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SEEKING FREEDOM IN 2013 THAT WAS PROMISED IN 1863

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No one can say that 2013 has been boring. As I write this letter, September has only just begun, yet so much has happened, so much tragedy and sadness, and not nearly enough joy. Perhaps, if we take a good, long look at these events through the lens of social justice, reaffirming our “commitment to the fundamental humanity of all persons,”¹ we can begin to make sense of them, and maybe even formulate some sort of rational response.

It started on a high note, with the inauguration of President Barack Obama for his second term of office on January 21st. Then, after barely enough time to celebrate, Pope Benedict XVI announced his resignation from the papacy, effective February 28th, citing failing health due to advanced age as his motivation – the first papal resignation in 600 years.² And on March 13th, the swirls of *fumata bianca* from the Sistine Chapel signaled the election of our new pontiff – Francis I of Argentina, the first Latin American pope, the first Jesuit pope, and the first non-European pope in over 1000 years.³

Just as we were getting to know Pope Francis, the Boston Marathon bombing grabbed our attention. On April 15th two

¹ Our fundamental mission – see the BCTS web site, bcts.org.

² The last pope to resign was Gregory XII, who was forced to step down in 1415 to end the Western Schism. He was succeeded by Pope Martin V.

³ Pope Victor I (ca 186-198), Pope St Miltiades (311-14), and Pope St Gelasius (492-496) were Africans. See “Reflections on African Popes,” The National Black Catholic Congress, accessed September 9, 2013, <http://www.nbccongress.org/black-catholics/african-popes.asp>.

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pressure-cooker bombs went off at the finish line of the marathon, killing three people (including an 8-year-old boy).

Less than a month later we were confronted with the May 6th rescue of three young women who had been kidnapped and held hostage for up to a decade by Ariel Castro. One of the women had borne Castro a child. Another had conceived several children but Castro had induced abortion by repeatedly beating and starving her.

Then on June 10th, jury selection began for the trial of George Zimmerman in the ‘Stand Your Ground’⁴ murder of 17-year old Trayvon Martin.

The case shocked America – or, at least it shocked African Americans and those who care about justice, including BCTS members. The unanimous ‘not-guilty’ verdict sickened and horrified us. That a young black teen could be stalked and killed while walking home from buying candy in his own neighborhood, and that his white killer, after freely admitting what he’d done, could still be acquitted – that reality causes us to reel. Is this really the year 2013, or have we somehow been transported back in time, fifty years ago, back to 1963, before the passage of the Civil Rights Act, before the March on Washington, before the election of our first African American president? This verdict was a startling reminder of how very, very far we have to go in our quest for social justice and racial equality. Our past-convenor, Bryan Massingale, published his thoughts on the verdict in the *U.S. Catholic Social Justice Blog*. He described the blues that threaten to overwhelm him, saying:

⁴ Zimmerman’s lawyers cited the “Stand Your Ground” legislation when he was initially questioned but used self- defense rather than “Stand Your Ground” during the trial.

I, too, have been profiled by police officers, followed by campus safety patrols and stalked by mall security guards for doing nothing more than walking to my office, shopping for clothes, or enjoying an evening stroll. ... Living with such terror and indignity is to be expected. You don't have to wear a hoodie or sagging pants to be perceived as a threat. The very presence of a black man in any space that violates the expectations of those in authority can constitute sufficient probable cause for suspicion and danger.⁵

Juror B37 explained the verdict, in an attempt, no doubt, to ease the tension surrounding the case. She couldn't have been more wrong. Our tension only grew. Her words made us more keenly aware, not less, of the depth of racism in our society when she stated, "I think George Zimmerman is a man whose heart was in the right place. ... It just went terribly wrong." She continued by stating that, even though Zimmerman "started the ball rolling" by stalking Martin after being told by 911 operators to stay in his car: "But he wanted to do good. I think he had good in his heart, he just went overboard ... He was justified in shooting Trayvon Martin." This same juror believed that Martin "played a huge role in his [own] death. He could have ... When George confronted him, and he could have walked away and gone home. He didn't have to do whatever he did and come back and be in a fight," she said, certain that Zimmerman feared for his life.⁶ Zimmerman's fear was more real to her than Martin's. Persuaded that George Zimmerman is good and just, she is just as convinced that Trayvon Martin caused his own death by standing up to Zimmerman rather than fleeing.

⁵ Bryan Massingale, "When Profiling is 'Reasonable' Injustice Becomes Excusable", *U.S. Catholic, Social Justice Blog*, July 19, 2013, accessed August 3, 2013, <http://www.uscatholic.org/blog/201307/when-profiling-%E2%80%9Creasonable%E2%80%9Dinjustice-becomes-excusable-2757>.

⁶ Dana Ford, "George Zimmerman was 'Justified' in Shooting Trayvon Martin, Juror Says," *CNN U.S.*, July 17, 2013, accessed September 9, 2013, <http://www.cnn.com/2013/07/16/us/zimmerman-juror>.

Zimmerman, in other words, was acting reasonably when he stalked, threatened, fought, shot, and killed an unarmed child. Massingale's comment resonates loudly with many of us:

We are dealing with a more or less unconscious racial bias that is manifested in the pervasive association of 'black' with criminality, in the willingness to presume the innocence of nonblacks (or, at least, to give them the benefit of the doubt), and, above all, in the inability to empathize with the plight of a black teenager confronted by an armed and 'creepy' adult. ... What is at the core of this situation, then, is the nonconscious inability of many white Americans to connect with, much less have empathy for, the experience of their fellow citizens with black skin.⁷

It was a paralyzing moment for many of us. Inspired by Bryan, however, several BCTS members shook off their shocked paralysis and shared their feelings about the verdict via the BCTS listserve. Here is a sampling of a few:

I was just watching and reflecting on the news of the newborn prince [British Prince George Alexander Louis, born July 22, 2013] and his royal debut for the entire world to see. As exciting as this news is for me and many others, I so wish that all Black male children could be afforded this same kind of affirmation and praise upon their births. In all of this hoopla, I am recalling that years ago, when I was a labor and delivery nurse, an attending physician, upon the delivery of a Black male child, jokingly said "here is another one for the welfare rolls and the prison system." This newborn already was being racially profiled and *given a guilty verdict* and he was not in this world 2 minutes yet. I often wonder where this 24 year old is today.

⁷ Ibid.

I hope that he is doing very well. (Shawnee Daniels-Sykes, posted July 24, 2013)

Bryan, I read your piece and also went for the comments. As usual and expected, many of the comments have a denying and defensive tone. The "declining significance of race" – the false pretense of post-racial society – in this country is the cause of the racial tragedies we face today. I am grateful to see your persistence in keeping race and racism in the front burner even as forces, both within and outside the black community, often grow tired of hearing or talking about it. I would argue that we must fight racism today with more vehemence than in the past, because racism is now a creepy, naturalized, systematized, and taken-for-granted phenomenon – a green snake under green grass can't be more dangerous! (Kwame Assenyoh, S.V.D., posted on July 23, 2013)

Greetings to all from Nigeria. I have been here since the end of June. I could not believe my ears when I heard of the [Zimmerman] verdict. Being black while male can be a burden especially for the younger group. This was a 17 year old kid! I am amazed at the number of people who are not prepared to allow him the chance to act like a human being – take a walk, eat ice cream, pass through any neighborhood on your way home, etc. It is even more amazing how many people who, blinded by race, cannot feel the pain of a mother and father who lost a budding 17 year-old to an utterly senseless violent act. Let us continue to reflect on the lesson of this very sad issue. May he rest in Peace. (Paulinus Odozor, posted July 21, 2013)

In 1937, Cornelius Homes, a freed man, in Winnsboro South Carolina told an interviewer from the WPA: "Although the slave question is settled, the race question will be with us always, until Jesus come the second time. It's in our politics, in our justice courts, on our highways, on our side walks, in

our manners, in our religion, and in our thoughts, all the day and every day. The good [Lord] pity both sides. In the end, will it be settled by hate or by the policy of love your neighbor as you do yourself? Who knows?" Only God knows, and God waits with us in hope! (M. Shawn Copeland, posted on July 19, 2013)

To try to make sense of the senseless suffering, injustice, and tragedy of this year, we might look back 150 and 50 years. The events of 1863 and 1963 laid the groundwork for who we are today, how far we've come, and what forces we've managed to overcome. In so doing, we may also learn something about what still needs to be done.

150 years ago, President Abraham Lincoln penned the Emancipation Proclamation. It was an incredible moment in time. Lincoln had invoked his authority as Commander-in-Chief of the military to issue an executive order freeing the slaves. His intent was to create chaos in those states still in rebellion against the Union:⁸

That on the first day of January, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and sixty-three, all persons held as slaves within any State or designated part of a State, the people whereof shall then be in rebellion against the United States, shall be then, thenceforward, and forever free; and the Executive Government of the United States, including the military and naval authority thereof, will recognize and maintain the freedom of such persons, and will do no act or acts to repress such persons, or any of them, in any efforts they may make for their actual freedom. ... And upon this

⁸ The text of the Emancipation Proclamation can be found on the web site of the National Archives and Records Administration, http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/featured_documents/emancipation_proclamation/transcript.html (accessed August 28, 2013).

act, sincerely believed to be an act of justice, warranted by the Constitution, upon military necessity, I invoke the considerate judgment of mankind, and the gracious favor of Almighty God.

While it may be true that the Emancipation Proclamation did not, in and of itself, free any slaves, it was accepted as an official endorsement of the Abolitionist Movement and symbolized the eventual objective of our nation's executive office to abolish slavery completely. The joy of hearing that the Proclamation had been signed was a cause for great celebration for Blacks. Lucy Davis, a slave owned by a Cape Girardeau family in Missouri who was interviewed by the Federal Writers Project in the mid-1930s, describes her mother's reaction to learning that she was free:

When de sojers was round de neighborhood dey'd allus have me playing' round de front gate so I cud tell em when dey's comin' up the road. Den dey goes an' hides 'fore de sojers gits dar. Dey all skeer'd o' de sojers. I's skeerd too but dey say sojers won't bother little black gal. ... When de war wuz over Ole Massa Joe came in an' he say, 'Rose, you all aint slaves no mo'—You is all free as I is. Den you should a heard my mammy shout! You never heard sich shoutin' in all yo' bahn days.⁹

New Year's Eve of 1862 was celebrated as "Watch Night" by abolitionists, and New Year's Day 1863 represented the day of freedom, the end of the moral outrage that had so tainted this

⁹ Aaron Lisec, "The Emancipation Proclamation at 150: Narratives of Soldiers and Former Slaves," *Raiders of the Lost Archives – Behind the Stacks at the Special Collections Research Center, Morris Library, SIUC*, accessed September 12, 2013, <http://scrc1.wordpress.com/2013/01/08/the-emancipation-proclamation-at-150-narratives-of-soldiers-and-former-slaves/>. Missouri was one of the states for whom the Emancipation Proclamation did not apply.

nation, as described by Fanny Garrison Villard on the 50th anniversary of the Proclamation:

The recent celebrations of the Proclamations of Emancipation have brought vividly before me the "Watch Night" of New Year's Eve fifty years ago in a crowded African Church in Boston ... [w]e being the only white people present. When my father's name was mentioned we were at once given seats. The solemnity and intense excitement of the occasion were indescribably thrilling, and I almost felt as if I could hear the heart-beats of those present, as well as my own. The black preacher said, in substance: 'The President of the United States has promised that if the Confederates do not lay down their arms he will free all the slaves to-morrow. They have not laid down their arms, and to-morrow will bring freedom of the oppressed slaves. But we all know that the powers of darkness are with the President, trying to make him break his word, but we must watch and see that he does not break his word.' ... [The next day] came real exaltation of spirit with the announcement by someone from the platform that the President's proclamation was coming over the wires. Nine cheers were given for Lincoln and three for William Lloyd Garrison. I can imagine what my father's feelings were at that happy beginning of the end of slavery to which he had given more than thirty years of his life, but I know that I stood up in the gallery beside him when he received the plaudits of the audience with joy in his heart that was akin to pain. ... *The question that concerns us to-day is, more than all else, whether our duty to the liberated bondmen has been fulfilled. The answer is, alas! No. Untutored, ignorant of the meaning of liberty, they were for a long time after the war abandoned both by the North and the South (save for few exceptions) and we are still to-day repairing the harvest of our neglect.*¹⁰

¹⁰ Fanny Garrison Villard, 1913, "How Boston Received the Emancipation Proclamation," *AntiSlavery Literature*, accessed September 13, 2013,

A century later, Villard's words ring true. In the year 2013, we are still "repairing the harvest of neglect."

January 1, 1863 may have been a day of celebration, but the estimated 500,000 slaves held in states that weren't in rebellion – namely, Missouri, Kentucky, Maryland, Tennessee, and Delaware, and parts of Louisiana and Virginia – were not freed by the Proclamation.

[I] designate as the States and parts of States wherein the people thereof respectively, are this day in rebellion against the United States, the following, to wit: Arkansas, Texas, Louisiana, (except the Parishes of St. Bernard, Plaquemines, Jefferson, St. John, St. Charles, St. James Ascension, Assumption, Terrebonne, Lafourche, St. Mary, St. Martin, and Orleans, including the City of New Orleans) Mississippi, Alabama, Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, and Virginia, (except the forty-eight counties designated as West Virginia, and also the counties of Berkley, Accomac, Northampton, Elizabeth City, York, Princess Ann, and Norfolk, including the cities of Norfolk and Portsmouth[]), and which excepted parts, are for the present, left precisely as if this proclamation were not issued. And by virtue of the power, and for the purpose aforesaid, I do order and declare that all persons held as slaves within said designated States, and parts of States, are, and henceforward shall be free; and that the Executive government of the United States, including the military and naval authorities thereof, will recognize and maintain the freedom of said persons.¹¹

<http://antislavery.eserver.org/legacies/how-boston-received-the-emancipation-proclamation> [emphasis added].

¹¹ From the Emancipation Proclamation, pages 1-2.

Slavery was not declared illegal in our nation until the Thirteenth Amendment was passed on December 18, 1865. We can only imagine the devastation felt by the slaves who discovered that the Proclamation did not apply to them. Consider this letter written to President Lincoln by Annie Davis, a slave held in Maryland which was not in rebellion:

Belair Aug 20/63
Mr President
It is my
Desire to be free. To go
to see my people on
the eastern shore. My
mistress wont let me.
You will please let me
know if we are free. and
what I can do. I write
to you for advice. Please
send me word this week.
Or as soon as possible
and oblige.
Annie Davis
Belair Thosd
County, Md.

Mr. President

It is my Desire to be free. To go to see my people on the eastern shore. My mistress wont let me. You will please let me know if we are free. And what I can do. I write to you for advice. Please send me word this week. Or as soon as possible, and oblige.

Annie Davis

Figure 1: Annie Davis' Letter¹²

Viewed through the lens of social justice, the sentiment of the Emancipation Proclamation is flawed and inadequate. But it remains a testament to the tenacious spirit of our ancestors, who

¹² A'Lella Bundles, "Slave's Letter Reveals Pace of Freedom, Your Take: Annie Davis' plea speaks volumes on the 150th birthday of the Emancipation Proclamation." *MSNBC's The Root*, January 1, 2013, accessed September 13, 2013, <http://www.theroot.com/views/slaves-letter-reveals-pace-freedom>; Image taken from "Letter to President Lincoln from Annie Davis," *National Archives, Docs Teach*, accessed September 13, 2013, <http://docsteach.org/activities/7678/print>.

took that germ of goodness and nurtured it to full blossoming, to the end of slavery, to full participation in our democracy. And so the Emancipation Proclamation – clearly a brilliant military stratagem and not the manifestation of any passion Lincoln may have had for our freedom – remains the most significant document in American history. Those five handwritten pages are among the most important words ever written. Whatever their intent, they served to crystalize a burning passion for an end to the ultimate dehumanization in all those who cared about justice – slaves and free, black and white. There can be no more powerful symbol of freedom for the United States.

This year marks another great anniversary – the 1963 March on Washington. It was during this historic moment that the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., gave his famous “I Have A Dream” speech to the estimated 250,000 people gathered at the National Mall. Today, fifty years later, it’s hard to explain to our students how charged the environment had become, how our ancestors were forced to live like second-class citizens or risk their very lives, how courageous the “Freedom Riders” were for simply insisting on being served food and drink in the South. So many died during those battles, risking everything just so that their descendants might have the gift of simple human dignity.

Ken Howard,¹³ a Howard University student at the time who would later become an administrator with the D.C. Department of Education, tries to explain what it was like on that sweltering August 28 day: “It’s difficult for someone these days to understand what it was like, to suddenly have a ray of light in the dark. That’s really what it was like.” He continues:

¹³ Michael Fletcher, “A Change Is Gonna Come” *Smithsonian* 44[4] (July-August 2013): 41.

In May 1963, Bull Connor with the dogs and fire hoses, turning them on people, front-page news. And then in June, that summer, you have Medgar Evers shot down in the South, and his body actually on view on 14th Street at a church in D.C. So you had a group of individuals who had been not just oppressed, but discriminated against and killed because of their color. The March on Washington symbolized a rising up, if you will, of people who were saying enough is enough.¹⁴

A few weeks ago, I was sipping coffee in my living room waiting for the 5:00 AM news before heading out to my university, when a PBS special called *The March* began. I was so captivated by the video footage of that historic day that I never heard the morning news (and I was almost late for an early morning meeting!). I looked for Catholic nuns in habits and priests in their collars – to my relief I did see a few, and I know that there were many in attendance that day (though perhaps there should have been more). It was an excellent documentary. Toward the end, I noticed a sign carried by a woman which read, “We Seek Freedom in 1963 That Was Promised in 1863.” How far have we come, fifty years later? We have an African American president, which would have been unimaginable then. When Barack Obama was elected President in 2008, we felt like Lucy Davis and her mother did 150 years ago, “You never heard sich shoutin’ in all yo’ bahn days!” Yet, we are still abandoned, as Fanny Garrison Villard observed a century ago, “they were for a long time after the war abandoned both by the North and the South (save for few exceptions) and we are still to-day repairing the harvest of our neglect.” President Obama has received more death threats against himself and his family than any other president. A glance through the U.S. Census

¹⁴ Ibid.

reveals how far we have to go before we can claim to have achieved equality.¹⁵

- 26% of Blacks live in poverty compared with 9.9% of those who are White, non-Hispanic (2007-2011)
- 37% of Black children live in poverty – making Black children the most impoverished of all racial/ethnic groups (2009)
- The average per-capita income for Blacks is \$18,135, compared with \$28,034 for Whites (and \$15,063 for Hispanics; 2009)
- Blacks make up 38% of the prison population convicted of violent crime, and 39% of the jail population (2009)
- 44% of the prison population under a sentence of death are “Blacks and other” (2009)

We commemorate another important anniversary this year. In 1963, the second session of the Second Vatican Council was convened. Vatican II marked the beginning of a new era for the Church. The sixteen documents that resulted from the Council gave new shape, new vision, and new focus for the Catholic Church. Two documents were promulgated by Pope Paul VI in 1963:

- *Constitution on Sacred Liturgy* transformed the liturgy and advocated translation from Latin into vernacular languages.¹⁶

¹⁵ *United States Census Bureau*, <http://www.census.gov/> (accessed 13 September 2013).

- *Decree on Means of Social Communication* acknowledged the role of the media in our changing world and the good it can serve in informing and educating us. It also reminded us of our responsibilities in producing, using, and responding to media as Catholics and as parents and citizens.¹⁷

The most significant of the documents, however, wasn't released until the following year. *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church – Lumen Gentium*¹⁸ was promulgated by Pope Paul VI in 1964. *Lumen Gentium*, "light of the nations," describes its revolutionary message – that salvation is not limited to Catholics only, but includes all people of God regardless of faith tradition. Here too we see the Church promoting a message of racial justice and equality in following paragraph:

32. By divine institution Holy Church is ordered and governed with a wonderful diversity. "For just as in one body we have many members, yet all the members have not the same function, so we, the many, are one body in Christ, but severally members one of another." Therefore, the chosen People of God is one: "one Lord, one faith, one baptism;" sharing a common dignity as members from their regeneration in Christ, having the same filial grace and the same vocation to perfection; possessing in common one salvation, one hope and one undivided charity. *There is,*

¹⁶ "Constitution on Sacred Liturgy," *II Vatican Council, October 11, 1962 – December 8, 1965*, accessed September 13, 2013, <http://www.cin.org/v2litur.html>.

¹⁷ "Decree on Means of Social Communication," *II Vatican Council, October 11, 1962 – December 8, 1965*, accessed September 14, 2013, <http://stjosef.at/council/>.

¹⁸ "Dogmatic Constitution on the Church – Lumen Gentium," *II Vatican Council, October 11, 1962 – December 8, 1965*, accessed September 14, 2013, <http://www.cin.org/v2church.html>.

*therefore, in Christ and in the Church no inequality on the basis of race or nationality, social condition or sex, because "there is neither Jew nor Greek: there is neither bond nor free: there is neither male nor female. For you are all 'one' in Christ Jesus."*¹⁹

Our present is shaped by our past. In some cases, the injustices and oppressions of the past leech into our present, tainting and poisoning our communities. There are still too many George Zimmermans and Jurors 37B, too many innocent victims like Trayvon Martin who suffer from our society's failure to see past the veil of their own ethnocentrism, who don't try to dream the dream of justice. Will it take yet another century before we can begin to realize it?

¹⁹ Ibid., emphasis added.

This year, the BCTS suffered the loss of two of our brothers. Moses Anderson, S.S.E. (1928-2013), retired Auxiliary Bishop of Detroit from 1982-2003, passed away on January 1st of this year. He was the first African-American bishop of Detroit. Anderson was a charter member of the BCTS and attended the 1978 meeting in Baltimore. Later, he contributed to *Theology: A Portrait in Black*.²⁰

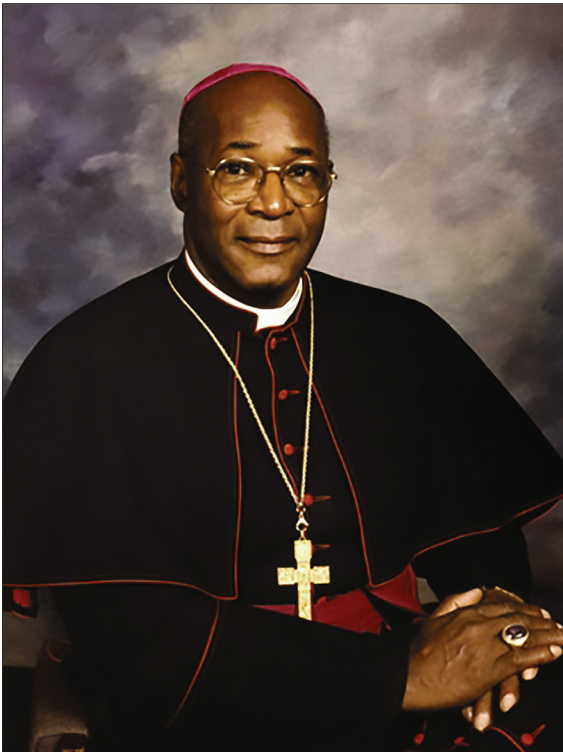


Figure 2: Bishop Moses Anderson, S.S.E. (1928-2013)

²⁰ Moses Anderson, S.S.E., "Self-Identity – A Christian Concept," *Theology: A Portrait in Black* (Philadelphia: The Capuchin Press, 1980): 39-51.



Figure 3: Bishop Moses B. Anderson's Coat of Arms

[His] "coat of arms includes symbols of his aspirations in ministry as well as his personal history.

The shield most prominently contains a cross made of Kente cloth, which represents Anderson's African heritage and faith. The cross is covered with three golden rings like those that appear on the coat of arms of St. Edmund of Canterbury, a symbol of the Holy Trinity.

The bottom left corner includes an image of the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Ala. where Anderson was born. The bridge is a symbol of the Civil Rights movement.

The bottom right corner contains a pyramid and the tablets of the Ten Commandments, which is another symbol of Anderson heritage combined with a symbol of his faith.

The number of tassels draped alongside the shield, six, is representative of Anderson's title as bishop.

The motto below the shield—Unity in Diversity—is representative of Anderson's hope for a diverse world."²¹

²¹ Bishop Anderson's portrait and coat of arms content used with permission of the Archdiocese of Detroit. <http://www.aod.org/our-archdiocese/meet-our-bishops/retired-bishops/bishop-moses-anderson/>.

We also lost a founder, Dr. Fr. Thaddeus J. Posey, O.F.M. Cap (1944-2013). Fr. Thaddeus brought together the group of scholars and graduate students who were to become the Black Catholic Theological Symposium. He was also the founding director of the Institute for Black Catholic Studies in New Orleans. We owe Fr. Thaddeus a great debt – he is honored in this volume with an *In Memoriam* essay.

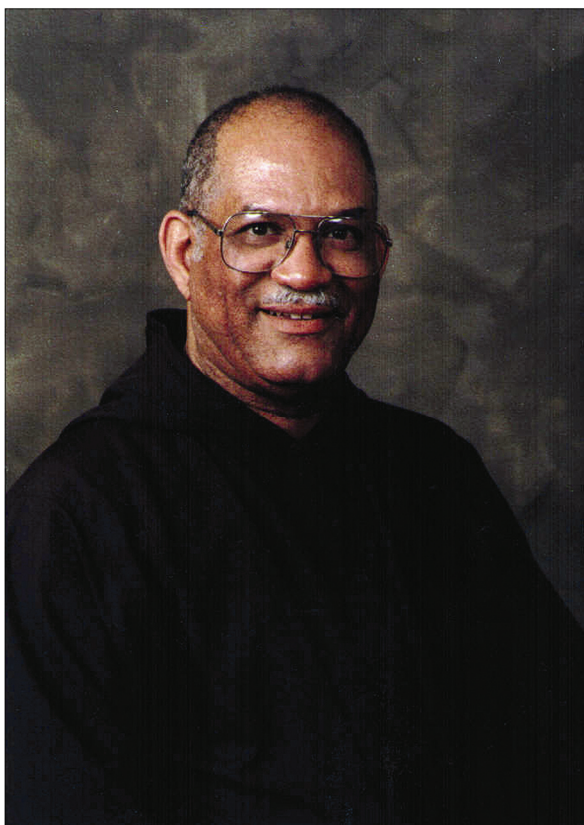


Figure 4: Father Thaddeus Posey, O.F.M. Cap (1944-2013)

Additionally, in this volume are reflections on this special anniversary by Bishop James Terry Steib, S.V.D., Bishop of Memphis, Tennessee, and by BCTS member Kim Harris. We also feature three important articles: Diane Batts Morrow's *The Experience of the Oblate Sisters of Providence during the Civil War Era*, Joseph Flipper's *Suffering As Glory In Hans Urs Von Balthasar And James Cone*, and Sven Smith's and Naseer Malik's *The Representation of Blacks and Hispanics in Media Depictions of The Catholic Church*. Finally, Book Review Editor Diana Hayes offers her insights on two 2012 books, *The Color of Christ: The Son of God and the Saga of Race in America* by Edward J. Blum and Paul Harvey, and *Christology and Whiteness: What Would Jesus Do?*, edited by George Yancy. We may not have realized our goal of justice and equality, but in asking the difficult questions about our traditions and customs, learning more about the successes of our ancestors, and scrutinizing our own practices and those of the media, perhaps we are moving in the right direction.

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