

**The Catholic Church  
and The Black Lives Matter Movement:  
*The Racial Divide in the United States Revisited***



**A Pastoral Letter  
By  
His Excellency,  
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**This Pastoral Letter should be read as a companion piece to  
The Racial Divide in the United States:  
*A Reflection for the World Day of Peace 2015***





## **The Catholic Church and the Black Lives Matter Movement: The Racial Divide in the United States Revisited**

By

**The Most Reverend Edward K. Braxton, Ph.D., S.T.D.  
Bishop of Belleville, Illinois**

**February 26, 2016**

**The 4<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the death of Mr. Trayvon Martin, 17, in Sanford, Florida  
African-American History Month**

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ:

- (1) May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace, fill your hearts throughout the remainder of Lent and in the coming Easter Season! As the Catholic Church celebrates the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ during this Jubilee Year of Mercy proclaimed by His Holiness, Pope Francis, I am pleased to share with you this Pastoral Letter, “The Catholic Church and the Black Lives Matter Movement: The Racial Divide in the United States Revisited.”

This Pastoral Letter has a moving viewpoint in eight parts.

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### I. Introduction

#### “Incident”

Once riding in old Baltimore,  
Heart-filled, head-filled with glee,  
I saw a Baltimorean  
Keep looking straight at me.

Now I was eight and very small,  
And he was no whit bigger,  
And so I smiled, but he poked out  
His tongue, and called me, 'Nigger.'

I saw the whole of Baltimore  
From May until December;  
Of all the things that happened there  
That's all that I remember.

-Countee Cullen

- (2) ¶ When I was a senior at Quigley Preparatory Seminary studying to be a priest for the Archdiocese of Chicago, I was the only Person of Color in my class of several hundred seminarians. A group of us saw the film version of the late Harper Lee’s brilliant, Pulitzer Prize winning novel, “To Kill a Mockingbird.” It is the story of Tom Robinson set in Maycomb, Alabama, during the Great Depression. Tom, an upright and honest, innocent Black man is falsely accused of sexually assaulting a White woman. He is defended by an equally upright and honest White attorney, Atticus Finch. Predictably, the all-White jury finds Tom “guilty,” though he is, in fact, innocent and he is killed while “attempting to run from the police” during the appeal process. Tom Robinson’s family is devastated by the murder and Atticus is angered by the miscarriage of justice born of racial prejudice. In our discussion after this extraordinary film, one of my classmates said his father had taught him that “all you need to know about the relationship between people of different races is this: ‘Birds of a feather flock together.’ This is simply the law of nature. This is why the Archdiocese of Chicago has Polish parishes, Irish parishes, German parishes, Italian Parishes, and Black parishes. People of similar backgrounds want to live, work, and worship with their own kind! It has always been this way and it always

will be. It's that simple: birds of a feather flock together." He said nothing about the death of Tom Robinson, as if his life did not matter. I have never forgotten that conversation.

(3) I did not write about the Black Lives Matter Movement in my Pastoral Letter, "The Racial Divide in the United States: A Reflection for the World Day of Peace 2015."\* At that time, the movement had not yet attained the high visibility and considerable influence that it has today. Readers of this reflection would benefit from having an awareness of the main themes addressed in my 2015 Pastoral. That Letter is an invitation to readers, inviting them:

- ❖ To imagine how African-Americans experience the Catholic Church which almost always uses European-based religious art depicting God, Jesus, Mary, the saints and angels as White and almost never depicting them as African, Asian, or Hispanic;
- ❖ To allow the new awareness of the racial divide to move Catholics to think about the way the followers of Jesus Christ should speak and act in the face of the racial divide;
- ❖ To come face-to-face with accounts of the events surrounding the deaths of numerous African-American men in altercations with White law enforcement agents and the international protests that followed;
- ❖ To review the Catholic Church's teachings ("Brothers and Sisters to Us," "What We have Seen and Heard") concerning the racial divide in America;
- ❖ To discontinue the Church's common practice of referring to People of Color with biased terms like "minorities," "minority" Americans and "minority" Catholics, since all are Americans and all are Catholics;
- ❖ To refer to people as who they are rather than who they are not (e.g., African-Americans, not "a minority group," or Baptists, not "non-Catholics");
- ❖ To commit themselves to praying, listening, learning, thinking, and acting in ways that will help to bridge the racial divide.

(4) During this past year, the racial conflicts addressed in "The Racial Divide" seem to have been exacerbated. It was my hope that my previous Pastoral Letter, in a Study Guide format, would be a contribution to the urgently needed conversation within the Catholic Church in the United States about the ongoing challenges Black and White Americans continue to face. These challenges have become even more acute with the high visibility of additional violent, often fatal, altercations between White law enforcement agents and African-American men, and with the alarming number of young People of Color who die at the hands of other African-Americans. As a result, in different settings around the country, I have been frequently asked, "What do you think of the Black Lives Matter Movement?" "What is the position of the Catholic Church concerning the Black Lives Matter Movement?" "Why are Catholic leaders silent about such an important, albeit controversial, social development?"

- (5) Some voices, Black and White, have condemned this movement as a violent ideology urging attacks on police officers, encouraging the disruption of the daily lives of innocent citizens by blocking traffic on major thoroughfares, closing down places of business, interrupting gatherings of political candidates and, perhaps unwittingly, participating in Black genocide by its strong support for the “right” of women to terminate their pregnancies. Other voices have compared the movement to the historic Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s—even though the current movement’s loud, brash, “in your face” tactics may lack the discipline and clearer focus of that earlier movement. The movement has staged more than a thousand protests (like “die ins” in shopping malls), which are intended to make everyone aware of the movement’s grievances.
- (6) In spite of the profound differences and seeming incompatibility between the teachings of the Church and the Black Lives Matter Movement, there may be ways in which the Church and the movement might benefit from a conversation. Because each group speaks from a unique perspective and with a unique tone of voice, a genuine conversation may be very difficult. Still, Catholics might, at the least, become better informed about a rapidly growing movement that “Time Magazine” placed fourth on its list of eight candidates for Person of the Year in December, 2015. We do well to recall the words of Blessed Paul VI’s first Encyclical, *Ecclesiam Suam*, “Dialogue in such conditions is very difficult...we have no preconceived intention of excluding the persons who profess these systems (those that are contrary to Catholic doctrine). For the lover of truth, dialogue is always possible.”(#102)
- (7) Any effort to invite a conversation about the Black Lives Matter Movement and the Catholic Church in the United States must begin by acknowledging that such an effort raises many questions that cannot be answered in a brief reflection. My modest goal is to share with you some themes that might foster a conversation which might otherwise not take place. What follows does not presume to provide a complete overview of all of the relevant questions posed by bringing these topics together. Instead, this reflection should be seen as a companion piece to my Pastoral Letter, “The Racial Divide in the United States.”

## II. All Lives Matter

- (8) All human beings, as conscious subjects, feel strongly that their individual lives matter. Our lives matter to us as individuals, to our families, friends, neighbors, co-workers, and others. Ideally, all of our lives should matter to every other human being. But, every morning’s newspaper cries out that in today’s world not everyone embraces this truth. Certainly, from the theological perspectives of the authentic teachings of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, your life and my life should matter to everyone on this planet. In the Gospels, Jesus of Nazareth, drawing from Deuteronomy and Leviticus teaches us to love God with our whole being and love our neighbor as we love ourselves (Matt. 22:37-39, Deut. 6:5, Lev. 19:18). When He is asked who is our neighbor, Jesus tells all of us the story of the man who is beaten, robbed, and ignored by the members of his community who should have helped him. Yet a man, who was considered an enemy, had pity on him, bound his wounds, took him to an inn saying, “Take care of him, I will pay whatever it costs.” Jesus asks us, “Who was the true neighbor to the man violently attacked?” We know what our response should be, “The one who showed compassion.” Jesus then tells us, “Go and do likewise!” (cf. Luke 10, 36, 37)

- (9) The teaching of Scripture and Jesus Himself make it clear that for a Christian, for a Catholic, and for the Catholic Church, all lives should matter. Many Americans believe this should be the end of the question. Obviously, if all lives matter, then Black lives matter! Yet, this seemingly obvious truth has not been a sufficient answer to those whose voices are raised in protest in the Black Lives Matter Movement. Why is that? Several supporters of the movement have cited George Orwell's "Animal Farm" for the answer. They remind us that the mantra of the totalitarian world of the novel is "All animals are equal." But, eventually, the mantra is changed to, "All animals are equal. BUT, some animals are more equal than others."

### III. The Black Lives Matter Movement

- (10) The Black Lives Matter Movement began as a hashtag which became a protest slogan and fueled an Internet-driven international protest confronting what its originators and others believe to be indifference to the deaths of young, unarmed Black men at the hands of White law enforcement representatives. The phrase is more a call to action against racial profiling, police brutality, and racial injustice than a specific organization. The media and the public often associate a variety of unconnected groups with Black Lives Matter, when they are actually not structurally connected. According to the #Black Lives Matter web site, the first appearance of Black Lives Matter occurred when a Facebook post by Ms. Alicia Garza, Ms. Patrisse Cullors, and Ms. Opal Tometi used the expression after Mr. George Zimmerman was acquitted in the shooting death of Mr. Trayvon Martin, 17, an unarmed African-American youth. These women and other activists created the Black Lives Matter hashtag and social media pages. Later, after Mr. Michael Brown, Jr., 19, another unarmed African-American youth, was fatally shot in Ferguson, Missouri by Mr. Darren Wilson, a former police officer and Mr. Eric Garner died in what has been called a police chokehold, the movement gained greater prominence. Demonstrators and marchers around the country and around the world shouted "Hands up! Don't shoot!" "I can't breathe!" and "Black Lives Matter!" to call attention to what is perceived by many people to be systemic bias and racial prejudice in the criminal justice system and particularly in the behavior of some representatives of law enforcement. The complaint is not that all young Black men are always innocent of wrongdoing. We all know this is not true. The complaint is that even someone who may have broken the law should not be "tried, convicted, and executed" on the streets.
- (11) A particularly egregious example of this occurred in Chicago. On October 20, 2014, Mr. Laquan McDonald, 17, who was armed with a knife, died after being shot 16 times by Chicago Police Officer, Jason Van Dyke. The shooting was videotaped on the police car dashboard camera. However, the video, which showed Mr. McDonald walking away from the officer, was not initially released to the public. The Black Lives Matter Movement joined with those expressing anger over what many considered a politically motivated delay. On November 24, 2015, over 13 months after the shooting, the video was finally released. As a result, the police officer was charged with first degree murder. Days later, he was released on bail. There were massive protests and demonstrations in downtown Chicago demanding the resignation of Mayor Rahm Emanuel and the dismissal of Police Superintendent Garry McCarthy. Superintendent McCarthy did resign. However, the mayor remained in office pledging significant reforms in the Chicago Police Department, which has frequently been accused of racial bias.

- (12) The protest expression, “Black Lives Matter” became a dramatic way of calling attention to a reality largely ignored by the larger society. Namely, there are many circumstances in which society seems to operate as if it does not believe that the lives of young Men of Color really do matter as much as the lives of young White men. The intent of the frequent use of the phrase is to confront the consciences of those who might reply, “Of course Black lives matter because every human life matters.” Expressions such as this are perceived by participants in the movement as a way of ignoring the terrible reality that the actions of some police, the decisions of some criminal justice agencies, the activities in many prisons, and efforts to make it difficult for Black people to vote, strongly suggest that Black lives really do not matter. More than one commentator has proposed that Black Lives Matter is a form of shorthand. The true intent of “Black Lives Matter” is a plea to all Americans to work to refashion our country so that the lives of People of Color actually do matter as much as the lives of White people. Help us all live in communities in which everyone experiences equal safety, education and employment opportunities, and equal political power as well as equal treatment by the criminal justice system. The movement consciously embraces those who often seem to be at the margins of the Black community such as African-Americans who are disabled, undocumented, homosexual, lesbian, and transgender.
- (13) Since anyone can shout Black Lives Matter, the phrase has sometimes been used in ways that cause many who might be sympathetic to the concerns of Black people to criticize the Black Lives Matter Movement. Some individuals and groups chanting Black Lives Matter have used language that enflames violence against those charged with law enforcement. Whenever anyone associated with the Black Lives Matter Movement encourages attacking police officers, they are rightly condemned because police officers’ lives matter! When Governor Chris Christie of New Jersey was seeking the Republican presidential nomination, he said “I don’t believe that that movement should be justified when they’re calling for the murder of police officers.” Other political leaders have expressed similar concerns. Leaders within the movement, however, stress that they reject violence and say those who speak of harming police are speaking in their own names and not in the name of the movement. Their critics argue they are being disingenuous.
- (14) Significantly, Dr. Ben Carson, the distinguished pediatric neurosurgeon who was briefly—by a strange fate and stranger fortune—a leading Republican presidential candidate, has argued that many people involved with Black Lives Matter are misguided. The only African-American seeking to succeed President Barak Obama argues that it is not unjust treatment by White police that fills America’s urban communities with people who daily face growing hopelessness. Law enforcement and the judicial system are not the reasons why young African-American men and women are unemployed, lacking the skills needed to compete in the modern job market. Dr. Carson believes that many African-American families are suffering from self-inflicted wounds. As a pioneering specialist in the healthcare of infants, he has expressed particular concern about the number of Black lives that are extinguished by abortion.
- (15) Dr. Carson has singled out failed public schools as a source of African-American suffering because they are not really teaching children how to learn. He argues that the actions of rogue police officers take Black lives one at a time. However, the public school system has destroyed Black lives not in the ones and twos, but in whole generations. According to Dr. Carson, the failures of public schools do not kill as quickly, but they kill as surely as bullets do.



(16) Dr. Carson also faults the entertainment industry which earns huge amounts of money by glamorizing negative images of African-Americans, portraying men as thugs and women as immoral sexual objects. He urges Black Lives Matter supporters to use their influence so that Black teenagers will start talking to Hollywood with their wallets. They should let the motion picture industry know that demeaning women is not art and it should not be profitable. Glorifying violence and prison life is not art and these kinds of films should not make money from African-American communities. Dr. Carson believes the popular film, *Straight Outta Compton*, is a recent example of a film that does not provide African-American people with characters worthy of respect and imitation.

(17) Black Lives Matter supporters counter Dr. Carson with the argument that his ideas are determined by his age, social standing, conservative Republican ideology, and his strict adherence to his Seventh Day Adventist faith. One person on a radio talk show said, “He thinks like a White person!” While it is not clear what percentage of Black Lives Matter activists actually vote, it is clear that Republican politicians and Republican-leaning media are very critical of the movement and presume they will not lose votes because of this. Whereas, Democrat politicians and Democrat-leaning media are more tolerant of the movement (in spite of podium upstaging tactics) and, knowing that many African-Americans vote as Democrats, they are concerned not to alienate potential supporters. Nevertheless, when the Democratic National Committee endorsed the Black Lives Matter Movement representatives declined the endorsement.

#### **IV. The Catholic Church and Black Lives Matter**

(18) There are about 70,000,000 Catholics in the United States. At most, about 3,000,000 of these are African-Americans. There are many dioceses where there are no Black Catholics at all and many others where there are very few. This means that many White Catholics in certain states and in rural communities have virtually no contact with African-American Catholics. Many of them only experience the Black Lives Matter Movement indirectly by way of the media. It is probably not a major presence in their consciousness, nor is it a part of their daily concern. As one university student from a very small rural community said to me, “Growing up I never met any African-American people. Everyone in my neighborhood, in my parish, and in my school was White. I do not remember anyone saying much of anything one way or another about Black people. It was as if they did not exist, except on TV. I never wondered why there were no Black people in our parish church. If I thought about it at all, I probably thought they must have their own churches and they are happy there. It never occurred to me that African-Americans would have been unwelcome in my parish until I went to college, met many Black students, and began to read about racial prejudice in the Catholic Church. When I heard about Black Lives Matter, I wondered why it was necessary to single out the lives of one particular group. It took me awhile to appreciate the deeper meaning of this expression.”

(19) Because African-Americans make up such a small portion of the Catholic Church, it may be quite difficult for the Church to interact in a significant way with the Black Lives Matter Movement. People have long memories of past rejection and discrimination. It is not likely that the number of Black Catholics will increase significantly in the near future. Even if the Church were to mount an aggressive evangelization effort, it would probably make only small inroads in

African-American communities. Those with long histories of membership in the Baptist Church and the African Methodist Episcopal Church are not likely to leave these church families for Catholicism. The growing numbers of younger African-Americans with no church affiliation are not likely to be attracted to the Catholic Church in significant numbers.

- (20) The barbaric slaughter of the innocent on June 17, 2015 in Mother Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston by 21-year-old Dylann Roof, a White supremacist pictured wrapped in the Confederate flag, horrified many Americans. However, many of those horrified are unaware that the reason why the A.M.E. Church exists is the simple fact that the children of people who had been enslaved were not allowed to become members of mainline Christian communities, including the Methodist, Episcopal, and Catholic Churches. This fact is a part of African-American consciousness. A past marred by racial oppression and systematic discrimination cannot be undone by pastoral letters, no matter how heartfelt they may be. The evil of America's original sin of enslaving free human beings, like the evil that the Nazi Holocaust inflicted on the Jewish people, has left a permanent scar on the nation's psyche. As a result, "White" Christianity lacks credibility to many members of the traditional Black Church. And sadly, I know African-American Catholics who, based upon their personal experiences, do not believe that their Black lives matter in the Catholic Church as much as White lives matter.
- (21) If all African-American Catholics (clergy and religious included) suddenly disappeared, most White Catholics might not even notice the disappearance because they were more or less unaware of African-American Catholics. Most have no personal contact with African-American Catholic laity. They never see African-American Sisters, Brothers, Deacons, or Priests. They might not even know that there are a small number of African-American Bishops. If all of the White Catholic laity, Sisters, Brothers, Deacons, Priests, and Bishops (including Hispanics) suddenly disappeared, the African-American Catholic experience would, of course, be quite different. Black Catholics would notice it immediately. This is because the Church in the United States would be transformed from a large, influential, national religious institution into a small, largely African-American religious community comparable to the Jehovah's Witnesses who, according to the Pew Research Center, have about 2.5 million American members.
- (22) Historically, the Catholic Church has not been actively engaged in conversation with African-American communities at the level of ideas, major movements, and the emergence of Black consciousness. While several Popes and many Catholics condemned the anti-Christian practice of enslaving human beings to work the lucrative plantations of the south, the larger Catholic community maintained a distance from the abolitionist movement in which the Church played no leadership role. In 1889, Daniel Rudd initiated a series of Black Catholic Congresses. The Fifth Congress in Baltimore in 1894 said, "We hope to hail the day when the American people, the hierarchy of the Catholic Church, and the laity shall rise up in might and stamp out the prejudice which is today destroying the life blood of the country." However, that did not happen. The Church did not take a significant role in the Niagara Movement (1905-1909) led by W.E.B. Dubois, which forcefully worked for the welfare of People of Color, demanded equal rights and laid the foundations that led to the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. Nor did the Church address Marcus Garvey's Back to Africa Movement (1918-1920), which urged all Americans of African background to establish new lives in Liberia.

- (23) The Harlem Renaissance (1919-1940) produced many eloquent voices portraying the African-American experience including Alain Locke (author of the classic essay, “The New Negro”), Claude McKay (a Jamaican-born poet and essayist who became a Catholic in Chicago and was devoted to the Catholic Youth Organization), Zora Neale Hurston (a visionary writer and folklorist of international renown), Langston Hughes (the poet laureate of the Harlem Renaissance, “I, Too, Sing America!”), and Countee Cullen (the brilliant, haunting voice of the Harlem Renaissance, who gave us “Incident,” the poem, which is as timely as this morning’s headlines, that introduces this Pastoral Letter).
- (24) Later came Richard Wright (“Native Son”), Ralph Ellison (“Invisible Man”), and James Baldwin (“The Fire Next Time”). They were followed by the many challenging political, legal, moral, spiritual, and historical writings of Associate Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall (*Brown v. the Board of Education*), Malcolm X (“By Any Means Necessary”), Martin Luther King, Jr. (“Letter From a Birmingham Jail”), and Alex Haley (the Pulitzer Prize winning “Roots: The Saga of an American Family”). These are only a few of the major voices. Of course, in time, there were many more, including important women such as Lorraine Hansberry (“A Raisin in the Sun”), Maya Angelou (“I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings”), Toni Morrison (the Pulitzer Prize winning “Beloved”), and Alice Walker (the Pulitzer Prize winning “The Color Purple”). An examination of Catholic journals and periodicals does not suggest that the Church was particularly attentive to, or in dialogue with, these essential Black voices, with the possible exception of Dr. King. Formal statements by the Catholic Church have not been significantly informed by the voices that have articulated the depth and meaning of the African-American experience. This lack of a history of dialogue underscores the difficulties the Church might encounter seeking a genuine conversation with the Black Lives Matter Movement.
- (25) Until recently, my personal awareness of the Black Lives Matter Movement has been derived from various forms of media. During this past year, however, I have made a conscious effort to establish contact with individuals who, while not in leadership positions, have varying degrees of association with the movement. By means of emails, phone conversations, and face-to-face meetings, I have gained (in an admittedly limited way) a partial knowledge of what some Black Lives Matter Movement activists think about the Catholic Church, Church teachings, and the degree to which Catholics have demonstrated by their deeds that Black lives matter to them.
- (26) There are no reliable statistics concerning how many African-Americans are actively involved in Black Lives Matter. It is generally believed that the number is rather small and that the key voices of the movement are young people in their 20s and 30s, many of them women. There is also no reliable way of determining how many Black Catholics are supportive of the positions espoused by the movement. But I know for a fact that some young Black Catholics are sympathetic to some of the issues raised by movement members. My main impression from direct contact is that the movement does not give much thought to the Catholic Church. Movement supporters assume the Church does not give much thought to them either. “We live in different worlds.” While there is a degree of awareness of the Church’s various social, educational, and healthcare ministries that make a positive contribution to Black communities, the primary impression some movement supporters have of the Church is that it is a large, White, conservative (mainly Republican) institution that stands aloof from confrontational movements such as Black Lives Matter. (As a matter of fact, many Catholics are Democrats.) Movement

members think the Church is more a part of the problem than of the solution because it has a necessary allegiance to “White privilege.” The movement sees an incompatibility between itself and the Church’s “out of touch with the times,” moral teachings on marriage (rejecting “marriage equality” i.e., same sex “marriage”), contraception and abortion (“women’s reproductive justice,” “women’s right to choose” to end their pregnancies), and homosexual activity (“gay rights” and “Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender concerns”).

(27) Members of the Black Lives Matter Movement see the Church as a complex bureaucracy tied to the *status quo* and unwilling and unable to “speak truth to power.” One activist said, “When the Church does speak about social justice it is always in measured, balanced, reserved and qualified language.” When I asked which Church documents they had actually read, they said they had only read excerpts online. I explained that the Church’s social doctrine may be more forceful than they think. I also pointed out that Catholic beliefs about the nature of marriage, the meaning of human sexuality, and the dignity of human life from conception to natural death are not mere cultural norms or social issues. The Church cannot and will not change these moral doctrines. These beliefs represent what the Church firmly holds to be fundamental moral principles rooted in human nature, natural law, biblical revelation and the teachings of Jesus Christ. However, does this necessarily mean that a representative of the Church cannot have a meaningful conversation with representatives of the movement about these and other issues where there may be greater accord?

(28) In my conversations, I learned that the traditionally Black Protestant churches do not play the same role in the Black Lives Matter Movement that they played during the Civil Rights era. While there is an appreciation of the presence of ministers and priests on the streets during urban disturbances, this movement does not embrace traditional Christian theological ideas about praying to keep the peace and change hearts. One person wrote “turning the other cheek is not in our playbook.” They are not interested in a “passive respectability” type of Christianity. They embrace a radical theology of inclusion inspired by a revolutionary Jesus. They prefer a Jesus who spent more time confronting the power structure of Judaism and the Roman Empire than a Jesus who was turning the other cheek.

(29) Even though one of the young men with whom I spoke was raised in a Catholic family (he is now agnostic), neither he nor any of the others had ever met or even seen an African-American priest, deacon, or sister. Before their contact with me, none of them had any awareness that there was even one African-American Catholic Bishop. To my surprise, one participant in the conversation who has serious musical interests said she really liked Gregorian chant and church organ music though she likes rap, hip-hop, and jazz more. I was not surprised that all of them had a favorable impression of our Holy Father, Pope Francis. They, like many Catholics, had not actually read any of the Pontiff’s writings. Their high regard is influenced by their erroneous impressions, shaped by secular media, that the Pope is seriously considering changing fundamental moral and doctrinal teachings of the Church. I assured them that, while the Holy Father has brought a renewed pastoral spirit of compassion and mercy to his Pontificate, there was nothing to substantiate media speculations about a coming theological revolution.

## V. The Teachings of the Church

- (30) Throughout his Pontificate, St. John Paul II seemed to bestride the world like a moral giant proclaiming the Gospel that all lives mattered, including Black lives. During his 1987 pastoral visit to the United States, I was present when the Holy Father thanked nearly 2,000 representatives of the African-American Catholic community for the ways that they enrich the Church. He spoke forcefully against racial prejudice in American society and encouraged Black Catholics to contribute their cultural gifts to the wider Church. He lamented that "Even in this wealthy nation, committed by the Founding Fathers to the dignity and equality of all persons, the Black community suffers a disproportionate share of economic deprivation."
- (31) Later, in his 1995 Encyclical, *Evangelium Vitae*, the Holy Father outlined the philosophical and theological framework for the Church's belief in the incomparable worth of every human life, including every Black life.
- (32) "Man is called to a fullness of life which far exceeds the dimensions of his earthly existence, because it consists in sharing the very life of God. The loftiness of this supernatural vocation reveals the greatness and the inestimable value of human life even in its temporal phase. Life in time, in fact, is the fundamental condition, the initial stage and an integral part of the entire unified process of human existence. It is a process which, unexpectedly and undeservedly, is enlightened by the promise of and renewed by the gift of divine life, which will reach its full realization in eternity (cf. 1 Jn 3:1-2). At the same time, it is precisely this supernatural calling which highlights the relative character of each individual's earthly life. After all, life on earth is not an 'ultimate' but a 'penultimate' reality; even so, it remains a sacred reality entrusted to us, to be preserved with a sense of responsibility and brought to perfection in love and in the gift of ourselves to God and to our brothers and sisters.
- (33) The Church knows that this Gospel of life, which she has received from her Lord, has a profound and persuasive echo in the heart of every person - believer and non - believer alike-because it marvelously fulfils all the heart's expectations while infinitely surpassing them. Even in the midst of difficulties and uncertainties, every person sincerely open to truth and goodness can, by the light of reason and the hidden action of grace, come to recognize in the natural law written in the heart (cf. Rom 2:14-15) the sacred value of human life from its very beginning until its end, and can affirm the right of every human being to have this primary good respected to the highest degree. Upon the recognition of this right, every human community and the political community itself are founded.
- (34) In a special way, believers in Christ must defend and promote this right, aware as they are of the wonderful truth recalled by the Second Vatican Council: 'By his incarnation the Son of God has united himself in some fashion with every human being.' This saving event reveals to humanity not only the boundless love of God who 'so loved the world that He gave His only Son' (Jn 3:16), but also the incomparable value of every human person." (*Evangelium Vitae* #2)

(35) I was present in the gallery on September 24, 2015, when His Holiness, Pope Francis became the first Pontiff in history to address both chambers of the Congress of the United States with remarks that, to the surprise of his listeners, focused on four influential Americans: President Abraham Lincoln; Dorothy Day; Trappist mystic, Thomas Merton; and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Each of them affirmed, in different ways, that Black lives mattered. While President Lincoln's pragmatic, political motives for opposing human bondage have been idealized and romanticized, his efforts to bring an end to slavery and his "Emancipation Proclamation" demonstrated an atypical regard for Black lives even though he did not equate them with White lives. The "Catholic Worker" founder, Dorothy Day, was consistently outspoken in her opposition to racist attitudes in America. Her Catholic Worker Movement was prophetic in its concern for the poor, many of whom were People of Color. In "Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander" and "Letters to a White Liberal," Cistercian Father, Thomas Merton wrote searing condemnations of racial prejudice and provided the spiritual and theological foundation for his unambiguous affirmation that Black lives matter, if not in those words. Dr. King sacrificed his life for the cause of racial justice and the still deferred dream that African-Americans would be judged by the content of their character and not by the color of their skin.

(36) By calling to mind the legacies of these four remarkable Americans, not usually referred to in Papal addresses, the Bishop of Rome clearly wanted to associate himself with their beliefs that Black lives do indeed matter. To underscore the point, he said,

"Politics is, instead, an expression of our compelling need to live as one, in order to build as one the greatest common good: that of a community which sacrifices particular interests in order to share, in justice and peace, its goods, its interests, its social life. I do not underestimate the difficulty that this involves, but I encourage you in this effort. Here, too, I think of the march which Martin Luther King led from Selma to Montgomery fifty years ago as part of the campaign to fulfill his 'dream' of full civil and political rights for African Americans. That dream continues to inspire us all. I am happy that America continues to be, for many, a land of 'dreams,' dreams which lead to action, to participation, to commitment; dreams which awaken what is deepest and truest in the life of a people."

(37) By word and deed (especially during his November 25-30, 2015 pastoral visit to Kenya, Uganda, and the Central African Republic), Pope Francis has demonstrated that the lives of the people of African descent matter very much to the Church.

(38) On June 10, 2015, during the Bishops' meeting in St. Louis, the President of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Archbishop Joseph E. Kurtz issued a letter saying,

"I cannot help but think of recent events that have taken place around our beloved country. We mourn those tragic events in which African Americans and others have lost their lives in altercations with law enforcement officials. These deaths have led to peaceful demonstrations, as well as violent conflicts in the streets of our cities. ... Sadly, there is all too often an alienation of communities from those sworn to protect them.

- (39) Our efforts must address root causes of these conflicts. A violent, sorrowful history of racial injustice, accompanied by a lack of educational, employment and housing opportunities, has destroyed communities and broken down families, especially those who live in distressed urban communities...The Church has been present in these communities, active in education, health care and charities.....”
- (40) Archbishop Kurtz recalled the 1979 U.S. Bishops' pastoral letter, "Brothers and Sisters to Us," which named racial prejudice as a grave sin that denies the truth and meaning of the Incarnation of the Word of God in Jesus Christ.
- “Unfortunately, the words of that letter still ring true: ‘Racism is an evil which endures in our society and in our Church.’ The Bishops called for decisive action to eradicate racism from society and considerable progress has been made since 1979. However, more must be done. Let us again call upon our Catholic people to pray frequently in their homes and in their churches for the cause of peace and racial reconciliation.”
- (41) Speaking about the landmark Civil Rights Act of 1964, Archbishop Kurtz said it was “a monumental step forward” for human dignity. He stressed that continued work is necessary to fight the “destructive influence of racism.” He said that the Gospel requires “ongoing personal and social transformation.” This ongoing personal and social transformation is critical within the Church when it comes to living the truth that Black lives matter, precisely because all lives matter.

## **VI. Abortion and Black Lives**

- (42) Because the Catholic Church believes that all lives matter, from conception to natural death, the Catholic community has been deeply involved in efforts to argue forcefully in the public square in defense of developing human life in the womb and in increasing its opposition to the death penalty. The Black Lives Matter Movement would generally agree with the Church’s concerns about the death penalty which is imposed disproportionately on offenders who are poor People of Color and lack adequate legal representation. The movement would appreciate Pope Francis’ Year of Mercy plea to world leaders to abolish the death penalty altogether. However, the movement is outspoken in its defense of what it calls “reproductive justice” and “reproductive rights” and in its embrace of the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision of the Supreme Court. Like many Americans, including, sadly, some who consider themselves Catholics, the Black Lives Matter Movement rejects the arguments of those who speak in defense of human life in the mother’s womb.
- (43) Like many defenders of abortion “rights” in the larger secular society, many in the movement express a strong acceptance of the position that the fetal organism does not have the legal status of a human person at any stage of gestation. As a result, that life can be ended at any time. The position that fetal life is not human –or, at the very least, becoming human – is asserted without serious biological, philosophical, or theological argument. The spiritual dimension of a human being (the existence of a spiritual soul?) is ignored or rejected. The fetus is referred to as “just tissue” especially in the first trimester of pregnancy. However, the court

permits terminating pregnancy even in the third trimester. Yet, when a mother suffers a miscarriage, she does not say, "I am so sad because I lost my fetus." She says, "I lost my baby!" This dichotomy suggests that the nature and being of the developing life has no objective reality. Its "whatness," its "beingness" is determined by and dependent upon the intentionality of the mother. It should be noted that currently thirty-eight states have fetal homicide laws.

- (44) Black Lives Matter advocates, along with most others who favor abortion, place their focus not on the ethical question of what is being done to the life in the womb but on the legal question of a mother's "rights" to control her own body and determine when, or if, she will have children. Movement spokespersons are generally opposed to any federal or state law that would place limits on a mother's "right" to have an abortion. Their critics say that little consideration is given to the idea that the time to exercise this "right" is before becoming pregnant. They reject any assertion that Black women are killing their own children. This position has led some African-Americans to protest against "black genocide" and declare that the most dangerous place for an African-American is in the womb. According to the Centers for Disease Control, in 2010, the most recent year for which statistics are available, 765,651 abortions were performed in the United States. Black women continue to have the highest abortion rate of any racial or ethnic group. In that same year 138,539 African-American women ended their pregnancies by abortion. For every 1,000 live births, there were 483 abortions. Although African-Americans represent only 13 percent of the population of this country, between 2007 and 2010, almost 36 percent of the abortion deaths in the nation were Black infants.
- (45) Black Lives Matter argues that the goal of recounting these disturbing statistics is to shame Black women for exercising their "fundamental right" to make their own reproductive choices. They believe that defending the "right" of women who wish to end their pregnancy is greater than the "supposed right to life" of the fetus. The "right" of one Black woman to end her pregnancy, they argue, places no burden on another Black woman who believes, for whatever reason, that abortion is wrong, immoral, or sinful. Legal abortion does not prevent a woman who opposes abortion from carrying her child to term.
- (46) They believe some pro-life politicians make every effort to deprive poor, young, African-American women of their "right to choose" while opposing urgently needed social programs such as health care, sex education, food benefits, public assistance, and equal pay for women. They protest that it is programs such as these that are needed if Black women are going to be able to choose to become mothers and have the ability to raise healthy children.
- (47) The movement argues that traditional Christianity is selectively "pro-life." Where are the tens of thousands of White Christians marching in "pro life" rallies when Black children are gunned down in the street by White police? Don't those lives matter as much as the lives of those yet to be born? African-American women and men, who disagree with Black Lives Matter concerning abortion, firmly stand their ground. "If you genuinely believe that Black lives matter, you should be working to see that every Black infant is accorded the very first civil right, the right to life."



## VII. Crime and Black Lives

- (48) When pressed, representatives of the Black Lives Matter Movement are willing to concede that ALL lives matter. They say they know that the lives of Syrians who die trying to escape a civil war, the lives of those murdered by radicalized Islamic terrorists in Paris and San Bernardino, and the lives of White police officers slain in confrontations with young African-American men ALL matter. Their goal is to confront White people who say all lives matter but do not live this truth with the words of “Animal Farm,” “All animals are equal. BUT, some animals are more equal than others.”
- (49) Many Catholic priests, deacons, religious and members of the Christian faithful who serve in urban communities around the country raise the same burning question that is raised by many others. Why does a movement that is rightly calling attention to violent, deadly conflicts between White police officers and young African-American men, seem to almost ignore the obvious reality that most young Black men who die violent deaths do so, not at the hands of racist White police, but at the hands of other young Black men?
- (50) Ninety-three percent of Black murder victims are murdered by other Black people. Eighty-four percent of White murder victims are killed by other White people. Black and White commentators often raise the question of self-inflicted violent crime in Black communities. They are distressed when Black Lives Matter responds that it is painfully aware of the many violent crimes in Black neighborhoods. The movement knows that many people think their outrage should be focused on the many acts of violence within the community rather than the relatively few acts of violence inflicted from outside the community. They counter that even though the number of White police who inflict violence on Black youth is small by comparison, their voices must be raised in protest over the violent actions of White police. These officers, who are committed to serving and protecting all citizens, are not only violating this commitment, but also are frequently doing so without punishment.
- (51) The number of White police officers who intentionally shoot and kill Black men is small when compared to the estimated 7,000 Black people who are murdered each year by people from their own communities. In an opinion column in the February 12, 2016 edition of “The Wall Street Journal,” Heather MacDonald argues that Black Lives Matter is a myth and its claims are fiction. To make this point, she cites statistics of the high rate of violent crime in some Black communities, the fact that police officers are disproportionately endangered by Black assailants, and that Hispanic and Black officers are much more likely to shoot African-Americans than White officers because of the mistaken belief that the African-American is armed.
- (52) Black Lives Matter supporters argue that the high homicide rates in impoverished Black neighborhoods is fed, in part, by the structural racism that has been in place for generations since the Great Migration, maintaining segregated neighborhoods, inadequate housing, dreadful public schools, and bleak employment opportunities. Young people with nothing to do and no hope are easily ensnared into the world of gangs and selling drugs, which leads to internecine murders. The movement believes that these factors do not excuse violent crime in Black communities. However, they do help to explain a tragic pattern seen in many cities from Baltimore to Chicago to Los Angeles. This is seen as a systemic pattern over which the poor have very little control. If

those who have political power really cared about Black lives, they would address these issues and, by doing so, help to reduce urban violence.

(53) Nevertheless, some African-American community leaders believe the movement would gain more credibility if some of its members made it a high priority to contribute directly to grass roots efforts to at least diminish the scourge of Black youths killing one another. It has been encouraging to see young men in some African-American communities wearing tee-shirts with the message, “Let’s stop killing each other!” Those who minister in Catholic parishes in African-American communities might be able to support more effectively the Black Lives Matter Movement in its efforts to draw attention to White officers who display a reckless disregard for the lives of African-American lives, if the movement were able to devote some of its considerable energy to decreasing what is sometimes called “Black-on-Black crime.”

(54) Readily available deadly weapons are a major contributor to the frequent murders in some Black communities. One way in which the Catholic Church may increase its credibility in the eyes of those who believe the Church really does not think the lives of Black people matter is through the Church’s support for reasonable gun control legislation. Many Catholics share the view of many other Americans that any effort to regulate the buying, selling and transporting of guns in our society is an attack on their Second Amendment right to bear arms. However, a growing number have seen the need for change. A Religion News Service and the Public Religion Research Institute poll in 2013 found that 62 percent of American Catholics support some measures to strengthen gun control. Many Bishops have expressed their support for various gun control measures such as background checks and a ban on assault weapons. Pope Francis, in his address to Congress, said,

“Why are deadly weapons being sold to those who plan to inflict untold suffering on individuals and society? Sadly, the answer, as we all know, is simply for money: money that is drenched in blood, often innocent blood...In the face of this shameful and culpable silence, it is our duty to confront the problem and to stop the arms trade.”

The gun lobby argues that people and not guns kill people. While this is true, the evidence from other countries clearly confirms that when gun purchasers have been properly screened by background checks, when proper attention is given to the care of those with mental health needs, when violent offenders are monitored and when people have fewer guns, the number of murders declines.

### **VIII. Concluding Dialogue**

(55) ¶ In part IV of this letter (The Catholic Church and Black Lives Matter), I said that until recently, I had no personal contact with individuals directly associated with the Black Lives Matter Movement. I saw it as a grass roots movement that I viewed with genuine interest and concern. I wondered then, as I do now, if its long-term impact on the lives of People of Color and on the fabric of the nation would be positive or negative. It was at that time that I became acquainted with a young attorney who is a Catholic and who had a close relative who was deeply involved with Black Lives Matter. He was the primary person who facilitated my contact and

conversations with a small group of women and men who are involved with the movement but who are not, in any sense, representatives of or leaders of the movement. It is important to keep in mind that what I have written is a personal reflection and not an exhaustive, fully researched critique. It is simply an effort by one human being, who is a Catholic Bishop and a Person of Color, to call this movement to the attention of members of the Church who might easily overlook it. I have called this reflection “The Racial Divide Revisited” because it continues the conversation I initiated with my 2015 Pastoral Letter, “The Racial Divide,” by engaging the Black Lives Matter Movement in a very initial way.

- (56) I am grateful to my acquaintance for making my conversations with movement members possible, and I respect his desire not to be identified. However, after I shared with him the contents of this Pastoral Letter, he asked me a number of pointed questions. My responses to some of his questions will serve as the concluding dialogue of this reflection.

- (57) **Is it really your expectation that members of the Black Lives Matter Movement and members of the Church are going to sit down and discuss your Pastoral Letter?**

While that would be a remarkable development, it is not my realistic expectation. My hope is that Catholics who read this Pastoral Letter will find it a useful resource for having a conversation among themselves and with people of different racial backgrounds and points of view about a timely subject to which they may not have previously given much attention.

- (58) **What is your response to those who may say you have provided them with a helpful overview of a complex issue, but you have not provided them with a plan or program to help them effectively address the issues you have raised?**

This is true because I do not have such a plan or program. I would hope individuals would devise plans appropriate for their situation. I hope they will do what I asked at the conclusion of the prior Pastoral Letter. They should commit themselves to praying, listening, learning, thinking, and acting in ways that will help them to bridge the racial divide. They may already know someone who, unbeknownst to them, is associated with the movement.

- (59) **Is the Catholic Church abandoning schools in African-American neighborhoods because these schools have failed to produce converts to the Church?**

I do not agree with the premise of your question. The Church is not abandoning these schools. The entire Catholic school system in this country has undergone radical changes in the last fifty years. Maintaining schools has become much more expensive. Catholic families have fewer children. More Catholics send their children to free public schools with state-of-the-art facilities. And, most significantly, we have seen the virtual disappearance of the religious sisters who established and staffed these schools. Economic and staffing limitations have led to consolidating and closing large numbers of schools in many communities.

- (60) In the past, many people thought the Church’s commitment to maintaining schools in poorer, urban communities would serve as a means of evangelization. However, that has not proven to be the case. African-American parents have been appreciative of the Church for

providing an alternative to the often inferior urban public schools, but this has not led them to turn away in significant numbers from traditional Black churches for Catholicism. The Church's ministry of education has provided generations of young African-Americans with superior educational experiences making it possible for them to attain greater opportunities. A number of dioceses have made a deliberate choice to maintain urban schools at considerable expense while realizing these schools will not produce many converts to the faith. Contributing to the enrichment of the lives of African-Americans, who are not Catholics, has become part of the Church's ministry of education. This has been done because Black lives matter to the Church. (The same could be said of the Church's health care ministry, the vast network of social services, the Campaign for Human Development, Catholic Charities, and the St. Vincent de Paul Society. These services to anyone in need, at least implicitly, affirmed that Black lives matter.)

**(61) Do you personally believe that the Church as an institution (at the level of the Vatican, the Bishops' Conference, and parish leadership) really does believe that Black lives matter?**

In the end, the Church "as an institution" or the government "as an institution" is only as committed to living Christ's law of loving our neighbors as we love ourselves as the individuals who make up the institution. In this Pastoral I have stressed that the Gospel requires "ongoing personal and social transformation." This transformation takes place in the hearts of individuals and those individuals can change institutions. Even though they would be unlikely to use the expression Black Lives Matter because of unfamiliarity with it or because of certain ideas associated with it, I do believe that many people at every level of the Church have a desire to purify the Church of bias, prejudice, and discrimination. Nevertheless, we have a very long way to go. Otherwise, the Holy Father would not have called us to a Holy Year of mercy, forgiveness, and reconciliation. Nor would he have asked us to envision the Church as a hospital on the field of battle tending the spiritual wounds of the injured (including those injured by prejudice in the Church), not unlike the Good Samaritan.

**(62) Do you think that racial prejudice is the primary reason there are so few African-American Catholics?**

While historically speaking, it is certainly an important reason; I am not able to say it is the primary reason. Historic events and cultural, educational, emotional, and spiritual factors are also important reasons. Obvious examples of this are worship, liturgy and theological discourse. Catholic worship is shaped profoundly by European culture, which may make it less inviting for people whose cultural experience is more Afro-centric. Catholic theology is also formulated with categories of thought derived from ancient Greece and Medieval Europe. This may be one reason why the Scripture-centered vocabulary of Black Protestant Churches is so attractive.

**(63) You have argued in the past that the expressions "minorities" and "minority groups" commonly used by Black and White people and the Catholic Church are not neutral expressions. You have suggested that they are used in a biased and selective way, which make it more difficult to bridge the racial divide. Have you had much success in influencing the Church, for example, to refer to people and groups as who they are rather than who they are not? Not the "majority"?**

No, I have not. But I did not expect sudden changes in longstanding behavior. After all, the media and the government constantly use these terms. Indeed, People of Color often speak of themselves as “a minority group.” Nevertheless, my point remains true. Every American citizen is an American, not a minority American. Every member of the Church is a Catholic, not a minority Catholic. “Minority” effectively means “not White.” It is as demeaning as “non-Catholic.” The change in vocabulary that I am urging can only come about after a considerable amount of profound “consciousness raising.”

- (64) You have also indicated that one way for the Church to show that Black lives matter might be to depart from the long-standing practice of depicting God, Jesus, the angels and the saints as Europeans and make greater use of African, Asian, and Hispanic religious art. Have you sensed much interest in acting on this idea?**

No. However, I never expected any immediate interest. Again, changes like this take time, perhaps over generations. All I have been doing is planting seeds for consideration. I think the proposal is valid and truly “catholic.” John Nerva’s “Communion of Saints” tapestries in Our Lady of the Angels Cathedral in Los Angeles constitute one of the few prominent examples of racially inclusive quality Catholic religious art in the country. If efforts are not made to follow this example (including images of God and angels), the Church will be the poorer for it.

- (65) Are you optimistic about the future of Black lives in America?**

Yes, I am. As a human being, as a Christian, and as a Priest, I am naturally optimistic. Christ is our hope! There are many indicators to suggest grounds for optimism. You have only to look at where Black lives were in 1916, 1950, 2000, and today to see the reasons for optimism. At the same time, I am a realist. I do not have a *naïve* vision of a future marked only by racial harmony and accord. The points of conflict and the great disparity in education, employment, income, housing, health care, and social mobility are such that we will continue to see steps forward followed by steps backwards for years and years to come. This is so not only because of the many, including some Catholics, who are not committed to ongoing personal and communal spiritual and moral transformation (due to indifference?), not only because of the few who oppose ending the racial divide deep within their souls, but also because of the undertow of history.

- (66)** When President Obama was elected, several articles appeared hailing the dawn of the “post-racial era” in the United States. I said to anyone who would listen that this was not the case. I also pointed out that while Mr. Obama has embraced the African-American experience, it is strange that the fact that he is actually bi-racial is almost always ignored by the media.

- (67)** A 2015 New York Times/CBS News poll makes it clear that seven years after the President’s election we are still not in a “post-racial era.” The survey indicated that nearly six in 10 Americans, including significant majorities of Black and White people, think race relations are generally not good. Nearly four in 10 think the situation is getting worse. By comparison, two-thirds of Americans surveyed shortly after President Obama took office said they believed that race relations were generally good and getting better.

(68) During Mr. Obama’s 2008 campaign, nearly 60 percent of Black Americans said race relations were generally bad. Shortly after his election, that number was cut in half. It has now soared to 68 percent, the highest level of discontent among African-Americans during the President’s years in office. It is close to the numbers recorded in the aftermath of the civil disturbances that followed the 1992 acquittal of Los Angeles police officers charged in the beating of Mr. Rodney King. Almost half of those questioned said Mr. Obama’s presidency had had no effect on creating greater racial harmony. About a third said his presidency had driven people of different races further apart. Only 15 percent said race relations had improved. There is much to ponder here and no one can adequately explain why this is so.

(69) Nevertheless, I remain optimistic because of the encouraging signs I see around the country. And, of course, as Christians, who affirm the redemptive truth of the Incarnation of the Word of God in Jesus Christ, the transformative power of the amazing grace poured out by the Holy Spirit, and the powerful nourishment that we receive when we are fed by the Bread of Life in the Eucharist, we must never grow weary of grace-filled efforts. The Church has a grave responsibility to contribute to the ongoing conversion and spiritual transformation of us all. Working tirelessly day by day, we are co-workers with Christ.

(70) I hope all who read this pastoral letter share my optimism. But, our optimism must always be tempered by these words of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., in his “Letter from a Birmingham Jail”:

“I have just received a letter from a white brother in Texas. He writes: ‘All Christians know that the colored people will receive equal rights eventually, but it is possible that you are in too great a religious hurry. It has taken Christianity almost two thousand years to accomplish what it has. The teachings of Christ take time to come to earth.’ Such an attitude stems from a tragic misconception of time, from the strangely irrational notion that there is something in the very flow of time that will inevitably cure all ills. Actually, time itself is neutral; it can be used either destructively or constructively. More and more I feel that the people of ill will have used time much more effectively than have the people of good will. We will have to repent in this generation not merely for the hateful words and actions of the bad people but for the appalling silence of the good people.”

(71) Therefore, let us prepare to go up to Jerusalem with the Lord to celebrate the Paschal Mystery. We must pray that the Holy Spirit, who will come upon us at Pentecost, will give us the strength that we need not to maintain an “appalling silence”. Instead, we must follow the imperatives that I shared in my earlier Pastoral Letter. We must PRAY, LISTEN, LEARN, THINK, and ACT in such a way that all people everywhere will know that we truly believe that Black lives matter precisely because all lives matter!

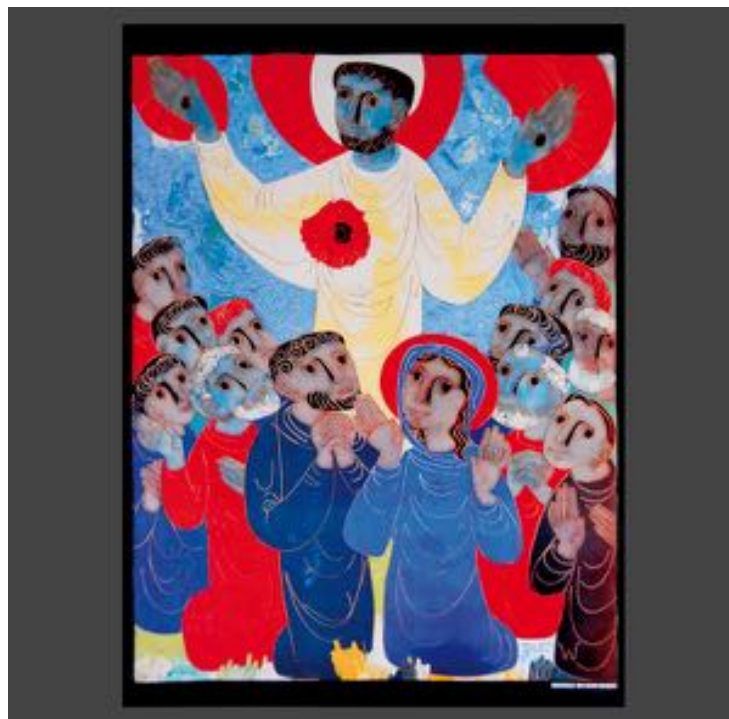
Praise be Jesus Christ!  
Both now and forever!  
Amen.

*+Edward K. Braxton*

**February 26, 2016**  
**The 4<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the death of Trayvon Martin, 17, in Sanford, Florida**  
**African-American History Month**

The Most Reverend Edward K. Braxton, Ph.D., S.T.D., is the Eighth Bishop of Belleville, Illinois. This Pastoral Letter was the basis for his February 28, 2016 address to the Los Angeles Religious Education Congress, as well as his March 3, 2016 address at a Lenten Reflection at Samford University in Birmingham on “Black and White in America—How Deep the Divide.” He can be reached through his Administrative Assistant at the Chancery of the Diocese of Belleville: Mrs. Judy I. Hoffmann at (618) 722-5003 or e-mail: [jhoffmann@diobelle.org](mailto:jhoffmann@diobelle.org)

\* “The Racial Divide in the United States: A Reflection for the World Day of Peace 2015,” *Origins*, January 15, 2015, Vol. 44, #32; also: Diocese of Belleville website [diobelle.org](http://diobelle.org); “All the Angels and Saints: Imagining a Church that Reflects the Diversity of its People,” *America*, March 9, 2015.



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*Love is the only force powerful enough to turn an enemy into a friend.*  
— **Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.**



The “Angel of Harmony,” which stands in front of the Cathedral Basilica of the Archdiocese of St. Louis, is the work of sculptor, Wiktor Szostalo. It is fashioned from welded stainless steel with musical wind chime wings. Bishop Braxton, who served as Auxiliary Bishop of St. Louis, contributed to the design which features children of different races protected by the outstretched arms of an angel whose features are those of the Bishop’s late brother, Cullen Lawrence Braxton, Jr.



**DIOCESE OF BELLEVILLE**