Moral theologian Bryan Massingale’s *Racial Justice and the Catholic Church* fills a long-standing void in moral theology that has largely failed to contend with racism. Deeply compassionate and prophetic, Massingale delivers an incisive analysis in a lively and widely accessible prose.

*Racial Justice* breaks down three obstacles to address racism in the U.S. First, we lack a common understanding of racism—we really don’t know what we are talking about. Second, in mixed-race contexts, we really don’t know how to talk about race. Finally, we—especially white European Americans—don’t want to talk about racial tensions in the U.S. because we don’t want to contend with the multiple ways that we benefit from racial hierarchy.

Yet it is precisely the unease, tension, denial, fear, anger, and confusion that we whites must work through. Massingale tenderly challenges us to engage reality honestly.

Too often, white Americans over-emphasize the negative impacts of racism without contending with the way our white way of life creates racial injustice. At best, this over-emphasis leads to a distanced relationship of charity without justice. Worse, the failure to address the dynamics of whiteness reinforces the culture of racial hierarchy.

Racial Justice illuminates the dynamics of whiteness through history, critical race analysis of U.S. Catholic pastoral letters on racism, and Massingale’s experience of urging the U.S. Catholic Bishops to issue a new pastoral letter.

In a meeting of U.S. Catholic Bishops to consider Massingale’s proposal for a new pastoral letter, two bishops responded in the meeting this way:

“If we say what you want us to say, our people will get mad.”

“My people won’t understand white privilege.”

Massingale responded: “Thank you for your comments. They are more helpful than you realize. But I need some clarification. When you say ‘your people’ will get mad, or ‘your people’ won’t understand, who do you mean? After all, I am sure that there are many Black, Latino, and American Indian parishioners in your dioceses who will not only welcome this document, but also understand exactly what is meant. So, who are your people?”

The bishops’ response was silence. Massingale concludes: “Through their comments, these church leaders and officials inadvertently revealed a core reality of U.S. Catholic Church, that is, what they really believe yet seldom make explicit. Namely, that ‘Catholic’ = ‘white.’”

The church does not reflect its multicultural reality, and it pervasively demonstrates that “European aesthetics, music, theology, and persons—these and only these—are standard, normative, universal, and truly ‘Catholic.’” More importantly, the church lacks the compassion to recognize the full humanity of persons of color, it lacks the passion to take responsibility for the enduring wounds of racism, and it offers no process for repairing the material harms caused by white systemic advantage.

*Racial Justice* invites all to risk a new way of life—to learn humbly, for example, the uncommon faithfulness of African American Catholics who witness how “there is a way when there is no way.” Dare we whites risk a new way of hope and love?

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