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Review – Darren W. Davis and Donald B. Pope-Davis, *Perseverance in the Parish? Religious Attitudes from a Black Catholic Perspective*

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***Perseverance in the Parish? Religious Attitudes from a Black Catholic Perspective.* Darren W. Davis & Donald B. Pope-Davis. Cambridge University Press, 2017. 184pp. \$105.00. Hard. ISBN:9781107191761**

This work was commissioned by Bishop John Ricard, S.S.J. on behalf of the National Black Catholic Congress (NBCC) in order to aid in developing a pastoral plan. Its purpose was to determine if the hypothesis that African-American Catholics were "abandoning their faith and the Church" (xi) due to racial intolerance that exists in the Church was valid. Davis and Pope-Davis' book is the compilation of their research results from a nationwide survey of Black Catholics. In their research, the authors included not only African-American Catholics but also Black Protestants, White Catholics and White Protestants. The other denominations were used as a comparison to African-American Catholics' religious attitudes and experiences.

African-American Catholics are a complex and multifaceted group that have found themselves in a denomination, Roman Catholic, that many of their Black Protestant brothers and sisters believe is a "white man's religion." Davis and Pope-Davis' research unpacks the complexities of the African-American Catholic and how they have persevered, remained steadfast in their faith and engaged in spite of the racial intolerance that exists in the Catholic Church.

The book starts by exploring "the origins of racial intolerance within the U.S. Catholic Church's hierarchy, their response to racial prejudice and how it has changed over time." (20) The empirical data presented in this work was gathered in the aforementioned research project commissioned by Bishop Ricard to explicitly examine if African-American Catholics' religious attitudes towards the Church and the struggles that they have endured when confronted with racism has helped to shape their religious identity. They also sought to discern whether, as a result of this mistreatment, they developed an "uncommon faithfulness" (5), and their survival was "a source of pride, proof of their Catholic authenticity and the strength of their Catholic identity." (4)

While the history of racism in the Church and the challenges that African American Catholics have faced in the church has been well documented, the research in this book primarily focuses on the "current experiences and perceptions of racial intolerance in the Church" (5) from

the African American Catholic' viewpoint in comparison with African American Protestants, White Catholics and White Protestants. The empirical data gathered through surveys was used to determine if African American Catholics experiences of racism in the Catholic Church has had any bearing on whether they stay and/or disengage or leave the Catholic Church.

Davis and Pope-Davis' findings did not support their theory (or the theory proposed by Bishop Ricard) that "African American Catholics who perceive a greater level racial prejudice/intolerance in the Church will leave and/or disengage from their parish." (21) Based on their survey, "the effects of racial intolerance does not cause African American Catholics to reassess their religious attitudes...nor abandon their religious community." (129)

My perspective is from a pastoral ministry viewpoint as opposed to the sociological one. There has been a steady decline of African American Catholics in our Catholic Churches for the last two decades for a variety of reasons and racism is at the top of the list, even though Davis and Pope-Davis' data does not support that premise.

There was an important question raised by the authors based on their survey results. In light of what is perceived as a White man's religion, why do they remain Catholic? The answer, they discovered, is that African American Catholics feel that dignity and self-respect are just as important as their religion. We are a people who have persevered through many trials and tribulations and we have a right to be "Authentically black and truly Catholic." No religion/denomination is perfect and African American Catholics have embraced the good, bad and ugly of the Roman Catholic Church.

This research that was commissioned by the NBCC did not reveal anything new about African American Catholics. However, there needs to be investment in finding innovative solutions as to how to stop the current downward trajectory of the numbers of African American Catholics (especially youth and young adults) and Black parishes in the United States.

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