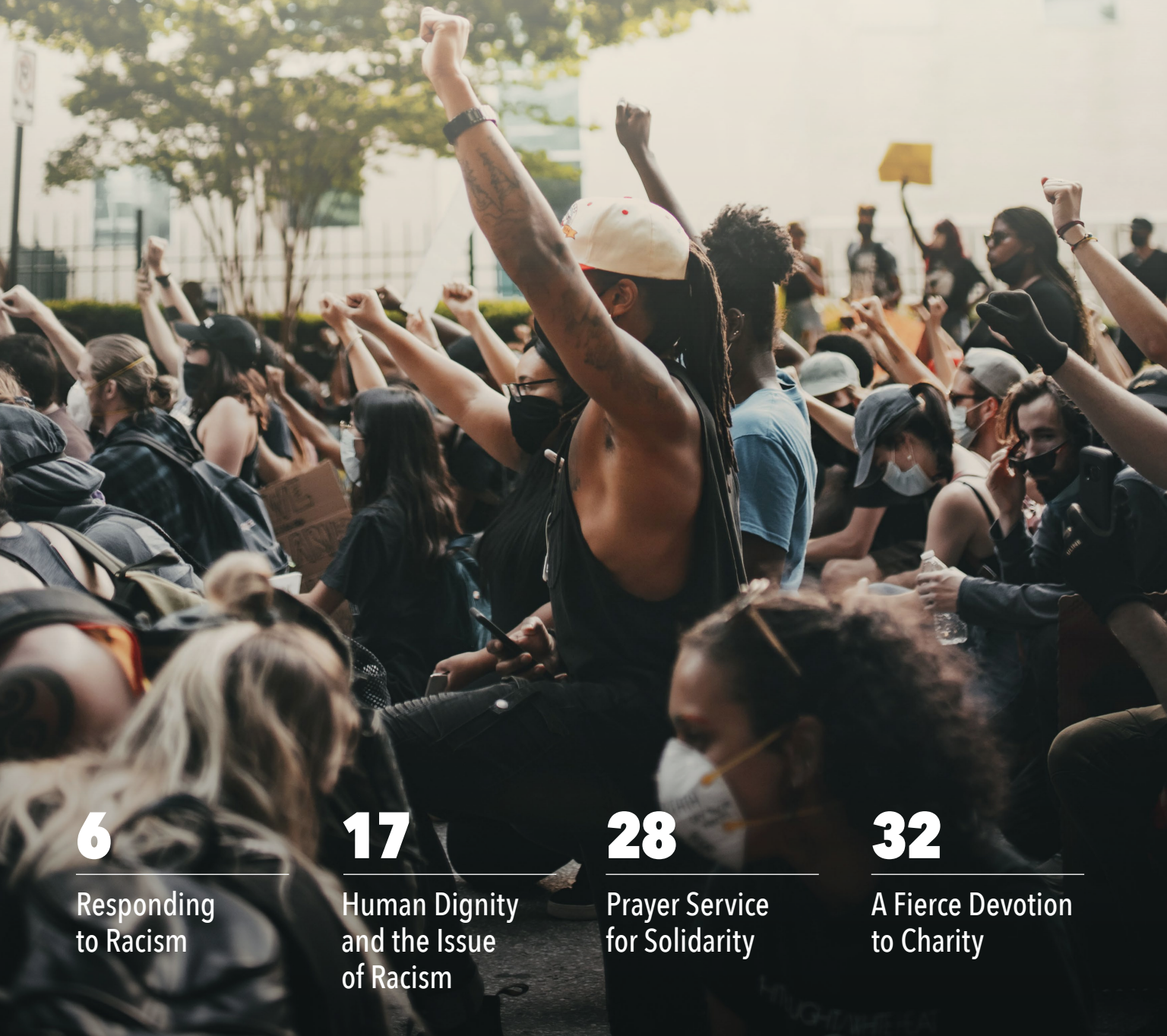


VOLUME 2, ISSUE 2

ASPIRE

A MAGAZINE FOR HIGH SCHOOL RELIGION TEACHERS



6

Responding
to Racism

17

Human Dignity
and the Issue
of Racism

28

Prayer Service
for Solidarity

32

A Fierce Devotion
to Charity

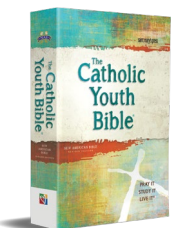


PREPARE FOR ACTION

Nehemiah, chapter 1

Do you ever watch the news and think, “Why bother trying to make the world a better place?” Christians are called to social actions—action for justice, action to make the world a better place. Social sin—such as poverty, racism, violence, materialism, and indifference—can often seem too big for any individual to do much about. In the overwhelming face of social sin, it is easy to say, “I give up.”

When Nehemiah heard of the results of Israel’s collective sin, he didn’t give up. Instead he turned to God in fasting and prayer. Pray today about a social issue you are most concerned about, and look for ways you can get more involved in action on the issue.



This is taken from the “Who Is My Neighbor?” feature near Nehemiah, chapter 1, in *The Catholic Youth Bible*, fourth edition.

FROM THE EDITOR



In this issue of *Aspire*, we aim to support you in your efforts to engage others in conversation about racial justice. With constant reminders that more work needs to be done in this area, the articles and classroom ideas contained within will hopefully spark some additional opportunities for reflection and ongoing discussion around this critical topic.

There is no question about how we are called to respond to this issue as Christians. Scripture and the Church's social teaching are clear. The challenge is living up to this call and doing the hard work of rooting out obstacles in the deepest parts of our own lives and in society at large.

We know that working toward justice is a marathon rather than a sprint, but it requires us all to remain fully engaged. By encouraging reflection, prayer, and conversation in our classrooms and faculty meetings, we have the potential to truly make a difference and to plant seeds that can bear fruit for generations to come.

May the love of Christ compel us to move forward with hope and hold firm to a vision of solidarity that sustains us in the vital work toward peace and justice.

Live Jesus in our hearts . . . forever!

Steven Ellair

ABOUT THE PUBLISHER

Saint Mary's Press is a nonprofit, Lasallian Catholic publisher administered by the Christian Brothers of the Midwest District. Our focus is a contemporary expression of the Catholic Church's mission to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ and the Lasallian mission to provide a human and Christian education for young people, including those who are economically deprived. With our partners in schools, parishes, and families, we share the Good News of Jesus Christ with children and young people through publications and services.

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WHAT'S INSIDE

ARTICLES



6 Responding to Racism

BY ERNEST J. MILLER, FSC

12

Reading the Signs of the Times: Racial Discrimination and White Privilege

BY ERIN M. BRIGHAM

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21 The Artist Alive: Explorations in Music, Art & Theology

BY CHRISTOPHER PRAMUK

CLASSROOM APPLICATIONS

11

A Conversation about "Responding to Racism"



17 Reflecting on Human Dignity and the Issue of Racism

MAKE COPIES

Every article and activity can be easily downloaded and printed for classroom use: smp.org/aspirevol2

REFLECTIONS



A Fierce Devotion to Charity

BY JOHN M. VITEK

Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration, fspa.org



Servant of God Thea Bowman

BY JOANNA DAILEY

CLASSROOM IDEAS

26 Solidarity Skits



Prayer Service for Solidarity



The Question of Civil Disobedience



RESPONDING TO RACISM

by Ernest J. Miller, FSC



DOWNLOAD THIS FOR YOUR CLASS TO READ: SMP.ORG/ASPIREVOL2

We are living in a historic moment.

The wave of public outrage in reaction to George Floyd's 21st-century lynching launched protests of a scope and scale unseen in decades in the United States and, indeed, around the world. These protests arrive at a moment when many people are hungry to end the moral pandemic of systemic, interlocking injustices. These protests arrive at a moment when many people aspire to heal the nation and expand the quest for human freedom, human dignity, and democracy.

This struggle requires frank discussion of the dimensions of human freedom and dignity—mercy, love, courage, resistance, imagination, empathy—all of which are essential to building a better world.

We watched crowds of people—of every age, skin color, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, and no religion—take to the streets to cry out against deep-seated structural anti-blackness. The racist ideology that emerged out of American slavery persists, framing Black people “as dangerous and likely criminals.”¹

This racist ideology shows the distorted moral narrative of our democracy, which we must play our own part in deconstructing. We cannot abide a world in which Black mothers and fathers must educate, as a matter of course, their children in how to survive an encounter with the police. We cannot accept a society that tells Black youth: “You are worth less than. Your life is cheap.”

At present, our society is in the depths of anguish and despair, what Martin Luther King Jr. calls “the disjointed elements of reality.” In this broken place, our nation needs to heed the ancient wisdom of the Hebrew prophet Zechariah: Take inventory of yourself and community. Publicly own the deep wounds and painful consequences of oppression and suffering in the land.

Zechariah calls us to become prisoners of prophetic hope.

We must shift from pleasant poetics of charity to a prophetic praxis of hope “capable of [transforming] the status quo.”² It opens up the possibility to create a movement that enacts transformational justice, that is to say, a movement that brings about the fruits of the Reign of God.



However, what exactly is the problem against which we must dedicate ourselves to struggle? At the opening of the 20th century, the great sociologist and civil rights activist W. E. B. Du Bois asserted: "The problem of the 20th century is the problem of the color line."³ This analysis remains desperately relevant today, as the nation continues to be affected by the fumes and odors of systemic, structural racism in American democracy.

"[W]e have ingested the idea," says Resmaa Menakem, "that the white body is the supreme standard of humanity."⁴ "While we see anger and violence in the streets of our country, the real battlefield is inside [all of] our bodies, [of every color]." Menakem continues: "If we are to survive as a country, it is inside our bodies where this conflict needs to be resolved"; that "the vital force [behind] white supremacy is in our nervous systems."⁵

If you do not understand this truth, everything about this moment will confuse you. Everything about racial inequities, poverty, and social unrest will confuse you.

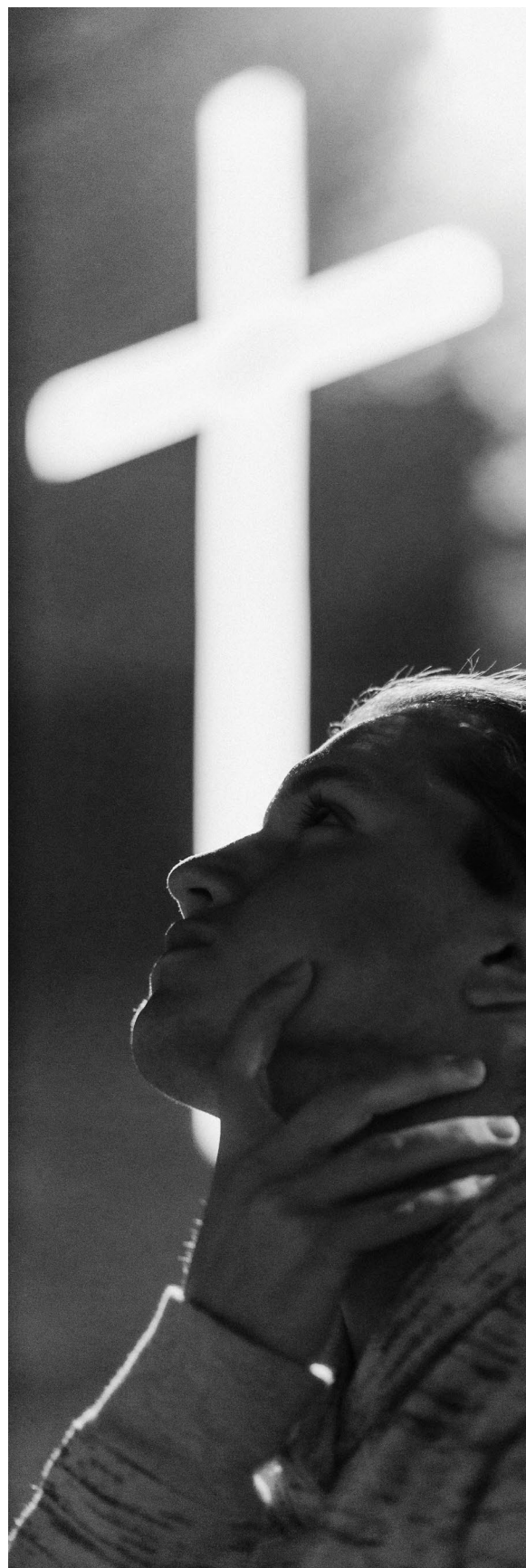
Let us pray that God will keep this knowledge close to our hearts.

The foundational motivation of Saint John Baptist de La Salle—the patron saint of Christian teachers and the founder of the Brothers of the Christian schools—was to establish schools that were a sign of the Reign of God and a means of salvation. Theologian-educator Br. Luke Salm, FSC, helps us critically understand the mission of salvation at the heart of Catholic education. Salvation is both a human reality and a religious concept rooted in hope. God’s will is that everyone be saved from “failure and disintegration of every kind” and to promote “health instead of sickness, knowledge instead of ignorance . . . relationship instead of loneliness . . . justice instead of injustice . . . love instead of hate.”⁶

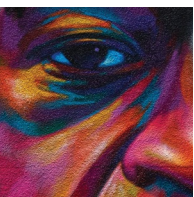
What, then, is required of us? What is required of the mission of Catholic education—a mission of salvation—to enact racial justice and participate in creating an anti-racist society?

As prisoners of prophetic hope, we are trying to keep track of not only our wounds and suffering but also our strengths and our tremendous possibilities for coming together to take decisive steps as communities of struggle “toward widening and strengthening human democracy.”⁷

If we are to amplify our participation in justice creation, Catholic education needs to embrace a critical pedagogy—a discourse of educated hope and possibility—across the curriculum and co-curriculum of each of our schools, universities, and other centers of education.



Let us provide those entrusted to our educational care with the prophetic sensibility of Br. John Johnston, FSC, who calls us to be indignant like Jesus about human beings suffering under the weight of social imbalance. Let us provide those entrusted to our educational care with Martin Luther King Jr.'s prophetic quest to become not just a Good Samaritan; rather, let us provide them a deep education that leads them to become an agent who transforms the Jericho Roads of life so no one is terrorized or traumatized or hated by other human beings.



To conclude, I encourage you to reflect on what you can do today—not tomorrow, not next week but today—to keep bending the arc of the moral universe toward transformational justice. To be a prophetic prisoner of hope is your vocation, your calling. It is a long-distance run.

-
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This article is adapted with permission from Br. Ernest J. Miller, from the opening meditation for an online event on June 25, 2020, titled *"Responding to Racism: A Lasallian Dialogue."* The full event can be viewed online at youtu.be/XabjRfQYvxo.

Ernest J. Miller, FSC, DMin, currently serves as the vice president of mission, diversity and inclusion at La Salle University in Philadelphia

A Conversation about “Responding to Racism”

Gather your faculty to discuss the article and its implications for your learning community. Consider breaking into four small groups and assigning one of the four questions below to each group for reflection and discussion. After 10–20 minutes, invite each small group to share with the large group the main thoughts that surfaced in their conversation. If you are meeting in a distance-learning setting, you might offer the questions as a large-group conversation. These questions can also be altered for use directly in the classroom with students.

- 1.** Why are the dimensions of human freedom and dignity—mercy, love, courage, resistance, imagination, and empathy—such an essential part of building a better world? How can these values become a more intentional part of the school curriculum?
- 2.** What would it mean to “take inventory of yourself and community”? What would public ownership of the deep wounds and painful consequences of oppression and suffering look like in your school community?
- 3.** How can educators become “prisoners of prophetic hope”? How might this more deeply inform or even alter the focus of Catholic education in your setting?
- 4.** What would an embodiment of a “discourse of educated hope and possibility” look like in your school? How could the curriculum proactively encourage movement toward transformational justice?





READING THE SIGNS OF THE TIMES: RACIAL DISCRIMINATION AND WHITE PRIVILEGE

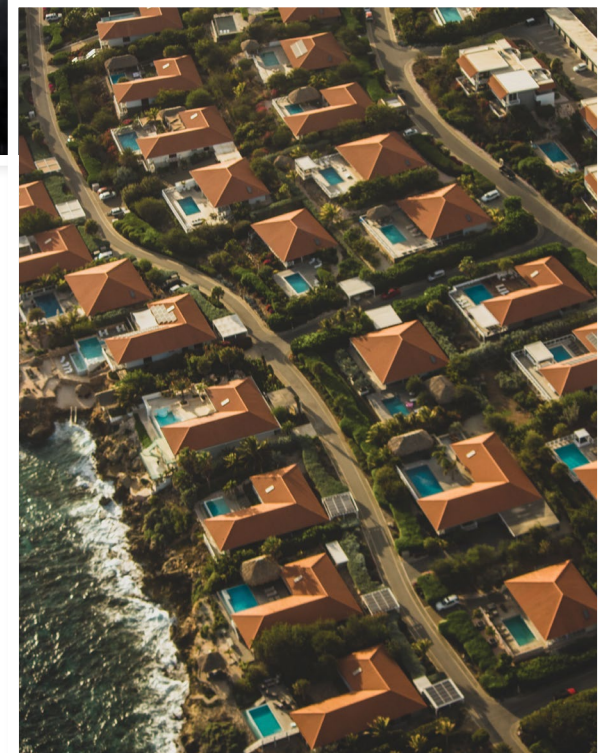
by Erin M. Brigham

“HANDS UP, DON’T SHOOT.”

In the fall of 2014, protestors gathered in Ferguson, Missouri, a suburb of St. Louis, chanting, “Hands up, don’t shoot.” Many of the protestors believed these to be the final words of Michael Brown, a Black teenager shot and killed by a white police officer on August 9, 2014. Although witnesses disputed details of the events surrounding Brown’s death, the results were tragic—the unarmed teenager was fatally shot. The Jesuit St. Louis University, along with the Archdiocese’s Human Rights Commission, joined other community leaders in advocating for racial justice and accountability.¹ The St. Louis County grand jury did not indict the police officer involved, reinforcing for many the racial injustice perpetuated by the criminal justice system in the United States.²

Brown’s death was one of the events that gave rise to the Black Lives Matter movement. The activists behind Black Lives Matter advocate for criminal justice reform, pointing to the systemic nature of police killings of young men of color. In February 2017, a study published by the American Journal of Public Health found significant racial disparities in the use of force by police officers. The author found that Black, Hispanic, and American Indian / Alaska Native men were disproportionately represented among young men who died from police force between 2010 and 2014.³ This study, consistent with previous research, illustrates the systemic reality of racism.

Despite such evidence pointing to the systemic nature of racism, polls show remarkable differences between white and Black Americans when it comes to perceptions of racism in the United States. In a 2016 survey, the Pew Research Center found that 88 percent of Black adults think the country needs to change in order to promote equal rights for Blacks. The same survey found that 53 percent of white adults expressed the same view about racial equality.⁴



Black theologian and Catholic priest Bryan Massingale explains the ambivalence that many white people have toward racial justice through the concept of white privilege. Examining white privilege requires a shift in attention away from the ways that racism disadvantages people of color and instead focuses on how racial injustice sets up advantages for white people. Massingale offers concrete examples such as redlining, the practice of designating certain neighborhoods based on racial demographics as high-risk lending zones, making it nearly impossible for people of color to obtain a mortgage. In the 1940s and 1950s, when the Federal Housing Administration offered low-cost loans to promote home ownership, the vast majority of the loans went to white people, enabling them to accumulate assets that they could pass on to their children.⁵ In her classic essay “White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack,” Peggy McIntosh proposes a number of examples of white

privilege. As a white person, she observes, “I can, if I wish, arrange to be in the company of people of my race most of the time. I am never asked to speak for all the people of my racial group. I can take a job with an affirmative action employer without having coworkers on the job suspect that I got it because of race.”⁶

Coming to terms with white privilege is crucial for overcoming the power imbalances that are engendered by racism, but it is not an easy process. Massingale observes:

Being racially advantaged might be unwanted or undesired by individual white Americans. In fact, some white Americans are distressed when they become aware of the reality of white privilege. Regardless of an individual's desires, an 'invisible package of unearned assets' is enjoyed by white people because of the racial consciousness that is subtly pervasive in our social customs and institutions.⁷

Massingale challenges the Catholic Church to do more to address racism on a pastoral level and in official teachings. In his reading of the bishops' statements on racism since *Brothers and Sisters to Us*, Massingale suggests that "the dominant approach found in recent Catholic episcopal reflection on racism is marked by (1) stress on its interpersonal manifestations; (2) a strategy of moral suasion and appeals to an enlightened conscience; and (3) calls for decency, civility, respect, and fair treatment, which will translate into improved social relationships among America's racial groups."⁸ What is lacking, Massingale argues, is an examination of racism on a cultural level. Culture carries the beliefs, symbols, and stories by which a community gives meaning to its experience and passes on that shared meaning to future generations. Addressing racism on a cultural level requires challenging deeply held beliefs and reshaping the systems that perpetuate these beliefs. With the exception of a few bishops, Massingale notes that the official Catholic response to racism emphasizes the need to change attitudes and personal behavior and is missing an analysis of the systems that structure racial inequalities.

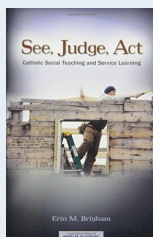


Massingale stresses the "systemic nature" of racism and notes that racism is not limited to the sins of individuals; it exists within the very fabric of society, embodied in systems that disadvantage and oppress people of color. Theologians, including Massingale, join the USCCB in identifying racism as a social sin. Social sin is not the same as personal sin, which emerges out of the freedom and responsibility of an individual; therefore, social sin requires a different framework to understand and address it. Social sin, however, is

rooted in human decisions and so cannot be separated from personal sin. Because social sin is larger than personal sin, it requires social as well as individual change. Describing social sin, Massingale states, “Social institutions and processes are not morally neutral; they reflect the values and the biases of those who create and maintain them.”⁹ It can be challenging to identify social sin because, as Massingale continues, “we are then born into a world already formed by these structures, and we grow up thinking that these structures and the values that they incarnate are perfectly normal and legitimate. One of the characteristics of social sin, then, is that we’re often blind to its existence.”¹⁰ Massingale’s work suggests that efforts to eradicate racism should consider the need for societal and ecclesial transformation in addition to personal transformation.

-
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 5. Bryan Massingale, *Racial Justice and the Catholic Church* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2010), 37–40.
 6. Peggy McIntosh, “White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack,” *Peace and Freedom* (July 1989): 10–12.
 7. Massingale, *Racial Justice*, 37.
 8. Bryan Massingale, “James Cone and Recent Catholic Episcopal Teaching on Racism,” *Theological Studies* 61:4 (December 2000): 714.
 9. Bryan Massingale, “Are You a Social Sinner?” interview with *U.S. Catholic*, *U.S. Catholic* 70, no. 2 (February 2005): 21.
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This article is an excerpt from “Defending Human Dignity against Discrimination,” by Erin M. Brigham, in *See, Judge, Act: Catholic Social Teaching and Service Learning*, revised edition (Winona, MN: Anselm Academic, 2018), pages 67–70. Copyright © 2018 by Erin M. Brigham. All rights reserved. www.anselmacademic.org.



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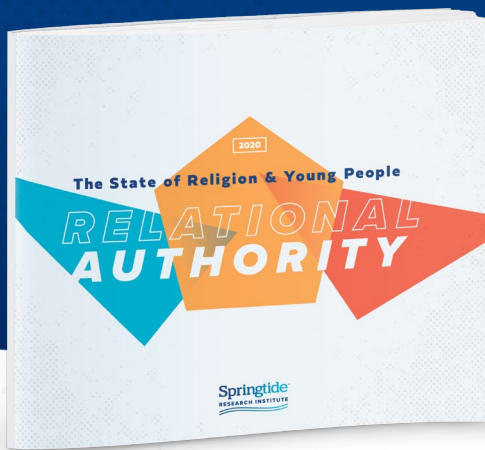
Reflecting on Human Dignity and the Issue of Racism

Use the following prompts to process the content in “Reading the Signs of the Times: Racial Discrimination and White Privilege,” or use alone as a way to begin a conversation around human dignity, racism, and what a Christian response to both might require.

- 1** How do you define *dignity*? What is the relationship between dignity and respect? What people, experiences, and beliefs have shaped your understanding of human dignity?
- 2** What does it mean to live with dignity? What social conditions allow people to grow in dignity? What social conditions violate human dignity?
- 3** Identify specific ways you may have seen people expressing and honoring human dignity. Also, identify ways you may have seen people diminish or disregard the dignity of others.
- 4** Have you thought about race a lot in your life? Where did you learn about racial differences? What role does it play in your identity and your relationship to others?
- 5** Has any service opportunity, immersion experience, or personal relationship prompted you to think differently about race? If so, has your thinking surfaced any assumptions or challenged any racial stereotypes that you were unaware of?
- 6** Can you identify ways that racism has affected the community you live in? Have you met people who have been affected by racism? If so, have you been able to discern attitudes or structures that perpetuate racism in these contexts?

These discussion prompts are adapted from “Defending Human Dignity against Discrimination” by Erin M. Brigham, in *See, Judge, Act: Catholic Social Teaching and Service Learning*, revised edition (Winona, MN: Anselm Academic 2018), pages 67–70. Copyright © 2018 by Erin M. Brigham. All rights reserved.





The State of Religion & Young People 2020 tells a story that needs to be heard.

The election cycle is just wrapping up. But politics impact our lives every day—not just every four years. And how we talk about politics matters to young people.



41%
of young people feel like most adults in their lives disregard their opinions about political issues.



45%
of young people say they wish the adults in their lives would let them into the conversation about politics more often.

Young people have made it clear: they want open-minded, healthy, and considerate political dialogue. But they haven't necessarily seen it modeled by the adults in their lives.

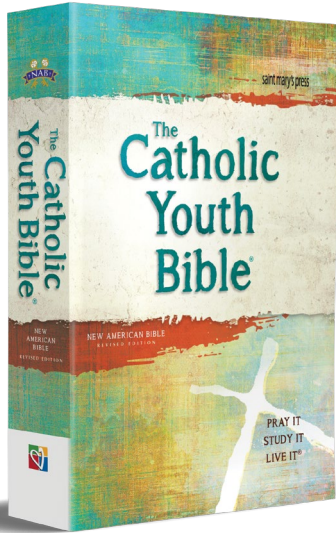
As young people's religious longings and belongings shift, expand, and change, religious leaders must be prepared to serve these impulses wherever expressed—whether in a church, online, in political discourses, or even the workplace. With data from over 10,000 young people ages 13 to 25, *The State of Religion & Young People 2020* offers findings and frameworks for forging connections and building trust with the young people in your life.



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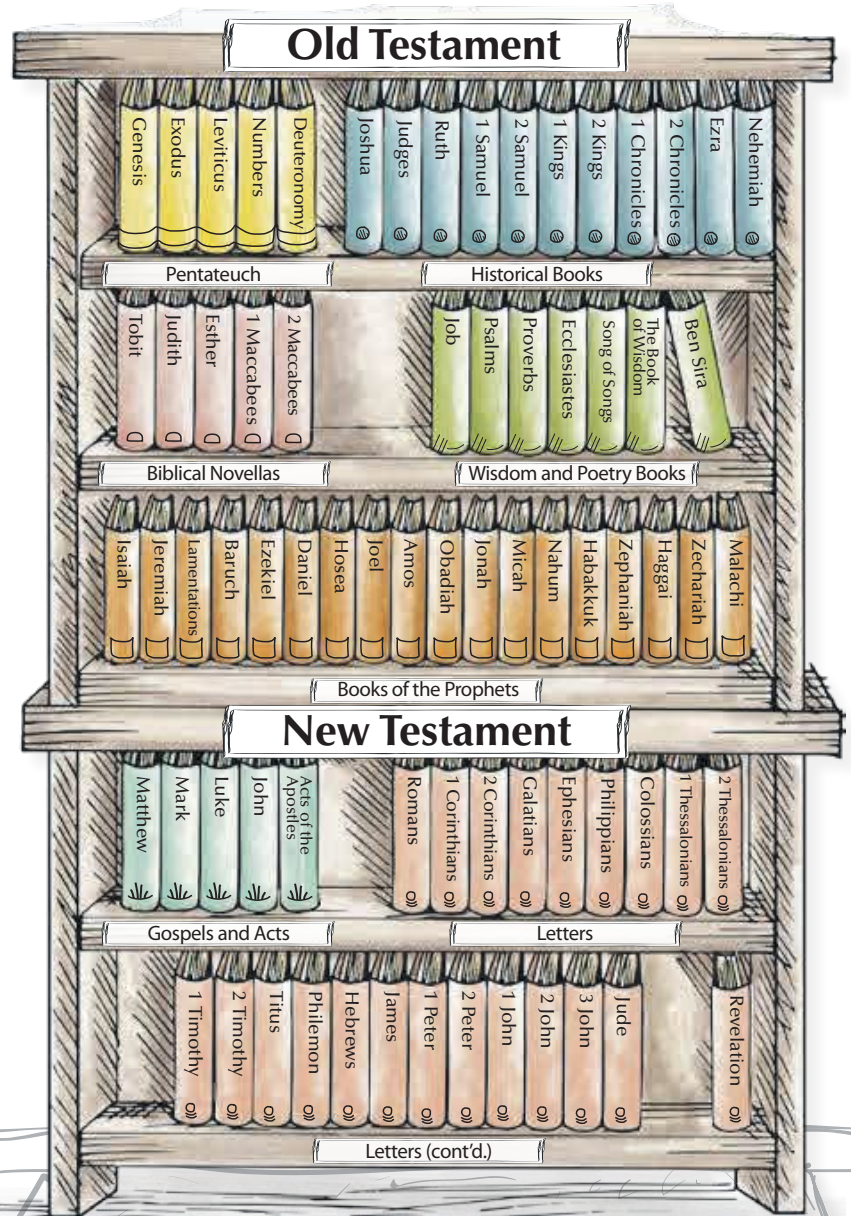
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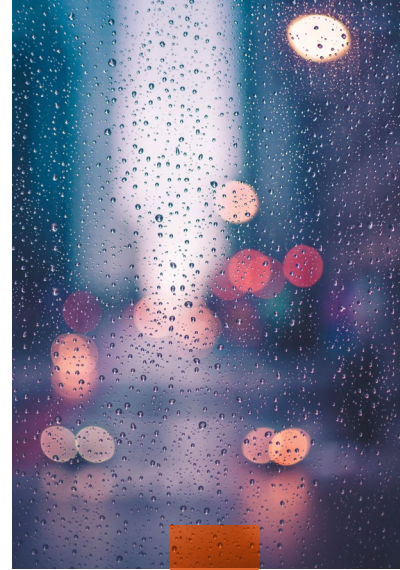
The Artist Alive: Explorations in Music, Art & Theology

by Christopher Pramuk

Introduction

From my childhood to the present day, my own spirituality or way of being in the world has been profoundly shaped by music, not least its capacity to carry me beyond myself and into communion with the mysterious, transcendent dimension of reality. From high school to undergraduate and graduate school classrooms, I've also marveled at the impact of engaging the arts with students as a doorway into life's most enduring human, spiritual, and theological questions.

Can the so-called "secular" music of artists like Pink Floyd, Joni Mitchell, Lady Gaga, and Bruce Springsteen bear us into realms of the holy and sacred? Can the social and racial critique embedded in Stevie Wonder's music disturb our personal and collective consciences, perhaps even opening the eyes of the "blind" to see? To what extent do songwriters, painters, filmmakers, and other artists play a prophetic role in society and church? Can art be a vehicle of hope, stirring that wondrous if elusive capacity in human beings to imagine a more just, humane, and joyful future? Such questions are implicitly theological insofar as they engage us in the search for answers to the deepest yearnings of human experience, and are attentive to moments in which that search confronts us with mysteries beyond understanding, not least, the ineffable reality believers name "God." . . .

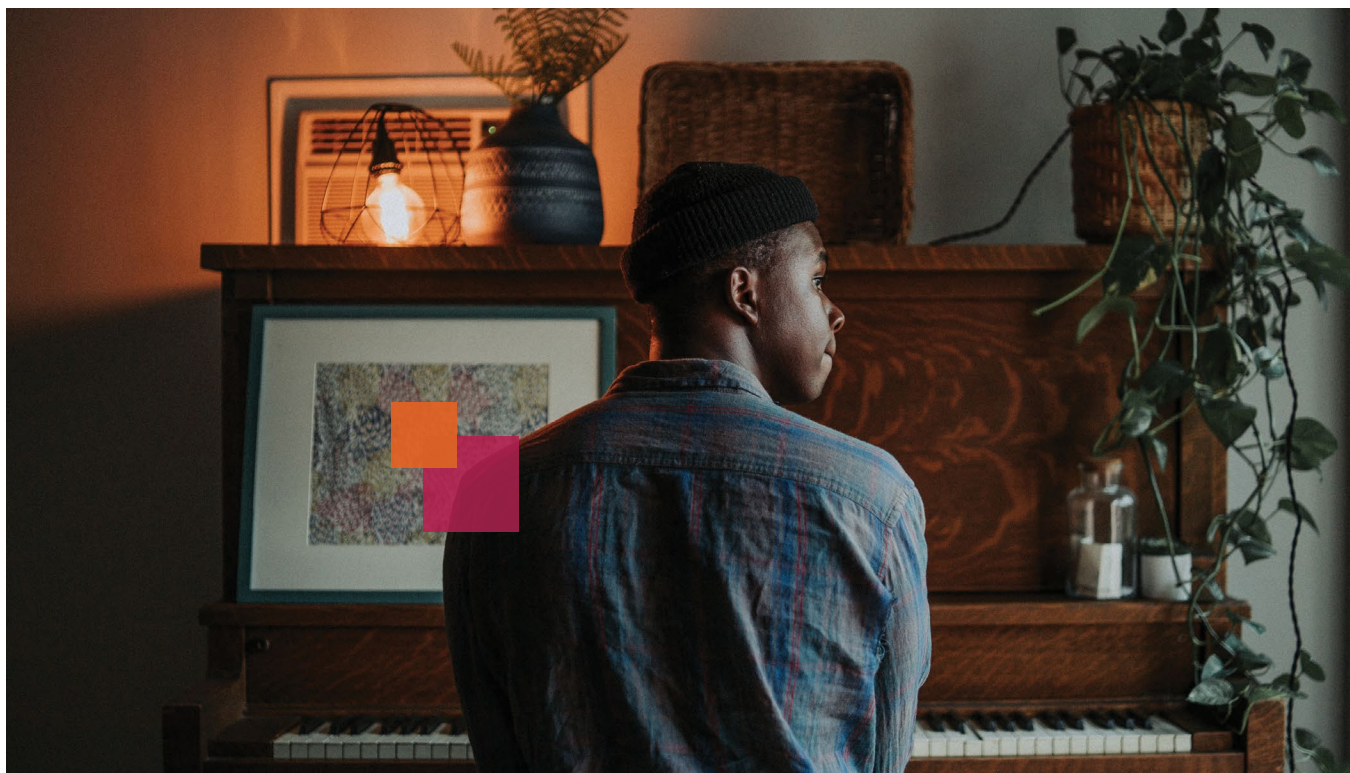


"Joy inside My Tears"

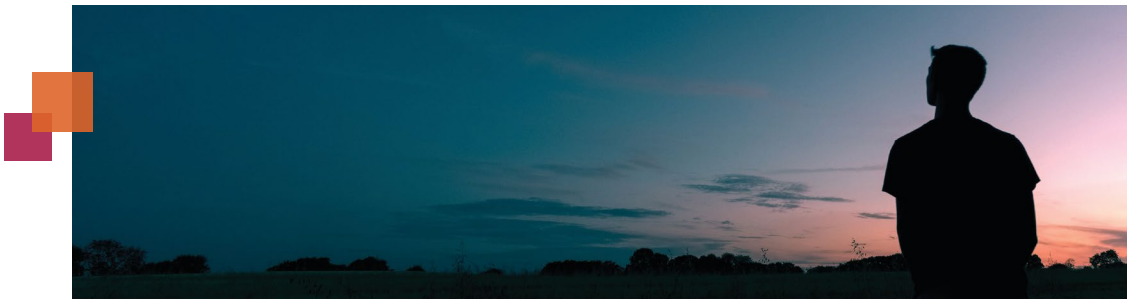
In 1976 Motown recording artist Stevie Wonder released a double-album masterpiece called *Songs in the Key of Life*, giving voice to the joys and struggles of life in inner-city America. With an original working title of "Let's see life the way it is," the album's seventeen songs reveal a world largely hidden from suburban, middle-class, white America. I was twelve years old when *Songs In the Key of Life* debuted at number one on the pop music charts. I remember listening to the record for the first time with my older brother in our bedroom. Though I was too young and far too insulated to grasp the social and racial complexity of the songs, I was mesmerized by the music. Forty years later, I am still mesmerized, and the full genius of Wonder's artistry still eludes me. Today, when I introduced his music to my students, I never cease to wonder at the way the encounter with such an artist opens their social horizons, much as mine were broken open as a child. Track three, for example, "Village Ghetto Land," layers images of "life the way it is" for the poor in the inner city over the serene and cultured instrumentation of a chamber quartet:

**Would you like to go with me / Down my dead end street
Would you like to come with me / To Village Ghetto Land
Children play with rusted cars / Sores cover their hands
Beggars watch and eat their meals / From garbage cans¹**

Two tracks later, as if to say, *Don't think you understand me or my people now*, Wonder delivers "Sir Duke," an infectiously funky tribute to the genius of Duke Ellington and other black artists, followed by "I Wish," a joyful remembrance of growing up on the streets of Detroit, "Knocks Me Off My Feet," an exuberant love poem, and "Pastime Paradise," a symphonically mesmerizing cautionary tale about the search for meaning and hope in history. "Isn't She Lovely" celebrates the birth of Wonder's daughter, Aisha, followed by "Joy inside My Tears" and "Black Man," all hymns to what it *feels like* to be alive, black, and proud, in America. Like turning a many-faceted diamond, now this way, now that, Stevie refracts the mosaic colors of life as it is for many in inner-city America, life held down to street level.



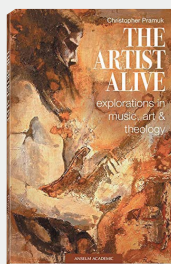
Listening to the album today, one might be tempted to celebrate just how much things have changed in a so-called post-racial America. Or, to the contrary, one might lament how far too little has changed at street level for peoples of color in the United States. In any case, what most interests me is not the insight into so-called “ghetto life” that Stevie Wonder’s music gives us, gives me, as a middle-class white person in America. What interests me is the critique of the *racially unconscious white listener* embedded in his music, an aspect of his legacy I didn’t really notice, much less appreciate, until I was much older.



For white listeners like myself, Wonder’s artistry facilitates a potentially painful realization: namely, my own nearly complete social isolation from black experience in America, my own “confinement in the prison built by racism,”² and the degree to which my own white habitus or groupthink conditions my very manner of seeing and judging reality. In other words, the opening of “Village Ghetto Land”—*Would you like to go with me, down my dead end street?*—still resonates today as both an accusation and an invitation: an accusation of social blindness but also an invitation to come and see life in these United States of America more intimately and clearly than I may have seen it before. To say yes to the invitation is to discover that what is at stake is not my grasp of so-called “black experience”—as if all such experience were monolithic (it certainly is not)—so much as the music of life itself, life in the key of humanity: black, white, brown, red, yellow. It is about the dance of human relationships, sorrowful and joyful, broken and redeemed. I’ve often wondered, how strange, sad, and beautiful, that Stevie Wonder, a blind man, would be teaching me how to see.

“The lamp of the body is the eye,” says Jesus. “If your eye is sound, your whole body will be filled with light; but if your eye is bad, your whole body will be in darkness. And if the light in you is darkness, how great will the darkness be” (Matt. 6:22–23). Repeatedly in the Gospels, Jesus is seen healing the blind, both literally and figuratively. Yet, for me, the most compelling of all these miracles is the one that did not “take” the first time: his encounter with the blind man of Bethsaida. “Putting spittle on his eyes [Jesus] laid his hands on him and asked, ‘Do you see anything?’ Looking up he replied, ‘I see people looking like trees and walking’” (Mark 8:23–24). Of course Jesus finishes the healing and sends the man on his way. But it is the man’s shadowy, in-between state of partial sight and partial blindness that seems to me an almost perfect metaphor for our human condition. Slow the story down and stretch it out over the course of a lifetime, generations, and then centuries, and the blind man of Bethsaida, *before* Jesus finishes the job, becomes a fitting parable for race relations in America. We are all still on the way, each of us stumbling forward in partial blindness, seeing people “looking like trees and walking.” Yet through the eyes of faith, Christ is there, hidden in light and shadow, calling us forward into our freedom—freedom for love, for transformation, for solidarity. . . .

This article comprises excerpts from *The Artist Alive: Explorations in Music, Art & Theology*, by Christopher Pramuk (Winona, MN: Anselm Academic 2019), pages 9–10 and 118–121. Copyright © 2019 by Anselm Academic. All rights reserved.



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1. Stevie Wonder, *Songs in the Key of Life*, Motown Records, 1976. The original vinyl release included seventeen songs. An additional four songs were released with the special edition version of the original LP and are included on most CD versions of the album.
2. The phrase is borrowed from Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, *Racism without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in Contemporary America* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2010).



CLASSROOM IDEA

SOLIDARITY SKITS

This activity invites the students to consider the Parable of the Good Samaritan in light of their own community dynamic and create a skit that challenges discrimination.

- 1** Begin by asking the students to individually read the Parable of the Good Samaritan, in Luke 10:25–37, and the Catholic social teaching article “Who Is the Samaritan?” from *The Catholic Youth Bible (CYB)*. Then have them write an answer to the first reflection question: “Who are the Samaritans in your community—that is, the culture or people that others judge and reject?”

- 2** In a class discussion, ask the students to identify modern-day Samaritans and to explain why these people face discrimination. Write responses on the board. Answers will vary, but they could include homeless people, people with mental illness, the elderly, people of different races or faith traditions, homosexuals, and so on. Remind the students that this conversation is a sensitive one, and the learning environment must be respectful of all people.

3 Arrange the students into small groups. Assign each small group one of the people or groups that the students identified as modern-day Samaritans. Have each small group write a script for a parable that includes the character of the modern-day Samaritan. The parable should not follow the story line of the original Good Samaritan parable but should demonstrate a current community situation where the modern-day Samaritan is the surprise hero. The entire small group must have roles written into the script, as the parable will be performed as a skit. Invite the small groups to perform their skits. After each presentation, analyze the content of the skit, considering how the story line challenges discrimination.

4 At the end of the activity, have the students individually write a response to the final question in the article: “What can you do to better live in solidarity with all people in your community?” Remind the students that Jesus constantly preached a message of solidarity where everyone was included, especially those considered outcasts. As disciples, we are called to do the same. Conclude by brainstorming possible ways to confront discrimination.

This activity is taken from *Catholic Social Teaching Activities*, which is part of the online resources for *The Catholic Youth Bible*, fourth edition.



CLASSROOM IDEA

Prayer Service for Solidarity

Opening Prayer

Good and gracious God, you invite us to love one another as brothers and sisters. Give us the courage to clearly see and challenge all that would divide us. Where racism persists, let us stand in solidarity with those who are persecuted, those who live in fear, and those who are marginalized by the structures of society.

In the face of violence and hatred, we look to the words of the prophet Micah to guide our actions: "To do justice and to love goodness, and to walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8).

Strengthen our hearts to love our neighbor as you love us.

We ask all things through Christ our Lord.

All: Amen.

First Reading

A reading compiled from the United States Catholic Bishops' pastoral letter "Brothers and Sisters to Us."

Racism is a sin: a sin that divides the human family, blots out the image of God among specific members of that family, and violates the fundamental human dignity of those called to be children of the same Father. Racism is the sin that says some human beings are inherently superior and others essentially inferior because of race.

When we give in to our fears of the other because he or she is of a race different from ourselves, when we prejudge the motives of

others precisely because they are of a different color, when we stereotype or ridicule the other because of racial characteristics and heritage, we fail to heed the command of the Prophet Amos: "Seek good and not evil, that you may live; then truly will the Lord . . . be with you as you claim! . . . Then let justice surge like water, and goodness like an unfailing stream" (Amos, 5:14,24).

In order to find the strength to overcome the evil of racism, we must look to Christ. In Christ Jesus "there does not exist among you Jew or Greek, slave or freedom, male or female. All are one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28).

Second Reading

(Play some instrumental music in the background and consider a ritual action, such as illuminating a battery-powered candle or just taking a moment of silence after each reflection).

When I think about those who feel threatened by racial equality . . .

Student 2: I look to Psalm 72 and remember that living in right relationship with others brings peace
(ritual action)

Student 1: When I am inspired by those willing to take a stand . . .

Student 2: I recall in the Gospel of Matthew that peacemakers are blessed and will be called children of God.
(ritual action)

Student 1: When I am hurt or angry at the way people are treated . . .

Student 2: I am encouraged by Paul's Letter to the Colossians to clothe myself in love and let the peace of Christ reign in my heart.
(ritual action)

Student 1: When the task of justice seems too great . . .

Student 2: I follow the instructions in Zechariah to speak truth, judge well, and make peace.

(ritual action)

Student 1: When my heart aches for those who have lost their lives in the fight for racial equality . . .

Student 2: I am comforted by the Gospel of John, which reminds me that there is no greater love than to lay down one's life for a friend.

(ritual action)

Student 1: When I feel disconnected from people who look different from me, immigrants and refugees, believers from other faith traditions, and all who are persecuted . . .

Student 2: I look to Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians, knowing that when one member of Christ's body suffers, all suffer.
(ritual action)



CLASSROOM IDEA

Gospel Reading

Matthew 22:37–40

“You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment. The second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. The whole law and the prophets depend on these two commandments.”

Short Reflection or Show UNDERSTANDING

RACISM: Reverse Poem:

<https://vimeo.com/195994157>

Intercessory Prayers

Leader: All peace comes from God. Let us now turn to God and offer our prayers for a world in need. The response to each petition will be, “Lord, hear our prayer.”

Reader: For the peace of the world, that a spirit of respect and forbearance may grow among nations and peoples, let us pray to the Lord. *(Lord, hear our prayer.)*

Reader: For the holy Church of God, that it may be filled with truth and love and be found without fault at the day of your coming, let us pray to the Lord. *(Lord, hear our prayer.)*

Reader: For those in positions of public trust, that they may serve justice and promote the dignity and freedom of all people, let us pray to the Lord. *(Lord, hear our prayer.)*

Reader: For the poor, the persecuted, the sick, and all who suffer; for refugees, prisoners, and all who are in danger, that they may be relieved and protected, let us pray to the Lord. *(Lord, hear our prayer.)*

Reader: For our enemies and those who wish us harm, and for all whom we have injured or offended, let us pray to the Lord. *(Lord, hear our prayer.)*

Reader: For all who have died in the faith of Christ, that with all the saints, they may have rest in that place where there is no pain or grief, but life eternal, let us pray to the Lord. *(Lord, hear our prayer.)*

Leader: Loving God, may the light of Christ shine in our hearts and may these prayers transform us into the peacemakers we are called to be. We make our prayer through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Our Father

Leader: Let us pray with confidence to the Father in the words our Savior gave us. (*Pray the Lord's Prayer together.*)

Sign of Peace

Leader: In our desire to create peace in the world, let us offer one another a Sign of Peace. (*Allow sufficient time for an exchange of peace.*)

Closing Prayer

Student 1: God of endless love, ever caring, ever strong, always present, always just: you gave your only Son to save us by the Blood of his cross.

Student 2: Gentle Jesus, shepherd of peace, join to your own suffering the pain of all who have been hurt in body, mind,

and spirit by those who betrayed the trust placed in them.

Student 3: Hear our cries as we agonize over the harm done to our brothers and sisters. Breathe wisdom into our prayers, soothe restless hearts with hope, steady shaken spirits with faith: show us the way to justice and wholeness, enlightened by truth and enfolded in your mercy.

Student 4: Holy Spirit, comforter of hearts, heal your people's wounds and transform our brokenness. Grant us courage and wisdom, humility and grace, so that we may act with justice and find peace in you. We ask this through Christ our Lord.

All: Amen.


This prayer service is adapted from the Saint Mary's Press Solidarity eLearning course: <http://elearning.smp.org/courses/solidarity>.

The first reading is from the United States Catholic Bishops' pastoral letter "Brothers and Sisters to Us," at: <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/cultural-diversity/african-american/brothers-and-sisters-to-us.cfm>.

All scriptural quotations are taken from the *New American Bible, revised edition* © 2010, 1991, 1986, 1970 Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Inc., Washington, DC. All Rights Reserved. No part of this work may be reproduced in any form without permission in writing from the copyright owner.

The intercessory prayers are from "Prayers of Intercession." *Catholic Household Blessings and Prayers*, United States Catholic Conference, 2008.

The closing prayer is from "Prayer for Healing." *Catholic Household Blessings and Prayers*, United States Catholic Conference, 2008.



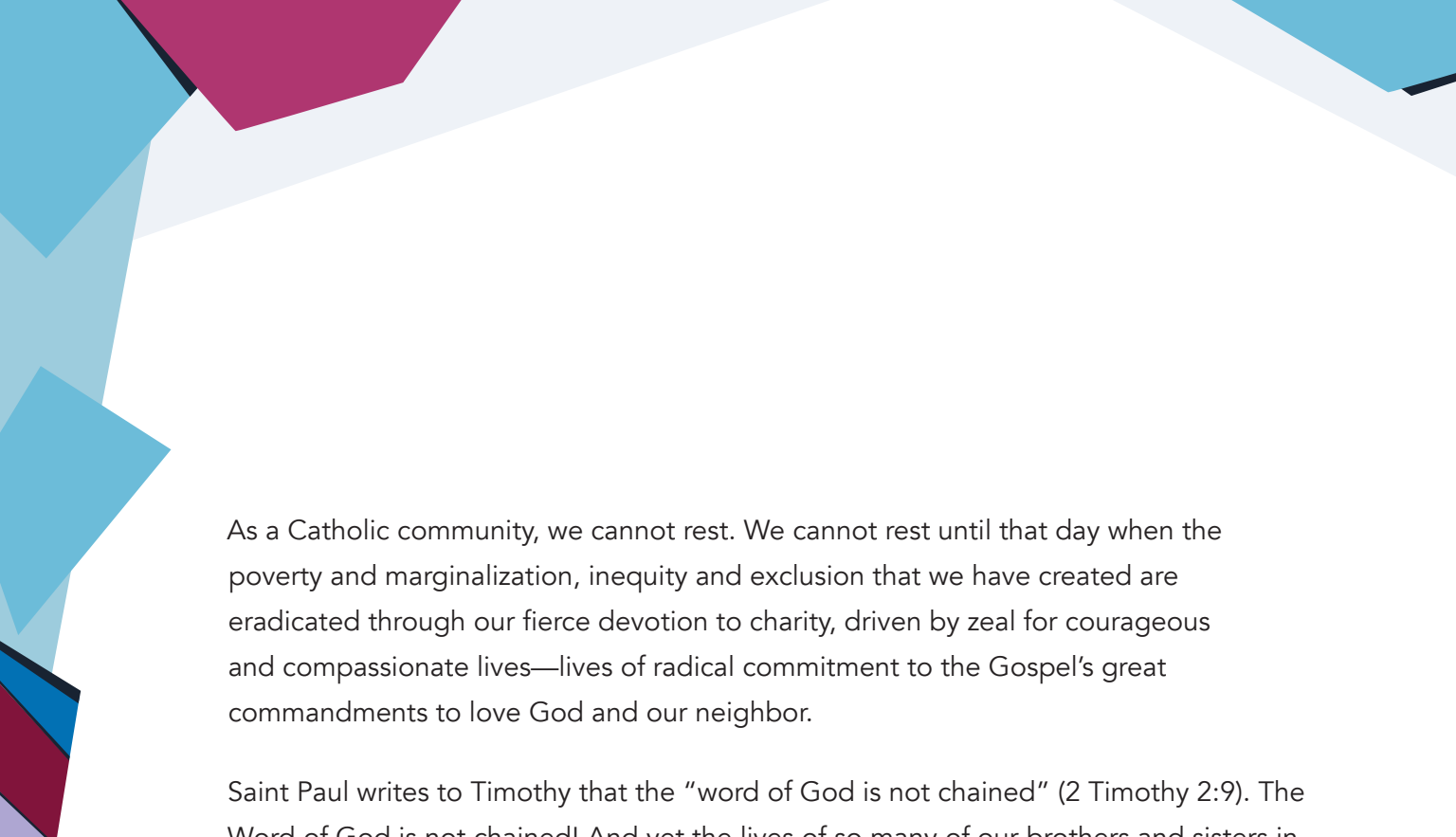
A FIERCE DEVOTION TO CHARITY

by John M. Vitek

To stand at the graveside of a loved one as they are lowered into the earth, dirt layered upon their coffin, sealing them from the oxygen upon which their life once depended, evokes in all gathered a gasping for breath, as if it, too, might be our final one.

The events of recent times have left many, if not all, of us gasping for air—the air of understanding, the air of justice, the air of equity, the air of unity. But they have also unleashed the airs of hatred, division, casting of judgment, and violence.

And so yet again we as a society are forced, rightly so, to look straight into the face of the complex realities that confront us and choose a path—one that divides or unites, one that stems from love or hatred, one that opens us up or closes us in.



As a Catholic community, we cannot rest. We cannot rest until that day when the poverty and marginalization, inequity and exclusion that we have created are eradicated through our fierce devotion to charity, driven by zeal for courageous and compassionate lives—lives of radical commitment to the Gospel’s great commandments to love God and our neighbor.

Saint Paul writes to Timothy that the “word of God is not chained” (2 Timothy 2:9). The Word of God is not chained! And yet the lives of so many of our brothers and sisters in this world are strangled each day by the chains of injustice, inequity, unacceptance.



The life of George Floyd was chained.

The life of Breonna Taylor was chained.

The life of Antwon Rose II was chained.

The life of Willie Tillman was chained.

The lives of Mark Carson, CeCe McDonald, Angie Zapata—chained.

Chained by the systemic effects of racism, bigotry, sexual bias. Chained to the point of death by the hateful actions of those unable to see through the lens of Saint Paul. The Word of God is not chained, because the Word of God is love, compassion, goodness, charity, forgiveness, understanding, justice, healing.

The Word of God does not imprison but frees.



Our faith community is founded in solidarity with those who are poor, underserved, and disenfranchised. We see the dignity of every human person. We cannot accept, stand idly by, or in any way contribute to the racism, inequity, and injustices that are endemic in society. We must commit ourselves to participate with all people of goodwill to bring about systemic change for a more just and peaceful world for all persons—persons of every race, ethnicity, gender, sexual identity, and faith.

We are called to be healers and unifiers. This requires that we first open our eyes, ears, and hearts to see and hear things we don't typically see or hear. While we all know sorrow and hardship in our own way, few of us have experienced the inescapable lament of the soul that accompanies the person who wakes each day wondering, Will today be the day that I will die at the hands of those who fear me or hate me just because they think I'm not "like them"—just because of the pigmentation of my skin or my sexuality or because of how I self-identify?

In his "Sixteenth Meditation for the Time of Retreat," Saint John Baptist de La Salle wrote that happiness will be possessed only when we "restore the robe of innocence" to others and recognize that all people are touched by the divinity of God. He said that we must be "guardian angels" for those in our care.

How will we, in this moment, renew our calling to be "guardian angels" of those whose lives are disrupted every day by the injustices, inequities, and biases prevalent in our society? How will we remove our unconscious blinders to see what needs to be seen, hear what needs to be heard, heal what needs to be healed, reconcile what needs to be reconciled?

John M. Vitek currently serves as the president and chief executive officer of Saint Mary's Press. John holds undergraduate degrees in religious studies and communication arts from Saint Mary's University of Minnesota and a master's degree in pastoral studies from the School of Divinity at St. Thomas University in St. Paul, Minnesota.



CLASSROOM IDEA

The Question of Civil Disobedience

This activity encourages the students to consider the value of civil disobedience as a Christian practice.

Materials Needed:

- the definition of *civil disobedience* from the Merriam-Webster online dictionary
- copies of the handout “Civil Disobedience Quotations,” one for every two students

- 1.** Invite a student to read aloud the article “Civil Disobedience” from the *CYB* near Luke 19:45-48. Provide the students with the standard definition for the term *civil disobedience* from the Merriam-Webster online dictionary. Ask the students to define *civil disobedience* in their own words. Read aloud Luke 19:45–48. Ask the students the following question: “How does Jesus demonstrate an act of civil disobedience in this passage?”
- 2.** Arrange the students into pairs and give each pair a copy of the handout. Ask the students to follow the directions on the handout and write their responses together. Tell them their responses will be collected at the end of class.
- 3.** Engage the entire group in a discussion about the value of civil disobedience. Ask the students the following questions:
 - Do you feel that civil disobedience is an effective way to promote meaningful change? Why or why not?
 - Could civil disobedience be considered a Christian practice?
 - What situations of injustice would Jesus take a stand against today?

This activity and handout is taken from *Catholic Social Teaching Activities*, which is part of the online resources for *The Catholic Youth Bible*, fourth edition.



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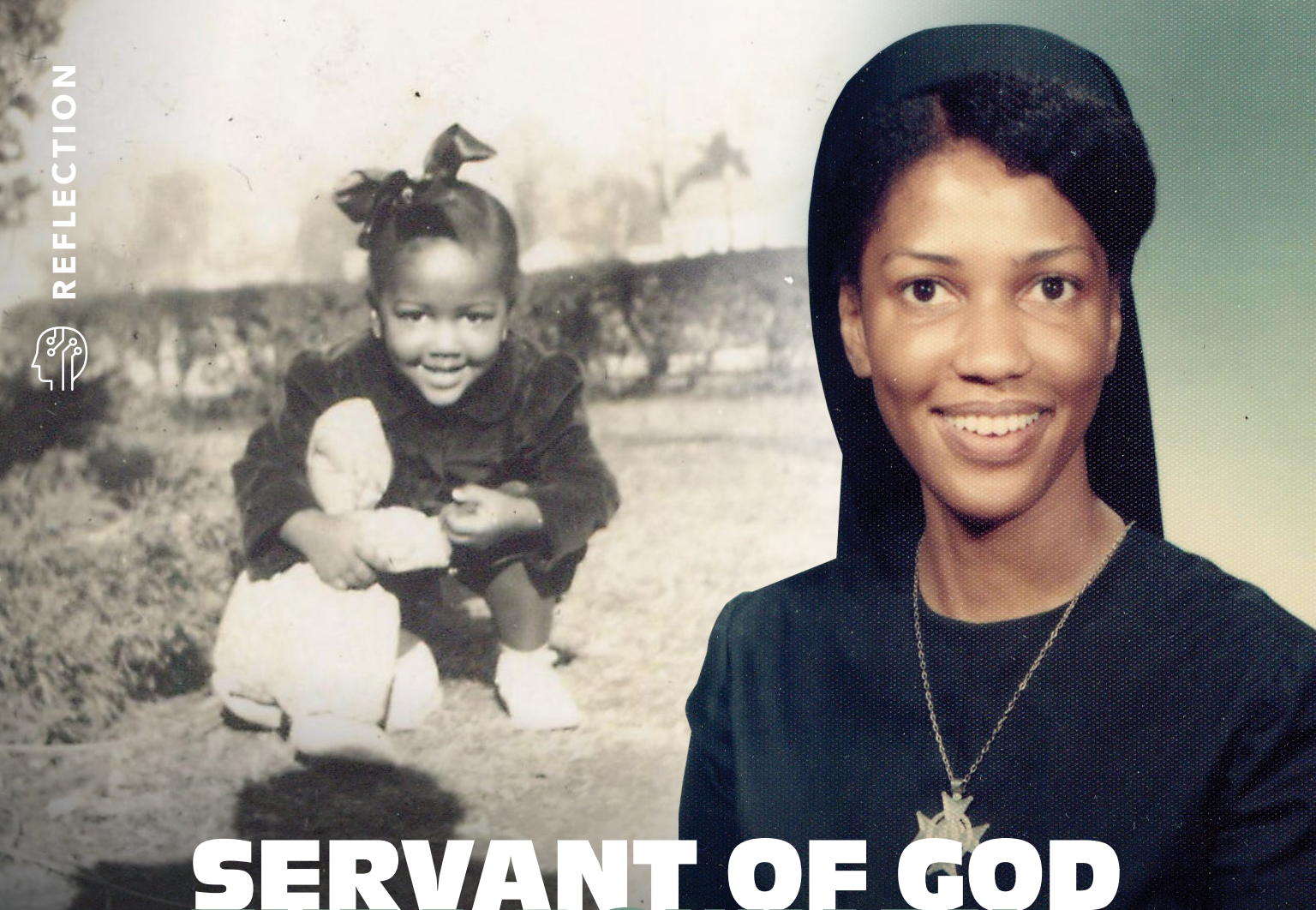
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SERVANT OF GOD THEA BOWMAN

by Joanna Dailey

At age ten, a little Black girl named Bertha, born in Yazoo City, Mississippi, asked her parents' permission to become a Catholic because she saw the way Catholics loved and cared for one another and for those who were poor.

Later, she joined the religious community who had taught her in her Catholic school. She was the first Black woman to join that community, the Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration in La Crosse, Wisconsin. She took the name Sister Thea, a feminine form of Theo, which is Greek for "God."

Thus began a lifetime of education and teaching. Earning a doctorate from Catholic University in English and linguistics, Sister Thea became not only a teacher but a consultant in pastoral life for Black people. Through her lectures and performances of Black music, she was instrumental in encouraging an authentic Black expression in the liturgy of Catholic parishes.

Yet, she was honest in her assessment of the state of race relations in the contemporary Catholic Church. In her talk to the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops in June of 1989, she reminded the bishops of the material and cultural contributions made by Blacks to the country. She also reminded the bishops that Blacks had made a spiritual contribution as well and continued to do so. Yet, she admitted that in the Church, to be Black and Catholic still often felt like being a second- or third-class citizen. At the end of her talk, Sister Thea invited the bishops to rise and sing the anthem of the Civil Rights movement in the 1960s, “We Shall Overcome.”

Sister Thea died on March 30, 1990, and today she is seen as a prophetic leader in the American Church. In 2018, the bishops endorsed the cause of sainthood for Sister Thea. She is now known as Servant of God Thea Bowman.

Joanna Dailey is part of the content development team at Saint Mary’s Press and has a wide range of experience in the educational field. She has authored and developed texts for elementary, middle school, and high school religious education settings.

A written copy of Sister Thea’s address to the US bishops can be found at <https://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/cultural-diversity/african-american/resources/upload/Transcript-Sr-Thea-Bowman-June-1989-Address.pdf>.

A video of Sister Thea’s entire speech is available on YouTube at <https://youtu.be/l2S0tD6qFIA>.

The Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration have devoted a significant part of their website to resources about Sister Thea’s life and work: <https://www.fspa.org/content/about/sister-thea-bowman>.





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