

Catholicism Demands That “Black Lives Matter!”

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White People 4 Black Lives**

Abstract

The historical role that the Catholic Church has played in oppressing many different groups is clear: for example, the oppression of women, children, LGBTQ people, and people of Color. Equally clear is the choice many churches and congregants make today to remain silent and inert when it comes to prioritizing the dignity of all marginalized populations, even those sitting beside them in the pews. Specifically, the White, Catholic community of faith is significantly absent in the work to challenge institutions that oppose the liberation of Black communities. However, this reality is inconsistent with the most faithful demands of Catholic scripture and tradition. From the Old Testament to Jesus of Nazareth and his apostles to Pope Francis, one core principle of Catholicism is the priority God places on the lives and dignity of the most oppressed. By exploring the compendium of Catholicism, White Catholics can find an appropriate framework for considering how to engage the work for racial justice. Additionally, those of White identity have a unique responsibility to explore the realities of their racial identity. By taking intentional action and heeding the call that so many others before them have taken up, they can find that it is very much in the lexicon of God to loudly proclaim the Gospel truth, “Black lives matter!” This is a personal self-reflection, and I envision the primary audience for this article to be privileged White Catholics who impose their social and political beliefs about the Black Lives Matter movement on their faith. The aim is to provide pushback to those who would argue that this social movement, along with others, is contrary to the Catholic faith and hopefully serve as a call to embolden them to action.

Note: UDP is a platform for voices to be heard. Therefore, this is a personal, self-reflection article for a specific population, and is not a reflection of the beliefs of UDP.

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After being activated in college, author Matt Harper got heavily involved with multicultural work on campus. Following graduation, he moved to Belize where he coordinated the rehabilitation programs in the youth facility of a Central American prison before returning home to Los Angeles to teach middle school students. Since returning home, he has been active in the Alliance of White Anti-Racists Everywhere-LA and, most recently, with White People for Black Lives (the local Showing Up for Racial Justice chapter). His activism and organizing has led him to join the Los Angeles Catholic Worker community, which both operates a soup kitchen on Skid Row and actively challenges state violence and oppression.

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I have spent the last few years exploring the social locations I occupy in the class, race, and sex-gender structures and the implications of those identities on my lived experience. A combination of genetics, personal decisions, socializations, cultural factors, circumstances, ideologies, convictions, and experiences have led me to occupy and thus benefit significantly from my place as an upper-class, White, heterosexual male. As industries travel overseas and unemployment and underemployment affects all people (including college graduates), the followers of Trump and Sanders can testify that some of the power in some of these positions is eroding. And yet, I still benefit from systems of privilege that those holding different identities do not receive.

While the privileges of these identities are sometimes hard to separate out, two of the identities that occupy much of my thinking these days are my racial and religious identities. Realistically, my affiliation with the Roman Catholic Church is more from inherited culture than from a deep conviction of its dogma and theology, more from a recognition of the constantly radical Gospels and occasionally radical tradition than from the institutional bureaucracy and hierarchy, and yet I choose to remain there. And though my spirituality is far more complex than I can explore here, I believe in a God of liberation who speaks truth to power (Luke 6:24, NIV), who overturns the money lenders’ tables (John 2:15, NIV), who demands a radical dismantling of everything divisive (Galatians 3:28, NIV), who stands against all oppressive systems and who stands with

those crushed by the cogs of powerful institutions (Matthew 23:2-4, NIV). I believe this is the foundation of my faith, practiced (albeit imperfectly) by my spiritual ancestors, and it is the one I willingly pursue and own today.

I remember participating in my first protest where the phrase “Black lives matter!” was chanted. It was the night a grand jury decided there was no need to indict Darren Wilson, a White police officer, for the killing of Michael Brown, a Black man. As I marched that evening, I found myself thinking about the White faith communities I had grown up in. I reflected on the many conversations and experiences I had in these spaces. I knew the reactions many wealthy, White families were having towards the movement and this national conversation because I had been there once myself. My culture had convinced me of the innocence and integrity of law enforcement institutions and encouraged me to presume the guilt of communities of Color and the poor, even before considering any situational specifics. As I got older, I did not consider questioning the brutality and violence committed by police on Black communities because to question the integrity of public institutions was to challenge the very system itself (and that would be too disruptive to my worldview and the implications too daunting). I aimed for “colorblindness”—as if it was even really possible or desired—from the security of my homogeneous community. I pointed to a handful of multiracial relationships as my justification that I was not also a culprit in this system of racism, even though I never really had honest conversations with those friends about the differences in our individually lived experiences, let alone how race affected the dynamics of our own

shared friendships. However, a series of events led me to a more honest and critical understanding of human dynamics, where I began listening and educating myself in a deeper way. As I marched that night I found myself wondering why this community of mine had not also grown out of these misinformed notions and how we had come to such different places with the same Gospels and the same God.

Despite what the last paragraph might suggest, I try my best not to presume that I can speak for anyone or anything but myself. I also recognize that much of this analysis is born of my personal interpretation of scripture, my lived experiences and the stories of those I care about whose experiences bear no resemblance to mine. White men have suggested that we have spoken infallibly for God for too long, and so I aim not to speak with certitude but with a grace born of reflection, dialogue, and prayer. Nevertheless, we can only speak the truths we've found as best we see them. Hopefully that image and likeness of God that Genesis reminds me I was born with is respected here as I search for thoughtful interpretation of stories, parables, and text. And so I began to wonder, "What would God say to this national movement and to people of Catholic or even Christian faith?" Is there a parallel between my God and this phrase, "Black lives matter?" And if there is a parallel, how can so many be so opposed to the Black Lives Matter movement? And for those who aren't opposed, why are so many White Catholics so absent from the struggle for Black liberation? And so I began to explore where my own faith tradition fits into the work being done to value Black lives on a systemic level.

It is impossible to ignore the violently oppressive and repressive history

of the institutional Catholic Church. It has perpetrated some of the worst acts in history. A series of papal-led Inquisitions permitted torture and brutal violence to suppress any "heresy" of the Catholic faith. A series of Crusades brought military violence against Islam, against heresy, and even in an effort to increase political and territorial advantage. Papal bulls (a charter issued by the Pope) sanctioned slavery and many Catholics (including Jesuit priests) made money on the ownership and sale of slaves. The mission system in California enslaved millions of Native Americans in an effort to spread colonization, sustain Catholic communities, and convert the indigenous peoples. The Native American boarding schools that followed aimed to strip indigenous children of their culture, language, and history. The prioritization of wealth and the collusion with power has, at moments and in specific situations, stripped the Catholic Church of its values and, in many ways, its credibility.

Given this history of oppression, one might logically question how anyone might believe that the Catholic Church could possibly demand that Black lives matter. But the scripture and tradition of Catholicism are unfathomably deep. While there is much for the Church to atone for (socially, spiritually, and financially), there is also much of value to be reclaimed, much that has been forgotten, lost, and even stolen. This in no way washes away or covers up the Church's racist, sexist, classist, and heterosexist actions, but it offers an alternative, a quieter portion that deserves to be uplifted and celebrated.

Jews, Christians, and Muslims can begin to trace God's preference for the liberation of the oppressed to Exodus, where the Israelites were in captivity in Egypt. It is an interesting coincidence that the Israelites

of Exodus were in slavery, given that we have our own legacy of slavery with which we have refused to come to terms in the United States. My ancestors in the Abrahamic faiths knew the pains of the system's whip, ensnared in a system seeking to exploit and devalue their lives, enforced by an empire committed to maintaining the status quo. And yet, despite this past, their Christian descendants perpetuated the same system in the United States a few thousand years later. It is disgusting what the quest for power, wealth, and security can do.

As mentioned, Pharaoh was on a quest for power and this led him to create a plan for his empire that necessitated oppressing the Israelites (Exodus 1:10, NIV). His shrewd system manifested itself in two different ways. First, an overseer police system was designed and implemented to ensure the subjugation of the Israelite slaves (Exodus 1:11, NIV). Second, more than just implementing a means of maintaining the oppression of the slaves, Pharaoh targeted and selected these people for death. "When you are helping the Hebrew women during childbirth on the delivery stool," he told the midwives, "if you see that the baby is a boy, kill him ..." (Exodus 1:16, NIV).

Has not the same system of "shrewdness" found its way, intentionally or incidentally, into our institutions in the United States? Not only are some lives valued far above others, but we have also granted permission and justification for the untempered force of police. Even though officers are complicit in different ways, the institution itself remains constant. Like Pharaoh's overseer police, "Samuel Walker identified slave patrols as the first publically funded police agencies in the American South. Slave patrols ... were created with the specific intent of maintaining control

over slave populations," wrote Carol Archbold in her text *Policing* (2013, p. 4). And though our society claims we shun the judicial and extrajudicial killing of people, many historical examples exist of willingly and dishonestly compromising the health of people of Color (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2016; Cimon, 1996), forced sterilization of incarcerated women of Color (Ko, 2016), and the unfettered pollution of low-income communities (Badger, 2014). Systemic racism is also well documented through a judicial system that removes Black populations from society—physically, geographically, politically, economically, etc.—through race-targeted policies and practices (Alexander, 2011). One has to wonder if Catholics recognize the irony of the systems into which they have chosen to put unquestioned faith: It was, in fact, an empire just like ours that executed their savior.

And so those Egyptians in power commissioned themselves to do what was needed to maintain order and control in the society. But it is important to acknowledge the nuance here as well: "The midwives, however, feared God and did not do what the king of Egypt had told them to do; they let the boys live" (Exodus 1:17, NIV). And in our contemporary society there are examples of individual officers challenging institutions that permit and encourage racist practices (Townes, 2015; Wallace, 2016). But when an institution's fabric is interwoven with a tolerance for and perpetuation of racist policies and decisions, it is easy for those within the institution to participate themselves in bigoted thoughts and discriminatory practices. Because these fall into the larger reality of systematic racism—much different from individual acts of prejudice by those without systemic power—their effects of collective bigotry are magnified. And just as lethal as these

inevitable thoughts and practices are the complacency and silence from those officers who genuinely desire justice. Just as many Catholics and early U.S. Christians have gotten sick from the toxic waters of power, wealth, racism, classism, and sexism, so too have officers. So too do we all absorb, internalize, and manifest the pathogens of hate spewed from our polluted systems. I am constantly combating a lifetime of socialization by institutions that encourage and perpetuate these various “isms.” I will be healing for the rest of my life from this diseased society. I will continue to make mistakes. Our often weak efforts to mend this human world seldom bring lasting change and frequently fall short of the kingdom that God asks those of the Catholic faith to create. The road to “hell” is not necessarily paved with good intentions, but neither is the road to paradise.

And then came Moses, a man raised in the privileges of power but whose identity connected him deeply to the Israelite slaves. And though the empire surely demanded his complicity with all types of dehumanization, there remained in him the ember of God’s spirit, enough compassion in his heart so that when “he saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his own people ... he killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand” (Exodus 2:11-12, NIV). Although I do not advocate for violence, my belief in God’s compassion forces me to acknowledge the complexity of the situations that lead to violence. And so Moses dared challenge the legal system that enforced such oppressive laws. And the system came down on him: “When Pharaoh heard of this, he tried to kill Moses, but Moses fled from Pharaoh ...” (Exodus 1:15, NIV). Moses was not permitted to question the empire’s methods of enforcing its rules, no matter the nature of those policies, and for his grave crime he was sought out for execution.

At this point, God had not revealed God’s self to Moses and God could have left it this way. God, echoing many in power today, could have prioritized the Egyptian economy over the Israelites’ lives. God could have demanded that the people wait until the “highly developed” Egyptian political system inched its way towards their collective liberation, as if total liberation is really the highest goal of our economic systems, our political systems, and those in power. God, like modern media, could have justified the actions of the Egyptians, choosing instead to blame the Israelites for whatever they might have done to “deserve” their enslavement. God could have killed Moses—as stories in the Old Testament suggest about God—in retribution for taking the life of another, or God could have left him alone in Midian as a sign of God’s mercy. But, when I consider the Bible in its totality, this does not reflect its continual demand for peace and love. Though occasional passages from the Bible reveal a violent and vengeful side of God—passages worthy of serious reflection, analysis, and prayer—my perception is that God makes it clear that God is not ultimately interested in maintaining the status quo of state violence. God is not interested in blaming victims or demanding a political system to resolve problems. The Israelites’ lives mattered too much. God sought out and found Moses, as God has a tendency of doing, and said, “And now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt” (Exodus 3:10, NIV). Ashamed of his speech impediment and afraid of the responsibility God was asking him to assume, Moses begged and pleaded for God to find someone else (Exodus 3:11, NIV), but this did not change God’s role for him. Moses was chosen to be a prophetic witness to Pharaoh.

I believe God's response was not to create justice in the way people expect God to do—through omnipotence. Rather, it was the exact opposite: God hardened Pharaoh's heart to the cries of the Israelites (Exodus 9:12, NIV). God did not do this because oppression is part of God's work and plan, but rather, it seems to me, because God chooses not to value a social liberation that is simply given. My God asks those of the Catholic faith to claim our power, our free will, and our agency to be co-creators of our world. God chose to demand that the Israelites claim their liberation for themselves, together. God's work could not have been done without the collective organizing and concrete resistance of Moses and the people (M. Hobgood, personal communication, June 2, 2016). God is dependent on us for God's work to be done. As Theresa of Avila so aptly articulated, "Christ has no body now but yours. No hands, no feet on earth but yours. Yours are the eyes through which he looks compassion on this world..." (Catholic Online, 2016). Oh, the delight God must have enjoyed as the Israelites' claimed their liberation.

And the Catholic tradition continued, through the life of Jesus, to proclaim and prioritize those marginalized by institutional power. Jesus announced his ministry, establishing his mission in clear terms: "The spirit of the Lord is upon me, for he has anointed me to bring good news to the afflicted. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives ... to let the oppressed go free ..." (Luke 4:18-19, NIV). His vision of the "Kingdom of God" was one where all are restored to their rightful place, liberated from the oppression placed on them by human hands (Matthew 5:10, NIV; France, 1986). Jesus's interactions with the Syrophenician and Samaritan women further revealed that foreigners and "outsiders" were not outside the realm of his

mercy, love, and prioritization, and thus were equally worthy of liberation (Mark 7:24-30, NIV). But more than just lifting up those whose value had been ignored, Jesus plainly warned those in power: "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness" (Matthew 23:23, NIV). His admonishment of those in power affirms his recognition of the value of those put down in society. And this tradition continued with the earliest Church. The first disciples recognized that Christ had come to earth to "liberate us from this present wicked world" (Galatians 1:4, NIV). Paul, who had made it his earlier work to achieve "the total destruction of the Church ..." (Acts 8:2, NIV), was so moved by the liberating power of God's love that he sent a slave, Onesimus, back to his owner Philemon with the call that he be liberated from his enslavement and honored as a dear brother (Philemon 1:16, NIV). The lives of those who are socially outcast and oppressed are to be treated equally, to be raised and to be restored to full relation with all.

And though the institutionalization of Christianity in 313 c.e. by Constantine, and the choices by some in power, have led to many very serious, seemingly unforgivable, periods and decisions in the Church's history, the tradition holds aspects and people worth reclaiming. Though many of these human beings were likely still guilty of perpetuating other culturally learned oppressions, their liberation work is worthy of recognition. All institutions that play with the powers that be inevitably fall victim to the same tendencies. But, in its truest moments, parts of the Church and some of its members have carried a message of liberation.

St. Peter Claver (1580–1654) became a Spanish Jesuit in 1604. He was then sent to Spain’s New World colony of New Granada (Columbia) in 1610. Though he was sent to convert the indigenous people, his values and work changed after witnessing the horrors of the slave trade. He capitalized on his racial and clerical privileges, working tirelessly to meet the many physical needs of those arriving by slave ships. More than simply concerning himself with the physical needs of these people, though, he worked for the abolition of the slave trade in his country’s colony because he recognized slavery is incompatible with Catholicism.

John LaFarge (1835–1910) was born into a distinguished, White, New England family before becoming a priest. A series of life events led him to recognize the deep oppression that Black communities faced in American society as well as in the Catholic Church. He began to strive to awaken the conscience of America, leading Pope Pius XI to ask him to draft an encyclical on racism in 1938. Though it was shelved after Pope Pius XI’s death, *Humani generis unitas* spoke about the moral repugnancy of racism. He described it as a “sin and heresy,” exposing the hypocrisy of American democracy and the Church’s failure to address this abomination.

In addition to *Humani generis unitas*, other Church documents similarly address the sin of racism. Pope Benedict XVI acknowledged in *Caritas In Veritate* (2009) that for those who care about justice, it is mandatory to desire the common good and to strive towards it. Justice is, in fact, due to all people on the basis of their being alive. In talking about solidarity, the United States Catholic Conference of Bishops (USCCB, 2015) reaffirmed that “[w]e are one human family, whatever our national, racial, ethnic,

economic, and ideological differences. We are our brothers’ and sisters’ keepers, wherever they may be. Loving our neighbor has global dimensions and requires us to eradicate racism and address the extreme poverty and disease plaguing so much of the world” (Solidarity section, para. 1). This was nothing new, though. It was a reaffirmation of their 1979 letter *Brothers and Sisters to Us*, where they declared that racism is a fact, an evil that endures in our society and in our Church, and more than simply mocking the words of Jesus, “racism is a denial of the dignity of each human being revealed by the mystery of the Incarnation.” The roots of these concepts, found in Catholic Social Teaching (USCCB, 2011), connect back to the prophets of the Old Testament (Colecchi, 2017) and continue today. Liberation Theology reminds us that “Christian ethics is meaningless apart from God’s election of the oppressed for freedom in this world. Indeed, apart from divine liberation, there would be no community and thus no Christian ethics” (Cone, 1997, p.189).

And so the conclusion I draw in regard to the earlier question of what my God would say to or about the national Black Lives Matter movement is this: Regardless of God’s methods, even though God hardened Pharaoh’s heart, God hears the cry of the poor (Psalm 34, NIV). “The LORD [God] said, ‘I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned with their suffering’” (Exodus 3:7, NIV). God listens to the cry of the poor. However, this listening is not passive. God chose to speak to Moses, to reveal God’s self to Moses because God prioritizes the cry of the poor. In the same way, Black lives matter. Black lives are prioritized because of the

marginalized place they hold in our systems and larger culture.

Now, let's be clear: All lives surely do matter, for my God is a God of all people; but God is no fool to oppression, power, and societal indifference. God's love for all life is not so removed and impersonal that God ignores the specifics of people's lives. God chose Moses, a person who had killed an officer of the state, to lead the enslaved Israelites to claim their freedom. God's compassion recognized the crushing nature of systemic power and the incalculable pains of oppression forced upon the Israelites. God saw these things and told Moses that the lives of the Israelites mattered. God did not remind Pharaoh that the Egyptians' lives mattered, though they surely do. God recognized the difference in their lived realities. How, then, can we not also hear our God professing with equal vigor, "Black lives matter"?

I believe all present-day Catholics who desire to remain faithful to the tradition must take these words seriously. For our God assures us, "Whoever shuts their ears to the cry of the poor will also cry out and not be answered" (Proverbs 21:13, NIV). I believe the God of my biological and spiritual ancestors stands on the side of the poor and oppressed today as in biblical times, and this God calls each of us to do so as well. When it comes to oppression and victimization by the criminal justice system, by those commissioned to maintain public safety and protect all citizens, the data over the last 400 years shows that it is people in Black communities who have suffered the most and who continue to suffer the most in the United States (Alexander, 2011; Kindy, Fisher, Tate, & Jenkins, 2015; Sentencing Project, 2013; Sinyangwe, Elize, McKesson, & Packnett, 2016). The more I engage in the deep concepts of the Bible, the more I hear

God demand, "Black lives matter." The way Black communities have been treated is an institutional sin that is also a part of our collective social sin. It is one of our society's deepest wounds today and it is the responsibility of all of us to right the historical and present-day wrongs.

However, in a moment of honesty I find myself wondering, is this just confirmation bias, looking through scripture for text that justifies the position I already held? As my editor reflected, "Given the multitude of interpretations (virtually all of them by men) claiming to know what God's intentions are, how could it not be?" Many people have used the Bible to justify their actions and their inactions, their violence and their nonviolence. When contemplating the words of the Bible, there is context to consider, challenges with translation that occur, the implications of human authorship, my own ego, and much more. But when we honestly read through the scriptures, it seems inarguable, and most Christian traditions admit, that our God is a God of liberation, mercy, and radical love. In the Bible, the most righteous people are seldom those who hold the power and even less those who wield it over the people like a club. As Jesus told the Pharisees, "The Sabbath was made for humans, not humans for the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27, NIV). And so when one honestly looks at the destruction being done to Black communities—the development of the school-to-prison pipeline, the hyper-criminalization of nonviolent offenses, the devaluation of Black contributions in history, the dehumanization of Black values and families—it becomes so clear the affirmation of God, "Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream" (Amos 5:24, NIV). *Black lives matter!*

As I have mentioned, it is the responsibility of all people to get involved, and some are doing incredible work for liberation. When Moses was sent out, he was given an assorted bag of tactics and methods to raise the issue with Pharaoh and these strategies dramatically affected the lives of all people in Egypt. God gave Moses the power to turn the Nile to blood and to bring about a series of plagues so that all Egyptians would see that life could not simply be continued in the same way it had been. God gave Moses the power and ability to inconvenience the Egyptians, to throw off their routines and upend their comforts and privileges, even though many Egyptians were not living in economic comfort (a similar reality today).

So, too, has the Black Lives Matter movement reclaimed and co-created a seemingly unconventional bag of tricks. People bemoan their tactics—shutting down freeways, disrupting holiday consumerism, confronting police commissions, and interrupting political candidates—and I have wrestled with my own questions about the “rightfulness” of certain tactics and methods. However, when I engage my thought processes critically, a few things stand out: First, White society criticizes Black communities both when some resort to violent tactics and also when some choose nonviolent tactics. Just as many White pastors criticized Martin Luther King, Jr. (1963), this hypocrisy and double standard puts pressure on Black communities to slow down their fight for the justice they deserve. Second, White society demands that Black communities use specific “appropriate” forums and methods for addressing their wrongs and criticizes anything that deviates from this “norm.” Whites do not understand that communities of Color do not have the same results with those tactics. Do Whites really believe that debate, petitions, and an

appeal for legislative change have not been tried over the hundreds of years of racial oppression? Do we not remember what happened to these communities when they tried this? Do Whites really believe that pursuing these avenues is all that is keeping discrimination from ending? It seems to me, that when communities of Color attempt to use the methods deemed “appropriate” by White society, they have made the slowest progress, if any. White communities must admit, then, that the methods that may work for communities of Color are not only different from what works for us (a huge privilege we must grapple with) but might also make us a little uncomfortable—and, in fact, *must* make us uncomfortable. We need to dismantle the litmus test we use to determine “appropriate methods” because, as Audre Lorde so aptly recognized, “... the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house” (1984, para. 10). Third, it seems to me that the real complaint about Black Lives Matters’ tactics is that it inconveniences White people and implicates them in systemic racism. It seems we have decided that the personal convenience and comfort of White people is more important than the serious injustice Black communities experience. And we seem to forget that, even though the privilege of our White identity does not inoculate us from every challenge, our Whiteness gives us unfathomable advantages in society. We are implicated in systemic racism both by our biases and actions, but also by unearned benefits stemming from our White privilege.

When I reflect on these things, it becomes clear to me how hardened my heart and the hearts of many others have become. Communities of Color have been sharing their truths patiently with White society for many decades, if not centuries. They have waited and worked hard despite the fact that justice delayed is justice denied. With great

integrity, patience, and love, Black Lives Matter actively refrains from perpetuating or encouraging violence—despite what political figures and mainstream media suggest—and chooses instead to try tactics to shake us from our slumber. Our society needs a spirituality of open eyes (Eggemeier, 2009) to see and address the many ways our hearts have been hardened.

“Black lives matter!” is God’s call to each of those whose faith is in Him, and though each must work to transform this system, some have greater responsibility. Despite the fact that I believe liberation must be claimed, I also believe that those benefitting from systemic oppression have the greatest responsibility to rise up and dismantle it. This is not just about the liberation of Black communities; our own lives and dignity are at stake. As James Cone (1997) wrote in *God of the Oppressed*, “Christians join the cause of the oppressed in the fight for justice not because of some philosophical principle of ‘the Good’ or because of a religious feeling of sympathy for people in prison. Sympathy does not change the structures of injustice ... Christians fight not for humanity in general but for themselves and out of their love for concrete human beings” (p. 135-36). We must claim our own liberation from this oppressive system. Additionally, it is White people who must bear the burden of tearing down the corrupt institutions Whites have created and from which they benefit, even if we believe it is not our fault that these institutions exist.

And so more work is needed and we—White Catholics—are far from finished. Even worse, we are often the obstacle and impediment to further progress. As Paul recited from Isaiah, “For the heart of this nation has grown coarse, their ears

are hard of hearing and they have shut their eyes, for fear they should see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their heart and be converted and be healed ...” (Acts 28:26-27, NIV). We must begin to believe the stories we are told. We must trust the credibility of people of Color to share their own stories with truth and insight. And when we hear conflicting stories from these communities, we must trust each to be equally true. We live in a complex world, but we do not know the truths of other people better than they know their own. And when we do begin to see, believe, and be moved, we must respond. Even though one might find him/herself like Moses, crying out to God, “Pardon your servant, Lord. Please send someone else” (Exodus 4:13, NIV), we have been called, just like Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi have been, to declare, “Black lives matter!” The example of these Black Lives Matter founders and many others (including the legacy of Whites who have fought for racial justice) also calls to us, even if our textbooks refuse to acknowledge their existence. Like Moses, we have been given privileges that must be used to dismantle structural injustice. We are called to praxis, to turn our radical faith into liberating action. And when it gets hard or when we forget why this is necessary, let us Catholics pray together the same words Jesus shared with his friends as they thought about how to take on the Empire for the glory of God, “Our Father [and Mother], who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1994, p. 726) for thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, now and forever. Amen.

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