

For the Love of One Another

A Special Message
on the Occasion of
the Tenth Anniversary of
Brothers and Sisters to Us



Publication No. 312-4
Office for Publishing and Promotion Services
United States Catholic Conference
Washington, D.C.

ISBN 1-55586-312-4

Bishops' Committee on Black Catholics
National Conference of Catholic Bishops

September 1989



For the Love of One Another

A Special Message
on the Occasion of
the Tenth Anniversary of
Brothers and Sisters to Us

**Bishops' Committee on Black Catholics
National Conference of Catholic Bishops**

September 1989

In commemoration of the tenth anniversary of the publication of *Brothers and Sisters to Us: U.S. Bishops' Pastoral Letter on Racism in Our Day*, the Bishops' Committee on Black Catholics, National Conference of Catholic Bishops, was authorized to prepare *For the Love of One Another*. This present document was approved by the NCCB Administrative Committee at its September 1989 meeting and is authorized for publication by the undersigned.

November 3, 1989

Monsignor Robert N. Lynch
General Secretary
NCCB/USCC

ISBN 1-55586-312-4

Copyright © 1989
United States Catholic Conference, Inc.
Washington, D.C.
All rights reserved.

Contents

Foreword / 1

For the Love of One Another / 3

Summary / 9

Suggested Ways to Become Involved / 10

Foreword

November 1989 marks the tenth anniversary of the publication of *Brothers and Sisters to Us: U.S. Bishops' Pastoral Letter on Racism in Our Day*. Several national events are planned to emphasize the importance of the pastoral and to raise consciousness on the evils of racism. The Bishops' Committee on Black Catholics, National Conference of Catholic Bishops, would like to take this opportunity to add their voices to the occasion with the issuance of this Special Message, *For the Love of One Another*.

Even more important and prophetic, the timing is ripe for a more forceful response of the Church to examine our own institutions, policies, and structures and rid them of any racist attitudes or behaviors. The credibility of the Church in the African American community is at stake. Justice within the Church must be seen as a reality and not just a dream. By issuing this statement, the Bishops' Committee on Black Catholics negates the common perception that the issue of racism has been resolved and should no longer be on our agenda. We hope this Special Message will serve as a catalyst for discussion and action and that hearts will be stirred, energies renewed, and brothers and sisters everywhere will be united in their fight against racism, in all its manifestations.

Most Reverend John H. Ricard, SSJ
Chairman
Bishops' Committee on Black Catholics
National Conference of Catholic Bishops

Jesus as our Brother. A fitting celebration would be to take up the pastoral on racism and make it a lived reality in our homes, churches, and communities. It is not too late to seek out and isolate the terrible virus of racism in our midst. To do so would place us squarely in the center of a fight for life. Racism is anti-life. Racism is anti-Christian. For the past five years, I have reflected daily on the final paragraph of the pastoral on racism. I have concluded every major address of the last five years with the words of that final paragraph:

... There must be no turning back along the road of justice, no sighing for bygone times of privilege, no nostalgia for simple solutions from another age. For we are children of the age to come, when the first shall be last and the last first, when blessed are they who serve Christ the Lord in all his brothers and sisters, especially those who are poor and suffer injustice.”¹

Five years later in 1989, we were delighted to receive the Pontifical Justice and Peace Commission’s document, *The Church and Racism: Towards a More Fraternal Society*. We read and reread certain sections and felt that our message—the message of the American bishops, which has been like “voices crying in the wilderness” and literally “proclaimed from the roof tops” for such a long time—was now being proclaimed forthrightly and unapologetically by the pope’s own Commission on Justice and Peace in 1989. There is a powerful, providential, perhaps even prophetic message in the timing of this document for the Church in the United States. The pontifical statement on racism comes just ten years after the National Conference of Catholic Bishops issued our own pastoral on racism entitled *Brothers and Sisters to Us: U.S. Bishops’ Pastoral Letter on Racism in Our Day*, which the pontifical document on racism calls “the most important document of the last decade.”² That pontifical statement arouses in us feelings of joy and pride, but also of sadness.

In September 1976, at the Call to Action Convocation in Detroit,

¹ National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Brothers and Sisters to Us: U.S. Bishops’ Pastoral Letter on Racism in Our Day* (Washington, D.C.: USCC Office of Publishing and Promotion Services, 1979), p. 15.

² Pontifical Commission Iustitia et Pax, *The Church and Racism: Towards a More Fraternal Society* (Washington, D.C.: USCC Office of Publishing and Promotion Services, 1989), p. 41, footnote 71.

our brother bishop, Archbishop Eugene A. Marino, SSJ, of Atlanta read a resolution calling for the National Conference of Catholic Bishops to issue a pastoral statement on the sin of racism in the Church and in society. While many Catholics express dissatisfaction with the results of the Call to Action Convocation, some consider it to be one of the greatest moments of real dialogue and openness in the history of the Catholic Church in the United States. The convocation did propose some resolutions that were nonnegotiable, but it also aroused the institutional and individual consciences of U.S. Catholics to a level never before achieved. Framed in the historical perspective of the nineteenth-century Church’s tragic response to the question of slavery, and the subsequent years of the effective and affective growth of institutional racism in the Church and in society, the Call to Action Convocation was a happening whose time had come to respond to so many critical issues in the U.S. Church, especially that of racism.

Following the Call to Action Convocation, the U.S. bishops selected those resolutions that were most in need of attention and established an ad hoc committee to address them. The resolution calling for a pastoral letter on racism was given to the Committee on Social Development and World Peace, which in turn established a committee to produce the pastoral letter. In the process of writing the pastoral on racism, the committee, in conjunction with the USCC staff, sought the widest possible consultation from individuals and groups around the country.

The letter was finally put into excellent literary form by Reverend Cyprian Davis, OSB. The presentation, discussions, and voting on the pastoral were not an easy task. The vote of approval for *Brothers and Sisters to Us* was overwhelming. Our National Conference of Catholic Bishops established an *ad hoc* committee to oversee the implementation of the Call to Action Resolutions. Nonetheless, what so many of us feared was that *Brothers and Sisters to Us* would suffer the same fate of previous statements produced by the Church, even the documents of Vatican II. The promulgation of the pastoral on racism was soon forgotten by all but a few. A survey by the *ad hoc* committee on the implementation of Call to Action projects undertaken by the U.S. bishops revealed a pathetic, anemic response from archdioceses and dioceses around the country when they were asked to report on social action programs. The pastoral on racism had made little or no impact on the majority of Catholics in the United States.

Thus, we have reason to be sad along with thousands of minori-

ties as we approach the tenth anniversary of *Brothers and Sisters to Us*. The pastoral suggests that "crude and blatant expressions of racist sentiment, though they occasionally exist, are today considered bad form."³

How we wish this was not the reality. Today, both individual and corporate institutional racism is on the rise in our country. We experience and hear about blatant forms of racism on the campuses of our colleges and universities—Catholic colleges are not exempt. In our cities, in government agencies, in the political arena, in corporate board rooms and, in some instances, in our church-related high schools and elementary schools, the ugly head of racism surfaces. During the past eight years, ground has been lost and hard-won civil rights have suffered greatly due to a lack of legislative support. False and misleading information about affirmative action initiatives and practices was fed to the public, with our apology. Housing developers and real estate agencies, along with many municipalities, adopted exclusionary policies and practices, even in defiance of state and federal regulations. It has been discovered that some of the most active Ku Klux Klan members are Catholics. Neo-Nazis, young and old, enjoy a resurgence that is hard to understand.

The question of why we have receded into a blatantly racist society this late in the twentieth century looms larger than life itself. Why has the Church been so vocal nationally and so silent locally? A part of the answer relates to racism in the Church itself, as well as in other societal institutions. A significant passage in the pontifical document on racism captured our attention. It is to be found in Part I, Section 7. This section speaks to the ultimate in modern racism—that of the Nazis. It reads:

Such theses had considerable resonance in Germany. It is well known that the National-Socialist totalitarian party made a racist ideology the basis of its insane programme, aimed at the physical elimination of those it deemed belonging to "inferior races." This party became responsible for one of the greatest genocides in history. This murderous folly struck first and foremost the Jewish people in unheard-of proportions, as well as other peoples such as the Gypsies and the Tziganes, and also categories of persons such as the handi-

capped, [homosexuals], and the mentally ill. It was only a step from racism to eugenics, and it was quickly taken.

The Church did not hesitate to raise her voice. Pope Pius XI clearly condemned Nazi doctrines in his encyclical, *Mit brennender Sorge*, stating in particular: "Whosoever takes race, or the people or the State . . . or any basic value of the human community . . . in order to withdraw them from [their] scale of values . . . and deify them through an idolatrous cult, overturns and falsifies the order of things created and established by God." On 13 April 1938, the Pope had the Sacred Congregation for Seminaries and Universities address a letter to all Rectors and Deans of Faculties, asking all professors of theology to refute, using the method proper to each discipline, the scientific pseudo-truths with which Nazism justified its racist ideologies.⁴

The reality of racism in 1989 vis à vis theological considerations on the subject forcefully challenges our consciousness. In spite of all that has been said and written about racism in the last twenty years, very little—if anything at all—has been done in Catholic education; such as it was yesterday, it is today. Should not there be a call in 1989 by the pope and by the episcopate to theologates, seminaries, and religious institutes asking all of the educators and persons in formation to educate their charges on the moral and ethical implications of racism in our day? Should not the subjects of such education be members of our seminaries, our religious congregations, our parishes? We have good reason to ask: How many seminarians in our theologates have read or even heard of *Brothers and Sisters to Us*? How many professors have ever even considered the question and reality of racism in their institutions? We wonder how many of these same academicians will take the pontifical document on racism seriously, let alone read it.

A few of us have "played the flute for you, but you did not dance, we sang a dirge but you did not mourn."⁵ We are tempted to cry out with Jeremiah: "Is there no balm in Gilead?"⁶

This Special Message is not meant to repeat what *Brothers and Sisters to Us* has said, nor what the pontifical document paints in much broader strokes. The purpose is to share in some small way,

⁴ *The Church and Racism*, p. 14.

⁵ Matthew 11:17.

⁶ Jeremiah 8:22.

³ *Brothers and Sisters to Us*, p. 6.

our hopes, disappointments, joys, and pain—perhaps, too, in a larger way our faith. We do have faith in good people everywhere in this country who would care, if only they knew. If only they would become conscious of the devastation, the tragedies, and the alienation, especially in the Church, that racism has caused and is causing. Good people would react positively if they realized, too, that *freedom for the victims of racism is a right-to-life issue*. We believe that good women and men would come together and profess, if only to themselves, their racism—conscious or otherwise.

What we have tried to do is to ask our readers to reflect on the price they would pay to eradicate racism from the institutions to which they belong, the most basic institution being the family. At the heart of all we have tried to write is the command given by Jesus to love one another, even when love seems impossible. We write this message joined in the episcopacy by a number of African American Catholic bishops. We write with the voices of those who have lived and continue to live with racism ever at their side. It is a companion no one should have to live with let alone accommodate in our Church. We believe the pontifical document on racism says it best in speaking of the Church:

The Catholic Church encourages all these efforts. The Holy See has its role to play in the context of its specific mission. All Catholics are invited to work concretely side by side with other Christians and all others who have this same respect for persons. The Church wants first and foremost to change racist attitudes, including those within her own communities. She appeals first of all to the moral and religious sense of people. She states exigencies but uses fraternal persuasion, her only weapon. She asks God to change hearts. She offers a place for reconciliation. She would like to see promoted initiatives of welcome, of exchange and of mutual assistance as regards men and women belonging to other ethnic groups. Her mission is to give soul to this immense undertaking of human fraternity. Despite the sinful limitations of her members, yesterday and today, she is aware of having been constituted a witness to Christ's charity on earth, a sign and instrument of the unity of humankind. The message she proposes to everyone, and which she tries to live is: "Every person is my brother or sister."⁷

⁷ *The Church and Racism*, pp. 44-45.

Summary

Of the 53 million American Catholics, only 2 million are of African American descent. History reveals that racism has played a powerful role in discouraging African Americans from the Catholic Church as a spiritual home. The commemoration of the tenth anniversary of *Brothers and Sisters to Us: U.S. Bishops' Pastoral Letter on Racism in Our Day* is another opportunity for the Church to speak out against racism, welcome our African American sisters and brothers, their culture, and the gifts of their "Blackness."

The Working Document of the National Black Catholic Congress entitled *Our Pastoral Vision* (a reflection paper on the status of evangelization from an African American perspective, enjoying the participation of more than 35,000 Black Catholics) has indicated *racism as the key "evangelization deterrent"* within the African American community.

As the Catholic Church prepares for the Fifth Centenary of Evangelization on these shores, the National Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee on Black Catholics encourages dioceses to discern the implications of racism in both the ecclesiastical and secular segments of society and to provide a Christian response to this dehumanizing and violent social sin.

*Wake me up Lord, so that the evil or racism
finds no home within me.
Keep watch over my heart Lord,
and remove from me any barriers to your grace
that may oppress and offend my brothers and sisters.
Fill my voice Lord, with the strength to cry freedom.
Free my spirit Lord, so that I may give services of
justice and peace.
Clear my mind Lord, and use it for your glory.
And finally, remind us Lord that you said
"blessed are the peacemakers,
for they shall be called children of God."
Amen.*

Suggested Ways to Become Involved

- **DESIGNATE** a Diocesan Task Force on Racism to assist parishes and diocesan leadership in their discernment and consequent response to racism. To assist the members of the task force in their work, the following resources are recommended for reading and discussion:

National Conference of Catholic Bishops. *Brothers and Sisters to Us: U.S. Bishops' Pastoral Letter on Racism in Our Day* (Washington, D.C.: USCC Office for Publishing and Promotion Services, 1979). Publication No. 653-0.

Pontifical Commission Iustitia et Pax. *The Church and Racism: Towards a More Fraternal Society* (Washington, D.C.: USCC Office for Publishing and Promotion Services, 1989). Publication No. 277-2.

"America's Original Sin—The Legacy of White Racism," *Study Guide on White Racism* (Washington, D.C.: Sojourners Resource Center, November 1987).

- **COLLECT** from diocesan archives and media centers, resources exploring the topic of racism and make them available for parish and diocesan use.
- **CONTACT** the National Black Catholic Congress delegates and Implementation Team leaders in your diocese to solicit input on this topic.
- **PUBLISH** provocative articles on racism in your local Catholic newspaper.
- **DISTRIBUTE** the statement of the Bishops' Committee on Black Catholics in your diocese or parish.
- **ENCOURAGE** diocesan directors and staffs to explore and evaluate the effects of racism on diocesan policies, decisions, hiring practices, promotions, purchasing, and other actions and activities.

- **ENCOURAGE** and support the empowerment of indigenous leaders. (Suggested Resources: National Catholic Conference for Interracial Justice [Affirmative Action Program and Affirmative Action Booklet]; USCC Ad Hoc Committee on the Implementation of the Pastoral Letter on the U.S. Economy.)
- **HEIGHTEN** the awareness of racism, its sinfulness, and its dehumanizing effects on today's society at evangelization, religious education, and social justice institutes and forums.
- **ENCOURAGE** youth dialogue on this topic at youth forums and social gatherings. Challenge them to oppose racist and ethnic persecution at school, social, and recreational programs
- **PARTICIPATE** in national forums that challenge racism, such as the National Teleconference on Racism, held in November 1989 by the Black Catholic Television Network.
- **ENCOURAGE** Catholics throughout the dioceses to pray for the demise of racial oppression.