



Created in God's Image

**a Pastoral Letter on the Sin of Racism
and a Call to Conversion**

*By the
Most Reverend Dale J. Melczek
Bishop of the Diocese of Gary*

Jeremiah 18:6

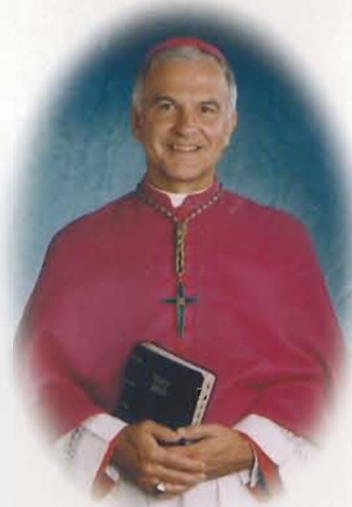


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Feast of the Transfiguration of the Lord

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

In my Pastoral Letter last year, I focused on the cultural diversity of Northwest Indiana and the richness of traditions which each culture brings to our Church and our region. We have, indeed, been blessed with a cultural mosaic resplendent in beauty with God-given gifts. Yet, there is something which inhibits that diversity from manifesting itself in all of its splendor. That obstacle is the sin and social sickness called racism.

As a religious and moral leader, it is from the standpoint of faith and morality that I wish to speak in this Pastoral Letter to the sin of racism. I shall refer to both Sacred Scripture and the teachings of the Church which are clear in their affirmation of the sacredness of all human life and the proper relationship which Christians should have with each other and with all of God's children.

However, there are other disciplines which can also be of great benefit to us. The everyday world in which we live is a world of relationships with other people and institutions in our society such as family, church, government, education, the media, as well as others. The disciplines of psychology and sociology help us to understand ourselves and these various relationships. Therefore, the approach of this Pastoral Letter in dealing with the issue of racism needs to be interdisciplinary. We will look at the sin of racism from the theological perspective, employing the insights which psychology and sociology provide us.

Vatican II reminds us in the document, *Gaudium et Spes*:

In pastoral care, sufficient use must be made not only of theological principles, but also of the findings of the secular sciences, especially of psychology and sociology, so that the faithful may be brought to a more adequate and mature life of faith. (article 62)

It is my fondest hope and fervent prayer that all of our Catholic faithful will respond to the guidance of the Holy Spirit as the Spirit calls upon each of us to address the sin of racism as found within our own hearts and to openly engage in dialogue with our brothers and sisters about this pernicious sin.

The first step in dealing with this sin is to summon the courage to face our own insecurities and fears and to be open to Jesus' call to deeper conversion which we receive through Scripture and the teachings of our Church. I invite you to join with me in that process.

With prayers and all best wishes, I am

Sincerely yours in the Lord Jesus,

Most Reverend Dale J. Melczek
Bishop of Gary

Created in God's Image:

a Pastoral Letter on the Sin of Racism
and a Call to Conversion

*By the Most Reverend Dale J. Melczek
Bishop of the Diocese of Gary*

My Pastoral Letter, *The Many Faces of Our Church, a Pastoral Letter on Cultural Diversity*, was intended to be a prelude to this current Pastoral Letter. The foundational religious principle upon which that letter was based is the same principle which provides the religious grounding for this current pastoral. In the first chapter of the Book of Genesis we read: "God created man in his image, in the divine image he created him; male and female he created them" (Gen. 1:27).

This fundamental religious principle is the basis for the dignity and value of every human being. It compels us to regard every human life with the respect due it, as a reflection of our eternal God.

This teaching is the thread which binds together these two Pastoral Letters. I have, therefore, decided to title this letter, *Created in God's Image: a Pastoral Letter on the Sin of Racism and a Call to Conversion*. It is my hope that everything contained herein will be interpreted and understood in the light of this religious teaching.

As we confront our own complicity with the sin of racism, may we constantly refer back to that all-important teaching as a reminder of why we need to root racism out of our hearts, our culture and the institutions of our society. You and I cannot truly be the reflection which our God desires until we have rooted out any traces of racism in our own hearts and decided to embrace all human persons as our brothers and sisters.

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Introduction

Nearly every page of this Pastoral Letter includes a digest that summarizes the key points on that page or on a nearby page.

Everyone has some opinion with regard to racism, and the feelings for many are acute and lay just below the surface of our everyday interaction with one another.

For some there is a deep sense of anger, and for others a sense of pessimism and hopelessness over the possibility of meaningful change.

At its worst, racism has fostered in some people a sense of meaninglessness of life. This often results in self-destructive behavior and contributes to an attitude of despair.

I am keenly aware of the deep-rooted sentiments that exist in the hearts of people in Northwest Indiana with regard to the issue of racism. For *People of Color*, who desire equal status in American society, there are often memories of racist opposition. For some *Whites*, it calls to mind devalued home prices and a sense of feeling compelled to relocate as a result of integration.

Everyone has some opinion with regard to this issue, and the feelings for many are acute and lay just below the surface of our everyday interaction with one another.

Although much has changed for the good within our culture and society, racism continues

to express itself. When it does, it takes very little to trigger the memory of those experiences, to reopen past wounds and reignite the sorrows and hurts, the anger and resentment, the sense of indignation and outrage that were experienced.

On occasion I have witnessed a deep-seated anger on the part of some who live in Northwest Indiana over the fact that racism continues to have a hold on our American culture. At other times, I have listened to those who have voiced pessimism and hopelessness concerning the possibility of any meaningful future change. It is a sort of "spiritual nihilism."¹

For some people there is a real sense of meaninglessness concerning life. It is an attitude which in some cases

For some people there is a real sense of meaninglessness concerning life. It is an attitude which in some cases has caused people to become self-destructive.

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has caused people to become self-destructive. This situation deeply saddens me because I know that it is but a short route from the experience of anger, pessimism, and hopelessness to adopting an attitude of despair.

I have personally heard *People of Color* relate their own negative experiences with the Catholic Church. One woman related that a pastor of a parish refused to make arrangements for the Baptism of her child in the 1950s. Her family was expected to go to another church. More recently, another woman recalled that she was denied the handshake of peace from an inhospitable parishioner. These experiences of rejection left the persons despairing of any real hope that they could belong to a church that would one day be devoid of racism.

For *Whites*, racism is rarely as personal a concern as it is for *People of Color*. *Whites* are seldom victimized by racist attitudes and actions. For *People of Color* it is an entirely different experience. They experience the cruelty of racism usually very early in childhood and to varying degrees throughout their lives. Most *Whites* give the issue of racism little thought. Those *Whites*, who are outraged by it, try their best to eradicate racism. But for most *Whites*, racism is something outside of their world. For *People of Color*, racism is the lived experience of their daily lives.

It is one thing to observe the pain of another. It is an entirely different thing to suffer that pain. On Good Friday, when we commemorate the Passion of the Lord, we empathize with Jesus as we venerate the cross, but no one can even imagine what it might have felt like to suffer the actual pain and humiliation of crucifixion as Jesus did.

***People of Color* experience the cruelty of racism usually very early in childhood and to varying degrees throughout their lives.**

I am aware that People of Color have experienced rejection within our Church and that these experiences have left them despairing of any real hope that they could belong to a church that would one day be devoid of racism.

For Whites, racism is rarely a personal concern. They are seldom victimized by racist attitudes and actions because it is something outside of their world. For People of Color, the cruelty of racism has often been part of the lived experience of their daily lives.

It is important to acknowledge the pain suffered by so many.

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While Civil Rights legislation has sought to affirm and guarantee the rights of disenfranchised people, and Affirmative Action has made up for some lost opportunities, there still exists within our culture among many people an attitude that resists the exercise of many of those rights and is openly hostile to Affirmative Action.

Civil Rights legislation and Affirmative Action have accomplished much. However, racism is perpetuated by those who resist the exercise of legal rights and are hostile to Affirmative Action.

In addition, there are those who resist dealing with the reality of racism in America by either denying its existence or being indifferent to any meaningful dialogue concerning it. The tools of denial and indifference substitute for the violent acts of years gone by and have evolved as a means of expressing racism in our modern day as well as resisting any efforts to remediate it.

There are those who live in segregated neighborhoods and comment that there are no race problems in their world.

It is rooted in ignorance, fear and insecurity, and is bolstered by negative experiences that have produced feelings of anger and resentment.

For example, although a *Person of Color* has the same right to purchase a home as anyone else wherever he or she may choose, neighbors have in some cases been openly hostile to those who have done so. Crosses have been burnt in their yards and property vandalized. Sometimes the resistance is more subtle, taking the form of making the entire process of purchasing a home much more difficult than it would be for someone else.

In addition to this, and much more insidious, is an attitude of resistance which is expressed in a veiled manner. It takes the form of *denial* and *indifference*: either the denial of the existence of racism or an indifference to its existence. These have often replaced the outright hatred of years gone by.

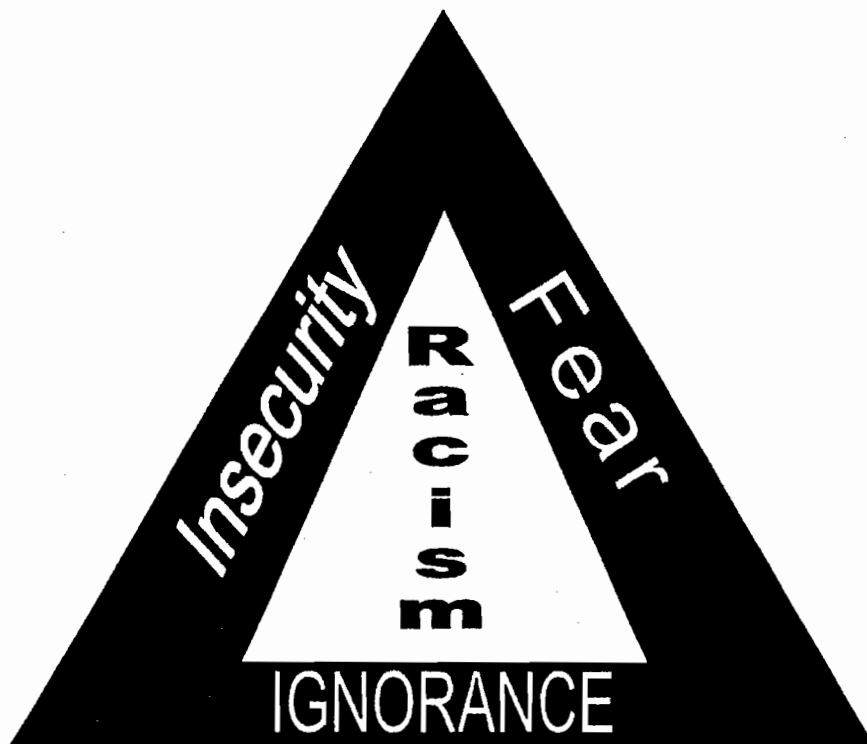
For instance, there are those who live in segregated neighborhoods and comment that there are no race problems in their world. Yet when confronted with the logic that segregated neighborhoods are, of themselves, indicative of racism, the same people choose to remain locked in that denial or indifferent to pursuing any dialogue.

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The root of this denial and indifference is to be found in the ignorance, insecurity, and fear of many, and the ill will of some. The former are the consequences of Original Sin, and the latter is the actual expression of sin.

I have no doubt that the next time some blatant and public display of racism raises its ugly head, those feelings lying just below the surface will come tumultuously pouring forth like lava from a volcano. The destruction which will be wrought will only further exacerbate the racial tensions so often denied, yet so obviously still present in our culture and society. The gulf between *Whites* and *People of Color* will only continue to widen and the possibility of working together in solidarity recede even farther into the background.

As one ordained to proclaim the Good News of Jesus and to Shepherd the Catholic faithful of the Diocese of Gary to live as witnesses of the Gospel, I feel compelled to address this situation. Although I am aware of the



The root of all resistance, including denial and indifference, is to be found in the ignorance, insecurity, and fear of many, and the ill will of some.

Ignorance, insecurity, and fear are the consequences of Original Sin, and ill will is the actual free expression of sin.

As one ordained to proclaim the Good News of Jesus and to Shepherd the Catholic faithful of the Diocese of Gary to live as witnesses of the Gospel, I feel compelled to address this situation.

I am optimistic concerning the good will and resolve of the people of Northwest Indiana and I know that we can work together to more clearly make our area a reflection of God's heavenly Kingdom.

We need not wait for the next racial incident to be the catalyst for action.

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great pain and hopelessness of some, as well as the daunting challenges that come with addressing the sin and sickness of racism, I am by no means pessimistic regarding the inroads we can make in this area. I am optimistic concerning the good will and resolve of the people of Northwest Indiana and I know that, fortified with God's grace, we can together work to more clearly make our area a reflection of God's heavenly Kingdom for all who live here. We need not, and should not, wait for the next racial incident to be the catalyst for action.

Racism is a sin, and its practice is contrary to the teaching of Scripture and the Church. The Book of Genesis teaches that all men and women have been created in the image and likeness of God.

In taking on a human body, Jesus also declared every human life sacred. Vatican II attests to this.

Part I

Racism is a Sin

Racism is a sin, and its practice is contrary to the teaching of Scripture and the Church. The story of creation in the book of Genesis teaches that all men and women have been created in the image and likeness of God:

“God created man in his image,
in the divine image he created him;
male and female he created them.”²

Consequently we have a responsibility to respect every human being. This is a teaching that Christians, Jews and Muslims share in common.

Furthermore, as Christians we believe in the Incarnation of Jesus. In becoming man, Jesus identifies with all human beings and declares every human life sacred. The teaching of Vatican II attests to this:

“For by His incarnation the Son of God has united Himself in some fashion with every man. He worked with human hands, He thought with a

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human mind, acted by human choice and loved with a human heart. Born of the Virgin Mary, He has truly been made one of us, like us in all things except sin.”³

The notion of racism, which teaches that one race is superior to another, is contrary to these teachings. Our Holy Father, John Paul II, said:

“Racism is a sin that constitutes a serious offense against God. Every honest conscience must decisively condemn racism in whatever heart or place it makes a home. Unfortunately, it is emerging in new and unexpected forms, offending and degrading the human family.”

In 1979, our United States Conference of Catholic Bishops issued a Pastoral Letter on racism titled, *Brothers and Sisters to Us*. In that letter, they said:

“Racism is a sin: a sin that divides the human family, blots out the image of God among specific members of that family and violates the fundamental human dignity of those called to be children of the same Father. Racism is the sin that says some human beings are inherently superior and others essentially inferior because of race. It is the sin that makes racial characteristics the determining factor for the exercise of human rights. It mocks the words of Jesus: ‘Treat others the way you would have them treat you.’ Indeed, racism is more than a disregard for the words of Jesus; it is a

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Pope John Paul II refers to racism as a sin that constitutes a serious offense against God and calls upon everyone with an honest conscience to condemn racism.

The U.S. Catholic Conference of Bishops, in their Pastoral Letter titled, “Brothers and Sisters to Us,” said: “Racism is a sin: a sin that divides the human family, blots out the image of God among specific members of that family, and violates the fundamental human dignity of those called to be children of the same Father.”

Our American Declaration of Independence also affirms the sanctity of human life in declaring that “all men are created equal.”

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denial of the truth of the dignity of each human being revealed by the mystery of the Incarnation.”

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Those who signed the Declaration of Independence further witnessed to the theological assumption of the sanctity of human life when they said that “all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.”

Whether or not they had personal reservations in the cases of some ethnic groups, today Americans interpret the words “all men” to mean *all men and women regardless of ethnic background*.

Dividing groups of people into different races made it possible for those who held power to rank certain groups as more or less important than others. They appealed to science as a means of justifying the difference.

A very important point to note is that biologists and anthropologists maintain that the concept of race cannot be justified scientifically. The notion of viewing people from the standpoint of race is relatively new in the history of humanity. Europeans introduced it early in the history of the Americas to justify the existence of slavery and the exploitation of the land inhabited by Native Americans. Dividing groups of people into different races made it possible for those who held power to rank certain groups as more or less important than others. They appealed to science as a means of justifying the difference.

In fact, science has shown that there exists more variation within a particular ethnic group than between so-called “races.” Even new DNA technology points to the

Europeans introduced racism as a means of justifying the exploitation of lands inhabited by Native Americans and the existence of slavery.

This ranking of people according to race is artificial.

Anthropologists and biologists maintain that the concept of race cannot be justified scientifically.

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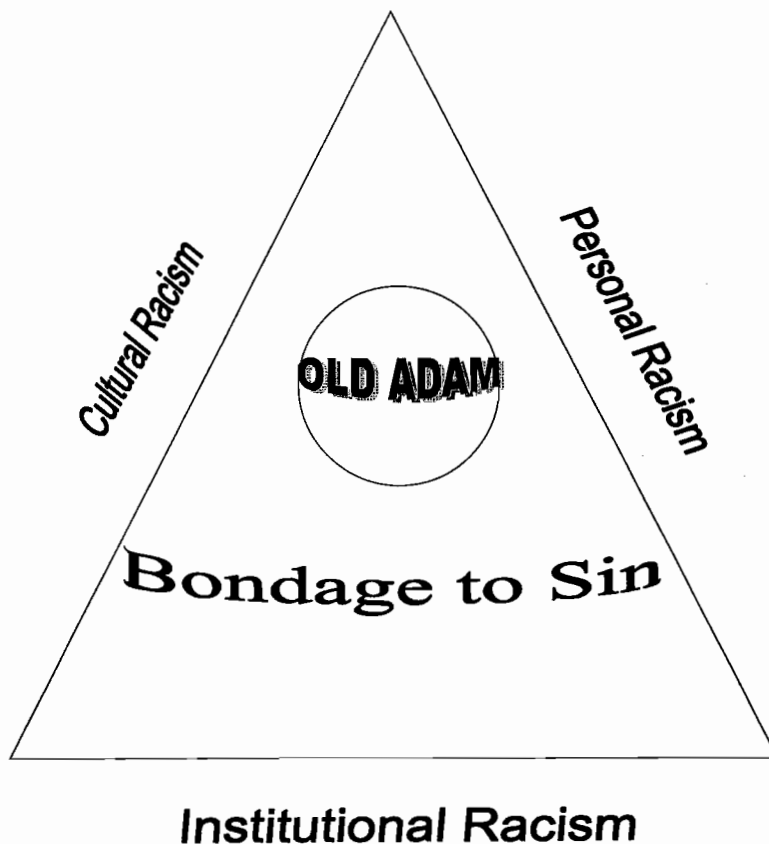
fact that we all have a common ancestry that originates in Africa.

Actually, to speak of any of us in terms of belonging to another race than that which we call human is erroneous. Regardless of ethnicity or color of skin, we really all are members of the same human race. We continue, however, to use the term when speaking of groups because it has become so embedded in our culture.

Part II

Bondage to the Sin of Racism

We truly are all members of the same human family, and each of us is sacred by virtue of the fact that we are a reflection of our God. This is a fundamental religious truth and the grounds for respecting all human life.



Even new DNA technology points to the fact that we all have a common ancestry that originates in Africa.

Regardless of skin color, we all are members of the same human race, but we continue to use the term "race" because it has become so embedded in our culture.

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Vatican II teaches:

“God, Who has fatherly concern for everyone, has willed that all men should constitute one family and treat one another in a spirit of brotherhood. For having been created in the image of God, Who ‘from one man has created the whole human race and made them live all over the face of the earth’ (Acts 17:26), all men are called to one and the same goal, namely God Himself.

Racism expresses itself in American life in three primary ways: through American culture, in the personal decisions of each individual, and through the institutions in our society. It is in precisely these three ways that we are held in bondage to the sin of racism.

Each of us grows up and is influenced by our culture, which consists of a system of beliefs, values, customs, practices, patterns of relating to persons and institutions. None of us is beyond this influence.

“For this reason, love for God and neighbor is the first and greatest commandment. Sacred Scripture, however, teaches us that the love of God cannot be separated from love of neighbor: ‘If there is any other commandment, it is summed up in this saying: Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.... Love therefore is the fulfillment of the Law’”(Rom. 13:9-10; cf. 1 John 4:20).⁵

However, the fact remains that racism continues to exist in a variety of forms in American society. Racism expresses itself in three primary ways: through American culture, in the personal decisions of each individual, and through the institutions in our society (See Appendix, Page 40, “Examples of Vicious Cycles of Racism”).

In the following pages, I would like to explore how this happens and to consider a possible means of liberation from our cultural, personal and institutional bondage to the sin of racism.

Racism expresses itself in three primary ways: through American culture, in the personal decisions of each individual, and through the institutions in our society

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Racism and American Culture

Each of us grows up and lives our life within a culture. Every culture is made up of a system of beliefs, values, customs, rituals, practices, patterns of relating to persons and institutions, and ways of thinking about life. Each culture, in large part, is shaped by those who represent the dominant power. Our own American culture was greatly influenced from the beginning by those who had their roots in Western Europe. Their influence on American culture affects how we view aspects of American life today.

Each culture, in large part, is shaped by those who represent the dominant power.

For example, each year our country celebrates Columbus Day, recalling the *discovery* of the so-called "new world" by Christopher Columbus. Since this

land was already inhabited by Native Americans, it follows that he did not really discover a "new" world. However, ascribing the discovery to Europeans made it possible for them to justify the confiscation of land belonging to Native Americans.

Since the dominant group in our country has its roots in Europe, this seeming anomaly is not upsetting to most people. On the other hand, it is greatly disconcerting to Native Americans, and it should be to all of us. Soon thereafter, the concept of race was utilized in America to justify the enslavement of African-Americans.

The fact that we commemorate Columbus Day without question is an example of how our American culture has influenced the way we think and how we often can play a part in perpetuating racist thinking without knowing it. It also illustrates that our history has been taught completely from a White European-American perspective.

Our culture is largely shaped by those who represent the dominant power. In America, Western Europeans had the greatest influence in molding American culture. Their influence affects how each of us views aspects of life in America today. Our history is largely told from a White European-American perspective.

The commemoration of Columbus' "so-called" discovery of this land is an example of how history has been told from a biased point of view and used to justify confiscating land from Native Americans who already occupied it. To continue to commemorate it is to reinforce this mistaken understanding as well as to gloss over an injustice done to Native Americans.

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The Racialized Self

Racism is interwoven into the fabric of our culture and affects the identity of every American. Our culture assigns each of us a place in society by virtue of where we stand in relationship to the dominant cultural group, which happens to be "White" in the U.S.

How our culture views us influences how we come to view ourselves. This identity is largely determined by the color of one's skin. This image acts as a passport in our society and determines which goods, services and opportunities we will enjoy and which will be denied. This identity is referred to as our "racialized-self."

Racism is inextricably bound up with our culture. As we search for our individual identity in life, we become aware very early in that quest that culture has already assigned us a place in society by virtue of where we stand in relationship to the dominant cultural group. We are presented with a picture of how our culture views us, which in turn affects how we view ourselves. It also informs each person of his or her standing in relationship to everyone else in society.

It is as though you have been given a passport at birth including a photograph of yourself. *The photograph is the most important part of the passport.* This photograph conveys an image of who you are from the standpoint of "race" and "color." We refer to this photograph as the "racialized self."⁶ It is one's identity in society from the standpoint of race. It is an image that is defined by the assumption in American culture that the worth of an individual is measured by the color of his or her skin.

Our culture regards your photograph as the indicator of what type of membership you will have in society and what access you will have to goods and services and opportunities for economic and educational advancement as well as political participation. Although the

As we search for our individual identity in life, we become aware very early in that quest that culture has already assigned us a place in society by virtue of where we stand in relationship to the dominant cultural group.

passport indicates that you are an American citizen, it is not, in itself, enough to guarantee that you will always be treated fairly.

The ranking which is assigned to you in the "color scheme" also affects your self-

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Full membership in the dominant culture is more consistent with the invitation that Jesus extends to all persons to become members of His Father's Kingdom.

image. The self-image that you internalize many times has nothing to do with your real personality, or the moral quality of your character, or the fact that you are a child of God. We are social beings looking for acceptance, and oftentimes your self-image is determined by how you are regarded by others. In this case, the term "others" refers to the dominant cultural group. The passport, unfortunately, opens the doors of opportunity only to some and not to others.

For *Whites*, this passport makes possible full membership in the dominant culture with rights and privileges which flow from that membership. This, in turn, reinforces feelings of positive self-worth.

For *People of Color*, this passport affords a more restricted membership. Access to the same rights and privileges is not automatically guaranteed and sometimes even denied. It can contribute to a sense of victimization. Even feelings of negative self-worth can be reinforced by this cultural image.

These are important considerations. First of all, full membership in the dominant culture is more consistent with the invitation that Jesus extends to all persons to become members of His Father's Kingdom. Since His Kingdom is inclusive of all, so should our concept of a just society mirror that image. So says Vatican II:

"Laymen should also know that it is generally the function of their well-formed Christian conscience to see that the divine law is inscribed in the life of the earthly city." 7

This ranking of an individual according to color affects one's self-image. Because we are social beings, the way we are regarded by others often has a significant impact on how we regard ourselves as persons of worth.

For Whites, the image assigned by culture makes possible full membership and affords the rights and privileges which flow from that membership. It also reinforces a positive self-image.

For People of Color, the image assigned allows for a more restricted membership and access to the same rights and privileges is not automatically guaranteed and sometimes denied. A negative self-image is sometimes reinforced.

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Secondly, psychology tells us that a positive self-image is necessary for a healthy personality. Reinforcing a negative self-image would be demeaning of the human person and contrary to the will of our Creator who fashioned us in His image and likeness and desires only good for us.

Anything which reinforces a negative self-image is demeaning of the human person and is contrary to the will of our Creator who fashioned us in His image and likeness and who desired only good for us.

When our culture assigns inequitable identities and roles to Whites and People of Color, it creates and reinforces a tension between these groups as well as subgroups of People of Color.

“Hence, the norm of human activity is this: that in accord with the divine plan and will, it harmonize with the genuine good of the human race, and that it allow men as individuals and as members of society to pursue their total vocation and fulfill it.”⁸

When our culture assigns inequitable identities and roles to *Whites* and *People of Color*, it creates and reinforces a tension between these two groups and among subgroups of *People of Color*. This tension has naturally enough grown into a conflict which has exhibited itself in violent ways over the years and which continues to jeopardize our efforts to build God's Kingdom.

Reinforcing a negative self-image would be demeaning of the human person and contrary to the will of our Creator who fashioned us in His image and likeness and desires only good for us.

Racism and the Person

As a dysfunction in the human family, racism has influenced us psychologically in ways that we often do not understand but which are manifested by our personal behavior. Although we like to think that every decision we make is freely made and totally ours, more often than not those decisions are culturally influenced.

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Racism has also manifested itself in the telling of demeaning stories and jokes, stereotyping, profiling and acts destructive of property.

In other words, we are all products of our environment: the influences of our parents, siblings and extended family, the values and taboos of our culture, media advertisement, role models from the world of sports and entertainment, and the "times" in which we live. All of these influence our thinking and behavior.

Sometimes our blind adherence to cultural assumptions causes us to make decisions that actually perpetuate racism without our knowing it. At other times, our willingness to abandon reason and submit to ignorance, insecurity or fear causes us to freely choose to act in a racist manner. Choosing not to hire a person on the basis of one's skin color would be an example of such behavior.

Racism has also manifested itself in the telling of demeaning stories and jokes, stereotyping, profiling and acts destructive of property. Not only have African-Americans and Latinos experienced this, but so have American citizens of Middle Eastern or Asian background become the most recent victims of these crimes. Sometimes demeaning remarks are made about immigrants as a result of their inability to speak English well, or their desire to speak their native language when they are with members of their family or cultural group. The irony is that immigrants often speak at least two languages and sometimes more. There are countless other examples.

Racism and the Institutions of our Society

Since our culture influences institutions as well as individuals, racism has expressed itself in a manner referred to as institutional racism. Sociologically this is an ideology which prevents many from becoming fully included in

We are all products of our environment and subject to its influences. Parents, siblings, values and taboos of culture, media advertisement, etc., all influence our thinking and behavior. Racism, as part of our culture, equally has influenced each individual, often in ways we do not understand.

Sometimes, by blind adherence to cultural influence, people perpetuate racism in word or action unwittingly. At other times they freely choose to commit racist acts, submitting to the degrading forces of ignorance, insecurity and fear.

Racism also expresses itself in the institutions of our society, such as family, government, church, education and media.

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society and enjoying the opportunities which are open to others.

Institutional racism is primarily manifested in laws, or in the practices and procedures of an institution such as a financial company, health facility, government office, school, church, the media, etc. Much institutional racism was effectively addressed by the passage of Civil Rights legislation. However, laws are only as good as is their level of enforcement. Where that enforcement has not taken place or where the legislation has not yet been enacted, institutional racism continues to abound. This is morally wrong because as Vatican II points out:

“Man’s social nature makes it evident that the progress of the human person and the advance of society itself hinge on one another. The beginning, the subject and the goal of all social institutions is and must be the human person which for its part and by its very nature stands completely in need of social life.”⁹

Thus, the sin of racism is seen as social. It is not just the sin of individuals but has become so ingrained in the institutions of society itself that it is a social as well as personal sin.

According to recent census figures, Northwest Indiana is one of the most racially segregated areas in the U.S. For example, Gary has the highest concentration of African-Americans of any city in our country at 85 percent.¹⁰

The segregated communities of our region are not characteristic of the entire U.S. Many areas have made great strides in providing a means of integration for

Institutional racism takes form in laws, practices, policies and procedures of institutions. Although Civil Rights legislation addressed much institutional racism, laws are only as effective as their enforcement. Where that has been negligible, racism continues to exist.

The sin of racism is not only a sin committed by individuals, but is a social sin as well. Once ingrained in our institutions, it takes on a social nature.

One example of the result of institutional racism is the existence of communities in Northwest Indiana, segregated by color of skin.

Racism is not just the sin of individuals but has become so ingrained in the institutions of society itself that it is a social as well as personal sin.

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The very existence of segregated communities is a sad testimony to the fact that people of faith have not translated religious values into action. Moreover, for Christians, it is a sign of our failure to cooperate with God in the building of His Kingdom.

those who choose it, while at the same time also increasing the economic viability of the region. Where some areas have begun to make progress, we find ourselves still lagging behind.

The very existence of segregated communities is a sad testimony to the fact that people of faith have not translated religious values into action. Moreover, for Christians, it is a sign of our failure to cooperate with God in the building of His Kingdom.

This is a problem that needs to be addressed before we can expect any meaningful strides to be attained in dealing with racism. I am especially concerned about this because so many of our Catholic faithful live in areas in which this denial and indifference persist.

Part III

What Does it Mean to be White?

The roots of racism run deep within the cultural psyche of our land. They are nurtured by an attitude that holds White European-Americans are superior to any other group of people. This understanding becomes the justification for "White dominance." This type of thinking became rooted within our culture immediately upon the arrival of Europeans to the shores of this country.

Adventurers and colonists alike, from Spain, Portugal, England, France and Holland, immediately took possession of the land they surveyed as if by "divine right." Often religious justification was given by references

The very existence of segregated communities is a sad testimony to the fact that people of faith have not translated religious values into action. Moreover, for Christians, it is a sign of our failure to cooperate with God in the building of His Kingdom.

The roots of racism run deep within the cultural psyche of our land. They are nurtured by an attitude that holds White European-Americans are superior to any other group of people. This understanding becomes the justification for "White dominance."

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made to a "new promised land" (consult the preface that we use in the celebration of the Eucharist on Thanksgiving Day). The Church sometimes officially and sometimes tacitly sanctioned the process.

The term "White" refers to more than color. It refers to what constitutes membership in the dominant cultural group in society. It designates a class of people who are set apart from others.

Originally, since English settlers were the dominant group in the land, they were considered to be the purest form of "White." To be English and Christian was to be at the pinnacle of the racial pyramid. To be African-American or Native American and non-Christian was to be at the base of the pyramid.

Other groups from Europe were slowly assimilated into the dominant group and given the status of "White." The French, German, Irish, Spanish, etc., slowly made their way into the dominant group. Later the Italians, Hungarians, Polish, Lithuanians, Slovaks, Czechs, Russians, Croatians, Greeks and others made their way into the mainstream.

It is interesting to note, however, that when each new ethnic group first arrived on these shores they were NOT considered "White." Only with the passage of time and their acceptance of the culture of the dominant group did they eventually gain "White status."¹¹

Those who read this and consider themselves part of mainstream "White America" today should realize that their ancestors were not considered part of the dominant cultural group upon arriving here, and therefore not considered "White." This demonstrates how arbitrary and

The term "White" refers to more than color. It refers to what constitutes membership in the dominant cultural group in society. It designates a "class" of people who are set apart.

To be English and Christian represented the pinnacle of the racial pyramid. To be African-American or Native American and non-Christian was to be at its base.

Only slowly did other immigrant groups from Europe and later from other geographic areas gain admittance to the "White class." Since skin color was not the sole determinant of admittance, ample time needed to pass in order to assure each group assimilated the values of the culture before it could gain "White status."

The term "white" refers to more than color. It refers to what constitutes membership in the dominant cultural group in society. It designates a "class" of people who are set apart.

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The term "White" does not refer so much to color of skin (although skin color is included) as it does to a classification of people to determine who "fits" in society.

artificial this designation is, and how descriptive it is of who really controls power in our society.

In fact, there is probably not one person who belongs to the Catholic Church today in Northwest Indiana who would have been considered "White" in the early history of this country. All

of us would have been outside of the dominant group in power.

There are some who question how they could be mistaken for anything else but White. However, the term "White" does not refer so much to color of skin (although skin color is included) as it does to a classification of people to determine who "fits" in society. We are all familiar with the term "WASP" — White Anglo-Saxon Protestant. Early in our history this defined who belonged to the dominant cultural group. In time, this definition slowly included those who were neither Anglo-Saxon nor Protestant. Yet the classification of "White" as opposed to "non-White" still remained. It is a classification whose meaning shifts in time. However, people know whether or not they are accepted as "White" by how they are treated in society.

It is an unfortunate fact that as each new ethnic group eventually gained "White status," the memory of prior exclusion and persecution waned. In many cases their standard of living often did not improve. However, the new-found status became cause for identifying with the dominant power and looking with contempt and disdain upon the next ethnic group trying to raise its own status.

This demonstrates how arbitrary and artificial the designation "White" really is and how descriptive it is of who actually controls power in our society.

It is unfortunate that as each new ethnic group, having suffered the initiation which gained "White status," participated in conducting those same rites for the next group. As one achieved status, it "gained" the right to "look down" upon the next ethnic group trying to raise its own status.

Those who hold power in our country have always attempted to divert attention away from themselves as the cause of misfortune for others by creating the illusion that the real cause is another group. Furthermore, that group always has the lowest economic and social standing.

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Instead of focusing on those who control wealth and power as the obvious cause of their problems, the “new Whites” look to the new immigrants, trying to improve their lot in life, as the cause of blame.

Southern plantation owners were able to convince poor Whites, who held no slaves, to engage in the Civil War by appealing to their low self-esteem and convincing them that their “whiteness” made them racially superior to African-Americans.

The powerful today try to convince the majority that the new immigrants are the cause of everyone's problems. Many choose to believe this illusion because it gives them a false sense of superiority over someone else. It appeals to both ignorance and insecurity. Thus each new group is made to suffer the same injustices as those before them.

White Status and Economic Class

It has been the history of those who have held power in this country to divert attention away from themselves as the cause of misfortune for others. This is usually done by creating the illusion that the real cause is another group, which always is perceived as being further down the ladder racially, socially, or economically.

This is how Southern plantation owners were able to persuade poor Whites, who held no slaves, to fight in the Civil War. The plantation owners appealed to the low self-esteem of the poor Whites, convincing them that African-Americans were inferior racially. Poor as they may have been, their “whiteness” was enough of a privilege to give them self-worth and reason to embrace the Southern cause.

In the same way, the powerful today seek to convince the “new Whites” that the most recent arrivals are inferior and their quest for employment, education, housing and health care is the reason there is not enough to go around for all. They are persuaded to take leave of their own common sense.

Instead of focusing on those who control wealth and power as the obvious cause of their problems, they look to the new immigrants, trying to improve their lot in life, as the cause of blame. They choose to believe an illusion because it gives them a false sense of superiority over someone. Just as in years gone by, the illusion usually works.

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The poorest suffer persecution, while those in control become even more powerful. So has been the case with each ethnic group that has arrived on these shores. There are many people today, usually second generation or later, who dismiss this as simply a necessary part of the rite of passage for new immigrants. Sooner or later, they say, hard work and determination will gain everyone "White status."

Whites should be sympathetic toward new immigrants and understanding of their desire to continue to be nourished by their culture, as they gradually become incorporated into the society and the larger culture. Whites should not allow their ignorance of other cultures

and the languages that are spoken by other ethnic groups in the U.S. to awaken the ever-present fear and insecurity within us that would lead to rejecting these groups.

We should appreciate the importance that each immigrant ethnic group attaches to its own culture, as well as the richness which that culture brings to our experience of American culture as a whole.

It is important that the Church reach out to those who have arrived in Northwest Indiana undocumented. Their motivation for coming to America was the same as it was for so many of our own ancestors. They seek a better quality of life for themselves and their children. It is inhospitable and un-Christian for us to turn a blind eye or deaf ear to them. The Priestly authors of Leviticus remind us of this:

Whites should be sympathetic toward new immigrants who come here for the same reasons they did. They should also be careful not to allow ignorance, fear, or insecurity to cause them to reject these groups or their cultures.

We all should appreciate the importance each new ethnic group attaches to its culture and the richness which that culture brings to our country.

It is important that the Church reach out to those who have arrived in Northwest Indiana undocumented, since their motivation for coming to the U.S. is the same as was the ancestors of many already here.

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"When an alien resides with you in your land, do not molest them. You shall treat the alien who resides with you no differently than the natives born among you; have the same love for him as for yourself; for you too were aliens in the land of Egypt. I, the Lord, am your God." ¹²

The importance of achieving "White status" is the ability to enjoy privileges and benefits which flow from it. However, it is impossible for People of Color to achieve this status. Consequently, opportunities afforded Whites are not given to People of Color.

Whites are generally not stereotyped, stand a better chance of being judged on their merits, and have greater opportunities for employment and higher pay than People of Color.

Even the concepts denoted by the terms "white" and "black" betray White privilege. White is associated with good and right, and black is associated with bad and evil.

White Privilege

The importance of achieving "White status" is the ability to enjoy privileges and benefits which flow from it. However, it is impossible for *People of Color* to achieve this status. This means that there are opportunities which are afforded *Whites* that *People of Color* simply do not share. *Whites* can generally move into whatever neighborhood they choose as long as they can afford it. There will be no repercussions as is usually the case when it is a *Person of Color*.

This also means they have the opportunity for better schools. With that usually comes better police protection and other services. *Whites* will not be stereotyped, but judged on their merits or lack thereof. Opportunity for employment and advancement in employment is generally better and the level of pay higher. *Whites* will be stopped by police less often than people of color for suspicion of committing a crime.

Even the concepts denoted by the terms "white" and "black" betray White privilege. White is associated with good and right; black is associated with bad or evil. Even when we lie we are less guilty with "white lies." We wear white for happy occasions and black for sad. White is associated with light and divinity; black is associated with darkness and Satan.

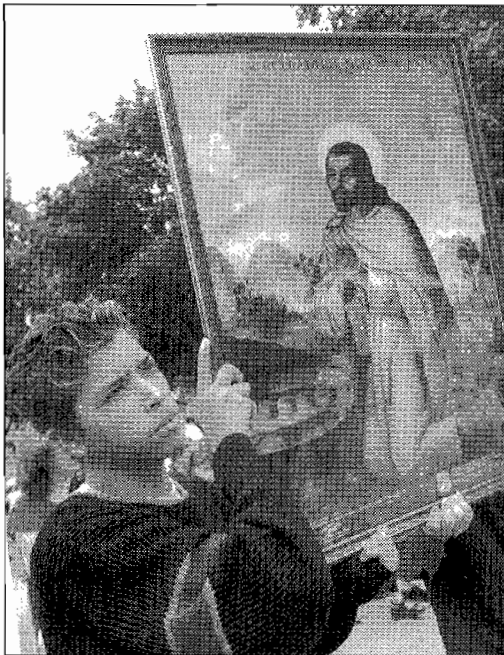
Whites will not be stereotyped, but judged on their merits or lack thereof.

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The statues in our churches usually look Western European even though Jesus, Mary, Joseph, and the Apostles were Middle Eastern. The prose and poetry we learn in school is almost entirely composed by *Whites*. It is difficult to build up a positive self-image for a *Person of Color* when the terms that apply to darkness of skin connote something less appealing and desirable.

People of Color

Although African-Americans certainly come to mind in any discussion of *People of Color*, there is a sizeable population of Latinos, Asians, and Arab Americans in Northwest Indiana. Latinos have long been valued members of our community. It is estimated that, by the year



Christian Romero, a member of St. Mary Parish, East Chicago, carries a picture of St. Juan Diego in a procession following a Mass of Thanksgiving for the canonization of the saint celebrated by his parish on Aug. 25, 2002.

2010, 40 percent of the Catholics in the U.S. will be Latino.¹³ Since their experience in Catholic parishes has not always been one of welcome, it is imperative that our Catholic faithful reach out to our Latino brothers and sisters with the hand of friendship.

As a Church we should learn a lesson from St. Paul who, instead of asking new Gentile converts to give up their cultural practices, tried to adapt *himself* to each new cultural group he encoun-

In addition to African-Americans, there are a number of other People of Color in Northwest Indiana who are also valued members of the community. Among these groupings are Latino, Asian, and Arab Americans.

It is estimated that by the year 2010, 40 percent of the Catholics in the U.S. will be Latino. A significant effort should be made to be more welcoming of our Latino brothers and sisters in our parishes.

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tered. He referred to this as trying to be "all things to all men." ¹⁴

More Asians and Indians have immigrated to this area in the last 50 years, contributing to the rich cultural mix of Northwest Indiana. As health care facilities began to grow in our area, many found opportunities to work in various capacities.

Arab-Americans are and have been an important part of the cultural mosaic of Northwest Indiana. It is interesting to note that, beginning in the 1950s, an influx of Muslim professionals, many of them physicians, finding conditions in their homelands inhospitable, settled in this country.

Arab-Americans are and have been an important part of the cultural mosaic of Northwest Indiana.

More Asians and Indians have immigrated to this area in the last 50 years, contributing to the rich cultural mix of Northwest Indiana.

Indiana has the fifth largest concentration of Muslims in the U.S. and Northwest Indiana has the most significant population. Since September 11, 2001, many have suffered the unfair brunt of discrimination. It is particularly important at this time for our Catholic faithful to become proactive in supporting our Muslim brothers and sisters.

During this period, Muslim communities began to form and mosques were erected in such places as Gary, Dearborn and Ann Arbor (Michigan), Cedar Rapids (Iowa), Sacramento (California) and the like. At present, the number of Muslims in the United States is estimated to be between 5 million and 8 million. By the year 2010, the number will have doubled. The 10 states with the highest concentration of Muslims are California, New York, Illinois, New Jersey, Indiana, Michigan, Virginia, Texas, Ohio and Maryland (listed in order of population). This represents 3.3 million of the Muslim population in the United States. ¹⁵

Muslims serve in the U.S. Armed Forces as well as in every other area of life in our country. Especially since September 11, 2001, and again as a result of the war with Iraq, they have suffered the brunt of discrimination and even violence. It is particularly important at this time in our history that our Catholic faithful become proactive

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It is difficult to admit, yet nonetheless true, that all Whites bear some responsibility for racism.

in supporting our Muslim brothers and sisters who unjustly suffer because their religion or ethnicity is shared by some who terrorize our world today.

Part IV

The Redemptive Process

The influence of racism is not always conspicuous. It is so delicately interwoven into the fabric of our American culture, that it manifests itself in often quiet and insidious ways. It is akin to a cancer, which goes unnoticed for a time as it invades and permeates the body.

It is difficult to admit, yet nonetheless true, that all Whites bear some responsibility for racism. I know that oftentimes many of our Catholic faithful will say that they are not responsible for the institution of slavery. Many, especially in Northwest Indiana, will point out that their ancestors arrived here in the 1900s, well after slavery was abolished. They further insist that they contribute in no way to the racist practices in the present day, and should not be held responsible for the conditions which led to them.

These same people, in good conscience, even declare their abhorrence of racism in American society. They feel unjustly attacked when they are included in any culpability for racism today. The NCCB Pastoral Letter, *To Live in Christ Jesus*, says:

“The absence of personal fault for an evil does not absolve one of all responsibility. We must seek to resist and undo injustices we have not caused, lest we become bystanders who tacitly endorse evil and so share in guilt for it.” ¹⁶

All Whites bear some responsibility for racism. Although not responsible for the institution of slavery, they are responsible for the continued existence of racism in our culture and society.

To remain silent to racist remarks, to become indifferent to injustices suffered because of racism, and to remain inactive in the face of efforts made to remedy the situation are all ways of perpetuating racism in our own times.

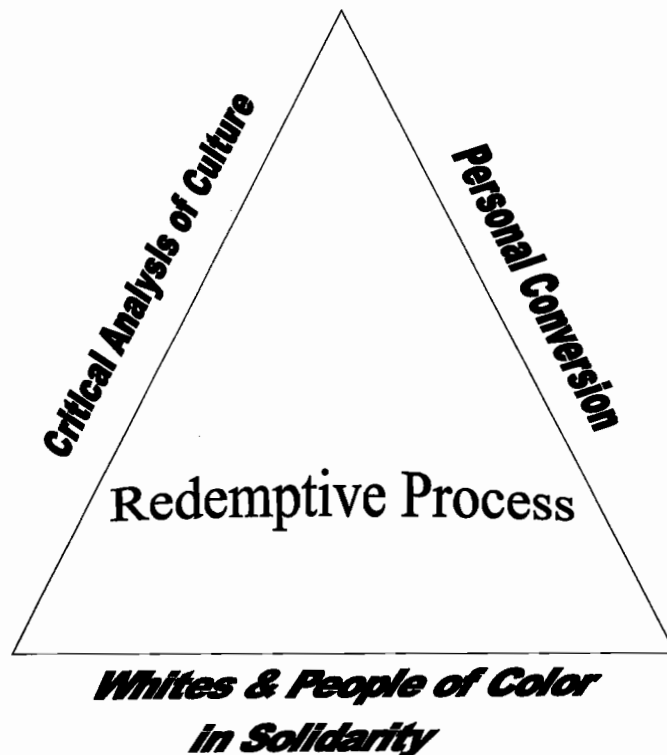
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In addition, we sometimes overlook just how powerful the cultural influences are that mold our lives. Neither the residents of Northwest Indiana nor their ancestors share in any responsibility for the existence of slavery. Nevertheless, our culture has been deeply and profoundly influenced by the racism which led to slavery and the racism that continues to exist to this day.

Many Catholic faithful were born in the United States and have been raised under the very powerful influence of this culture. If American culture has been tainted by the sin of racism, then it follows that we, too, have been influenced.

For example, the ancestors of most *Whites*, who have their roots in Europe, immigrated here to find freedom and to escape tyrants whose authority was based upon a culture of aristocracy. It is sadly ironic that this same dominant group has replaced an aristocracy of birth with an aristocracy of color.

If American culture has been tainted by the sin of racism, then it follows that we, too, have been influenced. Our culture stands in need of liberation from racism, as well as every person who is represented in the dominant cultural group of our society.



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Just as our culture stands in need of liberation from this sin's subtle but powerful control, so does each one of us who is represented in the dominant cultural group.

It is sadder still, that their children and grandchildren, who pride themselves so much in extolling the equality of all people in our country, at the same time collude with a culture that continues to perpetuate a class system based upon color. Although this may be done unwittingly, it nevertheless exemplifies how much we have been influenced by our culture.

Just as our culture stands in need of liberation from this sin's subtle but powerful control, so does each one of us who is represented in the dominant cultural group.

The first step toward liberation is to submit the forces which influence our culture to critical analysis. We need to acquire knowledge about how racism has influenced our American culture, our personal decisions, and the institutions of our society.

That knowledge assists us in dealing with our "racialized-self" and freeing ourselves of its grip. It enables each of us to more accurately identify ourselves in terms of who we really are as children of God and as individuals of worth as opposed to the image of how we are perceived by a culture corrupted by racism.

However, it is not enough just to know how racism has influenced our culture and our self-awareness. There is yet another task for those who believe that we have been created in God's image and likeness. The second step for every Christian is to submit to a *metanoia* or personal conversion of heart by which we die to the "old Adam" who embodies racist thinking and rise to the "new Adam," the image of Christ, so that we view every person, regardless of race or ethnicity, as our brother and sister. St. John reminds us:

The first step to liberation is to submit the forces which influence our culture to critical analysis. We need to become aware of just how racism has influenced our culture, our personal decision, and the institutions of our society.

The second step is for every Christian to submit to a personal process of conversion of heart, whereby we die to the "old Adam" who embodies racist thinking and rise to the "new Adam," the image of Christ, who views every person as brother and sister.

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"Anyone who says I love God and hates his brother is a liar, since the man who cannot love the brother that he can see, cannot love God whom he cannot see. So this is the commandment that He has given us, that anyone who loves God must also love his brother."¹⁷

Prayer will help us as we submit our thinking to critical review. Conforming our hearts to that of Christ will enable us to overcome any racism within us by the power of His transforming love.

The third step in the liberation process is for Whites and People of Color to work together in solidarity as vehicles of God's grace to eliminate every trace of racism from our culture and institutions. Just as individuals stand in need of conversion, so does our culture and the institutions of our society.

The Holy Father tells us that a conversion of heart is necessary, and that the starting point is prayer. He also reminds us that prayer to God is unworthy if those praying engage in discrimination against other groups of people.

This conversion of heart requires attuning oneself to the image of Christ.

"The ultimate remedy against evils such as this will not come solely from human effort. What is needed is the recreation of the human being according to the image revealed in Jesus Christ. For He reveals in Himself what each human being can and must become."¹⁸

The third step in the liberation process is for all of us, *Whites and People of Color*, to work together in solidarity as vehicles of God's grace to eliminate every trace of racism from our culture and the institutions of our society. As noted earlier, racism has so permeated our culture and the institutions of our society that it is a social as well as personal sin. Just as individuals stand in need of conversion, so, too, do the institutions of our society.

"The ultimate remedy against evils such as this will not come solely from human effort. What is needed is the recreation of the human being according to the image revealed in Jesus Christ. For He reveals in Himself what each human being can and must become."

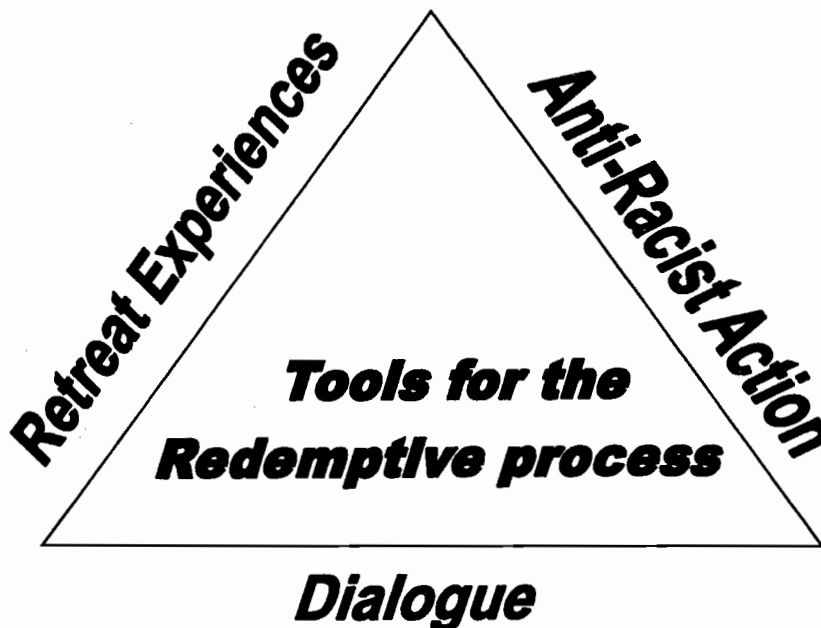
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Part V

Tools for the Redemptive Process

At the beginning of this letter, I made reference to racism affecting us personally, culturally and institutionally. It is important that any attempts to address this sin, and the consequent evil it produces, be attentive to these three levels. Therefore, I am proposing a concrete four-step approach. The first three address racism specifically on a cultural and personal level. While all are meant to have an impact upon institutional racism, the fourth initiative is designed to address that in a more direct fashion.

- The opportunity for dialogue among *Whites* and *People of Color*;
- A retreat-style format for *Whites* and *People of Color* to come to terms with how racism has affected the self-image of us all and to empower us to take control of that image;
- The opportunity for *Whites* to be able to examine the culture in which they were formed and to become



While all of the initiatives are meant to have an impact upon institutional racism, the fourth initiative is designed to address that in a more direct fashion.

Four tools for the redemptive process:

- 1. Dialogue among Whites and People of Color;*
- 2. Retreat experience to address the self-image caused by racism;*
- 3. Retreat experience on White Cultural Awareness;*
- 4. Creation of coalition groups to address institutional racism.*

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aware of the benefits which they enjoy that are denied to *People of Color*;

- The creation of coalitions of church groups to address specific issues of racism in Northwest Indiana.

Dialogue

An important first step in this process is to create opportunities for dialogue. Some would question what merit exists in dredging up painful memories or initiating a dialogue that may not lead to a fruitful conclusion. However, as in any dysfunctional family, unless the members are willing to admit to the dysfunction and to begin talking about their feelings, there is no movement toward health.

Dialogue is the first step in addressing the dysfunction of racism in our human family. It helps us step out of denial and give voice to the reality of how racism influences us personally.

I realize that it is impossible for people to forget the injustices they have suffered. Nor is it wise to try to do so, lest we forget what caused them and allow them to be repeated. But it is possible with God's grace, albeit with great difficulty, to move beyond that realm wherein pain, bitterness and resentment dwell, and to climb to a higher spiritual level. St. Paul reminds us:

“Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, bearing with one another and forgiving one another, if one has a grievance against another; as the Lord has forgiven you, so also you must do. And over all these put on love, that is the bond of perfection.” ¹⁹

Dialogue is the first step in addressing the dysfunction of racism. As in any dysfunctional family, unless the members are willing to admit the dysfunction and to begin talking about their feelings, there is no movement toward health.

Dialogue takes us past denial and indifference and sets us on a path to confront our own ignorance, insecurity and fear.

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It is imperative that those coming to the table be willing to "let go" of their bondage to the pain of past experiences in order for this dialogue to occur. St. Paul reminds us:

"Do not repay anyone evil for evil; be concerned for what is noble in the sight of all. If possible, on your part, live at peace with all. Beloved, do not look for revenge but leave room for the wrath; for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.'...Do not be conquered by evil but conquer evil with good." ²⁰

Those brave souls who summon the courage to do so will be among the pioneers who build a bridge across which others can traverse when they, too, become ready. This bridge will bring opportunities to live and move in each other's world until the day arrives when those worlds have become so welcoming of one another that the bridge becomes unnecessary.



Kathy Goudy, a parishioner at Ss. Monica and Luke, Gary, listens to Arvis Slaughter, a parishioner at St. Mary of the Lake, Gary, address topics on racism and social justice during a preparation workshop for National Black Catholic Congress IX, April 27, 2003.

It is imperative that those coming to the table be willing to "let go" of their bondage to the pain of past experiences in order for this dialogue to occur.

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On that day, the chasm of ignorance, insecurity and fear which had been bridged by people who dared to move out of their inner hurt will be filled with a greater knowledge of one another, a confidence in our ability to live in peace, and the courage to shape our future together in solidarity and friendship.

This will not happen unless there is leadership from our presbyterate and from the local Parish Pastoral Councils. It is important for our clergy and councils alike to take the steps necessary to create this dialogue. This means that people need to *search their own hearts and to let go of their own experiences of pain* as well as to examine wherein there exists traces of prejudice, discrimination and racism. The U.S. Bishops' Pastoral Letter, *Brothers and Sisters to Us*, says:

These brave souls build a bridge that enables each group to cross over into one another's world. They also pave the way for those who presently lack the courage to engage in this process to perhaps do so in the future. Our Parish Pastoral Councils and our presbyterate must provide the leadership and the opportunities for this to occur in every parish in our diocese.

"Racism is not merely one sin among many; it is a radical evil that divides the human family and denies the new creation of a redeemed world. To struggle against it demands an equally radical transformation, in our own minds and hearts as well as in the structure of our society."²¹

Retreat Experience

Following the dialogue phase, I also encourage the development of a program, modeled in the form of a retreat experience, for those who may want to become more actively involved in dealing with racism in a spiritual and psychological way. Such a program would enable *Whites* and *People of Color* to come together to examine the cultural effects of *White privilege* and racism on each of us. It would address the self-image racism bestows on us and how it influences us to regard others.

This is proposed as a means of empowering all of us to break free from the bondage of the "old Adam" so as to

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rise to a new way of thinking about ourselves and our relationship to others. Such an experience would also facilitate a process of healing so very much needed by us all.

A spiritual program of this kind would have benefits that go far beyond dealing with the reality of racism. It would strike at the very core of what it means to be Christian. Because the questions regarding race cause us to ask the deepest and most fundamental questions of our personal spirituality, this will necessarily cause us to revisit how we deal with all relationships.

It will necessitate asking ourselves what part we are playing in promoting justice and building up the Kingdom of God for all people of the world. The kind of conversion intended by the retreat experience is the same kind of spiritual transformation we seek to achieve each Lenten season. There is no member of the faithful who could not apply the benefits of this experience to every relationship in his/her life.

White Cultural Awareness

In conjunction with the retreat program open to all, opportunities must be provided for *Whites* to be able to reflect on how our American culture has influenced our lives and how deeply rooted racism has become in the American cultural psyche. We seldom take the time to examine the components of our cultural conditioning and are so busy with the tasks of survival that we simply react to life. Yet, those reactions, themselves, are influenced by our culture.

We can, in many ways, be unwitting participants in

Such soul searching is necessary if we are to examine how we, as Church, can better promote the building of God's Kingdom.

A retreat experience will be offered for Whites and People of Color to come together to examine the cultural effects of "White privilege" and to address the self-image racism bestows on each of us and how it influences us to regard others. The purpose is to empower each person to break free from the bondage of the "old Adam" so as to rise to a whole new way of thinking about oneself and others.

We will provide an experience in which Whites might come together to examine just how deeply our American culture has been influenced by racism and consequently each individual, and to explore how they can unwittingly collude with the perpetuation of racism.

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perpetuating racism. Only taking time to examine how that happens will enable us to begin taking measures to deal with it. There is no program in our area which presently enables *Whites* to engage in this process. This is an entirely new way of thinking for people in the *White* majority. I am, therefore, encouraging a program to be developed for this kind of experience of cultural examination with a view to reaching the personal spiritual *metanoia* I alluded to earlier.

Many of our White faithful have never had the opportunity to consider the benefits and privileges which flow from being "White" in American society. Such an experience will provide an opportunity to examine what is often simply taken for granted.

We are in need of more than mere tolerance of one another. We need for Whites and People of Color to join in fraternity and solidarity in an anti-racist approach to building the Kingdom of God.

Action

We need more than mere tolerance. We need more than a simple "live and let live" mentality. We need to join together, *Whites* and *People of Color*, in fraternity and solidarity in an anti-racist approach to building the Kingdom of God. We must realize our interdependence upon one another.

The dialogue, the retreat experience, and the "White Cultural Awareness" program will help us address the sin of racism as it exhibits itself in personal and cultural ways. In terms of institutional racism, I encourage our parishes to build coalitions with other parishes — perhaps by way of their Parish Pastoral Councils and Peace and Social Justice Commissions — to identify issues pertaining to racism and to begin to strategize how to address them.

It is also a priority that Catholic individuals, parishes, and diocesan institutions work in concert with other groups within Northwest Indiana to aggressively dismantle racism wherever it manifests itself in an institutional manner such as in hospitals, universities, businesses, social organizations, political organizations, banking, and any institution which affects the quality of life of the people of Northwest Indiana.

We need to work in broad coalitions to leverage the power necessary to deal with the most blatant manifestations of racism in our institutions today.

Recommendations

There are other recommendations which I would like to make to our faithful:

1) I encourage all of our faithful to examine their own consciences and make a greater effort to be sensitive to people of other cultures in our speech, the attitude and manner with which we relate to people and in decisions we make.

For the person who tells demeaning jokes or stories, or stereotypes a group of people, uses power or privilege to discriminate against someone, or refuses to be civil or extend the courtesy to another which he would desire himself, the real enemy is not the person who is the object of abuse, but the ignorance, fear, and insecurity within the person who commits these acts.

It is his own insecurity that prevents him from feeling good about himself that causes him to try to place someone else lower than himself. Such a person looks for others to legitimate his actions by soliciting their approval, whether by verbal or tacit consent.

Whenever we openly agree with that thinking we are complicit with racism. But also whenever we remain silent, we become just as guilty. It is imperative for each of our faithful to take an active role in making it known that they will not tolerate demeaning jokes or stories

or innuendos in their presence.

2) I ask our Parish Worship Commissions to specifically include in the examination of conscience during the Advent and Lenten penance services in their parish those areas in our life where we may be participating in or condoning racism.

3) I encourage parishes and their Pastoral Councils to assess what efforts they make to welcome newcomers to the parish and to the community, and to take whatever steps are necessary to be more welcoming and inclusive. Recent surveys have shown that we have much work to do in becoming the welcoming parishes we often think we already are.

4) I am asking parents to address the sin of racism with their children. *White* parents, and *Parents of Color* alike, can reaffirm that racism is an attitude which is based upon ignorance, fear and insecurity. Parents can teach their children not to demean others in speech or action and to stand up for the rights of all people. Most importantly, parents can "model" the kind of behavior they teach their children.

5) I am asking that, as in this past year, through our schools and religious

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education programs in our parishes, we make the necessary information available to our teachers which will help them better instruct our children in the cultures representative of Northwest Indiana and to participate whenever possible in the actual celebrations associated with those cultures. Occasions where children can visit and forge relationships with children of other parishes in our diocese are also to be encouraged.

6) The Catholic Diocese of Gary has made attempts to show solidarity with *People of Color* in different ways:

a) as a sign of the Church's commitment to remain present to a city which houses the largest population of *People of Color* in our area, the diocese has renovated Holy Angels Cathedral in Gary and uses it as the site for all major diocesan liturgical activities;

b) by rebuilding homes in Gary to make available to low-income purchasers;

c) by providing social services and advocacy programs through Catholic Charities for those who are in need;

d) by being attentive to equal opportunity employment practices; and

e) by bringing together the clergy of the diocese as well as parish leaders, Catholic school teachers, directors of religious education, catechists, diocesan programmatic coordinators, diocesan

staff and other employees of the diocese for the purpose of examining the sin of racism in their own hearts and the ways in which it may be addressed in all areas of the work of the Church.

Nevertheless, it is important for us to subject our Church policies to a more thorough diocesan audit to examine in what other ways we may better reflect the image of God's Kingdom. We will be taking steps to do so.

7) It is critical that the Church model the behavior it seeks to promote. Therefore, we must express our sorrow for past sins of racism, whether committed personally or by the institution of the Church, and to ritualize atonement for those sins. In 2004, I will ask the faithful of the Diocese of Gary to gather at the Holy Angels Cathedral to participate in an Atonement Service.

8) I also encourage, in years to come, the participation of all of our Catholic faithful in a new effort called "Study Circles." This program will enable people from diverse cultural backgrounds, geographic areas, and religions to come together for the purpose of dialogue about racism.

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Conclusion

I know there are many *People of Color* who feel that all of this and more has been a long time in coming, and are impatient to see the mechanisms of racism dismantled. There are also many *Whites* who have and will continue to work to end racism. They, too, are impatient, and they wonder what it will take to convince others to join ranks with them. My wish is that both of these groups work in unison to continue to build a new pluricultural society where there is no longer room for racism. The Pontifical Commission on Peace and Justice states:

“Respect for every person and every race is respect for basic rights, dignity and fundamental equality. This does not mean erasing cultural differences. Instead it is important to educate to a positive appreciation of the complementary diversity of peoples. A well-understood pluralism resolves the problem of closed racism.” ²²

In doing thus, we will, as Gandhi suggested, “become the solution we want to see.” There will be many who will refuse to be enlightened, but much can still be accomplished.

Jesus said that the Kingdom of God is among you. His Kingdom is something that exists not just in heaven but is among us here on earth as well, although in an incomplete form. His Kingdom exists wherever people are able to realize their God-given right to self-worth.

His Kingdom exists wherever our culture values and reinforces the right of every person to become all that God has desired for them. His Kingdom exists wherever the institutions of our society ensure the fair and equitable distribution of goods and services and ensures equal access to opportunities to every person in our society.

It is obvious that the fullness of God's Kingdom exists more in our prayers and hopes than in reality, but that is not cause for discouragement. It is the function of the Church to be the sign and instrument of building up God's Kingdom, and Jesus has promised that the power of God would always remain with His Church.

Confident of God's abiding presence, it is our task to enable the Church to be about its work of transforming individual hearts as well as our culture and the institutions of our society. Committed to this effort, each year that we work together will bring us closer to the realization of the vision Jesus has for His people. This will

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not happen, however, without some conflict. Jesus warned His Apostles of the same thing when He said:

“Do you think I have come to establish peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division. From now on a household will be divided, three against two and two against three; a father will be divided against his son and a son against his father, a mother against her daughter and a daughter against her mother, a mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law.” ²³

This is not something Jesus encouraged, but He was acknowledging that in the search for truth, even the closest of family members would have severe disagreements. We must expect this and not allow it to dissuade us from our goals. Jesus also said:

“You cannot be my disciple unless you love me more than you love your father and mother, your wife and children, and your brothers and sisters. You cannot come with me unless you love me more than you love your own life. You cannot be my disciple unless you carry your own cross and come with me.” ²⁴

Here Jesus is reminding us of the importance of choosing the “truth” over and above any allegiance to anything or anyone else. Our “cross” is the suffering we endure in the pursuit of fulfilling His will. In this case, the fulfillment of that will is realized in transforming our culture and society into one which is free from racism.

Faithful to the spiritual legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., let us proceed in a spirit of non-violence. Dr. King's desire to use non-violence as a tool for achieving success in passing civil rights legislation was based upon his love and respect of every human being as a creature fashioned in the image of God.

With that same spirit of love and respect, let us pledge to unite our minds, our hearts, and our wills in solidarity and friendship with the firm purpose to achieve the ends of building God's Kingdom and ridding our culture of the sin of racism, without resorting to violence, be it physical or psychological. And may our God who makes all things work for the Good, guide us in this, His Work.

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Notes

- ¹ West, Cornel (2001) *Race Matters*, p.17f, New York, Vintage Books.
- ² Genesis 1:27
- ³ *Gaudium et Spes*, No. 22
- ⁴ *Brothers and Sisters to Us*, p. 3
- ⁵ *Gaudium et Spes*, No. 24
- ⁶ Williams, C. (2002) *Racial Sobriety*, p. 35f. Detroit. Institute for Recovery from Racisms
- ⁷ *Gaudium et Spes*, No. 43
- ⁸ *Gaudium et Spes*, No. 35
- ⁹ *Gaudium et Spes*, No. 25
- ¹⁰ U.S. Census Bureau, 2000
- ¹¹ Ignatiev, N. and J. Garvey, Eds.(1996). *Race Traitor*. New York, Routledge Publishers.
- ¹² Leviticus 19: 33-34
- ¹³ U. S. Census Bureau, July 2001
- ¹⁴ I Cor. 9: 22
- ¹⁵ Dar Al Islam
- ¹⁶ *To Live in Christ Jesus*, p. 25. National Conference of Catholic Bishops
- ¹⁷ I John 4: 20-21
- ¹⁸ *Brothers and Sisters to Us*, p. 8
- ¹⁹ Colossians 3:12-14
- ²⁰ Romans 12:17-19, 21
- ²¹ *Brothers and Sisters to Us*, p. 10
- ²² Pontifical Commission on Peace and Justice, 1988 article 33.
- ²³ Luke 12:51-53
- ²⁴ Luke 14:26-27

Appendix

Definition of Terms

The terms prejudice, discrimination and racism are defined differently by many people, as are the terms *White* and *People of Color*. For purposes of clarity of understanding in this Pastoral Letter and in the discussion guide to follow, I would like to submit the following definitions:

Prejudice refers to a frame of mind in which we prejudge a person or group, make mental assumptions about that person and/or group, and then make decisions which we verbalize or upon which we act. This prejudgment (by virtue of the fact that it is a PREjudgment) is made without a

real knowledge of the person or group. It is a judgment made out of ignorance. The judgment may or may not have moral consequences. Not all prejudgments are malicious.

Discrimination refers to the decisions we make and/or actions we take, influenced by prejudice or racism which deny a person or group that to which they have a right.

Racism is based upon a belief that human beings can be divided into groups called races, that race is the primary determinant of human traits and capacities, and that *racial* differences produce an inherent superiority of a particular race. This belief takes shape in attitudes which are discriminatory to persons within a particular race. This is called racism. It is systemic in nature and is manifested in personal, cultural and institutional ways.

Racism is inextricably linked with our American culture and expresses itself primarily by means of defining each person in terms of race and, on that basis, assigning him/her a social identity in relationship to others. This is called *cultural racism*. The discriminatory words and actions of individuals which are reflective of cultural racism are the manifestation of *personal racism*.

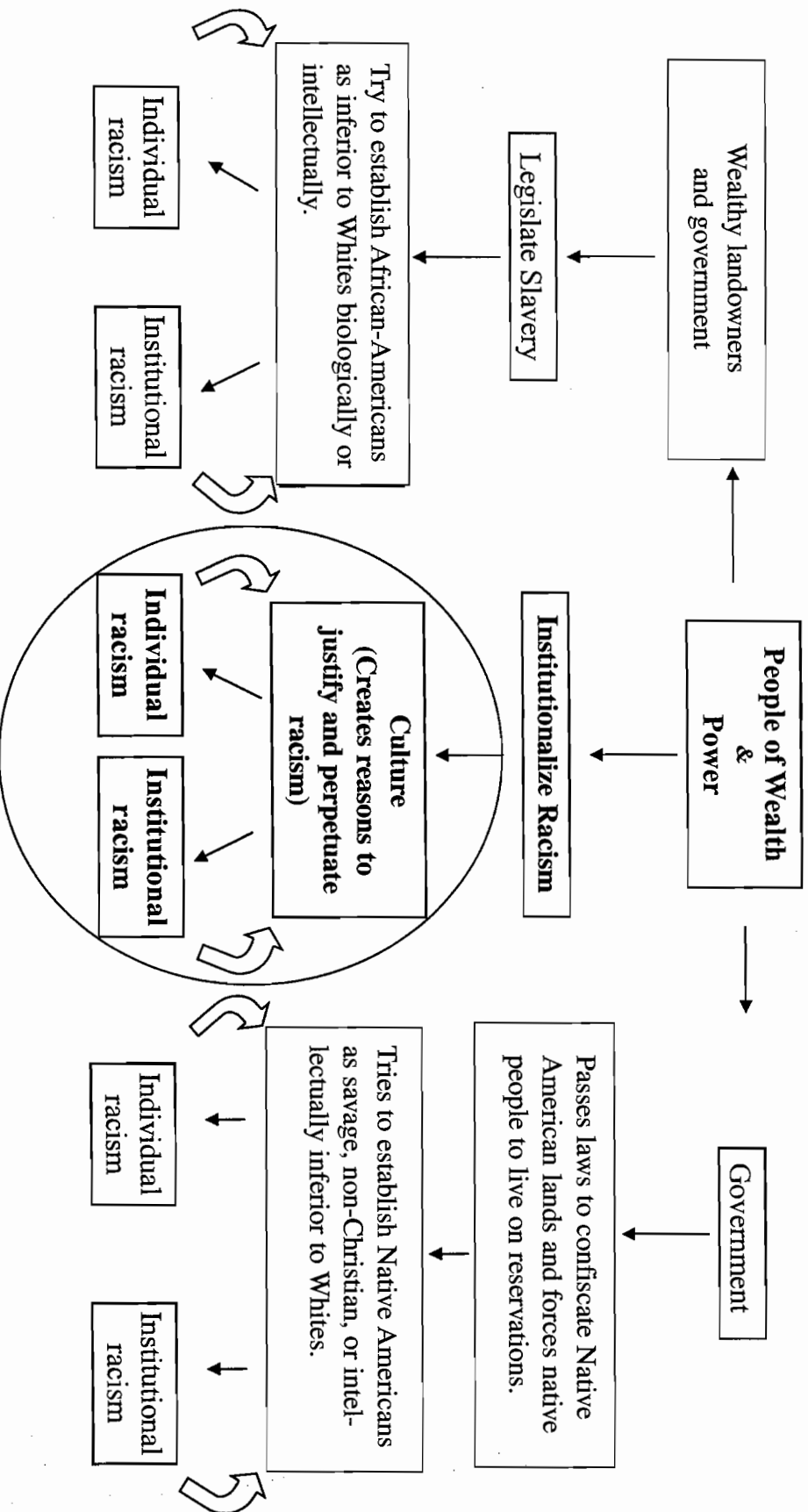
Racism also takes form in an institutional manner, i.e., in civil laws, in the practices, procedures and regulations of governmental, educational, health and social service institutions and businesses, etc. This is referred to as *institutional racism*.

The term **White** refers to the dominant cultural group in our country. Originally, this group was primarily of western European descent. It is important to note that "White" has come to include over the years ethnic groups from other parts of the world. *White* actually does not refer to a race but rather a social class or caste of people who have access to political and economic power which gives them privileges that *People of Color* do not share.

The terms **People of Color** and **Non-Whites** will refer to all other ethnic groups. While these terms do refer to skin color, they refer much more to a social class which, for the most part, finds itself disenfranchised and without the privileges enjoyed by *Whites*.

Examples of Vicious Cycles of Racism

A power elite (such as early landowners and government) institutionalizes racism (as in legislating slavery or confiscating Native American lands) and then seeks to justify such behavior by rationalizing a basis for it. In most cases, the powerful appeal to science or religion to justify that one race is superior to another. The culture, which is determined by this same power elite, incorporates this as belief. Through American culture, racism has influenced individuals and their decisions, as well as the institutions of our society. Racist individual decisions and institutional practices and laws reinforce racism even more strongly within our culture, thereby feeding a vicious cycle.



Appendix

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As we move beyond this letter to accomplish the work which the Gospel calls upon us to undertake, I want to thank our Priests, Deacons, and Parish Pastoral Councils, as well as the program coordinators of the diocese, Catholic school teachers, catechists and other dedicated Catholic faithful for their commitment to Jesus' mandate to eradicate racism from our hearts, our culture, and the institutions of our society.

"The first step

in dealing with the sin of racism is to summon the courage to face our own insecurities and fears and to be open to Jesus' call to deeper conversion which we receive through Scripture and the teachings of our Church. I invite you to join with me in that process."

From *"Created in God's Image: a Pastoral Letter on the Sin of Racism and a Call to Conversion"* by the
Most Reverend Dale J. Melczek
Bishop of the Diocese of Gary

