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## The Catholic Church and Anti-Racialism

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Friday, February 2, 2024

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Journalist Nikole Hannah-Jones, creator of the influential “1619 Project,” once claimed <sup>[1]</sup> that “the white race is the biggest murderer, rapist, pillager, and thief of the modern world.” Naturally, she also dismisses criticisms of her work <sup>[2]</sup> as motivated by racism. Bestselling author Ibram X. Kendi has similarly labeled his interlocutors bigots <sup>[3]</sup>, and in 2020 implied <sup>[4]</sup> that then-Supreme Court nominee Amy Coney Barrett’s adoption of two black children was a kind of white colonization. Black Lives Matter co-founder Patrice Cullors – who used BLM funds <sup>[5]</sup> to bankroll her extravagant lifestyle <sup>[6]</sup> – has accused her critics not only of being racist <sup>[7]</sup> but also seeking to assassinate her <sup>[8]</sup>.

These are some of the most prominent voices of America’s anti-racist movement, and the above examples are representative of how anti-racist leaders often respond to even measured criticism of their ideas: unsubstantiated, with vicious *ad hominem*. Which, as one might expect, complicates efforts to productively debate the veracity or utility of the anti-racism project.

As Kendi himself asserts in his book *How to Be an Antiracist*: “One either allows racial inequities to persevere, as a racist, or confronts racial inequities, as an anti-racist. There is no in-between safe space of ‘not racist.’” Read: if you don’t submissively accept what Anti-racism Inc. is selling (which is not cheap! <sup>[9]</sup>), then you are a racist and bigot, or an enabler of racists and bigots.

Deacon Harold Burke-Sivers, author of *Building a Civilization of Love: A Catholic Response to Racism* <sup>[10]</sup>, is aware of this problem: “Ever since the Black Lives Matter movement gained prominence, I have been an outspoken critic of what they stand for, to the point of not seeing any purpose of engaging in dialogue with them.” And yet, Burke-Sivers continues, “I now believe that Catholics should be open to establishing a dialogue with BLM, as difficult as those conversations may be. . . . There is no harm in having open and honest dialogue with those we disagree with.” Can one have open and honest dialogue with those whose default response is to attack or misrepresent criticism as stemming from bad faith?

It’s a curious position for Deacon Burke-Sivers to hold, given how well he understands anti-racism. His chapter on critical race theory, for example, carefully charts the Marxist origins of that intellectual movement, and then explains how CRT is incompatible with Catholicism, and more broadly, Biblical teaching. He notes that CRT holds that racism is an inherent, preternatural quality of the human condition that is impossible to eliminate, rather than a result of original sin.

This puts CRT at odds both with historic, orthodox Christianity, but also natural law and its understanding of vice and virtue. Moreover, in its emphasis on addressing systems and power structures to the exclusion of individuals and their choices, CRT elides the reality of personal culpability, whether it be on the part of victimizer whites or victimized “persons of color.”

*The Virgin of Guadalupe* <sup>[11]</sup> (*Black Madonna*) by an unknown artist, 1745 [Wellcome Collection, London]

His treatment of BLM – a child of both Marxism and CRT – is equally strong. Citing its own website, Burke-Sivers argues “BLM is using prejudice and racial injustice as a Trojan horse to advance their true agenda: the promotion and normalization of alternative lifestyle choices as well as the destruction of the nuclear family.” He rightly notes the hypocrisy of BLM’s dogmatically pro-choice politics, which result in the deaths of hundreds of thousands of black lives in the womb every year. He critiques BLM’s aversion to what it called “the Western-prescribed nuclear family structure requirement,” a foolhardy misjudgment of what ails black America, given that about seventy percent of black children in America <sup>[12]</sup> are born to unmarried mothers.

The chapter on liberation theology (and, more immediately relevant to the book, black liberation theology), is a bit less coherent. After rightly censuring liberation theology for its Marxist roots (and premises) and its tendency to promote equality through violence, Burke-Sivers discusses James H. Cone and his 1970 work *A Black Theology of Liberation*. Cone teaches, among other things, that “whiteness is the symbol for the Antichrist,” whereas “freedom means an affirmation of blackness. To be free is to be black.” Cone’s anthropology and theology, Burke-Sivers concludes, seem to have “no doctrinal basis but is simply an *ad hominem* attack against white people.” Well, yes, besides also being absurd and offensive.

Nevertheless, in response to the question “Can black liberation theology, then, be utilized in a Catholic response to racism?” Burke-Sivers answers, surprisingly, “I believe the answer is both yes and no.” The reason for this, besides the fact that this intellectual movement encourages racial antagonism while de-emphasizing individual sin, is because black liberation theology can potentially “[direct] the faithful toward a deeper understanding and appreciation of the black experience.”

Burke-Sivers cites as an example the work of M. Shawn Copeland, who explains that black Catholic theology evaluates social, political, economic, and cultural situations, as well as Catholic “traditions, symbols, and ecclesiastical structures,” to reveal “stories of repression.”

Yet theology is not properly the study of society, politics, economies, or cultures. It is the study of things *divine*. To interpret Catholic theology, or any Christian theology for that matter, through these sociological lenses, is to subject the study of God to the same Marxist methods of critical theory that Burke-Sivers so expertly exposes and refutes. (That might explain why Copeland in 2021 bluntly claimed that BLM “is what theology looks like.”)

Black liberation theology, then, while communicating something about the experience of *some* black Christians, seems the wrong tool to improve fellowship between black and non-black Christian

communities, as worthy an enterprise as that is.

It is true, as Burke-Sivers writes, that black Catholics, like all black Christians in America, have often faced a “struggle to be recognized, welcomed, and accepted as human persons.” Yet it seems unlikely we will address those struggles in dialogue with those whose Marxist and racist origins are so decidedly anti-Christian.

If the words and behaviors of the leading lights of the anti-racist movement are any indication, we already have ample evidence to predict how such conversations will go.

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Article printed from The Catholic Thing: <https://www.thecatholicthing.org>

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- [1] once claimed: <https://thefederalist.com/2020/06/25/in-racist-screed-nyts-1619-project-founder-calls-white-race-barbaric-devils-bloodsuckers-no-different-than-hitler/>
- [2] dismisses criticisms of her work: <https://thefederalist.com/2021/05/26/no-refusing-to-teach-the-1619-project-isnt-cancel-culture/>
- [3] labeled his interlocutors bigots: <https://www.firstthings.com/article/2020/10/against-racialism>
- [4] implied: <https://www.newsweek.com/why-ibram-kendi-facing-backlash-over-tweet-about-amy-coney-barretts-adopted-haitian-children-1534507>
- [5] used BLM funds: <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/nbcblk/black-lives-matter-leaders-condemn-allegations-mismanaged-funds-rcna23882>
- [6] bankroll her extravagant lifestyle: <https://nypost.com/2022/05/17/inside-blm-co-founder-patrice-cullors-questionable-tax-filings/>
- [7] not only of being racist: <https://nypost.com/2022/04/06/blms-patrice-cullors-slams-racist-report-on-6m-social-mansion/>
- [8] seeking to assassinate her: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/feb/28/i-have-a-lot-of-resentment-patrice-cullors-on-co-founding-black-lives-matter-the-backlash-and-why-the-police-must-go>
- [9] which is not cheap!: <https://www.nationalreview.com/corner/ibram-x-kendi-made-about-541-a-minute-for-a-speech-at-the-university-of-virginia/>
- [10] *Building a Civilization of Love: A Catholic Response to Racism*: <https://amzn.to/3SHGHGW>
- [11] [\*The Virgin of Guadalupe\*: https://www.thecatholicthing.org/wp-content/uploads/default-4.jpg](#)
- [12] [seventy percent of black children in America: https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nvsr/nvsr68/nvsr68\\_13\\_tables-508.pdf](https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nvsr/nvsr68/nvsr68_13_tables-508.pdf)

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