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## Thirty Years of Impact: The Institute for Black Catholic Studies

**C. Vanessa White**  
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This year marks the thirtieth anniversary of the Institute for Black Catholic Studies at Xavier University of Louisiana (1980-2010). As it states in its program literature, the Institute offers a holistic graduate theology program and certificate and enrichment programs that form students academically, theologically, socially, and spiritually for effective Catholic ministry in the Black community and in the Church at large. As Dr. Kathleen Dorsey Bellow has noted, the Institute has graduated 68 men and women with master's degrees in theology and countless more men and women have participated in its continuing education programs.

While in New Orleans in 1987, Pope John Paul II encouraged Black Catholics to share their gifts of Blackness. He specifically called on Black Catholics "to give priority to the great task of evangelization, to be missionaries of Christ's love and truth with your own black community."<sup>1</sup> Black Catholics have taken up this mission the ongoing presence, work and impact of the Institute for Black Catholics Studies.

Thus far ten graduates of the master's of theology program of the Institute for Black Catholic Studies have continued their formal theological education and have received doctorates in theology or ministry.<sup>2</sup> Many graduates and alumni of the Institute are now

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<sup>1</sup> Pope John Paul II in "The Papal Visit," 17 September 1987, *New York Times* online. <http://www.nytimes.com/1987/09/13/us/the-papal-visit-address-to-the-pope-by-a-black-bishop-and-john-paul-s-reply.html?pagewanted+2> (Accessed 12 September 2010).

<sup>2</sup> The Ph.D. graduates include Sister Addie Lorraine Walker, SSND, Father Roy Lee, LaReinë-Marie Mosely, and Father Donald Chambers. Graduates having earned the Doctorate in Ministry include Kathleen Dorsey Bellow, Sister Eva Lumas, SSS, Sr. Eva Regina Martin, S.S.F., Father Maurice Nutt, C.S.S.R., Father Freddy Washington, C.S.Sp., and Sister Oralisa Martin.

professors at seminaries and colleges throughout the United States.<sup>3</sup> They have also contributed to ongoing theological conversations by publishing books and articles in respected journals and by serving on a variety of editorial boards.<sup>4</sup> Institute scholars have presented papers at theological and historical society meetings around the country.<sup>5</sup>

The Institute was the birthplace for programs that have had a tremendous impact on the Black Catholic community. The Archbishop James Patterson Lyke Conference had its beginnings in the graduate research done by Fr. Ferdinand Cheri, O.F.M. on liturgy and music at the Institute for Black Catholic Studies. Similarly, Sr. Dr. Oralisa Martin developed the ORACLE Summer

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<sup>3</sup> Dr. LaReine-Marie Mosely teaches at Loyola University in Chicago, Sr. Dr. Eva Marie Lumas, SSS teaches at the Franciscan School of Theology in Berkley, Fr. Dr. Maurice Nutt, CSSR teaches for Hampton University in Virginia, Dr. C. Vanessa White teaches at the Catholic Theological Union in Chicago, Fr. Dr. Roy Lee teaches for St. Leo University in Atlanta, Georgia, Fr. Derran Combs, OFM teaches at the University of St. Francis in Joliet, Illinois, and Sr. Dr. Shawnee Daniels Sykes, SSND teaches at Mt. Mary College in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Several graduates and alumni have also returned to teach at the Institute for Black Catholic Studies in the master's degree program and in the certificate and enrichment programs.

<sup>4</sup> Cecilia A. Moore and Eva Lumas, SSS (*U.S. Catholic Historian*), Shawnee Daniels Sykes, SSND, Eva Lumas, SSS, C. Vanessa White, Maurice Nutt, CSSR (*New Theology Review*), Shawnee Daniels Sykes, SSND (*Health Progress*). Graduates and alumni also serve on publication editorial boards. Shawnee Daniels Sykes, SSND serves on the Institute for Catholic Bioethics at St. Joseph's University in Philadelphia and C. Vanessa White serves on the *New Theology Review*. LaReine-Marie Mosely co-edited *Uncommon Faithfulness: The Black Catholic Experience* with M. Shawn Copeland and Albert J. Raboteau, Maurice Nutt, CSSR edited *Sr. Thea: In Her Own Words*, C. Vanessa White, Cecilia A. Moore and Paul M. Marshall, S.M. co-edited *Songs of Our Hearts and Meditations of Our Souls: Prayers for Black Catholics*, and Father Ferdinand Cheri, O.F.M. and Marcia A. Berry contributed to the forthcoming *New African American Catholic Hymnal* to be published by GIA.

<sup>5</sup> Examples of such presentations include: LaReine-Marie Mosely, Shawnee Daniels Sykes, SSND, C. Vanessa White (Catholic Theological Society of America), LaReine-Marie Mosely (Society for the Study of Black Religion), Kathleen Dorsey Bellow, Shawnee Daniels Sykes, SSND, C. Vanessa White, Fr. Roy Lee (Black Catholic Theological Symposium) and Orita B. Edwards (Seventh Triennial Conference on the History of Women Religious at the University of Notre Dame).

Institute for Youth. Sr. Thea Bowman's influence can be seen in the workshops, seminars, and courses offered by many Institute graduates, but most notably in those offered by Fr. Dr. Maurice Nutt, CSSR in preaching.

In 1980, when the Institute for Black Catholic Studies began, there were few African American lay ministerial leaders in decision making roles in dioceses throughout the nation. Today Institute graduates, current students, and alumni are directors of religious education, pastoral associates, principals and teachers in Catholic schools, directors of pastoral offices, retreat and conference facilitators, workshop presenters, spiritual directors, and social justice ministers. Most recently members of the Institute for Black Catholic Studies faculty have been invited to participate in the 2011 National Symposium on Lay Ecclesial Ministry.<sup>6</sup>

In the thirty years since its formation, the Institute for Black Catholic Studies continues to break ground as the only program of its kind that teaches from a distinctly Black Catholic perspective. Its impact is seen in the lives and ministries of its students, faculty, and staff. It is with profound gratitude that we acknowledge the vision and sacrifices of the early founders of the Institute, Fr. Augustus Taylor, Fr. Dr. Thaddeus Posey, O.F.M., Cap., Fr. David Benz, Dr. Toinette Eugene, Fr. Dr. Joseph Nearon, SSS, Bishop Terry Steib, S.V.D., Sr. Dr. Francesca Thompson, O.S.F. and Sr. Dr. Jamie T. Phelps, O.P. As the Institute for Black Catholic Studies enters its thirty-first year, may its members continue to be open to the Holy Spirit.

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<sup>6</sup> C. Vanessa White and timone davis.

