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Full, Conscious and Active Participation: Sunday Eucharist, Black Life and Theological Considerations

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Abstract: The renewal of Catholic worship implemented through Vatican Council II instruction was designed to encourage the people of God towards "full, conscious and active participation" in liturgical celebrations. Their holistic engagement in liturgy is considered the best and most effective formation for the Christian life. This work presents Black Catholic theological reflections that connect "full, conscious and active participation" in Sunday Eucharist with the faithful's weekday commitment to community-building that affirms Black life.

Keywords: Black Catholic Liturgy, Liturgy and Social Justice, The Vocation of the Black Catholic Theologian, Missionary Discipleship and Sunday Eucharist, Black Theology and Sunday Worship

The Church earnestly desires that all the faithful be led to that "full, conscious and active" participation in liturgical celebrations called for by the very nature of the liturgy. Such participation by the Christian people as "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a redeemed people (1 Pet. 2:9; cf. 2:4-5), is their right and duty by reason of their baptism. In the restoration and promotion of the sacred liturgy, this full and active participation by all the people is the aim to be considered before all else; for it is the primary and indispensable source from which the faithful are to derive the true Christian spirit.¹

Pope John XXIII convened the Second Vatican Council at a critical crossroads in the life of the Catholic Church. Its culture, virtually frozen in Middle Age European tradition, clashed with the international steam of mid-twentieth century social and political upheaval. Inspired by the Holy Spirit and against the counsel of the Curia, John XXIII led

¹ Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (CSL), 14.
http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19631204_sacrosanctum-concilium_en.html.

Catholicism into modernity. The first document from the Council was the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, promulgated in 1963 to introduce principles for the renewal and promotion of Catholic liturgy. In its introduction, the *Constitution* outlined expectations of the Council that were wide and broad in scope, representing the Church's program to update its presentations of the Catholic faith to more effectively meet the needs of the contemporary people of God and engage the contemporary resources of the new age in its Christian evangelization. The aforementioned principle in the paragraph from the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* is a justice imperative for the 20th century and forward, calling for full engagement of the faithful in the celebration of liturgy - the source of the true Christian spirit with which they are sent forth into the world.

In 1978, fifteen years after the publication of the *Constitution*, the Black Catholic Theological Symposium gathered in Baltimore to discuss the vocation of the Black Catholic theologian. At this inaugural meeting, papers were presented on various aspects of Black culture and experience in the light of Christian theology and praxis. The concept of celebration was one category of thought in the various essays published in the proceedings, *Theology: A Portrait in Black*.² Fr. Clarence Joseph Rufus Rivers, Ph.D., a priest of the Archdiocese of Cincinnati with expertise in liturgical music, aesthetics and ritual, contributed a paper: "Thank God We Ain't What We Was: The State of the Liturgy in the Black Catholic Community". Another composition, "Black Catholic Worship: Celebrating Roots and Wings" was presented by Fr. Glenn V. Jeanmarie, a young priest of the Archdiocese of New Orleans at the time. In their presentations, Rivers and Jeanmarie made specific claims in their respective papers for an authentically Black Catholic worship that forms Christian disciples and sends them forth to be the Black Body of Christ in the context of everyday life. The other Symposium presenters also spoke, each according to their theological and pastoral expertise, of issues relevant to Black Christian life in the late 1970s.

Bearing in mind the teachings of the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* and those first Black Catholic theological reflections on liturgy, this work aims to explicate the vital connections between powerful celebration of Eucharistic liturgy and righteous living in the everyday world, a daily commitment to the reign of God here and now. More

² Posey, O.F.M. Cap., Thaddeus, J., editor, *Theology: A Portrait in Black: Proceedings of the Black Catholic Theological Symposium*, Vol. 1 (Pittsburgh: The Capuchin Press, 1980).

specifically, I will advocate that "full, conscious and active participation" of the Black Catholic assembly at Sunday eucharist is the most effective resource for forming the faithful in the living and true spirit of Christian discipleship in the world at-large. Unlike Jeanmarie and Rivers, I write from the perspective of the pew, as a Black Catholic laywoman of a different generation with access to many more theological, liturgical and social resources than were available in the 1970s. I will use contemporary Church teachings and Black theology to define the Christian mission of the Church in terms of black life and as a member of the Assembly. Here, the teachings of Pope Francis in his apostolic exhortation, *The Joy of the Gospel*, historical perspectives of the Black Church and insights from Melva Wilson Costen will be useful. I will turn to contemporary Black theologians to discuss the nature of liturgy and employ the structure of the Eucharistic Liturgy to explore "full, conscious and active" participation of the people gathered at Sunday Mass. I will conclude by offering a theological intervention invoked by Rivers, Jeanmarie and other attendees at that first convention of the BCTS, a prerequisite for an authentic and meaningful celebration of Sunday liturgy that would ignite among the faithful everyday commitments to authentic and relevant Christian discipleship that sustains the Black community. For the purposes of this paper, I will interchangeably use the terms missionary discipleship, church mission, social action and social justice although each has its specific definition.

Missionary Discipleship: The Call to Participate in the Life of Christ

...the liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; at the same time it is the fount from which all the Church's power flows. For the aim and object of apostolic works is that all who are made children of God by faith and baptism should come together to praise God in the midst of His Church, to take part in the sacrifice, and to eat the Lord's supper. The liturgy in its turn moves the faithful...and sets them on fire. From the liturgy, therefore, particularly the eucharist, grace is poured forth upon us from a fountain; the liturgy is the source for achieving in the most effective way possible human sanctification and God's glorification, the end to which all the Church's other activities are directed.³

³ CSL,10.

In *The Joy of the Gospel*, Pope Francis describes the church as a community of missionary disciples that responds to God's invitation and Christ's evangelistic example, believers "who take the first step, who are involved and supportive, who bear fruit and rejoice (EG, 24)." Francis makes the case for a Gospel-centered, mission-oriented praxis and theology directed toward the needs of God's people today. In his exhortation for a 21st century Catholic Church that is more inclusive, Pope Francis brings to light several key concepts - culture, diversity, new evangelization, parish. He perceptibly and vividly describes the struggle of contemporary humanity in terms that clearly allude to Black experience. He sheds light on current challenges that derive from global systems of exclusion and inequality in which "...priority is given to the outward, the immediate, the visible, the quick, the superficial and the provisional."⁴

Pope Francis calls baptized Christians to that which is their privilege and responsibility: to actively proclaim the Gospel message that God's love and salvation extends to all. As the faithful conform their lives more and more to the will of God, he promises, they grow in faith that "involves a deep desire to change the world, to transmit values, to leave this earth somehow better than we found it."⁵ The Holy Father describes culture as the organized way a people lives in relationship with one another, other creatures and God, emphasizing that, although Catholicism may seem to be deeply rooted in certain human cultures, the Faith in truth, is transcultural, "because the People of God is incarnate in the peoples of the earth, each of which has its own culture."⁶ The universal guidance of Church teaching presented here makes a way to consider how the worship of Black Catholics connects with their vocation to "full, conscious and active participation" in the mission of the Church in the world.

Using Pope Francis' terminology, missionary discipleship has been a prominent feature in the history of the African American Christian Church. From the time of enslavement through the Jim Crow era, the Black Church was the sole institutional means of humanitarian support for the African American community.⁷ The "Invisible Institution" refers to hidden spaces where enslaved believers secretly congregated to pray,

⁴ *Evangelii Gaudium* (EG), 62.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 183.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 115.

⁷ C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990), 47.

testify, shout, sing, and preach out of the sight and earshot of plantation owners and overseers. In these mostly rural places of worship, African descendants forged a New World Christian tradition rooted in traditional African religions. The Holy Ghost-inspired fervor and affirmation of black life was a celebration of the real Good News that in the midst of suffering and oppression "God is" and, with Jesus, "trouble don't last always". The full-body sharing of faith empowered God's beloved through the struggle for freedom. Melva Costen, scholar of African American liturgy, contends that "(g)atherings of the "Invisible Institution" occurred with such frequency that they are considered foundational to the subsequent establishment of African American "visible institutions": congregations, denominations, schools, burial associations, fraternal orders, sororities, political movements and organizations for the pursuit of justice and equality."⁸ The experience of Christian worship illuminated both the various human needs of brothers and sisters **and** the potential of the community to creatively respond.

In *The Black Church in the African American Experience*, C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence Mamiya report their findings of a ten-year study of urban and rural churches. The analysis maintains that the Black church was the strongest, most central and independent authority in African American communities. "It was readily apparent that the white church had become a principal instrument of the political and social policies undergirding slavery and the attendant degradation of the human spirit. Against this the Black Christians rebelled and the Black Church emerged as the symbol and substance of their rebellion."⁹ From the hush harbors of plantation life through Emancipation, the Black church emerged as a spiritual sanctuary, holy ground where the faithful gathered in regular Sunday worship and weekday services. From the *Sanctum Sanctorum*, Christian disciples were sent forth to be the Good News in their daily pursuits of liberation and survival. They returned to Sunday worship battered, fearful and disheartened from the daily struggle for life and dignity that consumed nearly everything they had. But God gathered the faithful once again, healing and feeding them back to life and mission.

The Black Church, itself a missionary disciple, stood in firm solidarity with the Black community at-large through a long-term comprehensive outreach of self-help and education. These sturdy institutions represented spaces of cultural refuge and safety, serving as

⁸ Melva Costen, *African American Christian Worship* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007), 25.

⁹ Lincoln and Mamiya, *The Black Church*, 47.

the school, the forum, the political arena, social club, art gallery, lyceum (lecture hall), conservatory of music, and gymnasium.¹⁰ The civil rights movement in the U.S. was largely church-based in rural communities; there is a record of at least 93 churches that were burned or bombed during the height of the movement from 1962 to 1965.¹¹ The engagement of Christian faith communities in acts of public disobedience, resistance, protests and campaigns significantly enhanced the legal status of black life through the desegregation of public facilities, the gain of voting rights and improved educational opportunities. Costen attests that the

...missional thrust, which ultimately gained the legal freedom for slaves and expanded the vision of oppressors, did not end with slavery. The "revolutionary" character of worship in action is basic to the life of Jesus. Inherent in the gospel message is a radical disapproval of the claim of power in a few who work vigorously to maintain the status quo. A part of the continual mission of congregations is to keep this biblical fact before all, who, through baptism and in the Lord's Supper, acknowledge their oneness in the body of Christ.¹²

Here Pope Francis' call for missionary discipleship should be apparent in the heroic interventions of historic African American Christian communities. It is true that the zeal of the Black church did not overtly inspire the worship of Black Catholics until the mid-twentieth century; however, the Black Church spirit of missionary discipleship was exemplified in parish life and in several Black Catholic religious and lay organizations such as the Oblate Sisters of Providence (established in 1829), the Sisters of the Holy Family (founded in 1842), the National Black Catholic Congresses (1889-1894), the Knights of Peter Claver (founded in 1909), and the Society of the Divine Word (founded in 1923). The witness of countless African American clergy, religious and laypersons valiantly modeled Christ's outreach and ministry with those who were most vulnerable and living on the margins.¹³ From the historical links between liturgy and social mission in the Black Church, this work will focus on the nature and structure of Catholic worship, in

¹⁰ Ibid., 93.

¹¹ Ibid., 97.

¹² Costen, *African American*, 112.

¹³ Cyprian Davis, O.S.B., *The History of Black Catholics in the United States* (New York: Crossroads, 1990).

particular, theological and pastoral approaches that would dispose the African American Catholic assembly towards a more "full, conscious and active participation" in Sunday liturgy and 21st century missionary discipleship.

**Sunday Liturgy:
"Full, Conscious and Active Participation" of the Black Assembly**

The church is essentially missionary and her primary mission is that of communion, that is, to be a sacrament of our unity with God and with the whole human race.¹⁴

Jamie Phelps' theological vision of the Church highlights the importance of the dismissal in the closing rites of the Eucharistic Liturgy, the point at which the faithful, having been formed by Christ present in the Word and Eucharist, are sent forward to signify God's grace in the world. In his 1998 apostolic letter, *On Keeping the Lord's Day Holy*, John Paul II proclaims that having received "...the bread of life, the disciples of Christ ready themselves to undertake with the strength of the Risen Lord and his Spirit the tasks which await them in their ordinary life. For the faithful who have understood the meaning of what they have done, the eucharistic celebration does not stop at the Church door."¹⁵ In other words, Sunday worship that engages the Assembly will potentially form Black Catholic worshippers, who, when sent forth from the sanctuary, will boldly serve the poor, dispossessed and marginalized, they uphold Black life.

The intent of Vatican Council II was to bridge the cultural gap between Catholicism and the world in the mid-20th century, to make more explicit the essential links between church and society, faith and culture, ritual and evangelization, sacrament and mission, worship and justice. The *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* laid out principles to update Catholic worship that more authentically reflects a 5th century Christian saying: "lex orandi, lex credendi, lex vivendi", translated as: "how we worship, is what we believe, is how we live". The reforms outlined in the *Constitution* 1) simplified the rites, 2) allowed prayer in the vernacular, 3) reestablished the role of Scripture so that the Liturgy

¹⁴ Jamie T. Phelps, "Communion Ecclesiology", in *Uncommon Faithfulness: The Black Catholic Experience*, ed. M. Shawn Copeland (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2009), 116.

¹⁵ Barry Glendinning, "Overview of *Dies Domini: On Keeping the Lord's Day Holy*" in *The Liturgy Documents: A Parish Resource*, vol. 2 (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1999), 45.

of the Word complements the Liturgy of the Eucharist, 4) restored the Prayer of the Faithful, 5) provided for Communion under both species, 6) incorporated lay ministries and 7) emphasized the importance of addressing faith formation and Christian living in liturgical preaching. Unfortunately, in the U.S., modernization of the liturgy was complicated by the fact that the renewals were unevenly imposed in faith communities, rather than comprehensively introduced with effective catechesis. As a result, most of the faithful missed the whole point of liturgical renewal. While some Catholics wholeheartedly embraced the change, others spiritually, physically and mentally continued to worship pre-Vatican II mode. African American parishes, like many others, struggled to resolve the divergent liturgical styles.

The Council promulgated two other Constitutions, *Lumen Gentium: The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church* and *Gaudium et Spes: The Church in the Modern World*, that advanced the Catholic Social Justice tradition, teachings that were quite relevant for the times and could have built essential links between the practices of worship and justice. The Church's failure to meaningfully correlate liturgy and social action in the context of Catholic faith and missionary discipleship contributes to underdeveloped perceptions of the role of the eucharistic assembly and liturgical praxis. Far too many perceive Eucharistic liturgy as an individualistic, routine, and devotional exercise, suited to an earlier era in the life of the Church and society.

The Nature of Sunday Eucharistic Celebration

From the earliest Christian tradition, Sunday has been the day of the Church, the weekly gathering of the Body of Christ to give God praise and thanksgiving for the Paschal Mystery that continues to unfold in the present day. "For on this day Christ's faithful are bound to come together into one place so that; by hearing the word of God and taking part in the eucharist, they may call to mind the passion, the resurrection and the glorification of the Lord Jesus, and may thank God who "has begotten them again, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, unto a living hope" (1 Pet. 1:3)".¹⁶

On the Christian journey, Sunday is prime time for celebrating the blessed Resurrection of the Risen Christ, his presence in the living Body of Christ and believers' expectation of that final Sunday when he returns in glory. The assembly at Sunday Mass is the preeminent

¹⁶ CSL, 106.

representation of the Christian Church, its most potent evangelization, and powerful expression of missionary discipleship. Glendinning, in "Overview of *Dies Domini: On Keeping the Lord's Day Holy*", surmises that "(m)any of us have been unaware of the place the eucharistic assembly holds in God's plan of salvation. We have sometimes overlooked the wonders of the assembly, perhaps in part because this is an age in which "religion is a matter between me and God".¹⁷

While one-on-one, private time with God is essential to a well-rounded spiritual life, the nature of eucharistic liturgy requires a different rapport with the divine. God takes the initiative, God invites, God, through the Holy Spirit, gathers the body of Christ together. The members' respond to God's outreach through a collective participation in the Liturgy. Sunday eucharist happens as a result of God's grace, those who take God up on the invitation assemble in hope and love and an ongoing commitment in Christ for the salvation of the world. Liturgy, by definition is public worship and public work offered by God's people; it is by nature, communal and missionary. Through the Eucharist, the people of God take part in the sacrifice of the cross, they "bring to the altar the week that has passed, with all its human burdens."¹⁸ In praise and thanksgiving, Sunday worshippers present themselves as simple eucharistic offerings: the joys and sorrows, defeats and victories, the ordinary and spectacular affairs of their daily lives. All that they are and ever hope to be, they offer through Christ, in the ultimate act of loving surrender to God. Drawn deeply into Christ who is present in the Word and Sacrament, the gathered assembly and the celebrant priest, all creation becomes one.

Through the Word and the Sacrament of Sunday Mass, Christ attends to the particular contexts and needs of each worshipper even as he addresses the various situations of sin and grace in the community at-large. Having participated in the most holy Communion, the assembly is sent forth to proclaim the Good News in word and deed, to bring communion to a world grossly in need.

¹⁷Glendinning, "Overview of *Dies Domini: On Keeping the Lord's Day Holy*, 5.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 43.

Sunday Eucharist and Black Life

In his BCTS presentation, Rivers registered a stark warning to and harsh critique of the liturgical leadership in his day: "We have not yet found a way to train our preachers and our readers and our prayers so that they would become fit instruments of the Holy Spirit; and until the Mass as a whole becomes an effective channel of the Spirit and leads to our on-going metanoia or conversion, to spiritual growth and inspiration, the Mass as a whole will be inauthentic."¹⁹ His strong rebuke was addressed to brother clergy, who at that time, were primarily responsible for liturgical planning and preparation. Despite the liturgical renewals and goals of Vatican Council II, accountability for the authentic celebration of Mass continues to reside primarily with the ordained clergy.

Speaking from a privileged place in the pew, even a good Sunday Mass fails to speak to the life of the Black faithful, a symptom of poor liturgical catechesis and a corresponding disconnect in Black Catholic identity with 1) the Paschal Mystery - the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ - as it relates to Black life, 2) the historical Black Church, and 3) the Catholic Church's updated teachings on culture and faith. The spirituality that typically pervades Catholic worship is a handed-down, tempered, conventional version that clouds the people's grasp of the awesome potential of Catholic worship that takes into consideration Black culture. As a human enterprise, the liturgy is imperfect: the preaching is often poor, the proclamation lackluster, and the prayer rather lifeless. Even when the liturgical performances are captivating, the assembly can leave Church uninspired and uninformed about how to carry the eucharistic spirit into the work week. Thank God that through the Holy Spirit, even lifeless Sunday eucharistic celebrations are perfected: God is glorified and God's people are sanctified, and transformed.

Yet, the missed opportunity that Rivers identified and that persist until today, are quite consequential for individuals and the community. *Plenty Good Room: The Spirit and Truth of African American Catholic Worship*, published in 1990, follows up on his critique, suggesting that through authentic liturgy,

¹⁹ Clarence Joseph Rivers, "Thank God We Ain't What We Was: The State of the Liturgy in the Black Catholic Community" in *Theology: A Portrait in Black: Proceedings of the Black Catholic Theological Symposium*, ed. Thaddeus, J. Posey (Pittsburgh: The Capuchin Press, 1980 Vol. 1), 71.

...people are able to unite the drama of their own sufferings with the paschal mystery of the Lord. The liturgy encourages the people of God, nourished by Christ's Body and Blood and filled with his Holy Spirit, to approach the future with hope and trust. Even though this future is unknown, faith guarantees that Christ will be there. This confident hope embraces everyone's personal history as well as the future of the world. Believers realize that their faith in Christ makes them conscious that they must do everything they can to overcome personal problems and world discord, to be a living sacrifice of praise. The liturgy also reminds them that when they have done all they can, they should not despair, because Christ is still with them.²⁰

Commemoration of the Paschal Mystery in the liturgy demands of the assembly a commitment to justice, defined in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* as "the moral virtue that consists in the constant and firm will to give their due to God and neighbor. Justice toward God is called the 'virtue of religion.' Justice toward (others) disposes one to respect the rights of each and to establish in human relationships the harmony that promotes equity with regard to persons and to the common good".²¹ The social justice activism of the historic Black Church in the everyday struggles of congregants and community carries over to Black Catholic participation in Sunday Mass that should never be an escape from the troubles of the world, but a safe harbor in troubled times. When the eucharistic community invests full, conscious and active participation in Mass, as some parishes consistently attempt to do, the faithful understand that they have been filled up with the true Christian spirit. Fired up, they are dismissed to participate in Christian discipleship - missionary, evangelistic and justice-oriented - in the world.

The eucharistic liturgy is a mystery, a collaboration divine and human. Acknowledging its inherent creativity and genius, it must be said that liturgical injustices related to power and authority, operate outrightly under the auspices of the U.S. Catholic Church. Rivers and Jeanmarie address one of several issues of social justice that intrude

²⁰ *Plenty Good Room: The Spirit and Truth of African American Catholic Worship*, 12.

²¹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1807.

upon the authentic celebration of Sunday liturgy. In his 1978 paper, Jeanmarie asserted that "Negritude is indeed beautiful and a gift from God...", a direct challenge to society's and thus the church's unwarranted discrimination against Black people.²² Rivers cited history to explain the "problem of black culture within the Catholic Church. "Only if we can understand that European-American Society consciously or unconsciously fabricated the myth of African sub humanity to justify its own inhumanity; only if we can understand that oppressed black people developed the affliction of self-hatred; only then can we understand why black culture has been unrecognized by the white churches and has been frequently rejected even by blacks within the white churches."²³ These early proponents of a worship that is authentically Black and truly Catholic built their claims on the rich religious heritage of African American believers who brought considerable resources to the undertaking. Black culture, including Church history, was a vital cornerstone of God's strategy for the liberation of God's people. From traditional African American perspectives, "full, conscious and active participation" in Sunday worship is a participation by the assembly in God's saving plan.

Black Culture and Black Catholic Worship

Pope Francis' notion of culture is supported by Black theologians who say that culture refers to the ways a people or community organizes itself to make sense of life, including its values, worldview, sense of the sacred, traditions, beliefs, spirituality, symbols, codes of behavior, history, affective patterns, etc. Expressions such as music, gesture, art, theologies, dance, for example, convey constitutive elements of culture.

Jeanmarie rightly situates the work of Black Catholic worship in the culture of Black people, not so much in the material symbols and expressions in which people often invest cultural identity. "Authentic Black Catholic Worship flows out of the rich experience of our people and all the elements working together (praying, preaching, praising, and proclaiming) produce the experience of Jesus being present with His people as they are being transformed in glory and power and in

²² Glenn V. Jeanmarie, "Black Catholic Worship: Celebrating Roots and Wings", in *Theology: A Portrait in Black: Proceedings of the Black Catholic Theological Symposium*, ed. Thaddeus, J. Posey (Pittsburgh: The Capuchin Press, 1980 vol. 1), 75.

²³ Rivers, "Thank God", 68.

Blackness in His name and by his power."²⁴ Rivers too came to the realization that "...it was not enough for us to introduce black music into the liturgy but that it was necessary to bring the whole range of black culture to bear on our worship efforts."²⁵

In 1984, building on these inspirations, the Black bishops of the United States gave an important instruction that supports their brothers Jeanmarie and Rivers. In *'What We Have Seen and Heard': A Pastoral Letter on Evangelization from the Black Bishops of the United States*, they assert that "(a)ll peoples and all cultures have been molded by the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit distributes his gifts in the language, culture and traditions of each".²⁶ They explain core qualities of Black spirituality, a cultural characteristic of Black worship. The bishops describe African American spirituality as holistic, joyful, communitarian and contemplative, qualities that lend themselves to full, conscious and active participation of Black congregants in liturgy.

A holistic spirit attends to the whole person, engaging the assembly with all its faculties - mind, body and soul. Costen stipulates that "(i)n true and authentic worship of God there is a dialectic relationship rather than a dichotomy between faith and practice, justice and ritual action (liturgy and justice), theological talk and doxological living, and sanctification and human liberation."²⁷ The mystery of Christian faith, the liturgical praxis that derives from it and daily life devoted to missionary discipleship collaborate to make believers holy and whole.

A joyful spirit celebrates the inherent goodness of life in every mode of human expression possible, including music, movement, sentiment, blessing, and praise. Joy communicates in voices exuberant and serene, through sorrow and happiness; joy gives color to the grayest of life's situations. A joyful spirit is the essence of Sunday eucharistic celebration, the weekly commemoration of the Easter narrative - the people assemble to give God praise and thanksgiving for the gift of the Paschal Mystery.

Community is a central feature of Black spirituality well-documented in the history of Africans in America and apparent in many

²⁴ Jean-Marie, "Black Catholic Worship", 82.

²⁵ Rivers, "Thank God", 70.

²⁶ *'What We Have Seen and Heard': A Pastoral Letter on Evangelization from the Black Bishops of the United States* (1984), 8.

²⁷ Costen, *African American*, 112.

traditional aspects of Black life - celebrations, family, prayer, its ongoing struggle for justice, for instance. Community is a core reality of Catholic life made present in the Blessed Trinity, the communion of saints, and the Eucharist - the Holy Communion. The Black spirit of community demands of the assembly a full, conscious and active participation in Sunday liturgy.

"God is". This truth of traditional African life speaks to the contemplative aspect of Black spirituality that leads God's beloved to, above all, surrender to the will of God. The Black wisdom, "God does not sleep" reflects an abiding assurance that God is ever active on behalf of the Black community, always present in every aspect of Black life, available whenever and wherever needed. The contemplative spirit stirs within God's people an unceasing attitude of prayer, praise and petition. In liturgy, contemplative prayer is not confined to interiority. It is quiet and soft-spoken, but communicates with God across the range of Black religious expression.

Spirituality is one of the constituent elements of culture that contribute to the way a people organizes itself to make sense of life. Black spirituality depicted by the Black bishops demonstrates a rich heritage that potentially brings much to the celebration of Sunday Eucharist. One might wonder why the spirituality that stirs the faithful in their daily living does not lead in their Sunday liturgical experience and why their participation at Mass does not urge them on to greater participation as Christian disciples in the world. In their 1978 papers, Jean-Marie and Rivers attributed the gaps to several factors, including 1) the Church's general lack of appreciation for Black culture and people; 2) a slow, uninformed acceptance of the Vatican II liturgical renewals that failed to recognize the power of the liturgy and the assembly's role in worship; and 3) the historical fact that the influences of the Second Vatican Council were bringing about big changes in the U.S. Church just as the African American community was growing into a modern Black consciousness. In their day, Rivers' and Jean-Marie's pioneer efforts at liturgical inculturation were considered avant-garde, experimentally Black and just barely Catholic. Worshippers, however, felt deeply the spirit of the Lord in the church gathered, the Word proclaimed and preached, in the song and movement, in the offering and sacrifice, the prayer and Holy Communion. They were intentionally dismissed with an awareness that Christ accompanied them out into the community and a sense of responsibility to share his Good News with the world.

A Profile: U.S. Culture

The presence of racism in the Catholic Church is historical and an ongoing source of injustice. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) provides some clue as to why the struggle to bring black culture more fully into the life and liturgy of the U.S. Catholic community persists, despite core teachings of the Church. The 2005 *National Directory for Catechesis* (NDC) analyzes U.S. culture, describing general characteristics of the national environment. Among the core features of U.S. society is freedom, a foundational principle upon which the U.S. way of life has developed. The NDC makes several value judgements, for example, freedom, in a 21st century U.S. understanding, primarily stands for individual rights without attendant individual responsibilities. Religious freedom best connotes the separation of church and society to the extent that religious beliefs and values represent private concerns that have little to do with the common good. Economic freedoms are highly valued in U.S. culture, although their unchecked growth contributes to the neglect and abuse of the marginalized and promotes societal greed and corruption. Pragmatic tendencies cause Americans to prize utility, comfort and convenience, resulting in a societal obsession with practical know-how versus intellectual knowledge. Globalization, interests in science and technology and mobility are also cited in the NDC as general characteristics of U.S. culture²⁸. Comparing these national attributes with the aforementioned traits of Black spirituality (communitarian, holistic, contemplative and joyful), draws direct attention to basic areas of incompatibility. Moral theologian, Bryan Massingale plainly states a related fundamental reality that Black Catholics face: "...in a white racist church, "Catholic" means "white." In U.S. Catholicism, only European aesthetics and cultural products are truly Catholic - regardless of the church's rhetorical commitment to universality."²⁹ These insights underline the challenging cultural environment in which the U.S. Church must teach, preach, minister, confronting its own sinfulness as it works to engender a true spirit of missionary discipleship.

²⁸ United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *National Directory for Catechesis* (D.C.: USCCB, 2005), 22-7.

²⁹ Bryan Massingale, *Racial Justice and the Catholic Church* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2010), 81.

Black Catholic Scholarship

In *Let It Shine: The Emergence of African American Catholic Worship*, liturgist and musician Rawn Harbor, a contemporary of Jeanmarie and long-time colleague of Rivers, comparatively analyzed approaches to Black Catholic worship in four papers presented at the 1978 meeting - Toinette Eugene, Edward Braxton, Rivers and Jean-Marie. His analysis of the papers of the latter two are considered here. As pastor of a New Orleans, Louisiana faith community, Fr. Glen Jeanmarie pioneered incorporating Black culture in the celebration of Sunday Eucharist at St. Theresa of the Child Jesus parish. The liturgy was alive with Spirit-led, Black-style prayer, preaching and proclamation that prepared the assembly for the Liturgy of the Eucharist and dismissed them from Mass to mediate God's presence in the surrounding neighborhoods and community at-large. Harbor describes Jeanmarie's style: "(t)he transformative potential of liturgy would be achieved by the palpable energy, passion and spirit participants bring to the enactment of the liturgical event. Attending to the prayer needs of the community would take precedence over rubrical adherence or preoccupation with normative liturgical practices..."³⁰ Jeanmarie's priestly ministry was a lived experience of the conflict between Black life and Catholic worship.

Fr. Clarence Rivers was also immersed as a "priest artist" in the pastoral work of leading the assembly in culturally authentic liturgical celebrations that moved and inspired. "For most of his priestly life, he had striven to bring the genius of African American religious culture to the forefront of Catholic pastoral efforts, working especially on the development of liturgical music."³¹ Harbor describes Rivers' approach to the assembly: "It is while consciously engaging in the liturgical enterprise that the deep psychic healing and assurance people are seeking can occur within Black individuals and communities. It is while actively participating in a liturgical event that the real and urgent demands of peoples' lives can seem manageable. The humanity of African American Catholics requires substance and drama, beauty and prophetic power if they are to transcend the troubles of this world."³²

In his study of Rivers' and Jeanmarie's respective contributions to the 1978 meeting of the BCTS, Harbor concludes that an African

³⁰Ronald (Rawn) Harbor, "Constructing an African American Catholic Liturgical Aesthetic" in *Let It Shine: The Emergence of African American Catholic Worship, with Mary McGann* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 124.

³¹*Ibid.*, 117.

³²*Ibid.*, 122.

American Catholic Liturgical Aesthetic - "understandings of what is beautiful, sacred, praiseworthy, profoundly expressive, and life-giving for African American worshipping communities - must be rooted in an expansive vision of that community's history, culture, spirituality and sociopolitical context."³³ Harbor is one of many Black Catholic scholars and allies whose works validate the vital relationship of Black Life and Catholic liturgy and advocate for an active engagement of Black faithful in the liturgical life of the church and the world beyond.

The previously quoted Jamie T. Phelps, O.P. also attended the first Symposium meeting; her paper was entitled "Black Self-Concept". Currently a systematic theologian whose work focuses on the mission of the Catholic Church, Phelps speaks of a communion ecclesiology that forms "human beings to live in the fullness of their humanity as free and responsible creatures made in the image and likeness of God. Such a life is only possible in the context of a radical communion, a union with God, with all human beings, and with the universe. Such a radical communion is born of deep contemplative prayer and God's gracious self-gift. God's grace alone enables us to live in right relationships with one another and all creation."³⁴ In her essay, "Communion Ecclesiology", Phelps expertly puts her finger right on specific social wounds that undermine the efforts of Black parishes and the national Black Catholic community from full, conscious and active collaborations in the mission of the church: internal division and fragmentation; the closure of Black Catholic schools and parishes; and racism with its false ideologies of white supremacy and black inferiority. Despite the brokenness, she reminds the community of the uncommon faithfulness of enslaved Africans and other Black ancestors in faith, as she encourages today's Black faithful to participate in the world with lives committed to communion with God, all humanity and creation.³⁵

In tackling the issue of racism in *Racial Justice and the Catholic Church*, Massingale ponders "(w)hat resources are available to the Catholic faith community to ground a more adequate and effective engagement with the evil of racism?"³⁶ In terms of liturgical praxis, he suggests that the eucharistic liturgy has the most potential. In its institution, Jesus of the Gospels has set the example of Eucharistic hospitality. According to Massingale,

³³Ibid., 125.

³⁴Phelps, "Communion", 119.

³⁵Ibid., 118-27.

³⁶Massingale, *Racial Justice*, 82.

Authentic worship cannot leave one at peace with social injustice for it immerses us in a larger reality that bursts the limits of our social imagination, limits that are necessary for our complacency with the status quo. The worthy celebration of the Eucharist, the primordial sacrament of unity, cannot but challenge the existence of white privilege and form in believers a counter identity more amenable to attitudes of compassion and risky acts of racial solidarity. Such celebrations enable an encounter with the Divine Mystery that stretches our imaginations, expands our awareness, disturbs our complacency, nourishes our hearts and sustains our hope.³⁷

African theologian and liturgist, Elochukwu Uzukwu, investigates human gesture as body language and symbol in liturgical ritual in the text, *Worship as Body Language, Introduction to Christian Worship: An African Orientation*. He proposes that "(t)he divergent attitudes towards the body as experienced in the African and Western traditions may expose the possible misunderstandings and conflicts in the cross-cultural contacts between the two traditions (formal and informal acculturation). We noted the dualistic tendency of the Western perception of the self; the great influence of the philosophy of Descartes solidified this dualism in modern Western culture. We also indicated the holistic and dialectic experience of the self among black Africans."³⁸ Uzukwu presents African perspectives of ritual and symbol, advocating for an informed cultural analysis and understanding of the essential dissonance between Black and Western styles of worship.

Diana Hayes uses the example of language to affirm the point that symbols are ambiguous and carry diverse connotations in different cultural contexts: "the terms *man, Lord, and brothers* are for many, male and female alike, jarring and exclusive, while for others they present no particular challenge. For some, spontaneous bursts of "amen" and alleluia can be disruptive as well but for others they are simply added affirmations of their own prayer and celebration."³⁹ Hayes, in *Standing in the Shoes My Mother Made*, takes a comprehensive

³⁷Ibid., 125.

³⁸Elochukwu E. Uzukwu, *Worship as Body Language, Introduction to Christian Worship: An African Orientation* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press), 14.

³⁹Diana Hayes, *Standing in the Shoes My Mother Made* (New York: Fortress Press, 2011), 37.

approach in her theologizing that connects the assembly's conscious participation in Sunday worship with everyday commitment to Christian discipleship that includes community building and social justice.

The small sampling of Black Catholic theological voices included here represents many - past and present - who despite cultural incongruities and challenges to its authentic celebration, affirm the centrality of the Roman Catholic Eucharist in their own lives, professions and ministries. They make us see the importance of cultural self-understandings that gives meaning to the people's participation in liturgical celebration and community life. Their perceptions of dissonance between the teachings of the church and its practices that presents in many instances as anti-blackness are familiar. From that initial BCTS meeting until today, there is a developing, robust corps of self-identified Black Catholic scholar-activists who speak to the central role of Black people in the life of the church and promote, at least in principle, the people's engagement in liturgical celebration that is existentially relevant to Black Catholics and in communion with Mother Church. Like Jeanmarie and Rivers, they step up and out in interesting and diverse voices to prophetically challenge the Church on its culture of white supremacy. The insights of contemporary Black theologians regarding worship recall the activism of the historic Black Church that encouraged the people of God's active and holistic involvement in the liberation of Black people. Black Catholic scholars are further supported by carefully-styled documents promulgated by the Catholic hierarchy that confess Jesus as Lord, spell out the rights and responsibilities of the people of God, affirm the importance of culture and the diversity of God's creation, and profess the authority of the Word and Eucharist. Yet, at the root of the ongoing dialogue between Black Catholic leaders and their Church, however remains the question: can a church that does not value Black life, respect Black worship? Alongside that dilemma, contemporary believers must discern what it means and what it costs to be a contemporary Black Church committed to the liberation of Black life through "full, conscious and active participation" in Sunday worship and weekday missionary discipleship.

Theological Implications for Full, Conscious and Active Participation

The Black Church is not the dominant powerhouse for social justice and liberation, the political ally, leader and defender of the people that it was in the 18th through the early twentieth centuries. However, in Christ, its potential legacy demands to be fulfilled today given the

vulnerabilities of Black life and the heresies of white supremacy, sexism, homophobia and the like.

Full members of the Body of Christ, Black Catholics are as responsible as any others to engage wholeheartedly, energetically and practically in the vocation of missionary discipleship spelled out by Pope Francis, for the salvation of Black people and the community at large. In Sunday worship, Catholics of every cultural heritage enjoy access to the true Christian spirit that sanctifies humanity and glorifies God. Black Catholic faith communities must marshal those extraordinary resources of faith, culture and scholarship that helped to address past abuses of power in Church and society, for they continue to present clear and present danger to Black life.

Theologian M. Shawn Copeland, a participant in the 1978 BCTS meeting, fervently describes the particular enterprise of Black Theology and the social situations out of which it emerged:

The term *black theology* irrupted in the United States in the mid-1960s, during the waning days of the Civil Rights Movement, to account for black people's social ferment, spiritual urgency, and unyielding gritty 350-year-old struggle to win and realize their freedom, to create for themselves before God a future full of hope. Its life-world was not some aloof armchair musing, but the social and psychic rage of black people enduring nearly a century of legal and customary segregation and discrimination. Black theology proposed a critical reading of the U.S. religious, cultural, and social condition in light of God's revelation in the life and ministry, passion and death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. . . It directly linked the struggle of black people for freedom and liberation to the message of the gospel. From its inception, black theology manifested a concern for the welfare of the whole person; thus it went beyond conventional Western dualisms of soul and body, spirit and matter, reason and emotion, sacred and profane. Even as black theology explicitly focused on historical and social liberation, it did not deprecate the necessity and importance of the Christian demand for holiness of life, for spiritual health. It underscored the continuity between the essential freedom of human persons as such, and the effective or social freedom that makes fully human living possible. At the same

time, black theology grasped the universal aspect of the gospel in meeting the creative tension between the particular and universal. Indeed, black theology carries within it the seed of universal concern that extends most particularly to all marginalized and oppressed persons and that advocates for the liberation of all – oppressed as well as the oppressor.⁴⁰

The historical energy of the Black church and the ethical muscle of Black theology are powerful arms in the challenge to link in the lives of the faithful their Sunday worship with their weekday Christian duty to build the reign of God here and now, to animate Black Catholic evangelization for present and future generations, and to help deal with the evils of racial bias, internalized racism and black inferiority that have a stronghold on Church and society. The vocation of the Black theologian demands their full, conscious and active participation in these blessed endeavors, working on behalf of and in conjunction with the entire community.

In the course of this work, many imperatives emerged relevant to the spiritual health of Black Catholics, related to authentic liturgy, missionary discipleship, anti-blackness, and the passivity of God's people in the related works of worship and social justice. Listening to the concerns of liturgical innovators Rivers and Jeanmarie, the Church fathers, and contemporary scholar-activists raises a multitude of thought-provoking issues pertinent to the vocation of Black Catholic theologians. The historical voices in this paper provide balance, with their advantage of perspective. They have accentuated the power of Black self-determination over time, that more often than not, inspires the faithful to respond creatively to the survival needs of the people.

A recent Facebook post by Juanita Blackshear, an African American Catholic woman, interrupted these reflections on the participation of God's beloved Black people, Sunday Eucharist and associated theological considerations. Blackshear raises a concern of the highest priority to which it seems Black Catholic theologians and the Black Church should attend:

⁴⁰M. Shawn Copeland, "Method in Emerging Black Catholic Theology," in *Taking Down Our Harps: Black Catholics in the United States* ed. Diana L. Hayes and Cyprian Davis (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1998), 123-4.

We have some serious work to do. I have students who do not want to claim their ties to the Motherland, Africa. 'I'm not African,' is what they said to me, today. Here we are in the 21st century and some of my students are still ashamed to embrace our blackness. They shared that when they see Africans in the news or other media all they see are dirty people, with flies on their eyes and 'fat' tummies. I gave a brief history lesson regarding our greatness, our riches, spirituality and how the world could not function without Africa. Left the classroom feeling I had failed. So, next school year I am going to make it a standard to do better for our children. So sad, so sad.⁴¹

Black Catholic Consciousness-Building and Youth Formation

Fr. Al McKnight, in his 1978 BCTS paper, identifies three components that characterize authentically black life: black skin, black culture and black consciousness. The latter he explains as self-awareness through an identification with and emotional commitment to Africa as the motherland.⁴²

Mass media distortion of Black life thrives in U.S. culture and the opposition forces that promote balanced perspectives face powerful competition, fed by money, fear and bias. The generalized consumption of anti-Black ideas and impressions contributes to a collective black consciousness and negative self-imagery that presents in the physical, mental, spiritual and social unwellness of God's people. Black children, the parents and grandparents who raise them, suffer together from internalized racism and a self-imposed anti-Blackness that blinds them to the historic victories and defeats of the Black struggle in the Americas and the many ways that African Americans have contributed and continue to subsidize the growth of the nation and the development of the Catholic Church. Blackshear's students, young people shaped by U.S. culture, have come to understand Blackness as a deficit and curse. They reject her invitation to engage with their own history and cultural

⁴¹Juanita Blackshear, Facebook message, June 1, 2019.

⁴² Al McKnight, "A Black Christian Perspective of Spirituality" in *Theology: A Portrait in Black: Proceedings of the Black Catholic Theological Symposium*, ed. Thaddeus, J. Posey (Pittsburgh: The Capuchin Press, 1980 Vol. 1), 108. Nearly every Symposium paper in the *Proceedings* addressed the need to attend to Black culture and Black consciousness. BCTS Moses Anderson and Jamie T. Phelps also treat the topic of Black Self-Concept in their proceedings papers.

heritage as God's beloved. Their mis-information is fed them by society's trusted, traditional educational systems (including those of the Church).

Blackshear's distress signal vividly suggests that Blacks who know better but avoid engaging in the warfare may be complicit in the systematic discounting of Black personhood - the continued loss of young Black life. To be sure, without the present and promised grace of God naturally embodied in Black youth, the Black Church will fall short in its mission to engage the people of God in authentic worship that energizes them to practice missionary Christian discipleship, where it is most needed - attending to the vital need of young people to be authentically Black.

As a pastoral theologian, Blackshear's commitment to do more to foster a Black consciousness in her students should encourage Black Catholic theologians to consider, for the sake of the community, and in the name of their darling nieces and nephews, precious daughters and sons, students and beloved junior church members, to more intentionally share the hard-won fruits of their academic careers and ministries with Black children, the parents and grandparents who raise them. Tell the stories of Black ancestors, recite for them Black wisdom in poetry, prose and proverbs, introduce Black achievements, and teach the faith in ways that young hearts can grasp. Incorporate Black art and illustration to further inform and engage spiritual imaginations. Help develop Black-themed books, games and periodicals, webpages that help children pray soulfully, think critically, reflect ethically, grow spiritually - an appropriate intervention in a U.S. time and culture that has grown increasingly secular and anti-Black in terms of its policies and systems. Teach cultural awareness and appreciation through community celebrations and rituals: Kwanzaa, Black history month, Black Greek life, rites of passage and family reunions. Communicate the Good News to young black people and their families in Sunday preaching, revival reflections, and retreat messages that promote strong, well-balanced, and self-conscious black life. Weave into public addresses and graduation speeches, the gift of black values, history, ideas and experiences.

Black scholars, by virtue of their vocation, are elders of the community. To do good by their people, they must do their own spiritual work of black consciousness-building in the theological truth that Blackness is a blessed and particular gift of God to be shared with the world. The communal nature of Black culture requires that Black

academics work in the midst of the community, engaging a variety of voices, thoughts and approaches. Engaged as they are in various roles in the church and vocations in the academy and society at-large, Black theologians and pastoral ministers should be in the forefront of efforts to build in the Catholic community respect for Black worship, which historically has been the source and summit of Black Christian life. Not promoting a particular liturgical style over another but advocating for effective liturgical catechesis, ritual studies, and ministry formation in seminaries, dioceses and parishes.

Juanita Blackshear's Facebook post is a sobering slap in the face, supported by liturgists Rivers and Jeanmarie, to the reality that "full, conscious and active participation" of the Assembly at Sunday Eucharist and in the context of Black life today, depends on Black Catholic leaders building up black consciousness, giving voice to the intergenerational demands of Black life as it relates to the Catholic Church, an institution that consistently exhibits anti-Black attitudes and practices.

Despite the Church's shortcomings, Black Catholics have faithfully attended Sunday Mass and involved themselves in parish life even as they struggle against the apparent racism of the Catholic community. What is needed is more than mere attendance at Mass but an engagement that emboldens worshippers to carry out the true mission of Christ and his Church. Black Catholic theologians are exceptionally well-positioned to steer the people on a right course. Renewed engagements with Vatican Council II teachings - its radical emphasis on social justice and "full, conscious and active" liturgical participation, the Civil Rights movement and its biblically-based mandate for equality and justice, and Black Theology's powerful critique of U.S. culture in light of the gospel values, will lay on the minds and hearts of Black theologians new understandings of how Black Catholic power through the Assembly can change the world and the church.

The intervention of a Facebook appeal, however demonstrates that a holistic engagement by Black worshippers in Sunday worship and weekday missionary discipleship will need the wholehearted commitment of Black Catholic theologians to work in conjunction with other scholars to build up cultural infrastructures that will call Black believers of every generation to "full, conscious and active participation" in authentic Sunday Eucharistic celebrations and missionary discipleship as the body of the Black Christ in the world.

"We have some serious work to do."

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