

Journal of the Black Catholic Theological Symposium

Volume 7

Article 3

12-1-2013

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Recommended Citation

Steib, J. Terry S.V.D. (2013) "A Statement on the Emancipation Proclamation 150 Years Later," *Journal of the Black Catholic Theological Symposium*: Vol. 7, Article 3.

Available at: <https://ecommons.udayton.edu/jbcts/vol7/iss1/3>

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A STATEMENT ON THE EMANCIPATION PROCLAMATION – 150 YEARS LATER

**Most Reverend J. Terry Steib, S.V.D.
Bishop of Memphis in Tennessee**

As a young lad growing up in the State of Louisiana, I would never have dreamed that an African American man would become the President of the United States of America. I would have been amazed to think that the Catholic Archbishop of Atlanta, Georgia – at one time the soul of the Confederacy – would be led, not just once, but twice by African American bishops. That a Secretary of State would be an African American man and later an African American woman would have seemed impossible to this young African American lad from the sugarcane fields of Louisiana.

But, I have seen all these astonishing events take place in my lifetime. So, 150 years after the Emancipation Proclamation, we are grateful for these and other accomplishments by African Americans. We are grateful for accomplishments which come as a result of a strong commitment to justice and equality as defined by our Catholic tradition.

And more is yet to be accomplished. One hundred and fifty years after the Emancipation Proclamation, we in the United States continue to struggle with racism, with poverty, and with poor education. As a Church, we Catholics continue to preach from the example of Jesus Christ who proclaimed that ALL are sons and daughters of an Almighty God, that ALL are sisters and brothers to one another as children of an everlasting God, and that ALL are equal, worthwhile and dignified by a gracious God. We continue to preach that Good News of Jesus telling us that ours is a God of love and that we all must love one another.

Just as the young patriots who formed our Constitution wrangled with the hypocrisy of slavery, so too must we continue to struggle with its plaguing results. One hundred and fifty years later, it still is our task as Americans to uphold justice and dignity as bestowed and promised by our God.