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## **Regrouping in the Clearing: Resisting *Liturgiam Authenticam* and Reconsidering an African American Rite**

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**Abstract:** In light of the move to the right manifested in the recent changes to the Roman Rite, this essay seeks to add an Africentric and postcolonial critique to other recent liturgical and linguistic critiques of the new rite by liturgy scholars and pastors. I argue that the new translation is an attack on not only Vatican II principles but also on black Catholic theological principles, the black Catholic community, and oppressed populations in general. The essay seeks to locate the racism, sexism, heterosexism, and classism behind the imperialist nostalgia of *Liturgiam Authenticam* by revisiting the nineteen sixties and the issues and movements to which the Second Vatican Council was a response. I make the argument that this present translation and the imperialist motivations behind it should be countered with a renewed effort from black Catholics to create and petition for an African American Catholic rite.

**Keywords:** Vatican Council II, liturgy, African American Catholic rite, *Liturgiam Authenticam*, patriarchy, liberation, black Catholic theology, liberation theology, political theology, black Catholics, racism, sexism, heterosexism, classism, postcolonialism and Christianity, postcolonial theory and Catholicism, queer theory and Catholicism

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### **Shaking Ourselves Up to Pour Ourselves Out**

In a talk delivered at the "Celebration Conference on Effective Liturgy" in Chicago, July 21-23, 2010 entitled "Shaken Up So We Can Pour Ourselves Out: Spontaneity Is An Essential Part Of Liturgy,"<sup>1</sup> internationally known liturgical composer and leader of black liturgy, Grayson Brown, tried to get at what's wrong with the 2010 linguistic and

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<sup>1</sup> Grayson Warren Brown, "Shaken Up So We Can Pour Ourselves Out" (*National Catholic Reporter*, August 10, 2010), <https://www.ncronline.org/news/parish/shaken-so-we-can-pour-ourselves-out?...> Accessed August 7, 2019.

theological approach of *Liturgiam Authenticam*<sup>2</sup> and its accompanying translation.<sup>3</sup> Drawing from the liturgical and theological principles painstakingly formed by African American Catholics over the last few decades, Brown's short piece speaks of the need to recapture a "spontaneity" that, in his words, cannot be embodied without a "shaking up" and "pouring out" of Spirit and purpose. Such a spontaneity is profoundly cultural and theological and speaks of the need, he claims, to have urgent preaching and prophetic ritual. Urgent preaching and prophetic ritual in the black Catholic church is more than a sometimes romanticized black "soulfulness." It is that which is necessary to our very political, ecclesial survival. Moreover, this survival involves more than black American Catholics. Given the important place and voice we black American Catholics hold and share in the international black Catholic church, it impacts profoundly the future of black Catholicism in the world.

Emancipation and survival have always been intimately connected for black Americans and black diasporic peoples. And so, the religions and churches black people created were finely shaped for survival; indeed, knowing how to survive in a multitude of ways is why black Christianity and black Christians exist. The poet Paul Lawrence Dunbar describes so well the personality and one of the methodologies of a people brought into bondage in a strange land in his poems "We Wear the Mask" and "I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings." In the former he writes:

We wear the mask that grins and lies,  
It hides our cheeks and shades our eyes,  
This debt we pay to human guile;  
With torn and bleeding hearts we smile...  
Why should the world be overwise...  
Nay, let them only see us, while  
We wear the mask.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> *Liturgiam Authenticam. On the Use of Vernacular Languages in the Publication of the Books of the Roman Liturgy.* (March, 2001). [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/ccdds/documents/rc\\_con\\_ccdds\\_doc\\_20010507\\_liturgiam-authenticam\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccdds/documents/rc_con_ccdds_doc_20010507_liturgiam-authenticam_en.html). Accessed August 10, 2019.

<sup>3</sup> For a discussion on the implementation of *Liturgiam Authenticam* see Gerald O'Collins, *Lost in Translation: The English Language and the Catholic Mass* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press Academic, 2017), 27-31.

<sup>4</sup> Paul Lawrence Dunbar, "We Wear the Mask," in *Black Voices: An Anthology of African-American Literature*, edited by Abraham Chapman (New York: Penguin Books, 1968), 355.

And so, I don't think I would be alone in arguing that anything that subverts the enduring principles, power, and wisdom we have developed for survival disarms us in dangerous ways. My personal concern about our black Catholic survival is the reason I am adding my voice to the debate against the newest translation of the Roman Missal. But my framework and background is not that of a scholar of the Roman liturgy. And, though I will refer to our black Catholic achievements in developing black liturgical principles and call for a return to them, the details of developing a black Catholic rite are less my concern than the reasons I believe such a rite is urgent. My concern is more that of a liberation theologian, a postcolonial and cultural theorist, and, of course, a black Catholic.

As to the larger church, the stage for developing such a rite has already been set by Pope Francis as he has called in his recent *motu proprio*, *Magnum Principium*,<sup>5</sup> for the reinstating of the "important principle" of the Vatican Council which allowed national bishops' conferences the right to translate liturgical texts in a comprehensible vernacular.<sup>6</sup> This right was stolen by *Liturgiam Authenticam*<sup>7</sup> and its subsequent translation as it replaced the post-conciliar translations with rhetorical style that emphasizes a more literal translation from the Latin texts. The primary principle of the Second Vatican Council, on the other hand, is articulated in the Vatican instruction issued November 1965 entitled *Comme le prévoit (CLP)* which was prepared by 249 experts and representatives from around the world. It said that, "when a common language is spoken in several different countries, international commissions should be appointed by the conferences of bishops who

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<sup>5</sup>Pope Francis, *Apostolic Letter in the form of Motu Proprio "Magnum Principium."* <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2017/09/09/170909a.html>. (accessed August 7, 2019). See commentary from Cesare Giraudo "Magnum Principium' and Liturgical Inculturation on the Path of the Council," (*La Civiltà Cattolica Quaderno 4018*, Volume IV, Anno 2017 ), 311 – 324. Original text found in Rita, Ferrone, "A nail in the coffin of *Liturgiam Authenticam*." Pray and Tell: Worship, Wisdom, and Wit. <https://www.praytellig.com/index.php/2017/11/18/a-nail-in-the-coffin-of-liturgiam-authenticam/>(accessed August 10, 2019).

<sup>6</sup> The pope has received some resistance and delay on this. E.g., see Ruth Gledhill, "Liturgy *motu proprio* 'cannot be applied retroactively'" (*The Tablet*, November, 20, 2017). <https://www.thetablet.co.uk/news/8113/liturgymotu-proprio-cannot-be-applied-retroactively/> Accessed August 7, 2019.

<sup>7</sup> For a longer discussion regarding the emergence of *Liturgiam Authenticam* see Gerald O'Collins, *Lost in Translation: The English Language and the Catholic Mass* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press Academic, 2017), 27-31. See also Maurice Taylor, *It's the Eucharist, Thank God*. (Suffolk, U.K.: Decani Books, 2009), 61-70.

speak the same language to make one text for all."<sup>8</sup> This method of translation is commonly called "dynamic equivalence"—a meaning-for-meaning vs. word-for-word approach—and allows for a language to grow and change according to the times, location, etc.<sup>9</sup> This method follows in the spirit of the Vatican II Constitution of Sacred Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, and is of great importance in that it is the very first of the Vatican II documents; and so the change from church Latin to the vernacular becomes emblematic of the whole paradigm shift of the council: one that sought to refocus the worship and theology of Roman Catholicism towards a more democratic, from-the-ground-up approach.

I, therefore, would like to analyze the advent of *Liturgiam Authenticam* from primarily a postcolonial and cultural criticism point of view and hope that such an addition might aid in the complete withdrawal of the translation to which we are presently subjected. My areas of interest include critical theories, liberative theologies, and ritual studies. I list these because they describe my point of view and have a direct bearing on why I find the spirit of the 2010 translation so offensive. That is to say, I am offended by the translation not from a purist liturgical position but because of the ways the translation acts upon the political lives of persons of color, ethnic and sexual minorities, women, and all persons oppressed by the rigid rituals, disciplines, rubrics, and prejudiced agendas behind these rules.

Internationally recognized liturgist Gerald O'Collins mentions in his 2017 work, *Lost in Translation: The English Language and the Catholic Mass*, that the new translation is, among other things, filled with errors that many linguists and translators—including conservative scholars<sup>10</sup>—see as grievous. Bishop Maurice Taylor, past chair (1997-2002) of the International Commission for English in the Liturgy (ICEL), recalls the adverse criticism that came after the 2001 publication of *Liturgiam Authenticam*:

[It] received a great deal of criticism in the reviews, letters to periodicals etc. Some of the criticism was directed at such matters as inconsistencies and errors in the document,

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<sup>8</sup> *Comme le prévoit* [CLP], 2.

[http://natcath.org/NCR\\_Online/documents/comme.htm](http://natcath.org/NCR_Online/documents/comme.htm). Accessed August 7, 2019.

<sup>9</sup> For a longer explanation of the goals and principles of CLP refer to Gerald O'Collins, *Lost in Translation: The English Language and the Catholic Mass*, 21 and 23-27.

<sup>10</sup> See O'Collins, *Lost in Translation: The English Language and the Catholic Mass*, 28-29. See also John F. Baldwin, "Idols and Icons: Reflections on the Current State of Liturgical Reform," *Worship* 84 (2010): 399.

excessive centralization and micromanaging, an ethos of negativity, control and suspicion...[and] a lack of respect and/or trust towards bishops' conferences and linguistic mixed commissions.<sup>11</sup>

The main problems, O'Collins contends, are that the language used in the translation is a clumsy attempt to turn the clock back through a "sacred vernacular,"<sup>12</sup> neither Latin nor English, that has no concern for the particular vernacular that we English speakers speak and that in order to cast wide its net it will risk theological heresies such as Pelagianism.<sup>13</sup> These are indeed real concerns and are connected to my own emphasis. But, as a person of color in this century, what is most offensive is that this is a direct attack on the achievements and efforts of our liberation movements of the past fifty-plus years. More than forty years ago Fr. Clarence Rivers warned black Catholics: "Make no mistake, we are under attack!!!(sic)."<sup>14</sup> The present translation is not an act of some historical naïvete but a conscious volley from the ecclesial right-wing to thwart the work of the latest ecumenical council, which, in my opinion, was bent on joining in with the spirit of liberation of the times. Its aim was, according to the opening paragraphs of the Constitution on the Liturgy, "to adapt more closely to the needs of our age..."<sup>15</sup> It is, according to Bishop Taylor, an attempt to reverse the paradigm shift of

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<sup>11</sup> Taylor, 67. See also Rita Ferrone, "It Doesn't Sing: The Trouble with the New Roman Missal," (*Commonweal* 138.13, July 15, 2011) <http://www.cweal.org/Accessed August 10, 2019>. Even the later *A Commentary on the Order of Mass of the "Roman Missal"* gives mixed reviews (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2011). As early as 2001 *Liturgiam Authenticam* was criticized by the Catholic Biblical Association Board in an open letter to the U.S. bishops. See "Letter and Critique on *Liturgiam Authenticam*" where the translation was accused of overusing the Latin or Vulgate version of the bible. The open letter particularly casts doubt on the authority of the 1979 translation of the Vulgate, the *Nova Vulgata*, which the CDF wished to make "the point of reference as regards the delineation of the sacred text." <https://www.catholicculture.org/culture/library/view.cfm?recnum=3958>. Accessed September 1, 2019.

<sup>12</sup> O'Collins, *Lost in Translation: The English Language and the Catholic Mass*, vii.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 44-45.

<sup>14</sup> Rivers, Clarence. "Thank God We Ain't What We Was: The State of the Liturgy in the Black Catholic Community," in *Theology: A Portrait in Black Theology: A Portrait in Black: Proceedings of the Black Catholic Theological Symposium*, ed. Thaddeus Posey, *Black Catholic Theological Symposium*, no. 1, Oct. 12-15, 1978 (Pittsburgh: The Capuchin Press, 1980 copyright of National Black Catholic Clergy Caucus), 74.

<sup>15</sup> Taylor, 22, quoting first paragraph of *Sacrosanctum Concilium*.

Vatican II and return the church four hundred years to the Council of Trent.<sup>16</sup>

In fact, Afridiasporic<sup>17</sup> people were well in the forefront of the spirit and movement of liberation in which Vatican II wished to join.<sup>18</sup> As far as the black American Catholic movement since the sixties is concerned, we might well re-name Vatican II "The Where We Got Our Start Council," for it was for black Catholics and others the paradigm shifting council that opened the door for us to do black Catholic theology and introduce black gospel music, African dance, more rhythmic and spirited liturgical celebrations, and a new ecumenism as seen, for instance, in the introduction of preaching styles from the larger black church, including call-and-response. This spirit and the movement that followed shook up the very Eurocentric parishes within which black Catholics worshipped and even once inspired the innovative black educator and theologian, Nathan Jones, to tell me that all that motivated him at a point in his life was the joy of actually "exegeting black life" to mine the authentic elements for a truly authentic black Catholic liturgy and catechesis.<sup>19</sup>

### **The Paradigm Shift: A Postcolonial Analysis**

The spirit that called the council together, as John XXIII signified with his use of the word "aggiornamento," was, without a doubt, the spirit of the times. And the times were the nineteen sixties! *Aggiornamento*, a true "shaking up," is actually what convened the council, not simply a papal summons. What other impulse could have called every single bishop from around the modern world together except a deep sense that something absolutely groundbreaking, albeit tumultuous, was going on in the world? Referring to this decade

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<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 22-26.

<sup>17</sup> My own expression, along with "Afrimerican" and "Africentric." These words reflect my propensity to use "Afri" over "Afro"—though the meaning is the same—and combine things that were separate. Eg: Afrimerican vs African American.

<sup>18</sup> Many might be ignorant of the real contributions of African Americans toward what became an international anti-colonial, anti-slavery, anti-capitalist, and pro-labor emancipation movement. In his book recounts the achievements of blacks, from the recently emancipated slaves to more recent activism, to lead and encourage solidarity and liberation movements throughout the world. See Paul Ortiz mentioned above.

<sup>19</sup> Private conversation with Dr. Jones in the 1970s but, see this articulated in his challenge to catechists and teachers to "rigorously study culture, black expressive styles and behaviors if we are ever to reverse the pattern of sterile, repetitive, and maladaptive religious education modalities of faith and culture that simply don't work."

<https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED399614.pdf>. Accessed August 7, 2019.

recently, I heard a comment by a young priest to his Vatican II-influenced pastor that the latter was "stuck in the sixties." I myself would not have been insulted by his rude comment, because if I have to be stuck anywhere, I wouldn't mind the sixties. But, actually, the more important point here is that the young priest was not aware of the decade in which he was stuck: the fifties...or, for that matter, any of the decades in the last four hundred years or so!

What were these four hundred years? For the imperialist powers (including the ecclesiastical ones), they were years of great missionary activity, expansion, and capitalist prosperity. For the victims of their conquests, these were years of African slavery and world colonization, the genocide of first nation peoples, the invention of diabolized races, of an expansionism that laid the groundwork of our present environmental crisis, and more. Those 400 years wherein the European "discovered" and "conquered" and "civilized" people of color were the centuries of the expansion not only of European capitalism, but of a theological metanarrative about God's will for those who would rule and those who would obey. For those privileged in the white race and white identity, these years were truly the "good old days" of Manifest Destiny.<sup>20</sup> For such as ourselves, it was a time the slave trade, of the demonization, exoticizing, and violation of the bodies of people of color throughout the world, of uncontrolled European expansionism, of lynching, of Jim Crow and of voter disenfranchisement.

The modernity of the European nations included the heyday of the privileged of Europe and the "hard times" of the European underclasses and the citizens of non-Western lands. This late capitalism was the heir of hard mercantilist and industrialist capitalisms and the precursor of an even harder neoliberalism. Specifically, this late capitalism was and is the epitome of the crude exchange system that was itself fueled by severely enforced hierarchies and crass but convenient binary oppositions, such as: male over female, white/light over black/dark, spirit over body, mind over matter, Christian over heathen, civilization and culture over primitive, "progress" over nature itself, etc. These binary oppositions, both ancient and modern, are, for instance, what is

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<sup>20</sup> To explain my racial terminology, I would actually prefer to narrow my designation to something like "the white-identified capitalist class." But so many white-identified persons, it seems to me, seem to enjoy engaging in numerous imperialist or nationalist nostalgias. This is to say that so many seem to share uncritical ideologies that are caught up in the fetishes of their European legacies, artifacts, myopic nationalist narratives, and simulacra.



behind the new translation returning to "and with your spirit," because it seeks to place spirit over body or at least demote or ignore the body (or the bodily) and its oneness with spirit; and those most identified with body (and sensuality, etc.) are women and "primitive" peoples (vs the rational and spiritual of the white male and white race). False dualisms, including church over state, moreover, deliberately disguise or blur the actual dominating powers of the world, which includes both the church and the state.

Lastly, binary oppositions divide the world into things over which there is so-called legitimate rule: men over women, white over black, hetero over queer. For instance, the state claims legitimate rule over the temporal and the church (with its notions of "God," good and evil, judgment, etc.) over the spiritual. As such, these binaries or hierarchies hide the reality that the state and church rule as one. The state and church institutions and rituals, to use French phenomenologist Jean-Luc Marion's notion, are "idols" hiding the mirror [the projections perhaps?] of who they really are. Marion is used by liturgy scholar John Baldovin to argue that the liturgy is not an idol to be worshipped but an icon through which we see ourselves in relation with God. It is an icon that encourages transparency; it does not result from some vision but, rather, provokes one in us.<sup>21</sup> The idol, on the other hand, "masks the mirror because it fills the gaze."<sup>22</sup> Instead, the enduring challenge begun at Vatican II is "to recover the liturgy's iconicity by letting it be more transparent for contemporary Christians."<sup>23</sup>

Binary oppositions represent a form of idolatry in that they mask that which oppresses by hiding it behind a division where one idea, one group stands over another and the higher one is worshipped and obeyed, though not really seen or understood. Why, for example, change "and also with you" back to a translation that divides the spirit from the body, as in "and with your spirit?" The Vatican II's ICEL consisted of linguists who decided that a more decipherable rendering of this response was "and also with you." The only truthful reason I can accept is that there is a wish to return to a certain time, a time when the Latin language and its few speakers ruled through "divide and conquer." On the other hand, the mother of black Catholicism, as I call Sr. Thea Bowman, FSPA, reminds us that "African people are diunital people, seeing richness of meaning in apparent contradiction. They are

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<sup>21</sup> Baldovin, 389.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 391.

comfortable with bringing together realities which may appear...in opposition: for example, body/spirit, sacred/secular, individual/community. ...God is like father and mother....sister [and] brother..."<sup>24</sup>

The recent changes toward a Latinist culture is "imperialist nostalgia."<sup>25</sup> Cultural critic and black feminist, bell hooks notices that what is longed for is a time, perhaps the last four hundred years, when white men ruled the world. This nostalgia for these past four or more centuries can be seen in the attitudes of many in the present male ecclesial hierarchy of the West, many if not most of whom, I would guess, have never heard or shared stories from slave ancestors and other narratives of oppression that reflect the personal experiences of the vast amount of those who peopled the world of these past centuries. I am sixty-five and a former altar server, but I can barely remember even the sounds of Latin or the forms of most of the devotional practices or "high" liturgies. Yet, I have heard young seminarians and bishops, for example, long for the days when the priest "knew who he was." Their claim—that there is a priestly identity crisis— seems bogus, however, because if you ask anyone in the congregation who the priest is, they'll point right to them. Ask them what the priest does and they'll say "everything."

The truth is that such clerical nostalgias do not long so much for the so-called good old days as much as for the privilege they enjoyed. The male privilege of clericalism is, among other things, the reason why Catholic women, for instance, have lost so much of the ground they have fought for in the liturgy. If we acknowledge that theology is also visual, or that a picture says a thousand words, what does one make of women ministers physically going from the top of the altar to the bottom step in many parishes? I'll return to this later, but the point for me is that the role of women in ministry is at the core of this intra-ecclesial

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<sup>24</sup> Thea Bowman, "The Gift of African American Sacred Song." *Lead Me, Guide Me* (GIA Publications, Inc., 1987) 4.

<sup>25</sup> bell hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Boston: South End Press, 1992). Here she follows theorist Renato Rosaldo, in his *Culture and Truth*, when he defines imperialist nostalgias as "nostalgia, often found under imperialism, where people mourn the passing of what they themselves have transformed" or as "a process of yearning for what one has destroyed that [which was always] a form of mystification," 25.

fight because sexism is the original oppression, the original domination!

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So, there is a simple logic framing my argument: The new liturgy seeks to be more Eurocentric, more in touch with a dead but highly symbolic Latinate, more supportive of the hierarchies and binary oppositions of an imperialist era, and more celebrative of a patriarchal triumphalist past. Therefore, it is not a friendly or a proper expression of the faith of those who were sorely oppressed over the past centuries of European oppression. Anything that seeks to turn back the accomplishments of those who sought and achieved some measure of self-liberation and equality (seen in the emergence of the “vernacular”) is, in my opinion, sexist. It is racist. It is classist.

As the secular Right has tried to dismantle the New Deal in our country, so has the church Right (or Roman Right) been working to dismantle the Vatican Council.<sup>27</sup> The church Right I refer to is not some uncomplicated alternative point of view represented by a few media pundits. It is not, as I say, innocent. It’s those—and I am specifically speaking here of an ideological and organized Right—who wish a “reform of the reform,” that is who wish to return to, as much as possible, the pre-Vatican II liturgy.<sup>28</sup> Yet, it is important to remember that black

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<sup>26</sup> Here I am only pointing out that, even the simplest mathematical argument indicates this: One defined race or ethnicity or class does not include members of another defined race or ethnicity or class. But all three of these include women. Women are the common denominator that allows male privilege even before cultures come into full contact with each other. Studies in patriarchy, such as historian Gerda Lerner’s *The Creation of Patriarchy*, expand on this notion that women’s oppression precedes all others. She points out, for instance, that “[n]o man has been excluded from the historical record because of his sex, yet all women were.” The “contradiction between women’s [actual] centrality in and active role in creating society and their marginality in the meaning-giving process of interpretation...has been a “dynamic force, causing women to struggle against their condition.” Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Patriarchy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 5.

<sup>27</sup> Though the agendas and attitudes of the larger Right, in my experience, largely coincide with the ecclesial Right—particularly the Catholic Right—they are not identical. Just recently, however, there was an article in the *National Catholic Reporter* detailing present connections between the church’s and a focused right-wing movement in the U.S. entitled “Conservative donors aim to shape Catholic narrative for the wider culture.”

<https://www.ncronline.org/news/accountability/conservative-donors-aim-shape-catholic-narrative-wider-culture>, Tom Roberts. Accessed August 7, 2019.

This church Right includes persons such as the late Mother Angelica and her EWTN network, a number of cardinals and bishops, in a more complicated way John Paul II and Benedict XVI, the formulators of *Liturgiam Authenticam*, such as Cardinal Jorge Medina Estevez, past prefect of the Congregation for Divine Worship, and many others.

<sup>28</sup> Baldwin, 386-387.

people have never been fooled by this agenda; the people on this particular Right for us were often wearing white hoods, others stood behind academic and medical doors to proclaim our inferiority, others simply pronounced us heathens and savages.

If the 1960s saw more sustained attempts to disempower the so-called white man, these are the so-called white men rising up to take back the little taken from them. These represent an angry resentment that, for instance, never forgave us for civil rights and supposedly revolutionizing their kids. These represent the ideology of the "end of history"<sup>29</sup> with the so-called triumph of the neoliberalist paradigm. These are the "Chicago Boys" of Milton Friedman who aligned with politicians to pillage their way through the world, assassinating, subverting, "regime changing," replacing various Aristides and Allendes with Pinochets, assassinating Lumumbas and leaving the world with Mugabes and Musevenis.<sup>30</sup>

The 2010 translation of the liturgy represents a similar *coup d'etat*. By the simple, angry impositions of Cardinal Jorge Medina Estevez, former prefect of the Congregation for Divine Worship, the aesthetic, pastoral interest, and scholarship of the progressive post-conciliar 1998 translation of the Catholic liturgy has never been seen!<sup>31</sup> It was Medina's demands<sup>32</sup> and, in a more complicated way, the larger ecclesiology of Benedict XVI and John Paul II that prompted these changes<sup>33</sup> and installed relatively unknown scholars rather than more respected liturgists, as the Council had done in the past.<sup>34</sup> So, I cannot understand

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<sup>29</sup> Francis Fukuyama's term, in Francois Cusset, *How the World Swung to the Right: Fifty Years of Counterrevolutions* (South Pasadena : Semiotext(e), 2018), 38.

<sup>30</sup> I refer to Fr. Jean-Bertrand Aristide, ousted democratically elected president of Haiti, 1991,2001-2004; Salvador Allende, first Marxist president of Chile from 1970-73; Fr. Gen. Augusto Pinochet, disgraced former dictator of Chile, 1973-90; Patrice Lumumba, assassinated democratically elected prime minister of Congo, 1960; Robert Mugabe, president of Zimbabwe from 1987-2017; Yoweri Museveni, president of Uganda, 1986-present. These coups and transformations across the globe are what Francois Cusset (Ibid) traces as a larger turn to the right, from the early 1970's. See his chapter entitled "A Counterrevolution in Three Parts," 15-65.

<sup>31</sup>John Wilkins, "The Missal That Never Was," in O'Collins, *Lost in Translation: The English Language and the Catholic Mass*, 1-19.

<sup>32</sup>O'Collins, ix.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., 4-9.

<sup>34</sup> See, for instance, the works of Aidan Kavanaugh, OSB, who wrote *Elements of Rite: A Handbook of Liturgical Style* (New York: Pueblo Publishing Company,1966). Kavanaugh was professor of liturgics at Yale University. In one blog dedicated to the pioneers of liturgical reform in the church said that "[Kavanaugh's] influence was critical in the United States to the appropriation of the liturgical reforms of the Second Vatican Council. "His seminal work, *On Liturgical Theology*, has been

why this latest translation is framed as the result of some esoteric theological infighting or Vatican intrigue rather than a serious move towards political oppression. As I say, the new liturgy is political, its direct intent is to dominate through the process of erasure. Those erased histories and languages and bodies are our histories, our words, our lives. The point of Cardinal Medina's *Liturgiam Authenticam* in 2001 was to reinstate past hierarchies; it was not the next step forward envisioned by Vatican II. What is important is not that this is chronologically the latest translation, but that our judgment should be based on whether a translation offers a more or a less inclusive and liberatory ecclesiology.

Let me return to the subject of women's baptismal rights to illustrate my point. A phrase I often use is the "visuals of ascendancy." For example, in some of the parishes where I have presided at liturgy women who had been serving at and standing around the altar for the most part of the last 50 years are now seen standing down from the altar. In one parish in which I served, the women, along with the male "lay" ministers, literally descended three stairs. Each of these stairs represented for me a symbolic struggle in which they have lost ground: the first step down represented the battle to claim their baptismal equality in the sanctuary, the second step down, their rights lost to creeping clericalism.<sup>35</sup> And, the final step down, their battle against the larger claims of male supremacy in general.<sup>36</sup> This is a conscious attack, particularly on the sixties notions of feminist radicalism, and, as a result, women in and out of the church are still in an uphill battle with an anti-woman Roman hierarchy. These changes in the liturgy that remove women from the altar and keep the male priest on it—particularly at the Sign of Peace of all times—make clear to me the deep white male resentments over the progress of these past decades. There is no need

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viewed as significant for establishing what came to be called his "theology of the congregation." See <http://liturgicalleaders.blogspot.com/2008/09/aidan-kavanagh-osb-april-20-1929july-9.html>. Accessed September 1, 2019.

<sup>35</sup> That second step is plaguing us even now. For any organization—ecclesial, military, governmental— with the three ingredients of being exclusively men, powerful, and secretive has always equaled the exploitation and abuse of women and children.

<sup>36</sup> I wonder, for instance, what the church would teach about abortion rights if women of all colors and economic brackets had more voice in making church doctrine. The battles of white women are often reversed but connected in the activism of women of color; and so, for instance, as these in-church battles wage, so do the larger battles for reproductive rights among Catholic women. Women of color have been involved in these reproductive battles from the very beginning, but often around the right to bear children.

to tell women they are losing ground for a picture—the visuals of ascendancy (hierarchical, gender, and spiritual) of women standing three steps down in the sanctuary—speak a thousand words.

Take, for instance, the church's ancient propensity to pedestalize some women (as virgins or mothers) and to demonize others (as whores). This ideology is by its very nature sexist because it distracts and divides and dominates half the human race. The most recent and blatant example might be when the Vatican began its infamous investigation of so-called feminist and secular tendencies in the sisterhoods (2013-2015).<sup>37</sup> It is probably no coincidence that this investigation was happening shortly after the same time of the new translation. And it is a sad irony that 2009 was proclaimed the "Year of the Priest!" in the midst of the ongoing priest sex scandals. The irony for me was that it is the men that were and are, for the most part, the accused, and yet Benedict XVI proclaimed the "Year of the Priest" before soon launching an investigation of the nuns.

The sad scene of women stepping backwards and down illustrates the larger point: that whenever the "causes" of self-empowerment are slowed down or questioned, these causes inevitably go backwards, become scattered and unfocused. It is not necessary to legislate outright racist or sexist regulations; it is only necessary to pause, to cause doubt, to throw a wrench into the machinery of liberation. It is only necessary to politely ask women to take a step down "for now." At that point much is lost and it is only a matter of time when, for instance, one inevitably male vote in congress or the Supreme Court or a church hierarchy will drag civil and human rights into a grave.

Of course, what else were the 1960s but a time of worldwide liberation movements? Along with the rise of a new wave of radical feminism, it saw an ever-expanding Pan Africanism, one that had inspired black leaders from DuBois to King and became part of the political vision of the civil rights movement. The sixties witnessed the papal acknowledgement of cultural-political "Negritude"<sup>38</sup> and saw the accompanying rise of the black Catholic movement in the United States

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<sup>37</sup> See 2013 reaction by journalist Jason Berry, "A New Inquisition: U.S. Nuns Are in The Vatican's Crosshairs for Liberal Leanings" (*GlobalPost*, 2013). <https://www.boiseweekly.com/boise/a-new-inquisition-us-nuns-are-in-the-vaticans-crosshairs-for-liberal-leanings/Content?oid=2795851>. Accessed August 7, 2019.

<sup>38</sup> See "Pope Paul VI's Apostolic Pilgrimage to Uganda." <http://www.totus2us.com/universal/uganda/pvi-pilgrim-visit-1969/>. Accessed July 26, 2019.

and elsewhere. The sixties occasioned the rethinking of the missionary principles and the incorporations of non-Eurocentric notions of inculturation and acculturation, of multiculturalism and critical race theory. The sixties highlighted the idea that the sacred and the Spirit are fully present in the vernacular of a people, a vernacular that, if you think about it, includes Ebonics and patois, the lost languages of first peoples and the technical jargon of postmodernism.

The present translation is not a linguistic correction; rather, it puts into bold relief what the battles of the past decades were about in the first place: the voices of the previously unheard. *Liturgiam Authenticam* deliberately chooses to address the Almighty in the form of a sovereign in the style of imperial courts of ancient times. Gerald O'Collins feels that the new tendency towards overblown language, such as the Confiteor's "I have greatly sinned," reflects the "obsequious, even cringing language of the imperial courts in Byzantium, Rome, and elsewhere."<sup>39</sup> I believe that any such imperialistic approach is threatening to the whole order of world peace because it silences and returns us to an unctuous slavishness to authority rather than the equal and shared relationship we have with each other and Jesus. He, after all, decided not to call us slaves but friends (Jn.15:15).

Imperialism has a proportionally greater impact on communities of color, such as the black Catholic community in the Catholic Church, just as health care disparities and prison sentencing in this country harms black and brown communities more white communities. So imperialism in language and attitude is an indirect attack on the liberative process because it is an attack on self-expression and consciousness. Black people are more than aware of this because it concretely effects their lives. For instance, imperialist language might remind them of how many blacks in parts of the U.S. South particularly were supposed to address white people, including white priests and nuns, with a subservient "yas suh" or "yes'm," a "yes fatha" or "yes sista" and a little lowering of the head to go with it. This is not to say that simple respect is oppressive, nor that only black people experienced a church in which authority demanded so much head lowering. But, under an oppressive theology we are not really lowering our head to the Almighty but to the white translators that have chosen the imperial over the vernacular and pastoral. Language is important. It cannot be said strongly enough that when God becomes more the imperial lord than the loving Creator and

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<sup>39</sup> O'Collins, *Lost in Translation: The English Language and the Catholic Mass*, 55.

Father, so do the interlocutors—that is, the primarily white male celebrants up there on the altar. Referring, for instance, to patriarchy in general, feminist scholar Mary Daly said it classically, that “if God is male, then the male is God.”<sup>40</sup>

Further, it is my honest belief is that this liturgical move is not only interlocked with racism, sexism, and classism; it is heterosexist too. This demonizing of the sixties—which saw the rise of queer activism and scholarship—is further evident in the present blaming words and homophobia of some right-wing bishops. A number of these bishops, with an amazing historical ignorance, have claimed that the present scandal in the Catholic Church is directly related to what they feel are the liberal and promiscuous attitudes that came out of the sixties.<sup>41</sup> Not considering even that the bishops themselves hold much responsibility for the scope of the crisis of morality they often decry,<sup>42</sup> a historian of religion might know that the “pederasty” or pedophilia (though equating the two terms is anachronistic) present in the church is nothing new at all. Indeed, a lot of breath has been spent and ink poured out over history condemning sodomy in general---which has been linked to pederasty and all sorts of sexual sins claimed to be the signs of the dissolution of a moral society. This is the scope of “sodomitical discourse.”<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>40</sup>Quoted in “Review: Beyond God the Father,” *Cross Currents*, 1973, 342. Reviewed by Zane Kotker. [https://www.istor.org/stable/24457865?seq=1#page\\_scan\\_tab\\_contents](https://www.istor.org/stable/24457865?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents). Accessed August 8, 2019.

<sup>41</sup> See, for instance, the statements of the conservative San Francisco archbishop Salvatore Cordileone who preaches against many of the “evils” that come from women’s rights, gay rights, etc. Michael Chapman, “God Is ‘Mocked in Our Very Streets,’ The ‘Vulgar and Blasphemous’ Celebrated,” *CNSNews.org*, October 12, 2017. <https://www.cnsnews.com/blog/michael-w-chapman/san-francisco-bishop-god-mocked-our-very-streets-vulgar-and-blasphemous>. Accessed July 26, 2019. Though Cordileone speaks of a moral decline starting a century ago, the sixties represent the explosion of so-called decadence and blasphemy to which he refers.

<sup>42</sup> In my opinion, the part the bishops play in the present sex crisis can be best described as hierarchical participation in and support of historical clericalism, homophobia, erotophobia, Islamophobia, imperialism, sexism, and racism. All of these various oppressions are part and parcel of a larger heteronormativity, which is about more than the patriarchal family but involves an intense domination of all non-white bodies and women. That is, heteronormativity links all these practices that it might order, subjugate, and police on the most intimate levels of humanity and discourse. A “moral” society is thus that which is heteronormative.

<sup>43</sup> Though there were early associations of the church fathers that referred to the sin in the story of Sodom and its moral implications, it was St. Peter Damian, prior of the community of Benedictine hermits at Fonte Avellana in Italy from 1035-1043, who was responsible for coining the term *sodomia*. Damian was known to be



Moreover, it should be added that homophobic or sodomitical discourse—largely the creation of Judeo-Christianity—is itself largely responsible for the closeting of same-sex behavior in the monastery, convent, seminary, mission compound, mission school, etc. Sodomitical discourse, moreover, coincides with the so-called Age of Discovery, the conquest of Latin America and indigenous peoples, a hardening of the Christian message that led to the expulsion of Muslims and Jews from the Iberian peninsula, the early staring into and exploitation of “deepest, darkest Africa,” the demonizing of supposedly effeminate Asian (etc.) peoples, and so forth. The key to conquest lies in the “othering” of whole races, sexualities, and religious experiences. Cultural theorist Rudi Bleys writes, for instance, how the church created whole cloth the notion of paganism/heathenism and heresy out of sodomitical discourse.

According to black postcolonial and queer theorist Kobena Mercer, “historically, the European construction of sexuality coincides with the epoch of imperialism and the two inter-connect.”<sup>44</sup> Balboa’s murder of sodomite priests in Panama in 1513, for instance, is a singular moment where a heteronorm becomes normative through the scapegoating of queer religious leaders, much like what is going on in the Catholic Church today. For centuries now queer religious persons, priests and religious included, have been targeted as sexual orientation is conflated

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a superb polemicist, who “from first to last... display[ed] a talent and a taste for attack,” and regarded himself as a “writer of persuasions rather than of histories” (Jordan 1997, 45-46). He took the righteous role of one who was exposing an “abomination.” The linking of pederasty to general concerns about homosexual acts can be seen in such cases as the 1886 case of the martyrdom of the pages of Kabaka [king] Mwanga in Buganda. This case has shaken free of its historical moorings and, from Right-wing evangelists, etc., becomes one of “pedophilia” and the king is demonized as a “homosexual,” even though neither term is accurate. Indeed, the real issue for Ugandans was how the case of the Ugandan pages (seen by Christian missionaries as targets of sexual aggression on the part of the King Mwanga) became the excuse to colonize Uganda in the age of the partition of Africa. Also, part of the linking of men-to-boys to men-to-men sexual behavior comes from the intense Islamophobia of the Christian missionaries who saw the two as practically synonymous and revealed in such works as the Sir Richard Francis Burton’s 1886 notion of the “Sotadic Zone” that he measured as “43 degrees north of the equator to 30 degrees south,” bounded by the Mediterranean nations, running eastward from Asia Minor to Japan, embracing the South Sea Islands and the New World. See Robert Aldrich, *Colonialism and Homosexuality* (London: Routledge, 2003), 31 In this zone Muslims and pagans practiced all sorts of moral evils, most of them sexual. See Kenneth Hamilton, “The Flames of Namugongo: Postcolonial, Queer, and Thea/logical Reflections on the Narrative of the 1886 Ugandan Martyrdom”, Ph.D. diss., The Union Institute and University, 2005.

<sup>44</sup> Rudi C. Bleys, *The Geography of Perversion: Male-to-Male Sexual Behavior Outside the West and the Ethnographic Imagination, 1750-1918* (New York: New York University Press, 1995), 1.

with sexual transgression. Yet, how can we as black Catholics look at liturgical renewal and not thank God for the contributions queer ancestors have undoubtedly already made to liturgy, ritual, symbolism, art, etc.? How can we effectively create our own liturgical renewal in a church atmosphere of homophobia?

Perhaps more importantly for black people who are Catholic and for black Christians in general is that the issues of sex and heteronormativity, in particular, lie at the core of racist discourse. Addressing this issue of hierarchies of the subordinate, Rudi Bleys outlines what he called the "pre-Enlightenment legacy" which laid the foundation and established some patterns by which Europeans, particularly missionaries, began to construct the New World's sexualities.<sup>45</sup> Two tropes began to emerge in the literature of the time: first, assessing an entire people along a "gradual scale of masculinity," and second, weighing the relative share of deviant behavior as "indicative, metonymically, of the latter's cultural or, gradually, racial status."<sup>46</sup>

That emotion—shouting, clapping, call-and-response, and overall ecstatic behavior—in the liturgies of many black churches is often characterized by such discourse as primitive/savage, juvenile, and impure helps us to see a bit more clearly this connection between race and vilified sexuality. That which is black and dark is juxtaposed with an enlightened, ordered, measured space. This, if nothing else, is a sexualized cultural model of supremacy and spiritual ascendancy. That which is more European, more marked by control and so-called intellectualism is to be desired in liturgy; but, it is notable that when we of the darker races and perverse geographies—inhabited by denizens of all kinds of "darkness"<sup>47</sup>—have the chance and freedom to add our own two cents to liturgy, we tend to choose opposite forms that involve dance, drum rhythms, and often ecstatic proclamation. One does not have to assume that black people all worship in the same way to acknowledge that such styles capture our black humanity. It is true that, ultimately, the process of self-authentication and self-liberation cannot really be stopped, not even by a conscious effort; but it can be paused or slowed down, regulated by a return to a more Latinized liturgy,

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>47</sup> Bryan D. Palmer provides a long list of these denizens in *Cultures of Darkness: Night Travels in the Histories of Transgression* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000), 9.

formal language, with mesmerizing words (like “consubstantial”), etc. Once again, the acts of the domination have a greater, more deadly effect on those with relatively little institutional power. Look at the changing to the pledge of “I believe” from the proclamation of “we believe.” Sure, there are moments and other historical creeds where the commitment is personal, but the move to “I believe” is, despite being untrue to the original creedal text, a regimenting of the troops and aligning them with Eurocentric notions of individuality. This is in contradicts the communal principles like the Ubuntu phrase “I am because we are.”

I don't believe that many of our white bishops realize what a return to their Eurocentric past means for people of color. Surely, they did not skip the geography course in school where the teacher had a map of the world in the front of the class and one could plainly see that most of Africa and Asia were colonies of Europe. Does European colonization for the white hierarchy mean something negative and never to be repeated, or is theirs a sinful nostalgia about empires upon which the sun never set? Somebody needs to let the bishops know that a Latinate translation of the missal is but a move toward a greater Eurocentric domination of the “lesser” languages and spiritual expressions. Somebody needs to inform them as to how absolutely racist such a move is in a world where the Roman Church is itself the source of so much suffering—inside but very much outside of Europe. Our church arrogantly rails, for instance, against both women's rights and condom use in a world when 50% of the HIV/AIDS cases are in Sub-Saharan Africa. This, by the way, is an Africa with a huge, loyal Catholic population, the Africa of Augustine and the early Christian movement. Sadly, it is also an Africa that was colonized by missionaries who demonized African sexualities and sexual practices, who disparaged traditional deities and replaced them with “civilizing” campaigns that introduced ideals of white purity, that clothed the naked “savage”.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> In my own study of the 1886 Ugandan martyrdom (see Hamion above) I attempt to clarify this collusion of sexual demonization and colonization. In this notorious case once heathen African men and boys are made into martyrs because they refused to submit to sodomy. They are thereby made “pure” and holy by their refusal in the missionaries' campaign to search out and destroy anal intercourse across the globe. And in the chaos and confusion that resulted in the theological fight led by the missionaries, the European nations found their excuse to conquer the country and eventually divide Africa up like a Sunday dinner pie.

### **An Urgency for an African American Rite**

Given what has happened to the English translation at this the beginning of the twenty-first century, the need for a more autonomous African American rite or liturgy seems all the more urgent for black Catholics. I would like to use Grayson Brown's words from the opening article to frame this proposed rite. Let me refer first to the scholarly input regarding the possibility of such a rite. D. Reginald Whitt's important definitions, cautions, and ideas are laid out in "*Varietates Legitimae* and an African-American Liturgical Tradition."<sup>49</sup> He offers hope of a way forward in this careful treatment from which a rite could eventually emerge. And, of course, he urges that, building on the achievements of African American liturgical documents such as "In Spirit and Truth"<sup>50</sup> and "Plenty Good Room,"<sup>51</sup> significant historical, anthropological, exegetical, and theological work be continued to achieve this goal.

In this last third of my essay, then, I end with a call to continue in the tradition of the generous visions of past decades and Vatican II liturgical principles. The spirit behind *Sacrosanctum Concilium* and *Comme le prevoit* must be recaptured. The goals of inculturation and the quest for expanded justice must be continued, as if to say in the most persuasive sense that black lives, black symbol, black culture, and black futures matter. This inculturation and cultural respect means that the basic principles of translation cannot recognize literal translations but, rather, the "'literary form proper' to the receptor language[s]."<sup>52</sup> Such a liturgical move favors, above all things, a true vernacular that is the result of a methodology of "dynamic equivalence" where the ongoing meaning of words and phrases are preferred. This dynamic inculturation is about "exegeting black lives." It is about meaning. Meaning has power, power to evangelize, power to identify with struggle, power to progress and find purpose even in desperate times, power to "save souls." Yet, it must be remembered that the most radical visions and profound interventions of the Second Vatican Council never made it into

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<sup>49</sup> D. Reginald Whitt, "*Varietates Legitimae* and an African-American Liturgical Tradition", in *Taking Down Our Harps*, eds. Diana L. Hayes and Cyrian Davis, O.S.B. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1998), 247-280.

<sup>50</sup> *In Spirit and Truth: Black Catholic Reflections on the Order of Mass* (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1987)

<sup>51</sup> See *Plenty Good Room: The Spirit and Truth of African American Catholic Worship* (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1991)

<http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/cultural-diversity/african-american/resources/upload/plenty-good-room.pdf>. Accessed August 9, 2019.

<sup>52</sup> *Comme le prevoit* 6, quoted in O'Collins, 25.

the liturgical books of this country.<sup>53</sup> The issue continues to be about the lack of implementation of the inculturation and liturgical innovation recommended by *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, article four.

Because the years following the Council have been filled with a lot of foot dragging, one step forwards/two steps back, regarding inculturation and liturgical innovation, it makes no sense for African American Catholics to wait on the bishops to begin the process. This process might lead to a rite or to profound liturgical inculturation<sup>54</sup> but we cannot delay. This essay is a call for a reenergizing of our efforts toward implementing black theo-cultural principles in the "Roman ritual family" and, in so doing, strive for a larger autonomy within the Catholic Church, especially in this country. By "autonomy" I don't just mean a recognized rite, I also mean developing consensus and consciousness among black Catholics that is strong enough to weather the attitudes and ignorance of the many of the pastors and teachers our black Catholic people have had to deal with over the years. Many of these men and women neither understood black culture or appreciated and recognized black lives and black empowerment. A changed consciousness and a wider consensus is what "radical" implies.

Black Catholics have been articulating and developing our essential principles and strategies from the early years of Clarence Rivers, Thea Bowman, Joseph Nearon, Bede Abram, and all the members of the Black Catholic Theological Symposium to recent years. We have heard from our black bishops. We have assembled hymnals and composed new music. And, we have developed black Catholic theology. *Taking Down Our Harps: Black Catholics in the United States* provides a fairly recent example of where Afrimerican Catholics have come in terms of self-awareness and theological insight within the Roman Catholic Church tradition. In this journey Toinette Eugene writes: we have "maintained a cutting edge on our own ebonized adaptations" as we also recognized the "role of social justice in relation to the reform of the sacred liturgy."<sup>55</sup> That is to say, these liturgical-cultural "ebonized adaptations" have always taken our political-bodily needs into consideration; and the two are one.

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<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 261-263.

<sup>54</sup> Whitt, "Varietates Legitimae and An African-American Liturgical Tradition," 262-271.

<sup>55</sup> Toinette Eugene, "Between 'Lord, Have Mercy' and 'Thank You, Jesus!': Liturgical Renewal and African American Assemblies," in *Taking Down Our Harps*, eds. Diana L. Hayes and Cyprian Davis, O.S.B. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1998), 163-164.

Taken as a whole and in the larger spirit of our times, the principles announced by our black Catholic pioneers ground a liberative approach in a time when black liberation is under attack. I believe that all the principles we have developed reflect the key element of social justice and solidarity in general and black liberation in particular. Returning to the short critical article of Grayson Brown, let me focus again on his primary principle of spontaneity. I hold that this principle is essential in the formation of any ritual that will resonate in African and African diasporic religions. This spontaneity is certainly connected with the notion of *aggiornamento* which calls for refreshment. But there is even more behind the spontaneity in ritual and philosophical lineage of authentic black worship. To echo Brown's words "people need to feel," those of African heritage need to feel! Because we feel racism, our worship needs to be felt. Because we feel hatred, pain, and anger—as well as joy and victory—we need to express it in worship. We need to have a service that lets us feel the love of God, that lets us feel God's power, that lets us feel the negative stuff so we can find the positive stuff that comes from Jesus Christ.

Spontaneity is the essence of body theology. It is a grounding in our deprecated flesh and a deep belief that "there is a God somewhere" because that which I feel "deep within a ma soul" told me so. This body theology is no different from, say, the affective mysticism of Hadewijch or Julian of Norwich or Bernard of Clairvaux who took seriously the oneness of spirit and body. This bodily theology is crucial for African diasporic peoples because it subverts the metanarratives of our slavery and subjugation, and because there are so many positive messages we have received from our own affective mystics to hold on to our self-esteem, spirit, and bodies. Toni Morrison's character, Baby Suggs Holy, preaches to her people to learn to love every limb and organ:

Here in this place, we flesh...love it. Love it hard. Yonder they do not love your flesh...[You] love it, love it...and the beat and beating heart, love that too...more than your life-holding womb and your life-giving private parts...For this is the prize.<sup>56</sup>

Spontaneity promotes adaptation. It reflects an ability to adjust and, therefore, survive. In this sense, it expresses the trust in Providence to "make a way out of no way" and a divine *kuumba* (purpose) and a startling prophecy to "deliver us" from the lion's den.

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<sup>56</sup> Toni Morrison, *Beloved*. (New York: Plume Books, 1987), 88-89.

Spontaneity is a call to the "God of our weary years and silent tears"<sup>57</sup> to hear and respond to us in the right now of our lives because ours is an "on time God." This spontaneity is intimately related to our political agency. As Brown reminds us, there was singing and praising (ritual) before every civil rights era march and rally. You might say, using this church rally scenario from that movement, that the whole political movement was a version of "having church." That is, it was a participation in and building up of both the needed ecstasy and purpose in Afrimerican people to move forward. For the oppressed in general and black Americans in particular, religion's main purpose is that of getting ready emotionally to fight for liberation.<sup>58</sup>

I believe we have the basics of everything we need to take the next step forward because formulators at the root of black conscious Catholicism have left us a legacy. In a recent presentation to the Black Catholic Theological Symposium, Kathleen Dorsey-Bellows asserted that "Black Catholic theologians are exceptionally well-positioned to steer the people on a right course."<sup>59</sup> We must continue to do the hard work that might lead to a well-thought-out ritual for black Catholicism because the situation is possibly more weighty than ever it was.

How serious is the crisis for the black Catholic church in the United States? In "For the Salvation of Souls" Fr. Victor Cohea lays out a number of possible paths for a new black Catholic rite. He does this because he feels that the very future of black Catholicism is a stake. He speculates that "by the year 2020 the majority of priests of African American descent will be retired or dead." Cohea asserted:

By the year 2020 the majority of priests of African American descent will be retired or dead. [At that point the whole question of African American priests, indigenous to the United

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<sup>57</sup> This from the final verse of "Lift Every Voice and Sing," a poem written by James Weldon Johnson (1871-1938)—a leader in the NAACP. It was set to music by his brother, John Rosamond Johnson (1873-1954), and is often called "The Black National Anthem." See <https://www.naacp.org/naacp-history-lift-evry-voice-and-sing/>. Accessed August 9, 2019.

<sup>58</sup> Scholar of religion Victor Lanternari and others who talk about the "religions of the oppressed" and, particularly, those—such as Albert Raboteau, Riggins Earl, Eugene Genovese, and Gayraud Wilmore—who write about slave religion, describe the religions created by oppressed peoples that demonstrate that there can be no real separation between bodily liberation and spiritual salvation, between freedom and health.

<sup>59</sup> Kathleen Dorsey-Bellows, "Full, Conscious and Active Participation: Sunday Eucharist, Black Life and Theological Considerations," a paper presented to the Annual Black Catholic Theological Symposium, October 2018.

States and present within the Roman Communion, will be a historical footnote.] The active participation of the indigenous African American laity will probably end much sooner. Now is the time for the clergy and laity to make the choices that ensure a vibrant and holistic presence within the Roman Communion.<sup>60</sup>

Grayson Brown's notion of spontaneity is just an example of how we should continue the black Catholic theological-liturgical hard work. We need to be out there writing and publishing on such principles. Fr. Clarence Rivers, who published *Soulfull Worship* in 1974,<sup>61</sup> was one of the first contributors to the Black Catholic Theological Symposium's 1978 *Theology: A Portrait in Black*.<sup>62</sup> His main principles are reiterated in *Taking Down Our Harps*<sup>63</sup> when he repeats his distinction between the oral/aural tradition of black worship and the intellectual tradition of Western religion. While the latter is dominated by the eye or a singular sense—such as seeing art or listening to a song—the former involves an “interpenetration of interplay [of all the senses] creating a concert or orchestration in which the ear sees, the eye hears, and where one both smells and tastes color wherein all the senses, unmuted, engage in every experience.”<sup>64</sup>

Rivers goes so far as to quote the great political liberator, President Leopold Senghor of Senegal who, defending African spontaneity and expression against Western charges of emotionalism, explains why African cultic expression represent a more integrated form of religious consciousness.

For emotion, under the semblance, at first, of a fall from consciousness, is quite to the contrary, an accession to higher state of knowing. It is a certain way of apprehending the world. It is the integrity of knowing since the Subject so

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<sup>60</sup> Victor Cohea, “For the Salvation of Souls,” unpublished essay (2011), 13.

<sup>61</sup> Clarence Joseph Rivers, *Soulfull Worship* (Washington D.C.: National Office for Black Catholics/Stimuli Inc., 1974).

<sup>62</sup> *Theology: A Portrait in Black: Proceedings of the Black Catholic Theological Symposium*, ed. Thaddeus Posey, *Black Catholic Theological Symposium*, no. 1, Oct. 12-15, 1978 (Pittsburgh: The Capuchin Press, 1980 copyright of National Black Catholic Clergy Caucus).

<sup>63</sup> Clarence Joseph Rivers, “The Oral African Tradition Versus the Ocular Western Tradition: The Spirit in Worship.” In *Taking Down Our Harps*, eds. Diana L. Hayes and Cyprian Davis, O.S.B. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1998), 232-246.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 243.



moved and the Object moving are united in an indissoluble synthesis..."<sup>65</sup>

According to Rivers, "[The] unmoved and unmoving is not spiritual; it is dead!"<sup>66</sup>

In his essay in *A Portrait in Black*, Glenn Jeanmarie, quoting Lerone Bennett, brings up another intriguing notion: that "the challenge of blackness is the challenge of living today in tomorrow's world...of internalizing and carrying us [in] the reborn black community" for the sake of our future!<sup>67</sup> Part of the process of developing and ritualizing our own faith is that our tomorrow and the not-yet-born who will be part of this tomorrow are at stake. The question is who will develop this notion further now that our very future is at stake? Over the last fifty years or so, the Catholic Church seemed to be opening up to the liberatory agenda of black self-empowerment. Such was the spirit Pope Paul VI was echoing in his call for African peoples to share their gift of Negritude. Fr. Rivers was grateful for that openness and was able to write a little more than a decade after the council, "thank God we ain't what we was."<sup>68</sup> But now is the time to be what we is gonna be!

Reading again Thea Bowman's introduction to the 1987 *Lead Me, Guide Me*,<sup>69</sup> what strikes me—outside of her excellent historical survey of black song—is her whole position and authority in the black Catholic community those many years and how she and others helped us understand our identity as both black and Catholic. In so doing, she helped mother our new identity into life. Speaking of black sacred song, she said: "[It] celebrates our God, His goodness, His promise, our faith and hope, our journey toward the promise."<sup>70</sup> Black song here becomes a metaphor of our past, present, and future as members of the Christian community. Our long black Christian legacy, then, is behind her deep belief that we are called to be fully Catholic and authentically black.<sup>71</sup> And so, in this period of transition, I believe Sr. Thea should be seen as

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 245.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Glenn Jeanmarie, "Black Catholic Worship: Celebrating Roots and Wings," in *Theology: A Portrait in Black*, 75.

<sup>68</sup> Rivers, *Theology: A Portrait in Black*, 66.

<sup>69</sup> Thea Bowman, "The Gift of African American Sacred Song," *Lead Me, Guide Me: The African American Catholic Hymnal* (Chicago: GIA Publications, Inc., 1987), n.p.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid, n.p.

<sup>71</sup> See "Black spiritual traditions have long history in Catholic Church: Ain't That Good News," *Global Sisters Report* (National Catholic Reporter, March, 19, 2018), <https://www.globalsistersreport.org/news/spirituality-equality/black-spiritual-traditions-have-long-history-catholic-church-52606>. Accessed August 9, 2019.

a prime authority in our continual journey toward a fully inculcated/acclulturated rite. We stand at a crossroad, in a clearing in the woods, in a prayer circle. We need to make our ancestors proud of us by continuing in the struggle for our black church community by continuing to study and act for the future.

There is a profound question at the core of our journey. It was articulated by the pioneering black Catholic theologian, Joseph Nearon, who, among others, asked back in 1974, "to what extent is Roman Catholic theology [itself] racist?"<sup>72</sup> He asks this question based on some of the history that I have discussed above.

...[The] "Good News" proclaimed was not only the salvation that comes from Christ, but also the salvation that comes from learning English or French or German and adopting the technology and values of Europe and American. ....[T]he missionaries not only came to evangelize they also came to civilize.....The Church "embracing all peoples" came to mean in fact, if not in theory, the Church replacing African values and civilization with the values of...Christendom...<sup>73</sup>

In many ways this question was rhetorical in the sixties because the newly-formed National Black Catholic Clergy Caucus had already proclaimed that indeed the institution and its theology was indeed racist.<sup>74</sup> But, answering that question about the Roman Catholic Church and its theology in the twenty-first century will certainly bring about something unique for a new rite.

Moreover, there is the accompanying question that should be researched: To what extent did Afridiasporic people actually bring about the formation of conciliar Catholic theology, just like they have greatly influenced Christianity itself throughout the centuries? M. Shawn Copeland and so many others have proposed a black theology that

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<sup>72</sup> Joseph Nearon, "Introduction," in *Theology: A Portrait in Black*, 5.

<sup>73</sup> Joseph Nearon, "The Question of the Church," in *Theology: A Portrait in Black*, 10.

<sup>74</sup> The NBCCC stated in 1968 that "The Catholic Church in the United States is primarily a white racist institution and has addressed itself primarily to white society and is definitely a part of that society." See "The National Black Catholic Clergy Caucus at 50," Peter Cajka. (Cushwa Center for the Study of American Catholicism, Notre Dame University). <https://cushwa.nd.edu/news/the-national-black-catholic-clergy-caucus-at-50/>. Accessed July 26, 2019.

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops as early as 1979, in their letter "Brothers and Sisters to Us," somewhat affirmed this racism (Washington, D.C., National Conference of Catholic Bishops, Inc., 1979).

correlates the burning questions we face right now with the ancient "Christian message of revelation"<sup>75</sup> of which we were a part. As we form this rite, let us remember the original and ongoing place of African and Afridiasporic formulators, martyrs, patriarchs, men and women founders, and faithful.

An Afrimerican rite should be American, but not too American. That is, it should be critical of some of the myopias of this nation, including its tradition of exceptionalism and ethics based in capitalism. Rather, it should further draw upon the rich spiritual legacy of both African Christian and traditional religion.<sup>76</sup> This might include a renewed emphasis on rites of passage, Africentric expressions of "corporate faith,"<sup>77</sup> a more profound devotion to ancestors and spirits, a ritualized sense of time and pervasive divine presence that is more Afridiasporic, a non-dualistic sense of nature and human activity, the use of black semantic styles (including ebonics) in shared prayer, space for ecstasy, an expanded credal statement that is still trinitarian and defined by the four marks of the church but also includes a developing of notions of the Spirit and universal salvation, the full incorporation of dance, iconography that includes not only the canonized but uncanonized holy ancestors, etc. The African diaspora has always employed the principle of appropriation. "Inculturation" is a term and principle developed fairly recently in the West, but appropriation, adaptation, and fluidity have been the main features of African religions, especially in and through the crucibles of the Mid-Atlantic Passage and the ensuing slavetocracies of the New World. Appropriation has always been a matter of survival.

To give just a few more examples of what might be used as guiding principles for a renewed African American rite, Jamie Phelps suggests in "Inculturating Jesus" that there is still a Jesus somewhere for us. He was a Jesus who broke with ritual to gain justice... "cur[ing] on the Sabbath, [eating] with known sinners and outcasts, [and] speaking with... "foreign women."<sup>78</sup> What Phelps is suggesting is a renewed Christology of this man Jesus in a rite that emphasizes justice

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<sup>75</sup>M. Shawn Copeland, "Method in Emerging Black Catholic Theology," in *Taking Down Our Harps*, eds. Diana L. Hayes and Cyprian Davis, O.S.B. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1998), 126.

<sup>76</sup> See the classic work of John Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, particularly chapters 3, 7, 9, and 17. (Oxford: Heinemann International, 1989).

<sup>77</sup> Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 67.

<sup>78</sup> Jamie Phelps, "Inculturating Jesus: A Search for Dynamic Images for the Mission of the Church among African Americans," *Taking Down Our Harps*, eds. Diana L. Hayes and Cyprian Davis, O.S.B. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1998), 75.

and care above all things, especially above present rules and formality. An inculturated Christology might, for instance, mean adding to the names of Jesus in our prayers and litanies. I might suggest "Jesus for whom black lives matter"; the "Black Slave Jesus"; "black Jesus of the diaspora"; "Jesus, companion of black women and children", etc. These names expand the meaning of Jesus to fit our needs for justice and affirm in our litanies that, indeed, there is still a Jesus somewhere for us.<sup>79</sup>

Toinette Eugene, in her profound and simple style, has said that we are still in a moment between "Lord, have mercy and thank you, Jesus."<sup>80</sup> This is the proleptic time (Kairos) of the Kingdom of God, but it is also the specific political moment that black Christians are always occupying (Chronos). That is, this is the time of what is arrived (the Kingdom of God) and what is still to come (the Kingdom of God)! Isn't this in-between time for black Catholics the implied moment of pending liturgical renewal? For an authentic liturgical movement is going to include both the hope of the Kingdom and the courage to take the practical steps that will lead to it. So, a new eschatological-liturgical approach will help us make the transition from hopelessness to hope because it will involve meditating on and expanding cultural traditions and liturgical reinforcements that will constantly and creatively deal with ongoing domination. This is Jeanmarie's vision of the future too, the one we also leave our descendants: domination.

I affirm with others that oppressions are always kin to one another, intersected.<sup>81</sup> This means that our liberation is always inclusive of all people's liberation, which, interestingly enough, means that when others fight the good fight, they too are black, just as when we fight back, we are all women or we are all poor. This is my understanding of the key principle behind the black liberation theology announced by the late James Cone, that God is black, that is, on the side of the oppressed.<sup>82</sup> It

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<sup>79</sup> This innovation could apply to our Mariology and Pneumatology also.

<sup>80</sup> Toinette Eugene, "Between 'Lord Have Mercy' and 'Thank You Jesus,': Liturgical Renewal and African American Catholic Assemblies" , in *Taking Down Our Harps*, eds. Diana L. Hayes and Cyprian Davis, O.S.B. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1998), 167.

<sup>81</sup> This pertains to the full scope of oppression or domination, not just in macroscopic terms, but on intimate levels. As Francois Cusset and others have pointed out, political movements are not just about the "great structures of domination," but also the "resistances and compromises" of the individual subject, 35.

<sup>82</sup> Cone explains this notion in *A Black Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1970) 63-64.

means that God hears the cry of the poor and dispossessed. Therefore, when we finally get to the “thank you, Jesus”—the “Peacable Kingdom” of prophecy and the Sermon on the Mount—the Roman church itself will not just have an African American Rite, the church will have itself become “black.” It will, to use Diana Hayes’s words, change into its true “revolutionary, radically liberative form, the true bearer of the gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ.”<sup>83</sup>

This true church needs our precious contribution toward an authentic theological methodology, especially a black Christology, so that it might know, echoing the words of black poet Countee Cullen, that we worship a Christ who has always been black. For, after all, Calvary was but the first in a line of trees “on which a Man should swing.”<sup>84</sup>

### Conclusion

Of course, the formation of a distinct and somewhat independent liturgy based as much on the radical differences in black experience/culture as on our common humanity with all is a challenging task. But, I think that the work of black liturgical innovators and theologians are crucial. Brown’s essay is poignant precisely because it is about the present 2010 translation and its deleterious effect on black Catholic ritual expression and spirituality. But, the negative effect on the whole church must not be forgotten. In creating an Afrimerican Rite the goal is never to isolate our black cause from the wider church because, to be honest, there is no solace in celebrating in a black and Catholic liturgical style and rite when the rest of our fellow Catholics are relegated to the “consubstantials” and “I believes” and “and with your spirit” dualisms. There can be no liberation for one part of the church when another part is “on pause,” distracted with words and regimes that seep not only into their spiritual consciousnesses but their political ones. I take heart that Pope Francis has turned the tide in this matter by dismissing the traditionalist central committee that produced *Liturgiam Authenticam* and the subsequent 2010 English translation and returned the translation of the mass to the hands of the various bishops’ conferences. I only hope that we can get back on the path of the council and continue to open, not close, the windows of the spirit of our times. For our times are, after all, the only times for which we are responsible.

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<sup>83</sup> Diana Hayes, “Through the Eyes of Faith: The Seventh Principle of the Nguzo Saba and the Beatitudes of Matthew, in *Taking Down Our Harps*, 61.

<sup>84</sup> Countee Cullen “The Black Christ.”

[http://www.flashpointmag.com/Countee\\_Cullen\\_The\\_Black\\_Christ.htm](http://www.flashpointmag.com/Countee_Cullen_The_Black_Christ.htm) Accessed August 9, 2019.

I seem to remember as a child seeing my father's copy of Martin Luther King's *Why We Can't Wait*<sup>85</sup> and noting that he had printed his name boldly right across the front cover of the book. It struck me that my father must have felt personal ownership of the message King was proclaiming there. King was one of many black teachers and preachers who spoke of the "urgency of the now" and how there is actually such a thing as being too late. Upon receiving the Word of God, a good prophet must be able to hear when God says "Get up. Come. Walk with me."<sup>86</sup> He or she must be able to explain just why we can't wait! This is the very urgency that I, as a black preacher among other black preachers, am feeling now in these times with a rise of the radical right. This comes from my own awareness of my place and my journey in this often unfriendly world and the need to always ask myself, as Brown does, "Why are you here?"<sup>87</sup> I am here in the exigencies of my own people, whose basic survival instincts almost always puts them at odds with the dominating class. We can't wait because of the radical contrast between the way black and brown, red, queer, lives (etc.) are treated in this country and how white-identified others are treated.

I firmly believe that we must work toward full inculturation in the relative autonomy of a new rite because we recognize those devout Afrimerican Catholics held by Catholic orders and Catholic slave owners who tried their best to find God in their religion. We must do this for those who have sacrificed so much to pave the way for something new: our formulators, teachers, mothers, and fathers. We must do this for our children. And we must do this for our bodies! This radical difference between black and white church lives is both symbolized and made manifest in our very concrete and real black bodies. Any liturgical turn towards the lives of black people would emphasize the reality of their bodies because it is precisely this flesh that white racism in the form of white religion has targeted. We must keep on keeping on, if not in our culture, if not in our souls, if not in our aesthetics, at least in our bodies!

An Afrimerican rite is not simply a cultic shift but one of our next political rites of empowerment. It is the next step of the journey that began when the new slaves grabbed ahold of the story of Exodus and made it their own; now it is, as the black bishops have said so long ago

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<sup>85</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., *Why We Can't Wait*. (New York: New American Library, Harper & Row), 1964.

<sup>86</sup> Brown, "Shaken Up So We Can Pour Ourselves Out," n.p.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*

in "What We Have Seen and Heard,"<sup>88</sup> our own time to grab ahold of the increased autonomy that comes with adulthood. I join our black bishops in sounding the Akoben horn<sup>89</sup> that is calling black Catholics to, echoing Maria Stewart's appeal, rise up without fear.<sup>90</sup> I believe that this is about finding our "harambee" (our "gathering") on the plains of time or, as Toni Morrison pictures it, our clearing in the woods. In this clearing we celebrate and praise in the way we want and need, for it is a place of relative safety wherein we can heal our abused and despised black identities. A new rite, it seems to me, is such a space, for us and for all those who love and work with us. We are still in that clearing in the woods. Here in the clearing our prophets urge us, once again, to dance, to find a corner in which to weep, to make a choice to love our flesh, hands and back and feet and organs "because them out there don't."

The present attack on the oppressed whose voices were finally being recognized by the church means that we must reorganize and regroup while still on this side of the Jordan. The banks of the Jordan River have spiritual, eschatological, and political meaning. It means a place of crossing over for the oppressed individuals and communities to a place of ultimate freedom. Yet, before that crossing over is complete, there has to be a conscious effort to prepare ourselves through the enduring principles of self-determination, cooperative economics, black family values, purpose, imagination, unity, and, of course, faith. Crossing over is not simply about stepping over into a heavenly land but making a way for those left to follow here on earth. It means making real the vision of the Beatitudes where the last shall be first or, at the least, equal with the first.

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<sup>88</sup> "What We Have Seen and Heard: A Pastoral Letter on Evangelization from the Black Bishops of the United States," (Congers, N.Y.: St. Anthony Messenger Press, 1984).

<sup>89</sup> Ghanaian Adinkra symbol of a war horn used to sound the battle cry. Signifies alertness, and readiness to serve a noble cause, <https://nzingamaxwell.wordpress.com/2013/04/19/the-adinkra-symbols-akoben/> Accessed August 9, 2019.

<sup>90</sup> In "Religion and the Pure Principles of Morality" she writes, "[I] would strongly recommend to you to improve your talents. Let not one talent lie buried in the earth. Show forth your powers of mind. Prove to the world that: Though black your skins as shades of night, your hearts are pure, your souls are white (sic)". See in *Missionaries, Mystics, and Prophets*, "Maria Stewart: You Are Made in God's Image," ed. Shawn Madigan (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 311.

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