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The Black Community and the Call for Vatican Council II (1962-1965)

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Abstract: Even as the Church celebrates the 50th anniversary of Vatican Council II (1962-65), the people of God have not unfolded much of its meaning for Catholic pastoral practice and teaching. In the excitement of Council developments, many updates were implemented in the life of the church without proper catechesis, leaving many of the faithful – proponents and opponents of the Council - wholly uninformed about the continuity of Council reforms with Catholic tradition. The dialogue between the Church and contemporary society formally endorsed in Vatican II is ongoing. A review of the world's situation in the 1950s and 60s provides perspective on the social unrest and cultural change that inspired Pope John XIII, with prompting from the Holy Ghost, to convene an ecumenical council. This essay will ground the Second Vatican Council in the context of the mid-twentieth century, with a particular focus on Black America and Black Catholic liturgical reform, to grasp a sense of its ongoing relevance for the faithful of today.

Keywords: Black Community, Vatican Council II, Black Catholic Liturgical Reform, Pope John XXIII, Zairean Rite and Clarence Rivers

The period running roughly from 1954 to 1968 is marked indelibly with the blood, prayer, and tears of men and women of all races and all faiths who gave themselves, once again, to the struggle to win basic civil rights for the black men and women of our nation. This was the period of the 1954 Supreme Court decision on school integration, of the Montgomery bus boycott of 1955, the Freedom Rides, sit-ins, and non-violent protest. This was the time of Cicero, Watts, Detroit, and Memphis. Indeed, this was a period that so decisively shifted the relations between blacks and whites in the

United States that it may be described aptly as axial.¹

Global Signs of the Times: Social Revolution

At all times, the Church carries the responsibility of reading the signs of the time and of interpreting them in the light of the gospel, if it is to carry out its task. In language intelligible to every generation, she should be able to answer the ever recurring questions which men ask about the meaning of this present life and the life to come, and how one is related to the other. We must be aware of and understand the aspirations, the yearnings, and the often dramatic features of the world in which we live.²

The signs of the times in the mid-20th century pointed to an astounding cultural revolution that threatened to turn the world community on its axis. Science and technology contributed in major ways to radical social change that, even as they conceivably improved the quality of human existence, challenged long-held conventions and values, raised new and different questions about life, faith and identity. In the give and take of societal change, it was inevitable that relationships between blacks and whites would also shift.

By the 1950s, television had become the main source of news and entertainment for many households. Through powerful marketing, McDonald's, Elvis and Playboy had made their way into the national vocabulary and helped change family consumption patterns. New medications, including the polio vaccine, oral contraception and antibiotics, were discovered.

Space travel was a breathtakingly modern field that demanded ever-new engineering, mechanical and electronic innovations. Computerization resulted in previously unheard of

¹ M. Shawn Copeland, "A Cadre of Women Religious Committed to Black Liberation: The National Black Sisters' Conference", *U.S. Catholic Historian* 14 (1996): 125.

² *Gaudium et Spes, Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, ed. Austin Flannery, O.P., (Boston: Daughters of St. Paul, 1988), #4, 905.

applications and automations. The hydrogen bomb, an "improvement" upon World War II nuclear weaponry, consolidated the deadly arsenal of the military-industrial complex. Armed forces around the world were the major patrons and beneficiaries of the astonishing technological and scientific advancements that occurred in the years 1950-70.

It is no surprise that in that era, war and the prospect of war triggered great anxiety in the world community. The Cold War gave rise to a nuclear arms race and the need for international espionage, nuclear bomb tests, home and school shelters. In addition to Cold War tensions, actual warfare raged in the Middle East, Africa and Asia. Political hostilities provoked social unrest in hotspots throughout the world.

The people of God responded variously to these complicating signs of the time.³ They shed blood, they prayed and they cried. Their prayers and tears expressed joy and flowed in response to the sheer hardness of life. The people also stood up and spoke out. They shouted and marched in grassroots movements – large and small – that sprung up around the globe. People sat-in, demonstrated, and organized to make their various points. Opposing camps protested loudly for and against the cause of war on its many fronts. Nations in Africa, Central America and Europe fought for independence against colonial powers. There were civil rights movements for equality; the U.S. struggle described in the passage above is but one example. Women organized to oppose male-dominated systems and oppressive social structures. Young people and students joined in countless protest campaigns. Poor people world-wide pressed for economic justice. Environmentalists railed against capitalists and industrialists whose management of natural resources put the natural world at risk. Workers united to demand greater participation in the systems of commerce sustained by their labor. In the 1960 uproar of

³ "Lumen Gentium", *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, ed. Austin Flannery, O.P., (Boston: Daughters of St. Paul, 1988), #13, 364. The use of the term "God's people" refers to the following quote from the Constitution: "The one people of God is accordingly present in all the nations of the earth, since its citizens, who are taken from all nations, are of a kingdom whose nature is not earthly but heavenly."

modern social revolution, these and other popular movements took root and disorder radiated through society. To varying degrees, institutions, communities and families found everyday life turned upside down and inside out. The clash between cultural and counter-cultural ideas and values raised new questions about life with no easy answers. The people of God had become a sign of the times.

John XXII: Time for a Council

In the course of his life, Cardinal Angelo Roncalli was well-trained to read the signs of the times – the popular movements, advancements in science and technology, and the situations of war - in the light of the Gospel. Born in 1881 in northern Italy near Bergamo, the third of thirteen children in a peasant family, Roncalli envisioned the priesthood as a way to help the poor. He had no other ecclesiastical ambition. However, his natural intellect and talent were recognized and in 1901 he was sent to Rome for theological studies. The following year, he was drafted into the Italian army where he rose quickly to the rank of sergeant. When Angelo was ordained in 1904, his family could not afford the travel to Rome.⁴

After ordination, he served from 1905-14 as secretary to the bishop of Bergamo and taught in the local seminary. Drafted again during World War I as a medical orderly, Roncalli soon became a hospital chaplain. On balance, his family and life experiences were as influential in shaping his approach to ministry as the more privileged world of the seminary and bishop's office.

In 1921, Benedict XV made Angelo Roncalli national director of the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith. By 1925, he was drafted by Pius XI into the Vatican diplomatic corps; he served in Bulgaria (1925-34), Turkey and Greece (1934-1944) with a distinguished and affectionate outreach to the Orthodox Christian churches. The diplomat Roncalli also quietly provided cover for the Jewish community during the

⁴ John W. O'Malley, *A History of the Popes: From Peter to the Present* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2010), 292-9; J.N.D. Kelly, *The Oxford Dictionary of Popes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 292.

German occupation of Greece. In these diplomatic posts, now Archbishop Roncalli spent twenty years outside Roman Catholic circles, building ecumenical alliances and working boldly across cultures.

In 1944, he was appointed papal nuncio to France. This appointment became particularly challenging after World War II due to the fact that many French clergy and prelates had taken sides during the great conflict. By most accounts, the archbishop successfully led the local church through a potentially explosive situation with considerable wisdom and negotiation skill.⁵ According to Vatican II scholar, Bill Huebsch,

In France, Roncalli also learned about the Church's needs in a "new world" whose political and spiritual lives had to be rebuilt in the wake of a devastating war. He witnessed the experimental "worker priest" movement in France, was aware of the new theology brewing in that part of Europe and involved himself personally in the question of whether the Church there in France, or indeed, in all of modern Europe would continue to decline or would experience rebirth.⁶

In 1953, he was named cardinal and patriarch of Venice, "where he was noted for his pastoral zeal, informality, and firm resistance to communist manoeuvres."⁷ At long last, "at age seventy-four, he would be able to enjoy pastoral work which had been his lifelong dream. In Venice, he polished his skills at administration, equipping himself to deal eventually with the many complex administrative problems at the Vatican, especially those associated with the calling of a council."⁸

After the death of Pius XII in 1958, Cardinal Roncalli was elected pope by the College of Cardinals.⁹ Shortly after his

⁵ Ibid, 320-2; Bill Huebsch, *Vatican II in Plain English: The Council* (Allen: Thomas More Publishing, 1997), 188-90.

⁶ Huebsch, 189-90.

⁷ Kelly, 321.

⁸ Ibid, 190.

⁹ John XXIII was elected on the 12th ballot of the October 25-28 conclave. "The consensus was that he would be a transitional pope, a congenial caretaker whom both the reformers and conservatives in the

election, prompted by the Holy Spirit, John XXIII made plans to convene an Ecumenical Council.¹⁰ The Pope persevered, despite internal resistance, in his desire that the Council affect an *aggiornamento* – an opening of the Catholic Church to the modern world, an engagement of the world with the Church, for a broader, more effective proclamation of the Good News of Salvation. He declared, “(t)he greatest concern of the ecumenical Council is that the sacred deposit of Christian doctrine should be guarded and taught more effectively...the Church should never depart from the sacred treasure of truth...But at the same time she must ever look to the present, to the new conditions and the new forms of life introduced into the modern world.”¹¹

This work will review historical moments in the African American community that were among contemporary signs of the times that may have stirred in Angelo Roncalli the urgent need for ecumenical dialogue that prompted the Second Vatican Council. This reflection is offered in a continuing effort to make more tangible connections between the everyday lives of African American faithful and the mission of the church universal that was stated in modern terms in the powerful gathering, interactions and documents of that Council. It is hoped that by looking back and across historical timelines in this way we might gain greater clarity of vision of who we are as God’s beloved and

Church could accept at the time.” Francis Rooney, *The Global Vatican: An Inside Look at the Catholic Church, World Politics and the Extraordinary Relationship Between the United States and the Holy See* (Lanham: Sheed & Ward, 2013), 118.

¹⁰ The word ecumenical as used in this work connotes “universal.” Huebsch, *The Council*, 53.

¹¹ “Pope John XIII’s Opening Address to the Second Vatican Council” (1962). “The pope’s prophetic gift was to see below the surface of the apparent triumph of midcentury Roman Catholicism: seminaries and convents around the world were overflowing with recruits; missionary priests and nuns in Africa and Latin America were moving into the postcolonial vacuum; the Cold War struggle with Communism had validated Catholic politics, with Asian figures like the Diem family in Viet Nam, leaders like Konrad Adenauer in Germany and Charles de Gaulle in France, with even Protestant America having just elected John F. Kennedy as president.” James Carroll, “Introduction: The Beginning of Change” in *Vatican II: The Essential Texts* (New York: Image Books, 2012), 17.

how we are called as a community with others to be Good News in the world.

This work began with a panorama of change that transformed society at-large in the mid-twentieth century followed by a brief introduction to the man Angelo Roncalli (now St. John XXIII¹²) who was spiritually compelled to convene the Second Vatican Council. The next section will highlight historical, social, political, economic and racial events that represent “aspirations, yearnings and dramatic features” of the Black community of the 1950s and 1960s. The reflection continues with a summary of Vatican II that draws connections between the rationale and mission of the Council and the life and mission of Black Americans. The conclusion sketches two instances of Black Catholic initiative that exemplify 1) the 20th century cultural transformation that created the need for Vatican Council II and 2) local responses to the 1960s cultural divide between the people of God and the universal church that predate the Council but brilliantly connect with its teachings and outcomes.

Signs of the Time: Black Cultural, Social and Religious Change

Post-World War II was a period of economic prosperity in the United States due largely to government investment in infrastructure, including highway expansions and schools, in veteran benefits in the form of the G.I Bill that provided access to higher education and home ownership to multitudes of Americans who never before had such opportunities, and in continued military spending that supported the Cold War. A peacetime baby boom also drove up the sale of consumer goods and pushed new housing growth out into the suburbs.¹³ The

¹² The Pope, now St. John XXIII, was canonized in April 2014.

¹³ James M. O’Toole, *The Faithful: A History of Catholics in America* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008), 193-8. The author also provides insight into the shift in religious and sacramental fervor that occurred in the U.S. Catholic community after World War II. The following chapter focuses on the effects of Vatican II on the U.S. Catholic faithful. See also Jay Nolan’s edited work, *A History from 1850 to the Present: The American Catholic Parish, Volume 1: The Northeast, Southeast and South Central States* (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1987).

white middle class was becoming upwardly mobile. Progress in the black community was measured more in terms of civil rights and black power, movements energized by a growing consciousness of racial injustice at home and changing events around the world.

As Americans who had served admirably in wartime, African Americans may have aspired to the economic progress enjoyed by their white counterparts, however, their yearnings post-World War II reflected more ongoing and basic psychological needs, the actualization of which would dramatically alter the racial scene in the United States and beyond. Cyprian Davis has described the collective turn in black perspective in this manner:

After the Second World War the United States confronted once again the issue of racial segregation. This time, however, things were different. American society was now forced to confront a new determination and resolve among black Americans. This confrontation now took place in a world in which colonialism was dying and new nations were arising amid wars of liberation. In America it was the beginning of a social revolution that would have enormous – indeed revolutionary – consequences in all sectors of American society.¹⁴

Historian Peniel Joseph provides additional range to this 1950-60s worldview and sense of self-determination that was emerging among African Americans. According to Joseph,

Both civil rights and Black Power have immediate roots in the Great Depression and Second World War. If World War II signaled the defeat of fascism and the decline of European colonial empires as the United States also extended new freedoms to far corners of the globe, it also imbued black U.S. veterans and ordinary citizens with a sense of hard-fought political entitlements. Black Americans were among the fiercest partisans in efforts to harness the political energies unleashed during wartime so

¹⁴ Davis, O.S.B., Cyprian, *The History of Black Catholics in the United States* (New York: Crossroads Publishing, 1991), 255.

as to secure new rights at home as well as abroad.¹⁵

If much of the developed world was in flux by the mid to late 1950s, the Black community was in a particular flux contending with the general societal, political and economic development issues of the day and times and enduring cultural issues of liberation, equality and self-identity.

Despite the challenges of living black and largely segregated, images of “Negro” aspirations and yearnings were gaining mass attention and blacks were making their mark on U.S. culture.¹⁶ In 1950 Chicagoan Gwendolyn Brooks won the Pulitzer Prize for poetry; Ralph Bunche, a civil rights leader, was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for mediating Middle East peace between the Arabs and Israelis; the National Basketball Association (NBA) recruited its first three black players; Ethel Waters became the first African American network television star; and author Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man* was published. In that same year Dr. Kenneth Clark, an African American psychologist, presented the results of his experiments with sixteen black children, ages six to nine, who were interviewed using black and white dolls. The findings of Clark’s investigation validated the negative effects of segregation.¹⁷ In 1951, the Pan-American Congress of Pharmacists adopted as its patron a black man, Martin de Porres, a lay brother of the Dominican Order who lived in Peru in the late 16th and early 17th centuries. Martin de Porres was beatified in 1837.¹⁸ Harry Moore, a Florida

¹⁵ Peniel E. Joseph, *Dark Days, Bright Nights: From Black Power to Barack Obama* (New York: Basic Civitas Books, 2010), 13-14. Although the U.S. civil rights movement is relatively well-documented in American history, Peniel writes in important detail about the black power movement that has also significantly contributed to the history of Black Americans.

¹⁶ Unless otherwise noted, the Black historical facts are listed by year in Quintard Taylor, *America I Am Black Facts: The Timelines of African American History, 1601-2008* (Carlsbad: SmileyBooks 2009), 149-57.

¹⁷ Juan Williams, *Eyes on the Prize: America’s Civil Rights Years 1954-1965*, New York: Penguin Books (1987), 20-21.

¹⁸ Claire Huchet Bishop, *Martín de Porres, Hero*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company (1954), 118. As a lay Dominican brother, Blessed Martin (1579-1639) ministered to the poor and sick with prayer, healing medical procedures, and remedial potions and drugs that he mixed

NAACP official, was killed in a bombing on Christmas Day 1951.

Charlotta Bass, a Los Angeles newswoman, was nominated vice-president on the Progressive Party ticket at the 1952 presidential convention. Paul Robeson placed her name in nomination; W.E. B. DuBois seconded the nomination. In the same year, Detroit's Cora Brown was the first black woman elected to the Michigan State Senate. For the first time in seventy-seven years of record-keeping, the Tuskegee Institute reported no lynchings in the United States.

Racial discrimination and segregation persisted through the decade as Black leaders fought for equality in housing, voting rights, education and employment. The 1954 *Brown v. the Board of Education* decision by the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that segregation in public schools was unconstitutional, reversing the judicial doctrine of "separate but equal." In that same year Benjamin. O. Davis, Jr. was appointed the first Black Air Force general and Malcolm X became minister of a Nation of Islam Harlem Temple.

The drama of the Black struggle was prominently featured in several U.S. civil rights actions, including the first organized bus boycott in 1953 in Baton Rouge, the arrests in Montgomery of fifteen-year-old Claudette Colvin and then Rosa Parks for refusing to give up their respective seats on the bus to white riders, and the subsequent 1955 Montgomery bus boycott that propelled Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. into leadership. Fourteen-year-old Emmitt Till of Chicago was lynched in 1955 during a visit with family in Mississippi. The U.S. Supreme Court issued a ruling known as Brown II ordering that school desegregation proceed with "all deliberate speed." In 1956, as Black students began to register in formerly segregated public schools, violence broke out in communities throughout the South.

In the entertainment arena, Dorothy Dandridge made the cover of *Life Magazine* in 1954, the first African American to be so prominently featured. In 1956, Nat King Cole became the

himself. He spent 45 years in the Convent of the Holy Rosary in Lima, Peru as a humble servant to all – human and animal - in need. See also, "St. Martin de Porres: Model of Heroic Charity" in *The Pope Speaks Magazine*, 8 (1962), 49-57.

first African American male to emcee his own prime-time variety show on network television. That same year, Clarence-Rufus Joseph Rivers, a black Catholic priest who dedicated himself to the development of an African American Catholic liturgical aesthetic, was ordained in Cincinnati.¹⁹

In 1957, Althea Gibson became the first African American winner in the Singles Division of the British Tennis Championship at Wimbledon. Dorothy Height assumed leadership of the National Council of Negro Women, a position she would hold for the next forty-one years.

There was historic movement on the government front:

Congress passes the Civil Rights Act of 1957, the first legislation protecting black rights since Reconstruction. The act establishes the Civil Rights section of the Justice Department and empowers federal prosecutors to obtain court injunctions against interference with the right to vote. It also creates the federal Civil Rights Commission, with the authority to investigate discriminatory conditions and recommend corrective measures.²⁰

Later in the year, President Dwight Eisenhower was compelled to dispatch federal troops to Little Rock to enforce a federal court order to desegregate Central High and protect nine African American students who enrolled as a result of the order. The federal troops would remain at Central High for the remainder of the school year. 30,000 citizens assembled at the Lincoln

¹⁹ Clarence-Rufus J. Rivers, "Freeing the Spirit: Very Personal Reflections on One Man's Search for the Spirit in Worship", *U.S. Catholic Historian*, 19 (Spring 2001), 97. Rivers' priestly vocation was one among many that were answered in the mid twentieth century. According to Dolan, "The amount of black priests increased during the period. Up to 1926, only ten American blacks were ordained priests; from 1930 to 1960, 113 were ordained, eighty-three of whom were associated with religious communities." Jay Dolan, ed., 144. The Catholic African World Network 2005 posting on the National Black Catholic Congress website accounts for 250 African American priests and 300 African American sisters in the United States. "Black Catholics: Worldwide Count", National Black Catholic Congress, 2005, <http://www.nbccongress.org/black-catholics/worldwide-count-black-catholics-01.asp> (accessed August 14, 2014).

²⁰ Taylor, 153.

Memorial in Washington, D.C. for a Prayer Pilgrimage for Freedom to advocate for desegregation and voter's rights.²¹

The Alvin Ailey Dance Theatre was launched in New York in 1958. In that same year in Atlanta, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) was established; Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was the first president. WNTA-TV in New York City hired Louis Lomax, the first African American newscaster. Also in 1958, Cardinal Roncalli was elected Pope John XXIII. By 1959, the ultraconservative Republican Senator Barry Goldwater was the most popular figure invited to speak on U.S. campuses; Malcolm X was number two.²²

As the decade of the 1950s closed, there continued to be forward motion, relapse, and stalls in African American movement towards the achievement of full and equal civil rights. In 1959, Barry Gordy founded Motown²³ and Lorraine Hansberry's "A Raisin in the Sun", starring Sidney Poitier, opened on Broadway. Ella Fitzgerald and Count Basie won two awards each at the first Grammy Awards Show. Mack Charles Parker was lynched in Mississippi.

The Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) was formed in 1960 in North Carolina; North Carolina A&T students staged a sit-in at a Woolworth's Drug Store to protest the ban on service to African Americans. At the Olympic Games, Wilma Rudolph won three gold medals in track. President Eisenhower signed the Civil Rights Bill of 1960 to protect voting

²¹Clayborne Carson, primary consultant, *Civil Rights Chronicle: The African American Struggle for Freedom*, (Lincolnwood: Publications, International, Ltd., 2003), 148.

²² Ibid, 111.

²³ "As the great voices grew louder, stronger and multiplied, Motown Records created an outlet where the *truth* (italics provided) could be expressed in an uncensored and enlightened setting. The launch of the Black Forum label was a platform where many of the days' thought leaders could express an Afro-American viewpoint on issues of race, culture and conflict – sentiments that would ultimately emerge in popular music." Taken from "Black Forum: 1960-1972", *Motown: Truth is a Hit*, exhibit at Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Harlem: New York Public Library (February 1-July 26, 2014), visited July 18, 2014.

rights. John F. Kennedy won the presidency of the United States with many African American votes.

Between January and December 1960, seventeen sub-Saharan African nations gained independence from European colonial powers.²⁴ Government brutality against Black freedom fighters resulted in the 1960 Sharpeville Massacre that sparked worldwide outrage against South African apartheid.²⁵

The Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) organized Freedom Rides throughout the Deep South in 1961. The DuSable Museum of African American History, one of the first major museums devoted to Black life in the U.S., was founded in Chicago. In Zaire, the conference of Catholic bishops boldly called for "a locally oriented liturgical movement".²⁶ On October 1, 1962 James Meredith enrolled in the University of Mississippi, the school's first African American student. Meredith was

²⁴ John Lewis, *Walking with the Wind: A Memoir of the Movement* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace & Company 1998), 71. He asserts, "Zaire, Somalia, Nigeria, the Congo – freedom was stirring in all these places, and we couldn't help being thrilled. Thrilled, but also a little bit ashamed. Here were black people thousands of miles away achieving liberation and independence from nations that had ruled them for centuries, and we still didn't have those rights in a country that was supposed to be free. Black Africans on their native continent were raising their own national flags for the first time in history, and we could not even get a hamburger and a Coke at a soda fountain." Joseph, 49-63, highlights the importance of pan-African consciousness to the U.S. black liberation struggle. During the 1955 Afro-Asian Conference in Bandung, Indonesia, participants discussed concepts of self-rule, Third World solidarity and self-determination. Although he was not in attendance, Malcolm X endorsed the Conference philosophy and eventually rolled those ideas into his own activist message. Harlem, N.Y. became an important U.S. center of Pan African political thought and action promoted by social activists and artists of the day like Lorraine Hansberry, Maya Angelou, and James Baldwin. Cecilia Moore in "Keeping Harlem Catholic: African Catholics and Harlem, 1920-1960", *American Catholic Studies*, 114 (2003): 16-21, counts Black Catholics Billie Holiday, Ellen Tarry and Mary Lou Williams among important activist artists in the 1950-60s Harlem community.

²⁵ Kevin Shillington, *History of Africa* (New York: St. Martin's Press 1989), 405-6.

²⁶ Nwaka Chris Egbulem, *The Power of Africentric Celebrations: Inspirations from the Zairean Liturgy* (New York: Crossroad Herder Books, 1996), 33-4.

escorted to class by U.S. marshals and federal troops were dispatched to prevent violent protests.

Of course, history does not happen in discrete moments along a timeline. Every important event unfolds against a complex backdrop of contributing primary and secondary circumstances and causes. Involved in that background is a network of people, most of whom remain nameless. As myriad events of the mid-twentieth century evolved, the profile of black America broadened and became more diversified just as new ideas, capabilities and media images of the times radicalized societies around the world. Political and social unrest, heightened by the prospect of nuclear war that could annihilate the earth in a moment's time, contributed to the instability of people's core beliefs and traditions. Novel concepts and attitudes pushed against established norms, values and expectations. As was typical in many cultural groups, African American youth and college students experimented with fresh interpretations of black consciousness articulated rather stridently in the music, dance, dress, gesture and literature of the day. Some found these modern trends outrageous. On the other hand, elders who welcomed the opportunity at last to express their African identity often embarrassed younger, more conservative, family and church members with their liberated behaviors. At the midpoint of the 20th century, generations had begun to engage in the collective work of reconciling a traditional African heritage with an innovating American culture, a work that would eventually flow over into every aspect of African American life. These negotiations were conducted across class, regional, denominational, generational, political party and ideological lines. Reflecting on this experience from the Black Catholic perspective, Father Joseph M. Davis, S.M. and Brother Cyprian L. Rowe, FMS contended,

Between the mid-1950s and the late 1960s the remarkable metamorphosis which happened was the strengthening of relational bonds, the reappropriation of cultural identity and pride, and the realization that power is as much a matter of internal disposition as it is an external condition. Within a span of ten years, Negroes became the Black community, moving from legal and persuasive efforts to dismantle desegregation to

non-violent resistance to Black pride, power and nationalism.²⁷

From its earliest days in America, a vibrant Black Catholic community had stubbornly rooted itself in the life of the universal Church presented as a predominantly European and European American reality. The struggle of this particular people of God to live free with humanity and faith intact is exemplified in this review of the years from 1950 through the 1960s presented here. What Catholic historian Katrina Sanders says about Black Catholic male leadership can be said of the women religious and the Black Catholic community at-large. According to Sanders: "(a)lthough records of their efforts are invisible in civil rights histories, black Catholic clergy and religious did play a significant role in securing civil rights in their communities. Either covertly or overtly, cautiously or loudly, black Catholic clergy and religious contributed as needed to securing rights for members of their communities in the rural South and the urban North."²⁸

The landmarks in U.S. and world events involving Black people presented in this work give just a hint of the audacious and faithful spirit that God has placed in his Black people, a spirit that challenged, animated, comforted and guided them forward through turbulent years of recent U.S. history and braced them for what was to come in the fiery years of the 1960s. These historic touchstones also provide valuable context for John XXIII's decision to convene the Second Vatican Council that opened on October 11, 1962.

²⁷Davis, S.M., Joseph M. and Cyprian Rowe, F.M.S., "The Development of the National Office for Black Catholics," *U.S. Catholic Historian*, 7 (1988): 265.

²⁸Katrina M. Sanders, "Black Catholic Clergy and the Struggle for Civil Rights: Winds of Change," in *Uncommon Faithfulness: The Black Catholic Experience*, eds. M. Shawn Copeland, LaReine-Marie Mosely, and Albert J. Raboteau (Maryknoll: Orbis Books 2009), 79. In this essay, Sanders highlights the civil rights leadership of Fr. August L. Thompson who was ordained in 1957 for the small Louisiana Diocese of Alexandria and the black empowerment ministry of Fr. George Clements, also ordained in 1957, in urban Chicago.

Vatican II and the Black Community

In his reading of the times,

...Pope John intuited that there was something profoundly out of sync in the inner life of the Church: intellectually sterile, liturgically lifeless, moral instruction depending more on imperatives than on invitations, fear emphasized over hope, a clergy cut off from the laity...the Living Word of Scripture all but forgotten, Jesus himself on the margin of piety.²⁹

Not only was the Catholic Church of the mid-20th century out of sync internally, the institution was out of step with the modern world undergoing a period of great cultural upheaval and social unrest.³⁰ His entire life and vocation gave John XXIII broad, sweeping vision of the world as an ecumenical community, yet he moved among the people of God with feet solidly on the ground, ministering with competence, warmth and a simple sophistication. Given his career involvement in international affairs, the prevalence of television as a communications and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, he surely had his eye on events in the 1950s and early 60s surrounding God's black children throughout the world in the months of preparation for the Council.

Signs of the Times Pointing to the Second Vatican Council

Pope John XXII's actions demonstrated that he was aware

²⁹ Carroll, 17.

³⁰ For perspectives of the cultural and ecclesial turmoil in U.S. parishes, see in Jay Dolan, ed., *A History from 1850 to the Present: The American Catholic Parish, Volume 1: Three Northeast, Southeast and South Central States*: Joseph J. Casino, "Part One: From Sanctuary to Involvement: A History of the Catholic Parish in the Northeast, 73-101; Michael J. McNally, "A Peculiar Institution: A History of Catholic Parish Life in the Southwest (1850-1980), 155-217; Charles Nolan, "Modest and Humble Crosses: A History of Catholic Parishes in the South Central Region" 292-310. Cecilia A. Moore reports on a local diocesan experience in "Dealing with Desegregation: Black and White Responses to the Desegregation of the Diocese of Raleigh, North Carolina, 1953" in *Uncommon Faithfulness: The Black Catholic Experience*, eds. M. Shawn Copeland, LaReine-Marie Mosely, and Albert J. Raboteau (Maryknoll: Orbis Books 2009), 63-75.

of and concerned with the anxieties and experiences of Catholics of African descent around the world. On May 6, 1962, he canonized Martin de Porres (1579-1639) of Lima, Peru, the lay Dominican brother of Black heritage who was beatified in 1837.³¹ He elected Laurean Rugambwa (1912-1997) of Tanzania the first African Cardinal in March 1960. The Pope mentioned the elevation of Rugambwa as evidence of the continent's long and enduring connection with the Church in a radio message delivered to African Catholics on June 5, 1960.³² His encyclicals, propagated between 1959 and 1963, critiqued the abuses of modernization and prescribed spiritual and social justice remedies for war, injustice, inequality and poverty, situations that plagued Black American and African communities. Surely God's Black people were of consequence to this pope.

John XXIII convened the Second Vatican Council in 1962, inviting bishops of the church from all over the world to reflect and consult, pray and discuss contemporary life in the light of

³¹ See *The Pope Speaks Magazine*, 8 (1962), "St. Martin de Porres: Model of Heroic Charity" and "The Canonization of a Saint, 91-95." In a May 1962 address to cardinals, bishops, clergy and laity assembled for the celebration to canonize Martin de Porres, John XXIII speaks of the new saint: "As we stated at the beginning of Our sermon, We feel that it is a most happy coincidence that, in the course of this year in which We decreed the celebration of the Ecumenical Council, the honors of sainthood should be bestowed upon Martin de Porres. This, because the pinnacles of Christian holiness which he attained, and the splendor of dazzling virtue, of which his whole life shone as an example, are of such magnitude that we may view in him, as it were, the wholesome fruits which We most ardently desire from this forthcoming and most solemn event, both for the Church and for the entire human community.", "St. Martin de Porres", 55.

³² See "Radiomensaje del Papa Juan XXIII a los Católicos Africanos", Domingo 5 de Junio de 1960, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father//john_xxiii/messages/pont_message_s/1960/documents/hf_j-xxiii_mes_19600605_fedeli-africa_sp.html (accessed August 14, 2014). Speaking familiarly in Spanish to African Catholics, particularly the faithful in recently liberated African nations and those in the struggle for liberation, Pope John XXIII acknowledged the rich spirituality of the people and recognized the timeless presence of Africa in the history of the Church. He offered examples, contemporary and ancient, of African faithful, martyrs and clergy who have witnessed wholeheartedly to the faith.

Catholic teaching.³³ Although he died the following year, the Council continued through 1965 under the leadership of his successor, Pope Paul VI.³⁴

"Vatican Council II met in the great nave of St. Peter's Basilica in Rome in four sessions in the autumns of the years 1962 to 1965, with committees doing extensive work between sessions. Made up of about 2,400 bishops, with about 500 *periti*, or experts, and something between 50 and 200 "observers" and "auditors" in attendance, the Council issued sixteen distinct statements..."³⁵ The aims of the Council were introduced in *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy), the first conciliar document promulgated in 1963. *Sacrosanctum Concilium* was intended to invigorate the Christian life of the faithful, to adapt institutions to the needs of the times, to foster unity among those who believe in Christ and to call all of humanity into communion with the Church.³⁶

The attention of the Black Catholic community was not fixed on the extensive preparations for and dramatic opening of the Council. It was concentrated instead on the daily dramas associated with the fight for freedom, dignity and full Black personhood in the many situations where all that was at risk. As a result of their history and contemporary circumstances, Black Catholics were dedicated, invigorated Christian disciples.

³³ A total of two hundred ninety-six bishops and other prelates from Africa attended Vatican Council II, there were three hundred from Asia, four hundred eighty-nine from South America, eighty-four representing Central America and four hundred four from North America. Huebsch, *Vatican II in Plain English: The Council*, 165-6. Bishop Harold Robert Perry (1916-1991), was the first self-identified African American ordained a Catholic bishop. Appointed on September 29, 1965 Auxiliary Bishop of New Orleans, Perry attended the fourth and final session of Vatican Council II, September to December 1965. "Second Vatican Council Session Four Council Fathers", May 2014, <http://www.catholic-hierarchy.org/event/ecv2-4-10.html> (accessed August 4, 2014), 3.

³⁴ *The Faithful Revolution: Vatican II*, (Cincinnati: RCL Benzinger, 1997), a 5-part documentary DVD set, gives a brilliant historical overview of the Council and its implementation in the Church of the United States.

³⁵ Carroll, 15.

³⁶ *Sacrosanctum Concilium, Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, ed. Austin Flannery, O.P., (Boston: Daughters of St. Paul, 1988 rev.), #1, 1.

They could sense a fundamental disconnect between the workings of the institutional Church and their everyday state of affairs. Despite the political status quo and because of a deep faith in God, they trusted that all who believe in Christ Jesus (and good folk who do not) would someday come together to promote God's reign on earth. Although they may not have been fully tuned in to the ceremony and proceedings, the simply stated aims of Vatican Council II resonated with the spirit of Black Catholic faithful. The fulfillment of those conciliar aims continues even until today as the Body of Christ strives to discern their meanings in a new age.

Signs of the Times: Black Catholic Initiatives in Liturgical Renewal

M. Shawn Copeland's analysis of the relevance of Vatican II for the faithful and the whole people of God is useful here. Copeland contends,

From its earliest sessions, the Second Vatican Council turned the mind and heart of the Church toward the concrete social (i.e., political, economic, and technological) world, and, the pastoral constitution, "The Church in the Modern World," identified itself with it.³⁷ The sixteen documents promulgated by the Council treated the theological understandings of the nature and the mission of the Church, its relation to Judaism, and to other world religions; restored to public view Catholic respect for individual conscience; advocated the notion of religious freedom; examined the roots of modern atheism...The Council also engaged the grave problems of the time – the economic and political exploitation of peoples and nations of the third world, the threat of world destruction by nuclear war, disregard for the sanctity of human life, racism and unbridled technological innovation. The Second Vatican Council rethought the notion of spirituality and holiness of life, asserting that all Christians are called to holiness and encouraging the laity to more active involvement in the apostolic mission of the Church. Insisting the lay women and men have a

³⁷ Flannery, *Documents of Vatican II, Gaudium et Spes*.

“special and indispensable role in the mission of the Church, “the Council reminded the hierarchy and clergy that the laity must not be deprived of “their rightful freedom to act on their own initiative.”³⁸

By the 1950s important reforms in liturgy and scripture, the discussion of which began early in the twentieth century, had found good soil in Catholic theological and pastoral settings throughout the world. So that on the second day of Vatican II, October 16, 1962, the Council Fathers could easily agree to take on reform of the liturgy as its first task. Liturgical renewal was a topic uppermost on the Council agendas of many of the bishops assembled due to the experimentation and discussions on the topic already underway in Catholic faith communities, particularly in the Church in the first world. The preparation for the discussion had been prepared by a sizeable committee of pastoral and liturgical experts.³⁹ Vatican II historian Bill Huebsch outlined the manner in which the Council approached this matter:

October 22, 1962: The **schema** (draft document) **on Liturgy is introduced** for debate. The press office reports that this is the first topic because the Council’s work will be directed primarily towards the task of the internal renewal of the Church. The debate is wide-ranging, including suggestions for use of the vernacular, more varied use of Scripture, communion under both forms, and concelebration. The discussion on the Liturgy lasts through fifteen general sessions, ending on November 13. The council fathers propose 625 amendments to the original schema. It eventually meets with their overwhelming approval, a blow for the conservatives at the council.⁴⁰

³⁸Copeland, “A Cadre of Women Religious”, 125; Flannery, *Documents of Vatican II, Lumen Gentium*, Ch. IV; see also *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, #1, #24.

³⁹ Bill Huebsch, *Vatican II in Plain English, The Constitutions* (Allen: Thomas More, 1997), 89-93; Edward P. Hahnenberg, “Documents: Prefatory Material” in *Vatican II: The Essential Texts* (New York: Image Books, 2012), 29-33.

⁴⁰ Huebsch, *Vatican II in Plain English: The Council*, 110. (emphasis in the original)

Pope Paul VI promulgated the "Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy" on December 4, 1963. An essential passage of the document stated:

Mother Church earnestly desires that all the faithful should be led to that fully conscious, and active participation in liturgical celebrations which is demanded by the very nature of the liturgy. Such participation by the Christian people as "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a redeemed people (1 Pet. 2:9; cf. 2:4-5), is their right and duty by reason of their baptism.

In the restoration and promotion of the sacred liturgy, this full and active participation by all the people is the aim to be considered before all else; for it is the primary and indispensable source from which the faithful are to derive the true Christian spirit; and therefore pastors of souls must zealously strive to achieve it, by means of the necessary instruction, in all their pastoral work (14).

The following section will lift up two examples of Black Catholic creativity that 1) were factors in pre-Vatican Council II liturgical reform, 2) were spurred on by the pervasive cultural unrest that characterized the 1950s and 1960s, 3) embraced the spirit of Vatican II renewal and 4) continue to influence contemporary Catholic liturgy. In their distinct contexts the Zairean Bishops' Conference in Central Africa and Father Clarence Joseph Rivers in Cincinnati, Ohio had wrestled with what some believed were incompatible actualities: black culture and the Catholic faith. The folk with whom they ministered were engrossed to varying degrees in a changing self-awareness of Blackness that impacted nearly every aspect of human existence, including their faith life. Long before the Council assembled, these prophetic pastors had begun working towards the key principle promoted in the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*: "(t)he Church earnestly desires that all the faithful be led to that full, conscious, and active participation in liturgical celebrations called for by the very nature of the liturgy. . . In the reform and promotion of the liturgy, this full and active participation by all the people is the aim to be considered before

all else. For it is the primary and indispensable source from which the faithful are to derive the true Christian spirit . . ."⁴¹

The Zairean Mass

Sacramental theologian Nwaka Chris Egbulem suggests that "(t)he Church of Zaire was the first truly to address the issue of bringing African life and sense into Catholic liturgy."⁴² Formerly known as Belgium Congo, the country of Zaire won its political independence in June 1960. At the time, Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of the Congo) was a nation of more than fifty three million people and two hundred plus ethnic groups that spoke Tshiluba, Swahili, Lingala, Kikongo and French. Half the population was Catholic; Belgium Congo had been evangelized primarily by Italian and Portuguese missionaries. The Catholic University of Kinshasha (the Lovanium), founded in 1954 and patterned after the University of Louvain in Belgium, was the first Catholic university in Africa. The Zairean episcopal conference also established a theology faculty in 1957 "given the mission of training seminary teachers and lecturers for higher institutes of learning. It is a faculty committed to research and reflection on African Christianity".⁴³ The investment in these scholarly resources - theological, philosophical, anthropological and liturgical - corresponded with the faithful's demand for a Catholic way of life more authentically rooted in Zairean culture and proved to be a catalyst for local church reform confirmed by Vatican Council II.⁴⁴

The bishops of Zaire recognized the need to incorporate aspects of African culture into Catholic worship. An early experiment in liturgical reform was "the "Missa Luba", a humble but daring attempt to use African musical instruments to

⁴¹ *Sancrosanctum Concilium*, 14.

⁴² Egbulem, 33.

⁴³ Elochukwu E. Uzukwu, *Worship as Body Language: Introduction to Christian Worship: An African Orientation*, (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1997), 298. Uzukwu, a scripture and liturgical scholar, provides essential foundation for the study and implementation of liturgical inculturation affirmed in theory in Vatican Council II.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 298.

accompany the Roman Mass sung in Latin. At the time of its release in the early 1960s, it was the first introduction of African rhythm, drums, and gongs into Catholic celebrations."⁴⁵ Aware of a general push for liturgical reform in the universal church, the bishops in a 1961 national meeting identified the following "adaptations" required to update the Mass in Zaire: use of the vernacular, incorporation of local expressions and cultural communication styles, African prayers and revised rituals, in essence, an African-styled Mass.

Vatican Council II responded in some ways to the Conference's requests for liturgical reforms better suited to the needs and genius of the Zairean people of God. However, as a result of their intense and early advocacy, their commitment to African cultural research and consistent consultation with Rome, the bishops of Zaire managed to lead the effort to "create a liturgy that incarnates the message of revelation in a specific socio-cultural context, thus presenting the mystery celebrated by the Christian community in an expressive and comprehensive manner. It was not enough for the liturgy to be Zairean, it must also be Christian."⁴⁶ Pressing the renewals of Vatican Council II in accordance with the prescriptions of the Vatican Congregation for Divine Worship, the "Missel Romain pour les Dioceses du Zaire (Roman Missal for the Diocese of Zaire, popularly known as the "Rite Zairois (Zairean Rite) was officially approved on April 30, 1988."⁴⁷

Even in the liturgy the Church has no wish to impose a rigid uniformity...Rather does she respect and foster the qualities and talents of the various races and nations. Anything in these people's way of life which is not indissolubly bound up with superstition and error she studies with sympathy, and if possible, preserves intact. She sometimes even admits such things into the liturgy itself, provided they harmonize with its true and authentic

⁴⁵ Egbulem, 35.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 36.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 47. Egbulem's depth of research and detail in this report on the evolution of the Zairean liturgy conveys important understanding of the process of liturgical inculturation the need for which is ongoing in the life of the church.

spirit. Provided that the substantial unity of the Roman rite is preserved, provision shall be made, when revising the liturgical books, for legitimate variations and adaptations to different groups, regions and peoples...This should be borne in mind when drawing up the rites and determining rubrics.⁴⁸

The visionary leadership of the conference of Zairean bishops is well reflected in this selection from the "Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy" in which the church once again affirmed in concept the cultural, ethnic and national diversity of God's people and acknowledged the role of culture in Catholic worship. In the U.S. Catholic Church, pre-Vatican II grassroots efforts at updating Sunday worship in response to the particular cultural needs and gifts of the people were also underway. A homegrown African American Catholic virtuoso – liturgist, composer, musician, and artist – had entered the scene.

Fr. Clarence Rufus Joseph Rivers: Black Priest-Artist

Born in Selma, Alabama in September 1931, Rivers moved as a child with his family to Cincinnati. He studied in local Catholic schools. His deep interest in the priesthood was encouraged and Clarence Rufus attended a diocesan seminary.⁴⁹ Upon ordination in 1956, Fr. Rivers was assigned to St. Joseph's parish in Cincinnati's West End where he ministered with Msgr. Clement Busemeyer. Reflecting on this experience, Rivers said, "I expected this exteriorly gruff, teutonic pastor to be unconcerned about the *quality* of worship; his masses took from twenty to thirty minutes, the "sacred words" slovenly raced over in the widespread custom of the day. However, he was very much concerned that worship was not reaching and touching the people in the pews."⁵⁰

Although his own style of presiding at Mass did not reflect his concern, Busemeyer provided the professional support and space for the novice Fr. Rivers to try different approaches to

⁴⁸ *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, #37-8.

⁴⁹ Clarence Joseph Rivers, "No Prejudice in Seminary, Writes Negro," *The Catholic Telegraph* (July 8, 1949).

⁵⁰ Rivers, "Freeing the Spirit", 97.

bring about an everyday change in the assembly's liturgical experience. Rivers recalled:

In presiding at Mass, usually the main parish Mass, I would intensify my efforts to read the Latin texts so as to convey their meaning. There was no illusion that the people would understand the Latin, but they must see that I, for the most part, did understand and was more or less raptured by my understanding. There was a certain validity in presuming that they could be moved by experiencing that I was moved. However, they must understand their own responses, and they must convey the meaning in the English hymns, psalms, and songs, to themselves and to one another. That was not to ask a great deal for the moment, and it laid a basis for further development."⁵¹

One further development in Rivers' repertoire was the incorporation of Black music in Catholic worship. His own first composition, "God is Love" and a recorded copy of the Zairean "*Missa Luba*" gave him and his collaborators, the Sisters of St. Francis (Oldenburg) on staff at the parish elementary school, the resources to teach the St. Joseph student body, and then the St. Joseph Sunday assembly, new music that boldly invigorated the celebration of the Roman Mass. As his appreciation for Black culture in Catholic worship deepened, Rivers worked to develop his preaching style. And he spent time before the start of the main Sunday Mass prepping the congregation to sing well to enhance, all the more, their "full, conscious and active" involvement in the liturgical enterprise. He describes the experimentation: "The sisters and I were products of our time. Therefore, we did not think of our attempts in worship as revolutionary; rather we were attempting to recapture what we thought was a forgotten tradition. We were full-time teachers who worked on worship – mainly on music and congregational participation – only in a "beginning way".⁵² Their "beginning way" in pre-Vatican Council II

⁵¹ Ibid, 98.

⁵² Ibid, 103.

Cincinnati, led to a realization that would motivate a full-blown African American Catholic liturgical movement:

...that all drama, including the drama of worship, needed movement from beginning to middle to end...It slowly dawned on me that a well-structured (aesthetically structured) worship was the same as a vitally effective, spiritually moving worship...St. Joseph's parish was moving with moderate speed toward an effective worship and a more comprehensive idea of inculturation, i.e. synthesizing and integrating African American culture and Catholic worship. This was a matter more sophisticated than adding a few Black-flavored hymns/songs onto an otherwise unyielding Roman rite.⁵³

Although he went on to produce classic works and make singular contributions to the development of a contemporary liturgical movement in the United States⁵⁴, Rivers' pastoral intuitions as a new priest established important ecclesial values in the 1950s and 60s - respect for the cultural genius of a people, a passion for "full, conscious and active" worship, collaboration in ministry and practiced excellence in liturgical performance in service to the people of God - that were reinforced in Vatican Council II.

These are brief illustrations of Black Catholics who, in the midst of the cultural revolutions of the mid-twentieth century, engaged in church reforms in their local situations that led to the call for Vatican II. Many Black Catholic developments incubated during the late 1950s and early 1960s, encouraged by these and other cultural initiatives. For example, there was a growing community of Black Catholic religious and clergy who faced questions, concerns and challenges related to Black identity and Roman Catholic vocation in their various ministry

⁵³ Ibid, 101.

⁵⁴ See Clarence Rivers, "The Oral African Tradition Versus the Ocular Western Tradition", *This Far by Faith: American Black Worship and Its African Roots* (Washington: National Office for Black Catholics and Liturgical Conference, 1976), 38-49; Rivers, *The Spirit in Worship* (Cincinnati: Stimuli, Inc., 1978) and Mary E. McGann, RSCJ, "Let It Shine": *The Emergence of African American Catholic Worship* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008).

settings. Also underway was a slow shift in Black Catholic consciousness that took into consideration the particular struggles, gifts and needs of the community and began to speak to the stark incompatibility of social segregation and injustice with the Gospel preached by the Church. Fresh, young African American Catholic scholars were exploring black approaches to theology, catechetics, ethics, liturgy and pastoral ministry. They were backed by a corps of accomplished liturgical musicians who experimented with the treasury of traditional Black music in the context of Catholic liturgy. As they matured, many of these fledgling efforts responded to the needs of Black Christian disciples while reinforcing Vatican II values, reconciling work that continued in the decades that followed, even until today.

Clearly, the Good News proclaimed in those Fall gatherings of the Council fifty years ago and the conciliar documents themselves still speak to the particular situations – of blood, sweat and tears – that Black people in the U.S. (and Africa) faced in that era. Their yearnings, aspirations and the dramatic features of the segregated, yet-to-be-liberated world in which they lived was always the concern of Jesus Christ. In the years preceding the Council, The Church universal was briefed on life in the modern world through technology, the popular movements, social unrest and the prospect of war that hung heavy in the air.⁵⁵ African American and African leaders read the signs of the times; they protested, strategized, and advocated for righteousness in the light of the Gospel.

Conclusion

Further investigation and cross study is needed to put a finger on tangible theological, liturgical, social and historical benefits that the Council brings to bear on the development of the post-1960s Black Catholic community. It must be noted that challenges to that faith development presented with a vengeance in the mid-1960s; they included the assassinations of

⁵⁵White Catholic reaction to Vatican Council II teachings and the quest for racial justice in the U.S. church are profiled by John T. McGreevy in "Racial Justice and the People of God: The Second Vatican Council, the Civil Rights Movement and American Catholics", *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation*, 4 (Summer 1994): 221-254.

national leaders and the continued killing of black children, racism and resistance to black progress, neighborhood violence and riots, and a radicalized self-consciousness that would boldly embrace the values of the Black Nationalism and Black Power movements.

In conclusion, there is evidence that leading up to the Council, Africa was on the mind and heart of Pope John XXIII. It is fair to speculate that he was well aware through the media that a minority of Blacks – mostly professionals, entertainers and athletes – was advancing in American society, gaining limited civil rights, but that the majority of the people were caught in situations of poverty, injustice and lack of opportunity. He assembled Vatican Council II to bring to the Church's attention signs of the times such as these, to consider what must be done in light of the Gospels, church teachings and social justice. The Council represents the type of collaborative effort needed within the Church, with other churches and communities of faith, and organizations of good will to address the cultural mayhem – global and local – that exists even until today and to proclaim Good News to those in need. To conclude, fifty years after its convocation, Vatican Council II is an ongoing movement of God's people whose continuing evolution in Christ is vital for the redemption of the African American community and all the holy people of God.

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