Catholic Social Teaching on Race: A Select Bibliography of Papal, Conciliar, Vatican, and U.S. Episcopal Statements and Pastoral Letters

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In-depth theological reflection and social analysis of the reality of race, racism, and xenophobia were not developed in magisterial Catholic social teaching until the late 20th century. This annotated bibliography of official Roman Catholic and U.S. episcopal teaching regarding racism highlights key points of the most significant documents from the past 70 years. This teaching contributes critical theological, biblical, and moral insight for personal, institutional, and societal conversion, including that of the church, in the struggle for racial justice and equality. For additional background and resources, see Dawn M. Nothwehr, *That They May Be One: Catholic Social Teaching on Racism, Tribalism, and Xenophobia*. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2008.

Papal, Conciliar, and Vatican Documents

Mit Brennender Sorge: On the Church and the German Reich
Pope Pius XI (1937)

*Key Points:* (This document was smuggled into Germany and read from Catholic pulpits on Palm Sunday, March 21, 1937.)
1. Condemns idolatry of particular races, peoples, or States.
2. Hebrew scriptures (Old Testament) convey divine revelation.

Gaudium et Spes: Pastoral Constitution in the Modern World
Vatican Council II (1965)

*Key Points:*
1. Universal human dignity means that any “social or cultural discrimination against basic personal rights” is incompatible with “God’s design” (No. 29).
2. Economic and social disparities are a scandal against social justice (No. 29).

The Church and Racism: Toward a More Fraternal Society

*Key Points:*
1. Doctrines of racial superiority are “scientifically false, morally condemnable and socially unjust and dangerous” (Nos. 2 and 33).
2. All human beings belong to one biological species (No. 18).
3. Develops critique of the following forms of racism:
   a. *Institutionalized* racism and apartheid systems that legally or culturally sanction superiority of European peoples over African, Indian, or “colored” peoples.
   b. *Social* racism that isolates, exploits, or maintains particular populations in inferior social or economic situations.
   c. *Xenophobia* or racial hatred that exaggerates nationalist or superficial chauvinism against new immigrants.
   d. *Eugenic* racism—ways that genetic manipulation, abortion, and sterilization campaigns may racially select human beings.
4. Ending legal discrimination is insufficient. Conversion to lived racial equality means living a spirituality of dialogue, sharing, mutual aid, and collaboration with other ethnic groups (No. 25).

Contribution to World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance
Pontifical Commission for Justice and Peace (Durban, South Africa, 2001)

*Key Points:*
1. Globalization has intensified racial and economic divides (Nos. 4 and 21).
2. Condemns new forms of economic, migrant, and sexual slavery.
4. Reaffirms requests for pardon for the church, so the church may be purified of “counter-witness and scandal” (No. 6).
5. Reparation “should erase all the consequences of the illicit action and restore things to the way they probably would be if that action had not occurred” (No. 12).

The Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church

*Key Points:*
1. Human dignity before God begins Christian reflection on race and racism.
2. Jesus Christ is the definitive witness of love and prototype of a new humanity.
3. The Spirit, through baptism, calls everyone to rediscover the unity and diversity of the human family, and build an effective common good.

U.S. Conference of Bishops

Victory and Peace
National Catholic Welfare Conference (1942)

The Essentials of a Good Peace
National Catholic Welfare Conference (1943)

*Key Point:*
1. Advocates political equality, fair economic and educational opportunities, a just share in public welfare, good housing, and full chance for social advancement of the Negro race.

Discrimination and the Christian Conscience
United States Catholic Welfare Conference (1958)

*Key Points:*
1. Race question is moral and religious.
2. “Full and equal justice must be given to all citizens, specifically those who are Negro.”

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Statement of the Bishops of the United States Concerning Racial Harmony (1963)

On Race Relations and Poverty
   National Conference of Catholic Bishops (1966)

National Race Crisis
   United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (1968)
   Key Points:
   1. White segregationist mentality responsible for present crisis and “to varying degrees, we all share in the guilt” (Nos. 6-7).
   3. Unfinished business of eradicating racism in every institution of the church.
   4. Develop jobs, affordable housing, and welfare assistance that does not break up families, citing the scandal of the “Man in the House” rule which limited national welfare payments to single mothers.
   5. Complacency will only lead to further alienation and polarization of society (Nos. 27-28).

Statement of U.S. Catholic Bishops on American Indians
   United States Catholic Conference (1977)
   Key Points:
   1. Calls Americans to reflect upon past injustices toward American Indians (No. 12).
   2. U.S. nation building filled with sorrow and death for diverse Indian populations (No. 14).
   3. American Indians struggle with multiple ways tribes have been uprooted.
   4. Jesus’ command to love neighbor demands that U.S. Catholics struggle together with Indian brothers and sisters to secure justice (No. 20).

Brothers and Sisters to Us
   United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (1979)
   Key Points:
   1. Racism is a “radical evil.” Laments loss of sense of urgency since 1968.
   2. Must address interconnection between racial and economic oppression.
   3. Societal structures are geared to success of majority and failure of minority.
   4. Condemns racist practices of social steering and blockbusting and disproportionate numbers of incarcerated minorities.

What We Have Seen and Heard: A Pastoral Letter on Evangelization
   Black Catholic Bishops of the United States (1984)
   Key Points:
   1. African-American spirituality is rooted in scriptural promise of liberation and hope learned through the “dark days of slavery.” Four characteristics mark Black spirituality: contemplation, holism, joy, and community.
   2. Equality prerequisite for true reconciliation.
   3. Black communities celebrate kin networks and value all life. Due to historical racial hatred toward Black men, calls for reevaluation of vocation of fatherhood.
   4. Affirm call to celebrate being Black and Catholic—the Catholic Church is not a “White Church.” African-American witness precious to universal character of Catholicism.
   5. Racist Church is still a hindrance to full development of Black leadership.

The Hispanic Presence: Challenge and Commitment

Asian and Pacific Presence: Harmony in Faith
   United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (2001)

Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship: A Call to Political Responsibility
   Key Point:
   1. Racism is intrinsically evil, a direct assault on human life, and can never be justified (No. 23).

Statements of Gulf South Catholic Conferences of Bishops

Florida
   The Social Concerns in Florida (1985)

Louisiana
   Confronting with Courageous Hearts (section on race relations) (1984)
   Statement Against Racism (1989)
   Statement Against Racism (1990)
   Racial Harmony (1997)

Pastoral Letters of Archbishops of New Orleans

The Morality of Racial Segregation
   Archbishop Joseph Rummel (1956)

Made in the Image of God: A Pastoral Letter on Racial Harmony
   Archbishop Alfred Hughes (2006)