastime" and prominent

Black citizens were occasionally shot to death for "disputing small amount[s]." The minister

concludes somewhat despairingly that he "sees nothing for our race to do but leave this part of

the country" where there is "nothing but slavery for us.[126]

Indeed, the overall character of the Great Migration reflected a confluence of sociological

´push´ and ´pull´ factors--in this case, the racialized terror of Southern states and the possibility

of employment in growing Northern cities, respectively. [127] The image of seeds scattering in

James Gregory´s ´Southern Diaspora´ paradigm underscores how this massive dislocation of

American southerners was more illinear than cohesive. The migration extended to white as well

as Black migrants, and those intrepid citizens migrated to the American West as well as the

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[126] "Tell the Cause of the Great Migration: South Likened to the Lower Regions-Blacks in Constant Dread," *Topeka Plaindealer*, February 8, 1918: https://infoweb-newsbank-com.ezproxy.lib.uwm.edu/apps/readex/doc.

[127] Stewart E. Tolnay & E.M Beck, ¨Rethinking the Role of Racial Violence in the Great Migration,¨ in *Black Exodus: The Great Migration From the American South,* ed. Alferdteen Harrison (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 1992), 20-24.

North.[128] Moreover, other vectors of relocations proved equally significant, such as the move from the deep South to the upper South or from rural environs to a (potentially Southern) city.[129]

As large cohorts of Black migrants settled into urban Northern environments, they of course did not find any semblance of racial utopia. Racism still existed in the forms of discrimination, pay inequities and segregation. Surveillance and violence by police weighed ponderously on Black neighborhoods. Racialized geographies and precise modes of interpersonal decorum were still waiting to be committed to muscle memory. Yet politically and economically, the north still presented more spaces for opportunity and autonomy. The franchise was relatively safe as compared to the South or Deep South. Racial violence still occurred, but northerners rarely ignited the sort of incandescent explosion of racial rage that killed Emmett Till in August 1955.

Black migrants frequently traveled to midwestern cities in search of stable industrial jobs.[130] In so doing, they brought with them the cultural legacies and institutions that they had fostered and matured in the South, cultural assets encompassing the literary, artistic, culinary and--most significant for our analysis--ecclesial. This dynamic took hold in Milwaukee as elsewhere, as Black Protestant churches of various denominations proliferated in the inner city. Yet despite the presence of Black churches in Milwaukee, ecclesiastically, it was arguably the Roman Catholic church and progressive clergy and parishioners therein who more visibly advocated and militated for Black freedom in Milwaukee´s iteration of the Black Freedom

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[128] James Gregory, *Southern Diaspora: How The Great Migrations of Black and White Southerners Transformed America* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

[129] Luther Adams, *Way Up North In Louisville: African American Migration in the Urban South, 1930-1970* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 13-36.

[130] See Joe Trotter, *Black Milwaukee: The Making of an Industrial Proletariat, 1915-1945* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2006).

Struggle--as seen in open housing, school choice, and other submovements between 1965 and 1970.

Before delving into the question of why this is so, two clarifications are in order. First, it must be acknowledged that the Black Protestant churches established in Milwaukee during the decades of the Great Migration furnished Black migrant parishioners with various forms of inclusion, social support, job connections and cultural mediation noted above--and so were indispensable to Black dignification and 'racial uplift' in ways beyond what was visible to the public (e.g., boycotts, marches, sit-ins). Second, the notion of *the Catholic Church as the most visible and active ecclesiastical vehicle* for the articulation and promotion of Black civil rights in the mid- to late-1960s should not be construed to suggest that the majority of Milwaukee Catholics supported the aspirations of the Civil Rights movement. Chapter three will in fact address some of the structural white resistance that would belie this idea.

Nevertheless, the Roman Catholic Church in Milwaukee, in its leadership, membership, and practices, lent important institutional impetus to the fight for Black rights in metropolitan Milwaukee. Several interrelated historical and sociological factors contribute to this reality. The first is simple chronology. Myriad Milwaukee parishes and convents were established by second-wave German and Polish immigrants (as well as other, smaller European constituencies). These include St. Josaphat's Basilica (1901); St. Veronica's (1925); the School Sisters of St. Francis (1874); St. Peter & Paul Parish (1889-1891); St. Benedict the Moor Parish (c. 1908); and St. Francis Parish (1869-1871), among others. It is to be expected that such ´senior´ institutions would be more deeply imbricated in the social and political fabric of the city than churches planted generations later.

Indeed, this point rises somewhat above conjecture. Particular Milwaukee parishes focused on Decades before the 1960s--yet still within the chronology delineated as the ¨longue-durée¨ Civil Rights movement.[131] Captain Lincoln Charles Valle and wife Julia Valle established St. Benedict the Moor parish in 1908 in the hopes of both evangelizing and educating Black Milwaukeeans. Under the pastoral guidance of S.J. Eckert, leaders hoped to turn St. Benedict into a ¨Catholic Tuskegee.¨ [132] Catholic parishes and attached schools often played a formative role in the lives of the young Black Milwaukeeans who attended; although essentially evangelistic and deeply invested in the propagation of neo-scholastic theology, these institutions were also educational and sometimes surprisingly aware of Black cultural contributions.[133]

Specific cultural moments and artifacts from the 1960s--both prior to and concurrent with the movement in Milwaukee--displayed the potential for different forms of Catholic religious praxis to function as sites of progressive racial politics. These were often experimental: irruptions or disjunctions in the institutional status quo that reflected collisions between Catholic sensibilities and other outcrops of tradition or worldview. As described by Matthew J. Cressler, on 1 December 1968, Chicago´s Knickerbocker Hotel saw the performance of a Liturgy of the Eucharist bedecked with African elements, including traditional robes, interpretive dance, and

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[131] Thomas J. Davis, ¨The Longue Durée of Black Civil Rights: Understanding Climaxes, Commencements and Continuities,¨ *Reviews in American History* 41, no. 3 (2013): 507-512.

[132] Steven Avella, ¨African-American Catholicism in Milwaukee: St. Benedict the Moor Church and School,¨ *Milwaukee History* 17 (1994): 70-86.

[133] Writes Steven Avella: ¨Equally impressive was the emphasis given by the sisters to the study of black history and historical figures of the Negro race. In 1943, what later was known as Black History Month was celebrated in February with an assembly commemorating the contributions of notable African American historical figures such as Crispus Attucks, Marian Anderson, Ralph Metcalfe, Benjamin Banneker, and even a favorite black Catholic priest, Father William Lane, who periodically visited the school from his home in Minnesota.¨ Steven Avella, ¨African American Socialization in Milwaukee: The Role of the Catholic Church,¨ *Kansas Quarterly* 25, no. 2 (1993): 42.

¨the beat of jungle music.¨[134] This ´African´ and ´Black Power´ Mass emerged in the years immediately following the Second Vatican Council, when Black Catholics, progressives, and Catholics at large were wrestling with the seismic, paradigmatic shifts in theology and practice wrought by the Council. The unconventional Mass precipitated conflict between Father George H. Clements (1932-2019) of Chicago and Archbishop John Patrick Cody (1907-1982); the latter proved less than sympathetic to the Mass as a space for exploring racial justice or cultural adaptation, asserting:

> ¨...Permission has not been granted… nor will it be granted to conduct any services not in keeping with the devotional spirit of the liturgy. It is forbidden to introduce nonliturgical elements into the mass at any time.¨[135]

The Black Power Mass and the tumult that followed in Catholic Chicago provide some insight into the possibilities and perils of liturgy as a vehicle for racial justice; these episodes also point to the ways in which the different scalar levels of the complex and bureaucratic entity that is the Roman Catholic Church could vigorously oppose one another.[136]

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[134] Matthew J. Cressler, ¨Black Power, Vatican II, and the Emergence of Black Catholic Liturgies,¨ *U.S. Catholic Historian* 32, no. 4 (2014): 99-100.

[135] Quoted in Cressler, ¨Black Power, Vatican II, and the Emergence of Black Catholic Liturgies,¨ 100.

[136] Sociologist Vatro Murvar has suggested a sociological framework in which new religious movements reflect an oppositional or dissenting--but still intra-religious--dialogue with the ´imperial´ mother institution. Murvar´s framework is certainly descriptive of Catholicism (and American Catholicism in particular), inasmuch as the initiatives of parish priests sometimes meet resistance in the conservative mindset of bishops and higher hierarchs. For instance: ¨Religious movements recognize the need for and demand radical social change to help the oppressed, the exploited, the poor, the aged, the victims of war and imperial (royal) structures in which religion increasingly performs the function of an opiate.¨ Vatro Murvar, ¨Toward a Sociological Theory of Religious Movements,¨ *Journal of the Scientific Study of Religion* 14, no. 3 (1975): 252.

Chapter 3: Vatican II, Postwar Milwaukee, & Catholic Ambivalence on Black Civil Rights

What's the longest bridge in the world?
The 16th Street Viaduct. It connects Africa and Poland.
    -Peggy Rozga, "The Bridge"

In this country, American means white. Everybody else has to hyphenate.
    -Toni Morrison, acclaimed novelist and Roman Catholic

On 28 August 1967 in Milwaukee, a group of Black activists and their liberal allies marched across the 16th St Viaduct to draw attention and garner support for open housing. Led by Father James Groppi, the throng would complete this same trek daily for the next 200 days. Along the way, these activists would encounter hostility from socially conservative whites. As in other sites of urban protest, hostility would take the form of taunts, shouted slurs, and thrown fists or rocks. Memorably, one counter-protester carried a sign that read, cryptically: *Groppi--The Black God.* Another, equally hostile, brandished the message: *I Want a Slave.* The ranks of hostile, white South-Sider counter-protestors swelled to about 3,000 at the south end of the Viaduct and as many as 5,000 at Kosciuszko Park.

A few years prior, amid a Civil Rights Movement growing in the American North and South, Pope John XXIII convened the Second Vatican Council. The Council, described by some as the most significant religious event of the twentieth century, lasted between 1962 and 1965. Not easily classed as liberal or conservative in its decrees and positions, Vatican II nevertheless made sweeping and memorable changes in its turn toward ecumenicalism and its endorsement of the vernacular Mass over the traditional Latin. As an undeniable product of its Cold War provenance, Vatican II documents reflect on labor and capitalism, the family, nuclear age anxieties, and, relevant to the purposes of this essay, race relations. What were the positions of the Council on race relations and Black rights in particular? More specifically, how did the

bishops of Vatican II expect (or hope) their theological and social positions in this arena to be realized pastorally at the level of city, neighborhood, and parish?

This essay represents an attempt to elucidate some of the interrelationships of Black Civil Rights activism with white resistance and with organized religion in the city of Milwaukee. The religion in question is not religiosity at large but Roman Catholicism in particular. In line with the de facto paradigm of activism in other cities, clergy were prominent among the vanguard of Civil Rights leadership in Milwaukee. This fact is reinforced by the institution of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, founded in Atlanta in 1957, with Martin Luther King, Jr. as its first president. The community prominence, education, and public speaking experience of the Black pastor gravitated him toward community organizing, politics, and activism.[137] Cities, moreover, provided "a ready-made political base."[138] Uniquely, however, activist clergy in and around Milwaukee were recognizably Roman Catholic. One of the more prominent names in this space is inarguably Fr. James Edmund Groppi, who also happened to be white.[139]

This chapter will adduce personal letters, ecclesiastical decrees, and pieces of official correspondence from Roman Catholic leaders in Milwaukee in an attempt to shed light on the ways in which Roman Catholicism interacted with and related to the circumstances and activism of Blacks in Milwaukee, concretely as well as ideologically. Despite a wealth of extant documents, this archive is incomplete. Therefore, the patterns and relationships offered herein

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[137] Peter Williams, *America's Religions: From Their Origins to the Twenty-First Century* (Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 445.

[138] Peter Williams, *America's Religions,* 446.

[139] Groppi's prominence and vocation as a Catholic priest make him a fascinating and relevant interlocutor for exploring the intersections of race activism and Catholic religion/spirituality in Milwaukee. I in no way intend to diminish the enormous contributions and leadership of 'indigenous' Black Milwaukeeans, such as Velvalea "Vel" Phillips and Lloyd Barbee.

are tentative and suggestive, rather than quantitative and comprehensive. Even so, it is to be hoped that such a modest sketch will help us to more fully and accurately situate some of the personal and institutional actors in Milwaukee Civil Rights, whether supportive, oppositional, neutral or conflicted.

A Brewing Crisis: Trends & Tensions in Mid-Century Milwaukee

In April 1924, Daniel Webster Hoan, the Socialist mayor of Milwaukee, had completed eight years in that position and used a Common Council session to comment on the city's superiority relative to other American cities "in eighteen particulars." An excerpt:

> *Twelfth*: No other city has undertaken to solve the housing problem as has Milwaukee. With the cooperation of our city and county governments, together with public spirited citizens, we have shown other American cities how it is possible to construct homes, modest but modern, for working people at a [cost] of $1,500 each.[140]

Hoan continues:

> No other large city has so little labor trouble. There are fewer strikes here and less disorder, when one occurs, than in any other large city…

> In view of these, and other accomplishments, Milwaukee is recognized today by students of government as the leader among American cities. We think in terms of progress, not reaction. Our patriotism is that of love, not of hatred. Our spirit is that of homes, not of dives. Our ethics is respect for all peoples and their religions. Our Americanism is that of right, tolerance, liberty and justice as written in the Declaration of Independence, [the] Bill of Rights and the life of Abraham Lincoln. [141]

Hoan's rose-colored eulogy of Milwaukee seems romantic and even utopian to modern ears. Hoan would live until 1961, long enough to see economic and social unrest belie his litany of

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[140] Daniel Webster Hoan, Proceedings of the Common Council of Milwaukee, 1924. Collected in George Lankevich, *Milwaukee: A Chronological & Documentary History, 1673-1977* (Dobbs Ferry, NY: Oceana Publications, 1977), 124-125.

[141] Ibid., 126.

social harmonies and vibrant economic indicators. Tellingly, this manifesto delivered to the

Common Council assiduously avoided any mention of race relations as such.

Ultimately, like other American cities at mid-century that still appeared highly functional

and even vital--Detroit among them--Milwaukee gave its citizens reasons for hope as well as

apprehension and anxiety.[142] To borrow a framework from Brian Tochterman's cultural history

of New York, Milwaukee combined elements of Cosmopolis with emerging strains of

Necropolis.[143] Milwaukee at mid-century had already long been recognized as an ethnic 'salad

bowl', a hub for (predominantly European) immigrants of many ethnicities, including Finns,

Hungarians, Irish, Italians, Czechs and Jewish migrants. Germans and subsequently German-

Americans constituted the 'first wave' of the 1840s and 1850s; this cohort predominated

numerically as well as in terms of political and economic ascendancy. Next to Germans, the

largest European segment was Poles.[144]

This second wave of Polish immigrants streamed into Milwaukee and its environs

primarily in the last two decades of the nineteenth century. Although they were not as

economically robust or quick to assimilate culturally as their German-American counterparts, the

sheer numbers of Polish Milwaukeeans commanded regard in city politics. Donald E. Pienkos

notes that Poles and Polish-Americans numbered 70,000 in Milwaukee in 1906, out of a

population of 313,000 ; this high proportion held stable even in 1955, when Polish-Americans in

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[142] Heather Ann Thompson, *Whose Detroit? Politics, Labor and Race in a Modern American City* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004).

[143] Brian Tochterman, *The Dying City: Postwar New York and the Ideology of Fear* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2017).

[144] Some scholars place Poles third, after Germans and the collective designation "Scandinavian."

Milwaukee amounted to 120,000 out of 640,000 (about 19%).[145] Collectively, Polish immigrants

to Milwaukee tended to be minimally educated, which meant this mostly Roman Catholic cohort

of immigrants sought jobs in unskilled labor--jostling not only each other but also the urban

African-American population.

Scholars such as Nikhil Pal Singh have argued persuasively that racial animus and indeed

'race war' have been intrinsic to the American project, which for Singh and other, Black and

post-colonial critics has amounted to 'empire'. Nevertheless, this oeuvre does not exclude or

vindicate corporate and capitalist logics from the fray of interracial conflict. Indeed, Singh's

work in particular contends that capitalism has consistently entangled itself in the enterprises of

race-making, white supremacy, and race war.[146] In this vein, urban labor and economic

circumstances form a necessary--if not sufficient--account at the bottom of interracial struggle;

these are particularly relevant as a backdrop to the tumult of the Civil Rights Movement in

Milwaukee. These factors are in turn deeply intertwined with the political circumstances and

aspirations of Polish Milwaukeeans.

Donald E. Pienkos shows that Poles in Milwaukee settled into two 'Polonias'--a smaller

one on the North Side and a much more numerically- and culturally dense one on the South Side

of the city. Although overall only about 5% of South Side Poles held professional positions, the

South Side Polish wards generated a significant business district, alongside a Polish-language

newspaper (*Kuryer Polski*) of wide reach and a host of fraternal organizations.[147] Religiously,

[145] Donald E. Pienkos, "The Polish Americans in Milwaukee Politics," in Angela T. Pienkos, ed., *Ethnic Politics in Urban America: The Polish Experience in Four Cities* (Chicago, IL: Polish American Historical Association, 1978), 66.

[146] Nikhil Pal Singh, *Race and America's Long War* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2017), 74f.

[147] Donald Pienkos, "The Polish Americans in Milwaukee Politics," 70.

Polish Milwaukeeans were overwhelmingly Roman Catholic, although nationalism had carved

out a small place for the schismatic Polish National Catholic Church (founded in 1903).[148]

Politically, Polish-Americans swung consistently to the left, with but a few deviations.

Democratic support in the Polish Wards outpaced Democratic percentages at the city level in

every election year between 1900 and 1976 (except in 1912, when Socialist Eugene Debs split

the left-wing vote).

Poles themselves were politically engaged at a high level; Polish-Americans frequently

gained seats as alderpersons and in the state senate and state assembly, but often failed to break

through into the judiciary or Milwaukee mayoral elections. Overall, "[w]hile the major offices

have eluded them, a host of Polish politicians have won elective offices at every level of local

government."[149] Pienkos does not discuss Polish relations to African-Americans explicitly,

except to comment that as "thousands of Poles have moved out of the city, new ethnic groups

such as Blacks and Spanish-speaking peoples have begun to make their presence felt."[150]

The author is of course alluding, rather casually, to the white flight that coincided with

the large-scale Black, urban relocation and dislocation known as the Great Migration.[151] As

Black Southerners fled to the North and West in droves, they gravitated to cities like Detroit,

Chicago, and Milwaukee for the economic opportunities and a greater sense of personal and

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[148] Ibid., 72.

[149] Ibid., 90.

[150] Ibid.

[151] James N. Gregory, *Southern Diaspora: How the Great Migrations of Black and White Southerners Transformed America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 36.
On the racial-political coalitions forged amid the Great Migration(s), see Erin Royston Battat, *Ain't Got No Home: America's Great Migrations and the Making of an Interracial Left* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2014).

social freedom. Nevertheless, although the urban North offered African-Americans expanded

freedom of spatiality and social mobility relative to their experience in the South and especially

Deep South, these migrants still encountered rigid, entrenched systems of racialized injustice and

starkly delimited geographies.[152]

Increased labor and professional opportunities in Milwaukee and other midwestern cities

went hand-in-hand with not only isolated and often dilapidated housing, but also a spate of

inequitable and exploitative real estate and mortgage practices. As Joe William Trotter, Jr.

writes: "Discriminatory real estate practices and zoning legislation also impeded Afro-American

access to adequate housing...The basic device for restricting blacks in Milwaukee, as in other

cities, was the racially restrictive covenant."[153] Similarly, Gregory D. Squires observes that

> [T]hrough the 1950s, mortgage lenders and other providers of housing services explicitly used race as an underwriting criterion, which resulted in the denial of...vital services for African-American neighborhoods.[154]

The gamut of these unfair tactics, which include redlining and blockbusting, has received

considerable scholarly attention in the decades since the 1960s.[155] Post-war Milwaukee carried

the dubious distinction of being the most strictly segregated city in the United States-- a title for

which it continues to contend today. Blacks in the city gained entry into neighborhoods fled by

Jewish residents and Italians, only to experience overall a sharp and thorough "spatial separation

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[152]Andrew Wiese, *Places of Their Own: African American Suburbanization in the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 197f.

[153] Joe Trotter, *Black Milwaukee: The Making of an Industrial Proletariat, 1915-1945,* 71.

[154] Gregory D. Squires, "Color and Money in Milwaukee: The Persistent Mortgage Lending Gap," in Stanley Battle, ed., *The State of Black Milwaukee* (Milwaukee, WI: Milwaukee Urban League, 2000), 195.

See also Frank Zeidler, "Some Conditions in MIlwaukee at the Time of *Brown v. Board of Education*," *Marquette Law Review* 89 (2005): 77-79.

[155] See, for instance, Richard Rothstein, *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America* (New York, NY: Liveright Publishing, 2017).

from whites" --especially Poles and Germans.[156] As historian Tula Connell notes: "From 1950 to 1960, Milwaukee's black population grew from 21,772 to 62,548, a 187 percent increase that alarmed many white residents and provided fuel for a race-baiting mayoral campaign."[157]

In sum, even when analyses of Euro-American Milwaukee opt not to address the situation of Blacks in the city, such analyses still provide important points of context for exegeting the plight of Black Milwaukee. In the pre- and post-war eras, ethnic European immigrants in Milwaukee and their children competed with Blacks--some native to Milwaukee but many also migrating--for employment, housing, and political voice. As outlined above, Poles in particular could be considered alongside Blacks as a (temporarily) ghettoized population. However, as with other ethnic Europeans, Polishness was eventually subsumed into the growing category of "whiteness," which brought with it expanded legal protection and social prestige. Claudia Sadowski-Smith refers to this category as a "historically constituted pan-European white identity" which "continues to shield individuals from systematic and institutionalized privilege and racialized violence." [158] While it is possible to situate Black/White tensions in Milwaukee strictly in terms of economic and material competition, the adoption by ethnic white migrants of longstanding racial antipathies also merits consideration.

Vatican II on Urban Problems & Race Relations

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[156] Trotter, *Black Milwaukee,* 67. Trotter includes a thorough census and ward-by-ward analysis of some trends in Milwaukee segregation and housing.

[157] Tula Connell, "1950s Milwaukee: Race, Class, and a City Divided," *Labor Studies Journal* 42, no. 1 (2017): 27. Connell further notes that this rancor was not merely interracial: middle- and upper-class Blacks often aligned their fears and interests with white residents and lawmakers as well.

[158] Claudia Sadowski-Smith, *The New Immigrant Whiteness: Race, Neoliberalism, Post-Soviet Migration to the United States* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2018), 7.

In the midst of the simmering racial tensions and rivalries of postwar Milwaukee came the Second Vatican Council, a global convocation of Roman Catholic leaders focused on resolving the problems and ultimate trajectories of the modern Catholic Church. Although Vatican II of course did not focus on or address itself primarily to the Catholic Church in the United States, the American republic did offer a convenient exemplar of modernity and democratic liberalism for theological reflection.[159] Moreover, the words and decrees of the Council were more or less guaranteed to reverberate in a heavily Roman Catholic city such as Milwaukee. The resultant Pastoral Constitution most relevant to the issues of race relations and general social unrest was *Gaudium Et Spes* (*Joy and Hope*), known alternatively as the 'Constitution on the Church in the Modern World' (decreed 7 December 1965).

The opening of *Gaudium Et Spes* (hereafter *GS*) seems to foreshadow a strong 'preferential option' for and identification with marginalized persons in society. It reads:

> The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ.[160]

After stating in a preamble the responsibility of the Church in discerning the 'signs of the times' and bringing the resources of the Church and Gospel to bear on the modern age, *GS* encompasses the breadth of modern (and somewhat postmodern) anxieties--namely, war, poverty, and tribalism:

> ...For political, social, economic, racial and ideological disputes still continue bitterly, and with them the peril of a war which would reduce everything to ashes (§4).

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[159] See James G. Manz, *Vatican II: Renewal or Reform?* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing, 1966), 52-53.

[160] Unless otherwise noted, the English translation of the text of *GS* is taken from Vatican.va, and accessible here: https://tinyurl.com/34xrhq.

From here, *GS* continues to be animated by the basic sentiment that the tensions and disharmonies of the modern world are caused more or less by the degree to which the technological and scientific development of the world has outpaced its 'spiritual' development. Although technical disciplines carry within them the potential for greater human self-understanding, as it happens, they have instead generated a sort of alienation of humankind from itself. This alienation is related to the spread of industrialization (§6) and even to the discontent of youth, who "have grown impatient on more than one occasion, and indeed become rebels in their distress" (§7).

In its second chapter, having developed the theme of innate human dignity and how it is perfected rather than undermined by the sovereignty of God, *GS* broaches the "human community" and the mutual, interdependent social responsibilities of its members:

> Coming down to practical and particularly urgent consequences, this council lays stress on reverence for man; everyone must consider his every neighbor without exception as another self, taking into account first of all His life and the means necessary to living it with dignity, so as not to imitate the rich man who had no concern for the poor man Lazarus…

> Respect and love ought to be extended also to those who think or act differently than we do in social, political and even religious matters. In fact, the more deeply we come to understand their ways of thinking through such courtesy and love, the more easily will we be able to enter into dialogue with them (§27; §28).

Race, not including references to the "human race," appears first in §29:

> Since all men possess a rational soul and are created in God's likeness, since they have the same nature and origin, have been redeemed by Christ and enjoy the same divine calling and destiny, the basic equality of all must receive increasingly greater recognition.

> True, all men are not alike from the point of view of varying physical power and the diversity of intellectual and moral resources. **Nevertheless, with respect to the fundamental rights of the person, every type of discrimination, whether social or cultural, whether based on sex, race, color, social condition, language or religion, is to be overcome and eradicated as contrary to God's intent** (emphasis added).

Having grounded intrinsic worth and equality in the "rational soul" and the image of God, *GS* repudiates a wide range of human evils, among them racial discrimination (and in several

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instances "slavery", although the historical expression of that usage is left unclarified). Such evil

is to "be overcome and eradicated" as contrary to the divine will. Strident language continues

later in this section, where public and private human institutions are obligated to "put up a

stubborn fight against any kind of slavery, whether social or political, and safeguard the basic

rights of man under every political system."

Such language certainly seems to strongly embrace social justice activism on the part of

the Church, its leadership and laity. At the same time, deficits are also readily apparent in *GS*. Its

international, global character precludes any sustained attention to the particular problems of

states, such as the structures and histories of racial animus and exploitation in the United States.

Racial issues are situated next to a spate of other evils, diffusing the impact on the audience. The

tone is also a bit utopian, giving the sense that dissolution of social evils represents more of a

wish or ideal rather than a mandate for concrete ecclesial praxis. Jesuit scholar Edouard Hamel

has observed that, fundamentally, *GS* lacked the opportunity "for a complete maturation

process;" in other words, theologically and sociologically, it was left in an embryonic state.[161]

Hamel remarks:

> …[I]t can hardly be claimed that the document provides a systematic, fully articulated, and
> complete presentation of [human rights]. Still less can we claim that it represents a theology of
> human rights. It does certainly contain important theological statements, but it would be left
> above all to John Paul II to fill these out and develop them. And the biblical foundations of
> human rights hardly appear at all.[162]

In sum, the conciliar decrees on the modern Catholic Church in Vatican II, summed up in *GS,*

placed American urban Catholicism in a state of institutional ambiguity. *GS* praises social justice

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[161] Edouard Hamel, SJ, "The Foundations of Human Rights in Biblical Theology Following the Orientations of *Gaudium et spes,"* in Rene Latourelle, ed., *Vatican II: Assessment and Perspectives: Twenty-Five Years After, 1962-1987* (New York, NY: Paulist Press, 1989), 460.

[162] Hamel, "The Foundations of Human Rights," 461.

and, seemingly, activism in unequivocal terms. Yet it also fails to situate these as priorities vis-a-vis personal piety or church duties. More problematic, it fails to endorse activism against the inevitable backlash of reactionary 'law and order' based ideological commitments. Preoccupied with addressing global 'development,' *GS* sports blunted teeth with respect to addressing urban racial hostility, nor does it explicitly repudiate the faith and community standing of religious exponents who might practice discrimination.

Catholic Leadership & Lay Response to Catholic Activism

Flouting the entrenched interracial antipathies in Milwaukee and especially the South Side, a fair number of urban Catholic clergymen adopted a progressive bent. Rev. James E. Groppi (d. 1985) was perhaps the most charismatic and visible, especially in the context of his participation in Milwaukee open housing activism.[163] Rev. Carl Diederichs, out of Marytown, was also an ardent liberal, and Groppi's superior Archbishop William Cousins proved (performatively) sympathetic to the cause of Black civil rights, although church politics subdued his fervor for activism. "Race liberal" clergy in Milwaukee generated a handful of nonprofit arms and initiatives to address 'urban problems' in Milwaukee--meaning more or less the plight of Black people, although extending to poverty as well.

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[163] For an outline, see Patrick D. Jones, " 'Selma of the North': The Fight For Open Housing in Milwaukee," *OAH Magazine of History* 26, no. 1 (2012): 17-22.

In deference to Black civil rights activists, and probably owing something to the avoidance of 'white savior' optics, Fr. Groppi always averred that he was only an "advisor" to the NAACP Youth Council in Milwaukee, as this was his official role and title. Nevertheless, Groppi in fact provided integral leadership at the moral and practical levels. It was certainly the case that the Youth Council/Commandoes were intelligent activists in their own right and not passive followers. A piece of CUL correspondence indicates that the Youth Council members left a mark on newcomers: One visiting priest writes in the CUL letters, "I understand some of these kids have troubled backgrounds...I was impressed by their level of respect and engagement…" Box 1, Folder 10, Council on Urban Life Files, Special Collections and University Archives at Marquette University.

The Council on Urban Life presents one such initiative, and its archive of meeting minutes and correspondence is largely extant. Executive Director Patrick Flood convened a meeting with Civil Rights-sympathetic fellow clergy "to interpret the developments that are taking place here and their national, if not world-wide, implications" (i.e., open housing marches). [164] Not only did the organization show general goodwill toward Black civil rights, it also repudiated whites over the realities of urban segregation and discrimination. One Council on Urban Life (CUL) document asserts that "White institutions have created and maintained the conditions of ghetto living" and even clarifies that "the fundamental cause of riots is not the activities of Civil Rights activists, but the frustrations [of white residents] from racial prejudice." [165] Tellingly, a memo from Eduard J. Walsh, SJ, on 5 April 1968, declares that St. Elizabeth, St. Michael, St. Francis and several other parish schools would close in mourning for the death of Martin Luther King, the "most significant spiritual leader in our nation." [166] Taken together, these quiet corpora tell the story of Catholic priests committed to open housing, integrated or improved Black education and similar issues, but mostly hamstrung by modest budgets, lack of staff and institutional support, and the responsibilities of the busy member-priests.

Although scientific precision is elusive here, it seems that the white Catholic adherents of Milwaukee swung largely to the right of these clergy and initiatives and were largely ambivalent, if not outright hostile toward Black civil rights activism. Hate mail directed at Fr. Groppi is

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[164] Patrick Flood, Letter, 1967, Box 1, Folder 1, Council On Urban Life Files, Special Collections and University Archives at Marquette University.

[165] Response to the Report on Civil Disorder, 29 February 1968, Box 1, Folder 10, Council on Urban Life Files, Special Collections and University Archives at Marquette University.

[166] Edward J. Walsh, SJ, Memo, 5 April 1968, Box 1, Folder 10, Council On Urban Life Files, Special Collections and University Archives at Marquette University.

colorful and suggestive along these lines. A "disgusted Catholic" wrote to Groppi in 25 August

1966 that

> The colored people are getting out of hand, and something should be done about
> it. And instead of marching with them, why don't you teach them "The Ten
> Commandments" ?[167]

Negative correspondence often took a 'law and order' approach to denigrating Black politics, but

some pieces were more belligerent. One Mrs. James O'Connor takes Groppi to task: "For you to

state that 'Jesus Christ was a social reformer' is heresy and blasphemy." [168] Some letters were

racist screeds with no pretense of civility:

> Father Groppi you call yourself a priest? No just a n--ger lover [amended].
> Before its to late wake up [sic]. How many donations do you get from your n-gers?
> I will answer the question none [sic]...[169]

Other, more sophisticated correspondents urged quietism, demanding that Groppi and

likeminded clergy return to the 'heavenly calling' of pastoral ministry. Overall, while one cannot

conduct a retroactive poll, these correspondences suggest a strong and troubling alignment

between committed Catholicism in Milwaukee and antagonism toward Black activism and civil

rights.

Milwaukee witnessed a deficient realization of Vatican II pronouncements and ideals at

the levels of city and parish. Well meaning clergy were often hamstrung by modest humanpower

and financial resources, as well as the complexities of the committee approach to education and

activism. Said another way, Catholic clergy collectively proved unable to effectively form their

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[167] Letter, 25 August 1966, James E. Groppi Papers, Box 5, Folder 1, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Archives.

[168] Mrs. James O'Connor, Letter, c. 1966, James E. Groppi Papers, Box 5, Folder 2, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Archives.

[169] Postcard, c. 1968, James E. Groppi Papers, Box 5, Folder 2, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Archives.

congregants towards progressive activism or often even sympathy toward Black civil rights activity. Pockets of progressive Catholic activism notwithstanding, the historical and labor-based antipathy between Black Milwaukeeans and co-resident European-Americans, especially working-class first- and second-generation Polish immigrants, proved almost intractable.

In some ways, the Catholic church--at both the diocesan and more local, parochial levels--was in some respects well-positioned to bolster Black liberationist activism. The parish structure imbricated the Church into the warp and woof of Milwaukee neighborhoods, including majority-nonwhite neighborhoods. The independent and denominational structure of white Protestant churches, by contrast, meant that they operated more like businesses; they could and often did follow the lead of their white constituents in relocating to the suburbs. White flight of this sort hurt mixed-race and inner urban neighborhoods by depleting the tax base (through the loss of economically stable professionals) and removing those citizens more likely to draw municipal attention to infrastructure concerns. The durable geographical investment of the archdiocese carried huge potential for both economic benevolence and activism. The full realization of this potential, however, was mitigated by both the rancor of working-class white Catholics in metropolitan Milwaukee and the inherent conservatism and institutionalism of the Church itself.

On the conciliar and institutional side, Vatican II was relatively idealistic and broadly liberal in its orientation toward race relations and social issues at large. At the same time, the idealism of its pastoral constitutions, most significantly *Gaudium Et Spes,* was largely blunted by historical generality and ideological incompleteness. Addressing a global church, these documents mainly express hope for a more harmonious and egalitarian future. They do not repudiate the historical failures of the United States in race relations, nor do they clearly convey the idea that racial prejudice is incompatible with personal Roman Catholic piety. Finally, the

historical structures of interracial antipathy, as seen in the hostility of the laity in Milwaukee, were mostly resistant to initiatives of urban clergy.

Chapter 4: Ecclesiastical Rhetoric & Racial Solidarity in Catholic Milwaukee

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, and there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.
            -St. Paul, Letter to the Galatians 3:28 (Modern English Version)

No! That-- that is the dark, fatal mark of Cain. Of the blood that feeds my heart, one drop in eight is black--bright red as the rest may be, that one drop poisons all the rest; those seven bright drops give me love like yours--hope like yours--ambition like yours--passions hung from life like dewdrops on morning flowers; but the one black drop gives me despair, for I'm an unclean thing-- I'm an octoroon*!*
            -Zoe, in Branden Jacob-Jenkins, *An Octoroon* (2015)

Will and Ariel Durant, esteemed late doyen and doyenne of Classical and Western history, broached the subject in their *The Lessons of History* (1968) of whether religion tended to contribute anything to the common moral fabric of a society, and likewise whether religionists displayed a morality advanced beyond that of their secular neighbors. The Durants conclude, in part, that most societies have had the benefit of organized religion in maintaining a certain level of order and stability in the state, and religion continues to exert a stabilizing effect; however, Western Christianity, in particular, ¨played only a modest part in the outstanding advance of modern morality--the abolition of slavery. It allowed the philosophers to take the lead in the humanitarian movements that have alleviated the evils of our time.¨[170] As the Durants penned that historical treatise, reflecting on the wide arc of the human saga, Milwaukee and other northern cities continued to face the paroxysms of the Black Freedom movement and its attendant white backlash. How did religion--as realized in its array of communities, identities, and rhetoric--engage with and inform these issues? How did religious language (i.e., homiletical and epistolary language) reveal and articulate social and political convictions and objectives?

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[170] Will and Ariel Durant, *The Lessons of History* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 1968), 45.

Chapter three explored the ways in which clerical initiatives in Milwaukee like the Council on Urban Life (CUL) and textual corpora like the hate mail directed at Fr. James Groppi, taken together, shed light on the fundamental ambivalence of the Catholic church and churchgoers in Milwaukee toward issues of social and racial justice. Chapter four will continue that analysis, with a particular focus on the relationship between religious language and political formation/orientation in the context of Civil Rights in Milwaukee. This chapter will also incorporate some synchronic elements of analysis in exploring how religious identity (both social/performative identity and self-understanding) factors into models of racial in/justice. Social science literature of the period provides a putatively ´neutral´ and disinterested rhetorical foil to ecclesiastical documents. As the liturgy can reflect a site for fresh political imagination and activism, so too might the homily/sermon.

Homiletics and Political Consciousness: The Sermons of Rev. James Groppi

His personal modesty notwithstanding, James Edmund Groppi (1930-1985) figured centrally in Civil Rights activism in Milwaukee. His parents, Giacondo and Giorgina Groppi, emigrated to the United States from Italy (Tuscany), meeting first in Chicago and settling in Milwaukee, where they established a beloved community grocery in the South Side Bay View neighborhood in 1913. [171] James and his family attended Immaculate Conception parish, but Fr. Thomas Pierce, a somewhat stern Irish-American pastor, expressed open hostility toward his Italian parishioners. [172] In other words, ardent Catholic faith as well as the experience of ethnic marginality shaped young Groppi and informed his growing sense of clerical vocation.

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[171] Steven M. Avella, *Confidence & Crisis: A History of the Archdiocese of Milwaukee 1959-1977* (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2014), 101.

[172] Ibid., 102.

A number of text genres cover James Groppi´s contributions to the Black Freedom

Struggle in Milwaukee: clerical correspondence, Archdiocesan memos, newspaper and magazine

articles. However, when it comes to the expression of his social views in the context of the

Sunday morning church gathering, only a few homilies remain. Given this paucity--and as a

corollary, our inability to draw conclusions from large textual corpora--it is valuable to attend to

extant material at some length and sketch tentative conclusions. In preparation for the Mass on 3

August 1969, Groppi produced a typed manuscript for his homily:

> In the Name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen. Today's epistle, St. Paul
> tells us that God has gifted different people in different ways. And not everyone works out their
> salvation or sanctifies themselves in the same way. St. Paul tells us that some individuals are
> gifted with wisdom. Some individuals have the ability to know the different languages of
> different peoples. Some individuals are gifted with prophecy. What he is telling us is that
> different individuals have different vocations in life.
> Even in the church today we have people who dedicate themselves to teaching. We have the
> Sisters who dedicate themselves totally to the people, denying themselves a family of their own.
> We have lay people that dedicate themselves to having children and the education of those
> children. We have priests, given the power to consecrate bread and wine, to absolve from sin, to
> offer sacrifice, to dedicate themselves totally to the people. Different individuals have different
> roles to play in life. This is what St. Paul is telling us. He is telling us that whatever role we have,
> we have received it from Jesus Christ and we are to live it, in order to promote the teachings of
> Jesus Christ.
>
> In the gospel our Lord tells us that whatever role we have in life, we are to exercise that role in a
> humble way. He gives the example of a Pharisee and of a tax-gatherer. The socially prominent
> and the individual who is ostracized in society. The Pharisee comes to church. He thanks God for
> making him as holy as he is. Comes up to the front of the Church, tells the Lord all about his
> virtues. The tax-gatherer, who is looked upon by those who went to the synagogue in those days
> as an individual who was a sinner because he associated and functioned with the Gentiles; he
> collected taxes.
>
> Those who went to the Temple in those days did not associate with the tax gatherer. He stayed in
> the back of the Church. He did not tell the Lord about his virtues; he looked within himself and
> saw that he was a sinner through and through. He knew that he had many faults, many
> weaknesses.
>
> And he did not have a self-righteous attitude, but he knelt in the back of the church and he said
> perhaps the perfect prayer. "Forgive me, Lord, I am a sinner." I think what the Lord is telling us
> is that we must look within ourselves. All of us here today are here because we are sinners.
> Cardinal Meyer, before he died, and when he went to Vatican II, said that what the Church should
> emphasize is that it is a church of sinners.
>
> We talked too long about the great holiness of individuals who go to church. That the church is a

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church of sinners. It is a place for those who have weaknesses, to come and express this to the Lord.

And this is what Christ meant when He said, "Come to me all who labor and are burdened. I will refresh you." Great joy, the sinner coming back to the Lord. And our Lord emphasized this and talked about this a great deal while he lived upon earth. He told parables about it. The story of the Prodigal son, for example. The young man who left his father and mother and he went off, spent his inheritance, sinned, came back to his Father and asked for forgiveness. The great joy of reunion of Father and Son and the forgiveness of sins is the kind of joy a Christian should feel when he comes to Church on Sunday. We're gathered here, we're going to consecrate bread and wine.

The great gift of the sacrifice of Calvary is going to be representative again here at the altar. It is a very beautiful gift. And at the offertory when we offer bread and wine, we are going to offer the gift of ourselves. Our lives, these gifts of bread and wine are going to be made perfect. They are going to become God himself. Bread and wine are going to become the Son of God. They're going to be offered to our heavenly Father. Jesus died on Calvary for the forgiveness of sins. Here at the altar again the sacrifice is going to be offered for the forgiveness of sins.

One of the great beauties, one of the great teachings of our Church is what is going to happen here at the altar today. You know, St. Paul in his epistle, tells the Christians to rejoice! He says that in the life of a Christian there is no room for sadness. The spirit of joy should always be in the life of a Christian.

We read these epistles of St. Paul where he brings the good news, the gospel, that's what gospel means, it means good news, and he tells people to rejoice. And at times we'll read in the epistles of St. Paul, the gospel story of Jesus Christ and we will say to ourselves, "What do they mean when they say rejoice?" ? Two-thirds of the world goes to bed hungry every night, thousands of people are being killed every day in Vietnam.

We have developed a kind of militarism in our own nation and in the nation of Russia where the entire human race is threatened with extinction. In our own nations we have reached a crisis where there is a possibility that our own nation will destroy itself. At least if the history of mankind in the past means anything, we have reached the danger point. Yet St. Paul says, *rejoice*.

The second, possibly partial extant text comes from just a week later, 10 August 1969:

Here in the Scriptures today we see also the concern of Christ for people who are afflicted. Coming here into this house myself and a number of the fellas-- what we're trying to do is show this concern for the needs of people in perhaps a different way. I don't have the power to cure anyone. But there is a blind woman living on 18th and Walnut, down the street.

There's a hole in her porch that's covered with plywood. The house was sold to a redevelopment organization. The redevelopment organization works in a rather interesting way. The[y] reconstruct a house in the community, but when they do, they always jack up the rent. The family

that's living in there can't meet the rent so they're pushed out [and] another family is brought in.

This is housing redevelopment in our community. So there is a concern of myself and a concern of some of the fellows here and this is what we get out of the Scriptures. We're going down to the Allen-Bradley Company tomorrow and that's going to be messy. We've been conferring with them. We conferred with them a year ago, conferred with them again last week. And that's the way we interpret the message of Christ. As our sermon, a form of preaching, we're going to get criticized. We're being 'irresponsible Christians.' If you want, if they're going to call us 'Christians.'

I remember Father Neuberger and myself got in a fuss with the archbishop--this was a number of years ago. Three years ago or so. One of the priests came over and criticized myself, [he] said I don't belong to any responsible civil rights groups. Like the Urban League and the Conference on Religion and Race and so on.

But this is what we are going to do and it's our way of feeding people in the community, of helping people in the community. The guys that are living here come to Mass every evening. They don't belong to any Church. They work here full time. They get a meal--always something to eat if we can help it. And help the kids in the neighborhood. But our actions are radical. We have an interesting liturgy here. In a way I'm sorry I did not invite you all to an evening Mass.

Some of our young people are here. This is the first time we've had a Mass this early in the day. A special tradition on Saturday nights in the Black community is this: no one goes to bed. This is the middle of the night for us. This is what we are doing. We read the Gospel. We see a very wild message. The coming of the Holy Spirit to us is a very wild thing. We look at Christ as being kind of a wild person. The things he said, the things he did.

We believe in Blacks and whites coming together. We're never going to close our door to anyone because of his skin color. We get a reaction from the Black community--certain aspects of the [Black] community--the Black community isn't monolithic. We've got that extreme left wing here also. It doesn't want any association.

We haven't got that kind of bag. We're interested in people who are concerned about the needs of people in the community. It is the color of a man's heart that concerns us. We want Black hearts here.

This is identification with those who are ostracized. You might say we are going to be a little irresponsible in our Christianity. I got a lot of questions about the Church, and I suppose I love the sacrifice of the Mass. I believe in the consecration, transubstantiation--a very beautiful thing for me. It [the Gospel] also tells me to do certain things. But the Church does raise questions in my mind many times. I don't know how Christian the Catholic Church is...

[They're] closing our schools next year. Well, I got questions about the Catholic school systems. I think it all has to be...I don't like the way it exists right now. If I were a married man and had children, I would not send them to a Catholic school. I would not entrust the teaching of religion to my children to some [of the] sisters or a priest there; I'd want to do that myself. But those in the chancery office believe the Catholic school system is something good. So does the Archdiocesan board of education.

And this is the question I have: if they believe it is good, then why are they giving it only to those who have? I cannot see the Christianity in keeping the Catholic school system open for St.

Robert's children and closing it for St. Boniface children. Poor children are here. Children from wealthier families are here and we are giving them this elitist Christian message because they have the money to receive it. That's my question about the whole thing.

We're going to have to close St. Boniface, maybe not this fall, but at least by the [following] semester. I didn't get into that fight. The community-controlled school idea, I believe it might be something good--but I also believe that the archdiocesan school board and the bishop is using the community school idea as a means and a tactic of excusing themselves so they don't either have to take care of it. And it answers a great problem in my mind: they don't have to integrate it. And that's the attitude of those who are supposed to be official interpreters of Christ, in my estimate.

I don't know. We're going out there--I don't know how many people we will have tomorrow. We'll have about five fellows. We're not allowing any women. No women. Some of the girls don't like it, but that's how dangerous we think it is. They don't exactly love us...

These are the questions I have in my own mind.

Analysis

The context of the first two paragraphs from the 3 August 1969 manuscript suggests strongly that Rev. Groppi was reflecting on I Corinthians 12, a lectionary text.[173] He first conveys the general thrust of the epistolary passage, that all members of the community of faith have unique gifts which in turn point to ¨different vocations in life.¨ Because this pursuit of vocation forms part of the mandate of Jesus on the believing community, the text then segues from epistle to the synoptic gospels.

The subsequent paragraphs make clear reference to Luke 18:9-14, a passage which depicts a Pharisee acting in an arrogant, condescending manner and a tax collector abasing himself in contrition; in the language of the homily, the Pharisee is ¨socially prominent¨ and the tax gatherer is ¨ostracized¨ because ¨he associated and functioned with the Gentiles.¨ This dominical parable highlights an inversion of ethics and of social location: the tax gatherer is rendered righteous by his contrition and humility, while the haughty Pharisee receives no such

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[173] More specifically, I Corinthians 12:12-31a is a Year C epistle reading (New Testament) for the third Sunday following the Epiphany. The year 1969 in fact marked the first year of the three-year cycle of the modern Roman Catholic lectionary (beginning at Advent with Year ´B´).

divine justification (and by implication, awaits a harsh future judgment). Groppi applies this narrative socially to indicate the need of the community for humility and introspection. He connects this sentiment--¨that the Church is a church of sinners¨-- to a priestly contemporary in the person of Albert Gregory Meyer. [174]

The Church, argues Groppi here, ought to be a place that welcomes weakness: he makes several references to the parable of the prodigal son as well as Jesus´ consolations to the weary.[175] In light of both this fact as well as the depth and grandeur of the Eucharistic mystery, the Church ought also to be a place of consistent joy. [176] Yet the subject matter of the homily turns sharply towards the grievous social and political plights of that day: widespread poverty and hunger, mounting casualties in Vietnam, and the Cold War nuclear arms race with the Soviet Union. The audience is left to ponder the demanding, frankly terrifying circumstances in which they are commanded to rejoice.

The homily of the following Sunday continues the narration of this litany of social maladies, this time at the micro-level of the neighborhood. The second paragraph offers an interesting, grounded example of gentrification and predatory real estate practices; such stories are indeed not far to find in metropolitan Milwaukee, with its tarnished history of ´redlining´ and one of the highest consistent de facto segregation rates in the nation. [177] On Groppi's telling, a

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[174] Albert G. Meyer was born in Milwaukee in 1903 and served as both Archbishop of Milwaukee (Sept. 1953-1958) and, until his death, as Archbishop of Chicago (1958-1965).

[175] The textual allusions here are general and do not indicate whether Groppi was using Matthew´s Gospel (Mt. 18:15-35) or Luke´s (Lk. 15:11-32).

[176] The reference is most likely to Philippians 4:4.

[177] For a recent and enlightening treatment of racism in real estate practices, see Richard Rothstein, *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America* (New York, NY: Liveright Press, 2017).

blind woman was residing ¨at 18th and Walnut, down the street.¨ Presumably for reasons of

financial hardship, this woman either chose or was forced to sell her home to a redevelopment

company. This company, far from keeping housing affordable and protecting the best interests of

the neighborhood, would ¨always jack up the rent¨ before bringing in a new tenant family. Such

practices reinforced the need for fair housing legislation: they reinforced patterns of

displacement and poverty among inner-city residents and parishioners.

Following this anecdote, Groppi alludes to the rancor and resistance to racial justice to be

found within the ranks of the hierarchy-- ¨Father Neuberger and myself got in a fuss with the

archbishop... One of the priests came over and criticized myself, [he] said I don't belong to any

responsible civil rights groups…¨[178] Groppi´s reflections in the subsequent paragraphs on the

engagement of Black neighbors with the life of the church, and vice versa, hint that--like the

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[178] Michael Neuberger was a priest and a contemporary colleague of James Groppi, but he has since
been barred from public ministry. According to Archdiocese of Milwaukee records, Neuberger was
installed as Assistant at St. Philip Neri Parish in July 1962; Curate at St. Boniface Parish in June 1964;
Instructor of Religion at St. John´s Cathedral High School in September 1965, with additional faculty
appointments in 1970 and 1973--all under the authority and approval of Archbishop William Cousins. The
serial appointments continued under Cousins´ successor, Archbishop Rembert Weakland. In a letter
dated 29 October 1993, the Auxiliary Bishop of Milwaukee, Richard J. Sklba, advised Neuberger to
¨refrain from any unsupervised contact with minors and...not accede to individual requests for counseling
at this time.¨ Neuberger had been accused of sexual abuse of numerous minors, dating from the 1960s
through the 1990s (and across multiple teaching appointments with enthusiastic episcopal approval).
Correspondence from Weakland to one Daniel Ward of St. Gregory Abbey, dated 2 September 1994,
reflects that Neuberger´s ¨resignation has been requested to make matters [i.e., litigation] easier on him.¨
Neuberger was dismissed from the clerical state (1998) and later, more forcefully, restricted from all
public ministry (2008). Cf. Archdiocese of Milwaukee,
https://www.archmil.org/ArchMil/Resources/COMM/Reorg/Doc-Release/Neuberger.pdf (accessed July 3,
2021). The failure of the Archdiocese of Milwaukee, including several Archbishops, to investigate, remove
and prosecute abusive priests is extensive, horrifying and familiar. Archdiocese documents chronicle
Neuberger´s extensive grooming and sexual abuse of parish minors over decades (confirmed in
psychological evaluations). While the public has arguably heard the most about clerical sexual abuse in
the Roman Catholic church, Protestant denominations, too, have proven far from immune to such
failures.

´radical´ Black Catholic believers in Chicago--he viewed the Liturgy as at least a potential vehicle for a fresh politics and for Black cultural accommodation.[179]

Several comments here point tantalizingly to what today might be called different ideological factions of the Black Freedom struggle: pacifist integrationism, championed by the ineluctable mind and eloquence of Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Black Power/Black liberationism of Malcolm X or Bobby Seale and Huey Newton, the latter two co-founders in 1966 of the Black Panther Party (BPP). Of course, the interlocutors of Black liberationism are not always the closest of intellectual bedfellows--Malcolm X is not James Cone is not Kwame Ture (originally Stokely Carmichael). Nor is the ideological bifurcation as clean as later generations of Americans would imagine it to be. Nevertheless, Groppi acknowledges diversity of opinion among Black Milwaukeeans (which could translate to similar cleavages among Black Americans at large): some, in line with the official position of the church, favor integration-- ¨Blacks and whites coming together;¨ however, the Black community is not ¨monolithic¨ and an ¨extreme left wing¨ eschews all association with whites.

What is arguably most striking about the last several paragraphs of the latter homily is the openness with which Rev. Groppi expresses ambivalence or outright disagreement with the echelons of Roman Catholic hierarchy with which he was in contact. These comments are delivered with the backdrop of the schooling conflicts in 1960s Milwaukee--as visceral and contested as the controversies over fair and open housing.[180] While reiterating his love and

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[179] Cf. Gayraud S. Wilmore, *Black Religion and Black Radicalism: An Interpretation of the Religious History of African Americans* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1998). Wilmore explores the specific communal contexts in which Black churches exercised political agency, such as the Zion Union Apostolic church of Virginia, which severed its ties to the Anglican Church to preserve Black identity and autonomy (pp. 92-95).
[180] On schooling-related activism, see Steven Avella, *Confidence & Crisis: A History of the Archdiocese of Milwaukee, 1959-1977* (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2014), 121-129.

appreciation for transubstantiation and the Eucharistic mystery, Groppi comments that he has ¨a lot of questions about the [Roman Catholic] Church¨ and would not entrust his (hypothetical) children to ¨some of the sisters or a priest there.¨[181]

While the lack of hefty textual corpora temper our ability to draw sweeping conclusions, homilies like these give us, at minimum, a window into the worldview orientation of a highly visible, activist priest in the thick of the Black Freedom Struggle in Milwaukee. We can make a few provisional reflections.

First, on the subject of intellectual influence: Groppi was clearly a student of the social conditions in his neighborhood as well as the wider world. Again, we lack the benefit of a wide arc of time and a trove of homilies--but Fr. Groppi approaches Biblical texts with a concern for their connection to the present and to parishioners, rather than honing in on exegetical minutiae. He also makes disapproving references to global poverty, the war in Vietnam, and Cold War tensions. He directs his greatest ire for the institutions and individuals who exploit African-Americans and the economically disadvantaged--groups which largely intersect in the St. Boniface parish. One way to deconstruct the approach of an ecclesiastical rhetor (i.e., a preacher) is to consider their epistemology in the framework of the Wesleyan quadrilateral: what weight is given to Scripture, reason, tradition, and experience, respectively?[182] In the homilies surveyed above, Scripture and personal experience clearly figure most prominently. Tradition is present, but largely in the background. Groppi makes a passing reference to Vatican II and a few

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[181] The referent for ¨there¨ is a bit unclear; most likely, Groppi is referring to the Archdiocesan school system in Milwaukee as a whole.

[182] This term was coined by Methodist scholar Albert C. Outler. See Albert C. Outler, "The Wesleyan Quadrilateral in Wesley," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 20 (1985): 7-18.

reassuring references to his affection for the Liturgy.[183] Aside from these allusions, there are no mentions of encyclicals or of Catholic Social Teaching as such. While these sermons certainly situate the orator on the Left in the American political spectrum, one ought not to assume that Groppi´s reading habits differed radically from his clerical contemporaries. According to Avella, the future priest subsisted, much like his peers, on a steady diet of John Ryan and Neo-Thomism while a student of St. Francis Seminary. [184] It was his interpretation and application of the religious traditions he inherited that led him to a more ´social´ gospel than many--though crucially, not all--of the priests in the Archdiocese of Milwaukee during his tenure.

This leads to a second observation, on the issue of alignment or institutional loyalty. Groppi evinces deep tensions with and ambivalence toward the Catholic hierarchy of his city, castigating what he viewed as evidence of elitism or classism in the archdiocesan school system. He was no doubt also jaded by the ineffectuality of well-meaning pastoral initiatives (like the CUL), the inertia and reticence of those in authority toward racial justice matters, and a stream of searing hate mail from those who were ostensibly ´good Catholics.´ Groppi does not mince words, but neither does he forget that Archbishop Cousins and others in hierarchical authority tend to view him as ¨radical.¨ Even so, there is little hint at this point of Groppi jettisoning Catholic tradition. [185] He is able to bind his commitment to racial and social justice to his fealty for the Catholic Church. Greeley´s ¨Catholic imagination¨ is certainly operating here: rarely is it easy to abandon such a deep reservoir of history, community, and thick practices, even when

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[183] It is interesting that Groppi mentions consecration and transubstantiation specifically. No other, non-liturgical dogmas are designated, although we must be careful not to make strident arguments from silence.

[184] Avella, *Crisis & Confidence,* 107-111.

[185] Groppi would eventually leave the priesthood in 1976; he married Margaret ¨Peggy¨ Rozga, a noted poet and professor of English at the University of Wisconsin (Waukesha/Milwaukee).

serious faults become visible. Yet Groppi likely also understood himself as the bearer of a (possibly minority) tradition, both Scriptural and ecclesiastical, that valued justice and charity over dogma.[186]

Archbishop William Cousins

William Cousins (1902-1988) served as archbishop of the Milwaukee archdiocese between 1958 and 1977, during which time he navigated the Church's response to Civil Rights activism; he was of course also the direct superior to Fr. Groppi. Cousins´ textual corpus comes largely in the form of public, semi-official and official documents: letters to parishes and ´Inner Core´ priests, meeting minutes, memoranda and the like. While these certainly constitute a different literary genre from the homily, the collected correspondence is similarly representative of his racial politics, his worldview, and his orientation to the role of the Archdiocese and the Church in the world.[187]

Correspondence from early 1966 seems to support the notion that Cousins is fully sympathetic and indeed an ally to the cause of Black racial justice and progressive clergy in Milwaukee. Prior to convening inner-city priests with Black parishioners, he makes reference to ¨our racial responsibilities.¨ His comments from 26 January 1966, during said meeting, impart a sense of the enthusiasm, optimism, and expected efficiency Cousins harbored for the racial justice endeavors of the Church in Milwaukee. He writes in part:

> …[T]he priests, religious, and faithful of the archdiocese pledged through me a constructive and continuing effort to bring about racial equality. We were convinced that the practice of charity and justice must be a way of life, if Christ's teachings are to be realized in the modern world…

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[186] See Daniel C. Maguire, *Whose Church? A Concise Guide to Progressive Catholicism* (London, UK: The New Press, 2008), 4-6f.

[187] While it falls somewhat beyond the purview of the current study, it is worth noting at the outset that the reputation of both Cousins and his successor, Rembert Weakland, have been significantly tarnished by credible allegations that both men in their archiepiscopal capacity protected and relocated priests accused of sexual abuse.

I am here to propose that this group...work as a responsible unit, thus avoiding duplication of effort--to act and to advise as a recognized religious entity instead of as individuals. From your number an efficient, competent steering committee should be elected. An open line of communication between that committee and the remaining membership would insure [sic] joint accountability for action taken or statements issued…

It would be my thought that this organization should consult and closely cooperate with all religious groups in the area. It should make full use of the talents and dedication of sisters and laity working in the interests of good community relations. It could and should be a telling, dynamic force with high spiritual motivation.

To this end I would suggest that we calmly and reasonably examine our positions and attitudes in the field of race relations and civil rights, with a view to clearing away misunderstandings...We cannot come to final solutions at this meeting...We can, however, objectively and intelligently today discuss our common cause. [188]

Probably without dissimulation, Cousins plays the role of sage elder statesman, gathering together interested clergy (all those present had at least some Black congregants), voicing solidarity with Civil Rights, and championing the potential of priestly cooperation. However, there are hints even here--at a crescendo of goodwill and positivity-- that Cousins´ ultimate posture might appear at odds with what one would expect.

The archbishop comments on the necessity to ¨calmly and reasonably examine our positions and attitude in the field of race relations.¨ As a reflection on the need for constructive, irenic dialogue between parties, this statement seems innocuous enough. In light of later correspondence and events, however, it shades disappointingly toward a kind of neo-liberal affinity for orderliness in society--dialogue over direct action, status quo over structural change.

To begin, in his comments on Milwaukee schooling and integration, Cousins subtly makes assumptions about the putative intelligence of African-American children. He writes that

Some of our Negro children are from backgrounds and environments that make adjustment to urban living and education difficult. Perhaps we could do much in the field of fundamental and correctional reading. We could explore more fully the idea of ungraded classrooms. We could think in terms of the child as a ¨whole¨ being rather than as [merely] a student…

[188] Records of the Archdiocese of Milwaukee, "Press Release January 26, 1966," https://www.archmil.org/ArchMil/offices/Archives/Digitized/MC-028-B1-F7-Contents.pdf (accessed December 2, 2021).

[Nevertheless,] certain required education standards must be met and maintained. We cannot reduce commendable standards to the lowest common denominator. But, even if we give opportunity to the more brilliant student, we must recognize the equally important task of working harder with the ¨slow learner.¨[189]

The archbishop starts by stating his intention to accommodate disadvantaged Black students. Yet the overall thrust of this passage is to conflate the Black student with the ´slow learner.´ The sentiment is condescending at best and racist at worst. Cousins defensively protests that ¨certain educational standards must be met and maintained¨ and ought not to be reduced ¨to the lowest common denominator.¨ By heavy-handed implication, the tutelage of Black students poses a threat to the maintenance of educational standards, and Black students represent, educationally, the ´lowest common denominator.´[190]

There are further reasons to take a less than optimistic view of the archbishop´s racial liberalism. Almost every instance of racial activism in Milwaukee (and sometimes, the United States) meets with rebuke from Cousins, who writes eloquently in defense of social inertia:

I have been asked my opinion on the school boycott and on the participation of priests and sisters in demonstrations…

I have been and I am opposed to school boycotts, even with the attendance of ¨striking¨ students at Freedom Schools. My reasons are not legalistic. I think of the program as a certain exploitation of children who are not old enough to appreciate the justification for truancy. This, in turn, could make school discipline and classroom order difficult to maintain…

If such defiance is encouraged by adults in one instance, how can this child be expected to draw fine distinctions in other instances?

Whether or not it is a popular doctrine, the Supreme Authority of God is reflected in a limited application to parents and teachers. A breakdown in healthy relations between parent and child or student and teacher is going to be felt in other orders of society. Hatred and resentment of the police is a case in point. Even baseball or football or basketball or any other sport gives its officials the right to make decisions and call plays. The same principle must apply to life itself…

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[189] Ibid.

[190] This mathematical term continues to be used in common parlance. However, the LCD is always larger than any number in a given set. Greatest common factor is the more appropriate idea.

The effectiveness of...publicized protest must be weighed against the disedification and embarrassment of good and sincere people. These are not ´Uncle Toms´ or disinterested critics. They applaud and share, as I do, the intense and burning desire to bring about racial equality. They disapprove not of the laudable end in view, but of a specific means of protest...[191]

Cousins again strikes a note of condescension, assuming that minors could never actually understand the premises of activism but merely exploit the opportunity to ´skip´ school. He again recoils at the possibility that discipline and order will not be maintained to satisfactory standards--a qualm that will disqualify most forms of activism aside from writing letters.

The subsequent paragraph underscores Cousins´ deep philosophical and practical need for orderliness. Any rupture in obedience on the part of students/children will be ¨felt in other orders of society.¨ This is in part a reference to the CST concept of subsidiarity, which has its roots in the theology of Aquinas. However, beyond this, the archbishop suggests that parents, teachers, and police officers vicariously represent the authority of God. In one stroke, Cousins grants divine imprimatur to all in authority--of which he is one-- and forecloses any possibility that civil disobedience works positively in the interest of justice.

¨Publicized protest¨ garners the archbishop´s disapproval because it foments ¨disedification and embarrassment,¨ presumably in some of those parishioners who wanted Rev. Groppi to ´burn in hell´ for supporting and marching with Black Milwaukeeans. There was, after all, no shortage of parishioners who criticized priests for supposedly neglecting their spiritual duties in the pursuit of ´politics.´ To alienate such traditionalists would potentially mean the loss of attendance and financial support in the archdiocese. Cynically, the archbishop claims

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[191] Records of the Archdiocese of Milwaukee, Correspondence of Rev. William E. Cousins, https://www.archmil.org/ArchMil/offices/Archives/Digitized/MC-028-B1-F7-Contents.pdf (accessed December 2, 2021).

desperately to desire racial equality, but he also expresses criticism of any direct tactic that might help secure racial equality. [192]

To underscore the point, Cousins´ curt dismissal of direct action, marching and boycotts as essentially unchristian breaches of social order and discipline regularly accompanied more public expressions of hopefulness and a spate of programs, initiatives and ideas. The press release for the 26 January 1966 meeting states

> [The convened priests] referred to the encyclical of Pope John XXIII who said that one who is being deprived of his rights in society has an obligation to stand up for those rights… A wide range of adult education programs were explained: Red Cross, First Aid, literacy classes, home nursing, homemaking, sewing, Negro history.[193]

Two observations ought to be noted in connection with this press release, which bears the name of Fr. Eugene Bleidorn and reflects the conference of Cousins with inner-city clergy. First, the course offerings here resemble the range of programs developed by the social justice-minded nuns and students of Alverno College in the Sixties (with Margaret Rozga numbering among the latter constituency). Second, the encyclical to which the text alludes is not entirely clear; it could be *Mater et Magistra* but is more likely *Pacem in Terris*, promulgated by Pope John XXIII in April 1963. Both encyclicals include extensive ethical reflection on human and civic rights. However, the specific language concerning rights and the obligation to defend those rights seems most likely to juxtapose sections 11 and 163 of *Pacem.* These sections read as follows:

> 11. But first We must speak of man's rights. Man has the right to live. He has the right to bodily integrity and to the means necessary for the proper development of life, particularly food, clothing, shelter, medical care, rest, and, finally, the necessary social services. In consequence, he has the right to be looked after in the event of ill health; disability stemming from his work; widowhood; old age; enforced unemployment; or whenever through no fault of his own he is deprived of the means of livelihood.

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[192] Cousins would likely align closely with the ´gradualism´ and ´economic uplift´ ideology of Booker T. Washington.

[193] Records of the Archdiocese of Milwaukee, "Press Release January 26, 1966."

163. Hence among the very serious obligations incumbent upon men of high principles, We must include the task of establishing new relationships in human society, under the mastery and guidance of truth, justice, charity and freedom—relations between individual citizens, between citizens and their respective States, between States, and finally between individuals, families, intermediate associations and States on the one hand, and the world community on the other. There is surely no one who will not consider this a most exalted task, for it is one which is able to bring about true peace in accordance with divinely established order.[194]

Of course, moderates and tentative, practical institutionalists like Cousins could point to the papal language that paints social justice efforts as an ¨exalted¨ but onerous task (and gives scant encouragement to the oppressed to resist unjust socio-legal structures).[195] However, viewed another way, it is noteworthy that, collectively, progressive clergy of the inner city of Milwaukee sought substantive connections between papal proclamations and their own racial justice convictions in the immediate wake of the Second Vatican Council.

Ultimately, Cousins´ deep mistrust of direct action seems to have undercut such expressions of optimism and the sense of deep congruence between urban racial justice efforts and the social dogmas of Vatican II and before. Again in 1966, Groppi and NAACP Youth Council ´Commandoes´ picketed the Fraternal Order of Eagles Club, a discriminatory, all-white club that counted elite white Milwaukeeans among its ranks, including Judge Robert Cannon. Archbishop Cousins´ response to this instance of activism reflects, at once, his essential rancor, his appeal to white authority figures, and his abiding unease at deviations from the status quo:

> To promote community peace and to permit responsible and reasonable meeting of minds on the Wauwatosa situation, I heartily approved and supported Governor Knowles´ proposal that last night´s demonstration by the Youth Council of [the] NAACP be cancelled. My personal intervention...was to no avail. The Governor was equally unsuccessful. The march was scheduled was without regrettable incident largely because of the very commendable operation of the Police and the National Guard.
>
> I deplore the arbitrary manner in which our sincere request was dismissed, and I now invoke the assistance of public opinion. I appeal to all citizens, to church groups, and to civil rights

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[194] See https://www.vatican.va/content/john-xxiii/en/encyclicals/documents /hf_j-xxiii_enc_11041963_pacem.html, accessed 8 July 2021.

[195] Stephen Tuck, *We Ain't What We Ought to Be: The Black Freedom Struggle From Emancipation to Obama* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2011), 146.

organizations to support our appeal for a cessation of marches, in favor of an effective discussion of vital issues.

Picketing of Judge Cannon´s home does not further the fundamental rights of minority groups to fair housing, educational and employment opportunities, or any of those privileges for which all of us are fighting. The quarrel actually has been with the Caucasian clause pertaining to membership in the Eagles… While recognizing the validity of a protest against restrictive clauses, we cannot justify an apparently discriminatory approach involving a specific individual whose responsibility does not involve policy. [196]

Later in this response, Cousins notes that he would be meeting ¨immediately¨ with Fr. Groppi, at which time he would ask the latter to ¨exercise his priestly responsibility in discontinuing marches to Wauwatosa.¨ But his episcopal frustrations would continue to mount. The following year, Cousins was more personally implicated in further activism, though of a different stripe. As reported in the 16 September 1967 issue of the *Catholic Herald Citizen,* ¨Four hundred white persons, some noticeably angry, marched from the south side to the Archbishop's residence at 2000 W. Wisconsin Ave, shouting for the ouster of Father Groppi.¨[197] The march of this reactionary cadre culminated in the archbishop receiving a small youth delegation--a sort of political inverse of the NAACP Youth Council--sharing their grievances about Black and progressive Catholic activism. Tellingly, Cousins did not muster any criticism of the angry white marchers, who of course enacted the kind of direct action he stridently denounced in priests, Black Catholics and Black Milwaukeeans. Instead, he demurred

The six boys behaved well. They were completely reverent and polite. Four were Roman Catholics. Each introduced himself and in turn gave the name of his parish. They did not ask for Father Groppi´s ouster but rather asked that something be done. I told them that we have a priest senate and a personnel committee to handle such matters.

This sits at odds with the article´s characterization of the white marchers, who reportedly chanted ¨We want Cousins!¨ as well as ¨Ee ai eei ai eei ai o, Father Groppi´s got to go.¨

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[196] Records of the Archdiocese of Milwaukee, Correspondence of Rev. William E. Cousins (dated 29 August 1966).

[197] "March Delegates Meet With Archbishop to Discuss Priest," *Catholic Herald Citizen,* Sept. 16, 1967.

Ironically, Cousins found himself time and again imbricated in realities he explicitly attempted to avoid in his episcopate. The *Catholic Herald Citizen* article lists, from Cousins himself, the two inviolable mandates of his tenure as archbishop of Milwaukee:

> First, that I would not serve for an indefinite period of time, and
> Second, at the first sign of any political overtones, I would resign
> immediately.

The archbishop´s rhetoric certainly coheres with his stated desire to be apolitical. Although internally consistent, it remained a pleasant fiction. His responses in fact carved out a rather clear politics--that of pledging religiously-garbed support to liberal/progressive causes while in practice condemning direct action and any disjunction with the status quo. As a further example, when a squad of antiwar priests burned draft cards and Selective Service records during a Sunday morning Mass, Cousins expressed clear condemnation. In archdiocesan correspondence dated to 23 September 1968, Cousins writes:

> A group of Catholics protesting the war in Vietnam attended Mass Sunday at St. John's Cathedral. Their admitted purpose was to create a disturbance for the sake of publicity. The news media had already been alerted. Their provocation included disruption of Holy Mass, an invasion of the sanctuary, and a forceful taking over of the pulpit.
>
> It is hard to avoid questioning the motivation and mental attitudes of those protesters. Regardless of the cause they have espoused, their actions were disgraceful, unwarranted, and completely irreverent. [198]

Writing on the ¨unpalatable episode¨ few weeks later, in October 1968, Cousins performs a rhetorical sleight of hand whereby he marshals the weight of Catholic tradition against war but also accedes to the logic of American military involvement in Vietnam, painting dissenters as intellectually deviant and misguided:

> Everyone in his right mind hates war and desires peace. We are completely on the side of the protesters in wanting to see an end to the war in Vietnam and the irradication [sic] of war anywhere in the world. The most outstanding disciple of peace in our modern day is Pope Paul VI, who has willingly risked antagonizing heads of state in his insistence that every way to peace

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[198] Records of the Archdiocese of Milwaukee, Correspondence of Rev. William E. Cousins (dated 23 Sept. 1968).

be unremittingly explored by men and nations. The entire fifth chapter of II Vatican Council [sic] , ¨The Church in the Modern World,¨ is devoted to peace and war. The American Bishops have made frequent pleas for peace and have spoken collectively against the use of arms as a means of arbitration.

With these facts clearly before us, it would seem that those who accuse the Church of not having expressed itself are either not well informed or they are intellectually dishonest. The protesters ask us to condemn the war in Vietnam as unjust and immoral. They feel that this is a matter of conscience. We do not presume to question their integrity or their sincerity. That is between themselves and God. It appears, however, that they are not justified in insisting that their state of conscience be imposed on everyone else. If they claim freedom of conscience for themselves, they cannot deny a similar freedom to those who, in conscience, are not convinced that our effort to prevent a complete take-over by atheistic communism is immoral. Neither is the honest virtue of patriotism to be considered immoral...[199]

This missive amounts to impressive sophistry by the archbishop. To call it convoluted would be charitable; it is a fallacious and bad faith argument. Cousins first trumpets the bona fides of the Catholic Church in opposing war generally, even using the proclamations of the Council. Those who would dare question the Church's position on this subject are either uninformed or ¨intellectually dishonest.¨ Presumably then, the antiwar Catholics who invaded the Mass at St. John´s were dramatic but acting in accord with the received tradition and teaching of the Church. Not so--suddenly, the basis of their motivation is mere ¨conscience,¨ and they are attempting to impose their malformed convictions on everyone else. But if the Catholic magisterium so obviously opposes war, why does the archbishop presume that the protesters are acting solely on conscience? In the penultimate line, Cousins shows that he fully accepts the American geopolitical dogmas of domino theory and containment. He resents that the protesters should oppose ¨our effort to prevent a complete take-over by atheistic communism.¨

Of course, it was not uncommon for Catholic prelates of the Cold War era to denounce Communism. Clergy were especially sensitive to the possibility that the concepts of social insurance, fair wages, and economic dignity for labor--concepts near to the heart of Catholic

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[199] Ibid. (dated 7 October 1968).

Social Teaching since *Rerum Novarum*--might appear compatible with Communism. [200] But the argumentation here is specious and shallow. Not only does Cousins fully accept the logic of American militarism, but he also assumes the comfortable alignment of that ¨honest virtue of patriotism¨ with an interventionist, pro-war position. The antiwar protesters expressed in practice the authentic position of the Church, but they are reduced to meddlers with a pesky conscience; they denounced military intervention in an unpopular, unjust, and ultimately fruitless war, but they are painted as implicitly, obviously unpatriotic.[201]

With Vietnam, as with issues of racial justice, Cousins wanted to have it both ways. He consistently exercised his prerogative to declare the Church and Catholic dogma to stand in solidarity with the oppressed and on the moral high ground of history. Just as consistently, he condemned the practical instrumentalities which might defend or foster justice. It is difficult to find in Cousins' correspondence an expression of approval for any tactic other than reading widely or gathering a roomful of sympathetic priests to discuss the problems at hand. Cousins would retire in September 1977, after a nineteen year episcopate rife with ´politics.´ With respect to his epistolary output, it seems also to have been marked by a reliable deference to American civil authorities and palpable fear that demonstrations might upset ´regular´ Catholics.

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[200] In 1947, the Catechetical Guild Educational Society, based in St. Paul, Minnesota, published a propaganda comic titled *Is This Tomorrow?* In the book, Communist saboteurs infiltrate the American government and media, toppling the country immediately and with ease. After a Bible burning, Communist President Jones declares, ¨Now is the time to finish off the Catholics!¨ The comic can be viewed digitally at https://flashbak.com/tomorrow-red-scare-comic-book-1947-391142/ (accessed December 2, 2021).

[201] Singh, *Race and America's Long War,* 53f.

Conclusion: Untangling the Racial Politics of Religion in Milwaukee, USA

By the time dawn came, and the next team of seminarians arrived to relieve us, Rockwell was gone, but so was my easy assumption that Nazi hatred of Jews sprang whole out of the Teutonic forest, a purely pagan phenomenon. Hitler, I learned for the first time, had died in official good standing as a Catholic.
        -James Carroll, *Practicing Catholic*

The slave prison and the church stand near each other. The clanking of fetters and the rattling of chains in the prison, and the pious psalm and solemn prayer in the church, may be heard at the same time. The dealers in the bodies of men erect their stand in the presence of the pulpit, and they mutually help each other. The dealer gives his blood-stained gold to support the pulpit, and the pulpit, in return, covers his infernal business with the garb of Christianity...
        -Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*

The racial politics of American religion reflects a tangled, convoluted problem that defies simple explanations or narratives. But, as with the problem of race relations in general, it demands that we continue to *attempt* to solve the problem, to analyze thoughtfully, create useful models, and deploy our best critical tools to the issues at hand. This thesis represents just such an attempt to contribute, albeit modestly, to the ongoing discourse regarding the historical and social intersections of race and religion. More specifically, it amounts to a kind of analysis of Roman Catholic engagements with the Black Freedom Struggle and issues of racial justice at different scalar levels.[202] Chapter one sketches the arc of Catholic theology in the first part of the 20th century, including intellectual engagements by the Vatican and US Bishops with racial and social justice. Chapter two reflected on how (well) Catholicism might work for Black liberation in its discursive architecture, and how it fits into the historical concept and social reality of the ´Black Church.´ Into this discussion, chapters three and four integrated the city of Milwaukee as a case study, including reactions to the Civil Rights movement by parishioners, clergy, and bishops.

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[202] My thanks to Dr. Joe Austin of the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee for his assistance in conceptualizing the present enterprise in this way.

What, if anything, might be learned from the practical and rhetorical responses by the global magisterium (i.e., the Pope/Vatican); the American Church; and Catholic Milwaukee to the Civil Rights movement? It may be constructive to consider the contours of a response here by way of an initial summary. As emphasized by scholars like Jamie Phelps and Fr. Bryan Massingale, paucity and inadequacy of response characterize global Catholic and American Catholic engagement with race relations.[203] Since *Rerum Novarum,* the Catholic hierarchy of Europe had promulgated and progressively articulated Social Teaching which emphasized economic justice, civic mindedness (i.e., common goods), and the dignity of the laborer. However, the pope and the doctors of the Church were careful to navigate the ideological waters such that Catholic Social Teaching should appear neither to accede to the logics of unfettered capitalism and democratic liberalism (i.e., the American experiment) nor to accommodate Communism or Socialism. Catholic practice should reflect an independent, self-governed social philosophy.

Unfortunately, CST and the hierarchy did not also offer, between *Rerum Novarum* and the onset of the Second World War, any noteworthy intellectual redress of racial wrongs. In part, the framers of Catholic social dogma were (and mostly continue to be) white Europeans, and they arguably operated within the framework of assumed, implicit whiteness on the part of Catholic faithful. Although not actively malicious, this certainly contributed to the erasure of Blacks--Black Catholics and European Blacks.

But this phenomenon also makes more sense if we consider CST not as emerging in a doctrinal vacuum but rather as historically situated and even somewhat polemical. Since the

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[203] Jamie T. Phelps, ed. *Black and Catholic: The Challenge and Gift of Black Folk: Contributions of African American Experience and Thought to Catholic Theology* (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 1998).

publication of *The Communist Manifesto* in 1848--a year that also saw a spate of failed liberal

revolutions in Europe--the political and economic philosophy of Marx and Engels demanded a

large and increasing share of attention from Catholic social scientists, theologians and ethicists.

In this sense, contemporaneous Catholic Social Teaching reflected a careful, mincing

discernment of which principles to endorse on labor and economics and which to reject. Race

relations and racial justice simply never rose to this level of critical attention.

  The Catholic Church in the United States evolved a bit differently from its ecclesiastical

analogue in Europe, shaped as the former was by semi-sacred American notions of

individualism, capitalism, and democratic liberalism. Yet similar challenges persisted here as

well. The US Bishops did indeed weigh in on matters of racial justice, though infrequently and

with less vigor than might be reasonably expected for such a persistent social problem. As seen

above, the pastoral letter *Discrimination & the Christian Conscience* (1958) declared racism to

be inconsistent with Catholic, Christian faith, but it did not analyze and denounce white

supremacism, Jim Crow, or active resistance to the cause of Black Civil Rights.

  We may look to the long decade between the end of World War II and the beginning of

the 1960s as an inflection point. For the United States, the postwar period saw the emergence of

a spate of important social trends: mass consumption, renewed attention to and visibility of the

experience of nonwhite people in the US, and religiously, the decline of denominationalism. [204]

Globally and geopolitically, the postwar period marked a brave, new, postcolonial epoch during

which a host of African and Asian nations declared independence from European sovereignty.[205]

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[204] ´Denominationalism´ is taken here to mean the tendency for specific religious affiliation to shape and constrain one´s social behavior. For example: Baptists frequently married Baptists, and Presbyterians attended Presbyterian or Reformed--not Catholic or Methodist--universities.

[205] Frantz Fanon calls decolonization "a program of complete disorder. But it cannot come as a result of magical practices, nor of a natural shock, nor of a friendly understanding...Decolonization is a historical process..[it can only be understood] in the exact measure that we can discern the movements which give

This period of decolonization and sovereignty-seeking on the part of non-European peoples shared a reciprocal intellectual exchange with the Black Freedom struggle in the United States. Furthermore, in parallel with the ongoing Civil Rights movement in the Sixties emerged the migratory phenomenon sometimes called the ´browning´ of America: the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, also known as the Hart-Celler Act, abolished the quota system and fostered the arrival of emigrants of new nationalities in the U.S. This bears the legacy, in part, of complicating the racial constellation of America.[206]

Given the unfolding geopolitics of decolonization and the deepening cultural ferment of the era, it certainly makes retrospective sense for the pontiff to have convened a plenary church council to engage a changing world--although it surprised many at the time. The pastoral constitutions produced by the Second Vatican Council, such as *Pacem* and *Gaudium,* while imperfect, reflected a greater rigor and a deeper awareness of the growing diversity and pluralism of the world than had the correspondence of the US Bishops in the prior decade. Roman Catholic theologians had shifted from a neo-scholastic mode of analysis and toward a more social-scientific approach, one better geared to understand a multiracial and pluralistic society.[207]

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it historical form and content." Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth,* trans. Constance Farrington (New York, NY: Grove Press, 1963), 36.

See also Robert Vitalis, *White World Order, Black Power Politics: The Birth of American International Relations* (London, UK: Cornell University Press, 2015), 133-142.

[206] This is to say, the ´color line´ no longer indicated exclusively the fraught relationship between Afro-Americans and whites (i.e., Americans of western European descent). Eastern Europeans, Indians, Latinos, and East Asians formed increasingly large portions of the American ethnic landscape.

[207] One of the methodological differences here, of course, is that Catholic theology operates under the a priori, axiomatic presumption that a divine Personality is at work in and through human affairs; modern sociology and anthropology lack this intellectual commitment to theism.

With its changes to liturgy, theology, and social ethics, Vatican II effectuated a seismic transformation of global, and American, Catholicism. The Council seemed to signal a more open, democratic spirit in the reformulated Church.[208] Vatican II carved out a wider, more robust space for progressive Catholics than had previously existed, the corollary being its erstwhile alienation of more traditional, ´Old Mass´ Catholics.[209] In its immediate aftermath, as parish priests (and their archbishops) were still assimilating and integrating the revisions in CST and doctrine, the Council certainly pointed to a tantalizing politics of possibility: not a few priests saw in Council documents a theological ratification of peaceful protests and even Black Power Masses.

Among the most notable features of Catholic institutional engagement with social and racial justice in the Sixties is its deeply dissonant, ambiguous character. It is not the case--to paint an idealized, progressive pole--that parishes castigated segregation, discrimination, and white supremacy, set up local commissions on racial reconciliation, and immediately integrated their parish schools. But neither is it the case that hierarchs univocally denounced and stifled any attempt to instantiate Vatican II in social, ecclesial practice. The response, in the aggregate, was deeply mixed. The different echelons of magisterial authority in the Church expressed widely diverging perspectives.

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[208] Perception rarely aligns perfectly with reality. While ideas like ´freedom of conscience´ appeared in some of the papal and conciliar texts of the first half of the 1960s, *Humanae Vitae,* promulgated in 1968, hewed a hard line on sexual ethics, including a denunciation of contraception. Catholics widely ignored magisterial pronouncements on sexual ethics--like *Humanae*-- that contradicted their own commitments and preferences. That trend continues apace. On the declining moral authority of the hierarchy over lay Catholics, see William V. D'Antonio, Michelle Dillon, and Mary L. Gautier, *American Catholics in Transition* (New York, NY: Rowman & Littlefield, 2013), 72-78.

[209] While it is outside the chronological scope of this work, Michael Cuneo has written in *The Smoke of Satan* concerning how the strident rejection of the Second Vatican Council by some Catholics has solidified in identifiable subcultures that reflect different theological and social foci: extreme Marianists, mystics, apocalypticists, political archconservatives, etc. See Michael W. Cuneo, *The Smoke of Satan: Conservative and Traditionalist Dissent in Contemporary American Catholicism* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 1999).

Some scholars have suggested that the theology of Vatican II reflects a kind of rare ´victory´ of global bishops´ concerns over the deeply conservative nature of the Roman Curia. If that is the case, the same kind of institutional discord can be viewed in the United States, specifically in the microcosm of Milwaukee. A vocal contingent of lay Catholics in the city felt dismay or even anger towards the Black freedom movement--and worse, support from their own priests! For their part, parish priests were themselves divided. Priests like James Groppi, Eugene Bleidorn, and certain members of the Council on Urban Life (CUL) supported and participated to varying degrees in racial justice efforts. Others demurred that they ought to cling to the pastoral domain or explicitly opposed the movement. Archbishop Cousins, as we have seen, was divided in his own person: he proclaimed his commitment to racial justice but found something to criticize in every practical effort to that end within his own city.

What dynamics drove these sociopolitical orientations? Today, the Civil Rights Movement feels sacrosanct and historically canonical in such a way that to attack it is unsafe, an invitation to shouts of sacrilege. This was not the case in the Fifties and Sixties. As Jeanne Theoharis has written, the majority of white Americans opposed the contemporaneous movement, with many annoyed that Blacks would demand or march for their rights, rather than passively *receive* them over time. She writes:

> In schools and national tributes, the March on Washington is now pictured as one of the most American events of the twentieth century...In 1963, however, most Americans disapproved of it, many congressmen saw it as potentially ¨seditious,¨ and law enforcement from local police to the FBI monitored it intensively.

> The popular fable of the movement makes it seem like most decent people were in favor of the movement. They were not. The civil rights movement was deeply unpopular and most Americans did not support it. They thought it was going too far, that movement activists were too extreme… [M]ost white Americans were content with the status quo. And so they criticized, monitored, demonized, and at times criminalized those who challenged it, making dissent very costly. [210]

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[210] Jeanne Theoharis, *A More Beautiful and Terrible History: The Uses and Misuses of Civil Rights History* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2018), 173.

In the context of metro Milwaukee, rancor among the laity probably derived in part from a sense of geographical and economic scarcity. But learned and inherited racist attitudes also contributed.

This claim begs in turn for further explanation. Why should there be an intimate, implicit linkage between racism and religiosity in the United States? Indeed, is it not the case that those egalitarian, ostensibly antiracist aphorisms that have permeated our cultural zeitgeist--such as *love your neighbor as yourself*---derive from religious texts, rather than from secular, constitutional, or Enlightenment texts?[211] For our purposes, there are two broad avenues of historical argument and inquiry by which we might make a cursory account of the curious assemblage of racism and religiosity in America. First, we can consider on its own terms the arc of Catholic history and its engagement with race in the early modern period to the present. Second, we can reflect on the commitments and alignments of American Protestantism, and argue by analogy (both historical and sociological).

White Protestantism has implicated itself in racism and the race-making enterprise for the last four centuries. White Protestants fostered and maintained the system of chattel slavery that first flourished in the Chesapeake colonies; while it became entrenched in the American South for several centuries, in its colonial inception, this regime of African bondage extended to then-colonies in the North, including New York and Vermont. [212]

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[211] Although the deeply self-contradictory words of Jefferson in the Declaration of Independence might also quickly come to mind: *We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.* As governor of Virginia and later President, Jefferson remained a prolific owner of enslaved Africans.

[212] Robert P. Jones cites research which suggests that slaveholding rates in 1860 remain a strong predictor of racial conservatism in the present for a given U.S. county. Robert P. Jones, *White Too Long: The Legacy of White Supremacy in American Christianity* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2020), 157.

The nineteenth century saw both the strengthening of the slave system (in the first six decades) and the ascendancy of Evangelicalism throughout. [213] In order to reconcile the *prima facie* contradictory realities of owning Black bodies while professing faith in Jesus, Southern theologians and slaveholders--intersecting descriptors for many--concocted self-serving and spurious frameworks of history and Biblical interpretation. One of the most durable was the idea of the ´curse of Ham.´[214] In the book of Genesis, Noah places a curse on the son of Canaan, whom Southerners conjectured was black, thus furnishing a convenient warrant for enslaving and brutalizing Africans.[215]

Racism and white supremacy remained at the core of white Protestant identity in the twentieth century, whether in implicit or explicit expression. The White League, White Citizens´ Councils, and the resurgent Ku Klux Klan openly articulated their understanding of the close relationship between Christian faith, whiteness, and the suppression of Black freedom. [216] Less visibly, the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE), which formed in 1942, excluded from its ranks all Black denominations, among them a number whose theology aligned closely. If the new Evangelicals of the 1940s and 1950s disagreed with their more insulated Fundamentalist counterparts on some issues, racial justice was not one of them. Leaders like Billy Graham

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[213] An important work in this space is Christine Leigh Heyrman, *Southern Cross: The Beginnings of the Bible Belt* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1998). Heyrman argues that, in order to make progress in evangelizing Southerners, Baptist, Methodist and Anglican missionaries largely assimilated and accepted conventional Southern mores about patriarchy, racial stratification, patriotism, violence and martial honor.

[214] The brief narrative can be found in Genesis 9:20-29.

[215] See, for instance, Jason E. Shelton and Michael O. Emerson, *Blacks and Whites in Christian America: How Racial Discrimination Shapes Religious Convictions* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2012), 35-36.

[216] See Anthea Butler, *White Evangelical Racism: The Politics of Morality in America* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2021), 28-30f.

typically called for Black gradualism and Black patience; Graham rarely if ever criticized the draconian racial order of the Jim Crow South, but he swiftly criticized Martin Luther King, Jr. for insisting too aggressively on racial equality for Blacks--nevermind that the movement was committed to nonviolence.[217]

The arc of American Catholicism included experiences of both cultural hegemony and cultural marginality. Roman Catholicism represented the official and majority religion for the Spanish empire in the ´New World.´ Dominican priest Bartolome de las Casas (1484-1566) provides a good example of the vital contradictions present in North American Catholicism. He first supported, and later vigorously opposed, the enslavement of Hispaniola natives and Black Africans; his passionate entreaties contributed to Pope Paul III´s issuance of the papal bull *Sublimis Deus* (1537), which endorsed the full humanity of indigenous peoples and granted them, hypothetically, protection from enslavement. In practice, the bull did not actually halt the forced labor and racialized order of the *encomienda* system.

In British North America and the nascent American republic, Catholicism figured as a minority religious constituency (outside of Maryland). The nineteenth century saw large waves of European Catholics migrating to the United States, especially Germans, Irish, and Italians. The influx of new Americans often sparked xenophobic backlash in the form of anti-Catholic rhetoric, violence, and the nativist ´Know Nothing´ party.

As Catholic immigration continued apace in the early twentieth century, anti-Catholic sentiment slowly eroded. Denominationalism receded in importance after World War II. More important was a high-energy, low-content ´Americanism´ that touted love of country and the strident denunciation of Soviet Communism--lines Catholic leaders and laity were frequently

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[217] Anthea Butler, *White Evangelical Racism,* 52-54.

more than happy to toe. Certain Catholics in the postwar period, including the literary cenobite

Thomas Merton and the Rev. Fulton Sheen, achieved high public visibility and even a measure

of celebrity.

Politically, white American Protestants and American Catholics peddled down a crash

course of eventual alignment. John F. Kennedy marked one inflection point; while some

Protestant Americans suspected JFK would simply do the Vatican´s bidding while in high office,

he both insisted that he would not and, of course, eventually won the presidency.[218] Suspicions

about Catholicism stalked the edges of American politics, but it was a dying beast. A generation

later, huge numbers of American Catholics would realign themselves as ´Reagan Democrats´

who also largely embraced the Moral Majority of Jerry Falwell (1979/1980). [219]

This is not to suggest that there are not significant political differences among Catholic

Americans, nor can we undertake here a complete demography of American Catholicism.

Hispanic and Latin-American Catholics, for instance, often locate on the Left of the political

spectrum. But it is the case that as Catholics emerged *as Americans*, they found themselves on

the Right, the conservative wing of American politics--ideological neighbors to the white

American Protestants who spurned and heckled them a few generations prior.[220]

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[218] Kennedy´s explicit disavowal of the notion that his Catholic faith would affect his governing was in itself a watershed moment that would influence later American Catholics in elected roles. More specifically, the pro-choice position of Catholic Democrats has ignited tensions with the US Bishops.

[219] See Robert P. Jones, *The End of White Christian America* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2016), 216-217.

[220] Will Herberg, writing in 1960 and in the context of a somewhat simpler racial and religious imaginary, offers a valuable sociological profile of American Catholics in their relationship to Protestants and to wider American society: "[A]uthoritative Catholic opinion is increasingly taking another line of ideological defense--that Catholicism is, in fact, a true expression of Americanism and that the genuine Catholic position on church and state is fully in line with American tradition and experience…By and large, AMerican Catholicism…[has moved] to a more positive affirmation of its legitimate place in the tripartite America of today. The Catholic attitude is increasingly that of a substantial minority with a strong sense of self-assurance." Will Herberg, *Protestant-Catholic-Jew: An Essay in American Religious Sociology* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1960), 234.

This sketch has treated as interchangeable ´Protestant´ and ´Evangelical,' an issue which

begs for a bit of historical clarification. In the aftermath of the Scopes trial (1925), the public

image of Fundamentalist Christianity took a drubbing. Fundamentalism itself did not disappear,

but culture-conscious leaders like Carl F. H. Henry helped repackage its essential theology with

softer edges. Historians often call this resurgent movement neo-Evangelicalism. Although

sociologically imprecise, the term ´mainline´ has been applied to those denominations that fell on

the abolitionist side of antebellum or Reconstruction-era schisms (such as the ABC-USA,

perpetually separated from the Southern Baptists). More immediately, it also applied to Christian

groups that embraced Modernist theology. Still Protestant, they are not Evangelicals and

emphatically not Fundamentalists.

Contemporary mainline churches in the United States, like the United Church of Christ or

the United Methodist Church (UCC, UMC), do not often teach von Harnack, Schleiermacher, or

Tillich from their pulpits, but they do sit on the Left of American politics. They also constitute a

smaller sociopolitical force than the white Christian conservatism populated by Evangelicals and

Catholics together. [221]

Uncovering the underlying ideological mechanisms that led Evangelicals and Catholics to

converge on the Right, the wing of American politics consistently opposed to racial justice, may

be a bit elusive. It is at least plausible that, since the logics of white supremacism have

permeated the historical DNA of white, American Evangelicalism, these toxic mores crept into

the rhetoric and praxis of immigrant Catholics working hard toward assimilation and American

acceptance. In this new dispensation, the respective Churches were, in parallel fashion, more

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[221] *Evangelicals and Catholics Together* is also the name of a 1994 ecumenical document, affirming the common cause and core beliefs of both groups.

concerned with ´morality´ and ´law and order´ than with justice and racial equity. Paul Kivel

writes about how the Christian theology of sin, as taught in American churches in particular,

actually reinforces ¨hierarchies of class, race, and gender.¨[222]

American Catholics and Protestants both have progressive constituencies, but these are

demonstrably smaller than the conservative and far-right coalitions in those respective

confessions. For instance, American Baptists (ABC-USA) number about 1.2 million members.

Southern Baptists (SBC) boast roughly 45,000 churches and over 14 million members. Those

conservative coalitions continue to make choices that erase, vilify or minimize the struggle of

Black Americans for freedom and full equality. In a denominational pronouncement from

January 2021, the Southern Baptist Convention issued a broad condemnation of racism but

unequivocally denounced Critical Race Theory (CRT)--an important analytical tool for

understanding and dismantling structural racism.

Americans have made *some kinds* of racial progress from the era that saw open

segregationists like George Wallace running viably for president (1968), but that progress may

lie more in minimizing racism as a live social issue than in actively combating it. It may be that

in the United States, as elsewhere, religious affiliation has become what Jacque Lacan (and

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[222] Paul Kivel, *Uprooting Racism: How White People Can Work For Racial Justice* (Gabriola Island, BC, Canada: New Society Publishers, 2017), 304.

Kivel further quotes Lillian Smith, a white woman of the American South: ¨When we as small children crept over the race line and ate and played with Negroes or broke other segregation customs known to us we felt the same dread fear of consequences, the same overwhelming guilt we felt when we crept over the sex line and played with our body, or thought thoughts about God or parents we weren´t supposed to think. Each was a ´sin´ and deserved ´punishment...´Each was tied up with the others and all were tied close to God...The lesson of segregation was only a logical extension of the lessons on sex and white superiority and God.¨

following him, Slavoj Zizek) calls a ´master signifier:´ a symbol of tribal allegiance largely disconnected from its intellectual roots and content.[223]

Nevertheless, the innate potentials for contrariwise thinking and behavior have remained both inside and a part of American Christianity, of whatever confession. The inhumane, white supremacist Christianity of the antebellum South became the vibrant, freedom-loving Christianity of Black Americans, slave and free. The ´law and order´ Catholicism of a wary hierarch like Cousins could become the liberation theology of Gustavo Gutierrez or of Black Milwaukeeans. What was required was not a disavowal or destruction of the religious mythology, but a reconfiguring and repurposing of the symbolic architecture. As J. Deotis Roberts writes, it would seem that Christianity is a religion ¨easily domesticated.¨[224] Jon Pahl describes American Christianity as having "contours…ambivalent enough to include both antislavery and proslavery voices."[225] Needless to say, these sociopolitical ambiguities embedded in both Protestantism and Roman Catholicism failed to resolve in Reconstruction or the generations that followed. It seems safe to predict that the dissonances within American religious groups will remain, just as long as some citizens focus on boundary maintenance and others on exodus.

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[223] Cf. Richard Coble, ¨Struggling With Our Racism: White Progressive Christians and Lacan,¨ *Pastoral Psychology* 68 (2019): 561-574. Coble writes with personal vulnerability and pathos about the need to work through unconscious racist biases present even in social-justice minded congregations and clergy.

[224]J. Deotis Roberts, *Black Theology in Dialogue* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1987), 111.

[225] Jon Pahl, *Empire of Sacrifice: The Religious Origins of American Violence* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2010), 65.

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