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# Fully Formed: To Be Black and Jesuit

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# FULLY FORMED:

# TO BE BLACK AND JESUIT

BY

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I recognize that approaching Black Jesuits to reflect on their experiences of racism in religious life is a lot to ask. I bear this in mind every time I discern this project. With love and gratitude, I am honored to bear witness to their stories. I hope to convey what they have said with care and authenticity. I thank them for their consideration in discerning their participation for this project. I thank them for allowing me to share this incredible discipleship with those who hunger and thirst to hear their stories.

# DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to my soul brother, Father Joseph McGowan, SJ, my rock and shining star who unconditionally loved and supported my Black, gay, Catholic self.

I love you. Rest in peace.

ABSTRACT

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This study addresses the collective voices of Black Jesuits in the United States. The purpose of this heuristic inquiry was to unearth the participants' lived anti-Black experiences within the Society of Jesus. The qualitative study utilized questionnaires with open ended questions, and the responses were coded and categorized into themes to elucidate the complexity of anti-Blackness in a predominately white male religious order.

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# CHAPTER 1

# INTRODUCTION

## Introduction

The Society of Jesus, also known as the Jesuits, is the largest male religious order of the Roman Catholic Church with over 15,000 members worldwide. In the United States, the Society of Jesus has over 2,000 members. The order was founded by Saint Ignatius of Loyola and his ten companions in 1540. Jesuits are brothers and priests who profess first and perpetual vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience after the completion of a two-year novitiate (Padberg 1996, 210).

The two grades for final vows are formed coadjutors and the solemnly professed. The major distinction between the two grades is academic qualification. The solemnly professed grade requires "the high level of learning in sacred sciences…shown by a higher academic degree, at least the licentiate, or by having taught them or written about them with distinction, or by the examination for grade" (Padberg 1996, 201). In other words, with rare exceptions, the solemnly professed earn a terminal degree. In addition, the solemnly professed have access to leadership responsibilities, such as provincial superior and Father General, which require them to profess a fourth vow for mission availability by the pope. Finals vows are professed privately within the Jesuit community. Jesuits who have professed final vows are eligible for the highest leadership roles in the Society of Jesus; this has contributed to a complicated history for Black Jesuits.

As a slaveholding and segregationist institution, the American Society of Jesuits prevented Black-identifying men from applying to the order until the mid-twentieth century. Legal slavery was an impediment for admission into the Society; therefore,

enslaved Black men were ineligible (Padberg 1996, 79). Although Black men were eventually permitted to apply for Jesuit candidacy, the Society of Jesus in the United States has historically fostered anti-Black racism and sought to whitewash and erase the experiences of Black Jesuits. The American Jesuits have never had an explicit, written policy that prohibited Black men from applying, but they denied Black applicants' entry for that reason. R. Bentley Anderson, SJ, (2010) describes a 1952 meeting among Jesuits at the New Orleans Province at St. Charles College in Grand Coteau, Louisiana, concerning Black candidates. He states, "During their deliberations, the participants learned that no Jesuit province in the United States has an exclusionary policy (the New Orleans Province just did not accept black applicants) and that five provinces already had men of color in their ranks" (11). Jesuit priest Raymond Bernard (1949) reported that the "Jesuit Fathers" accepted "negro applicants" at seven Jesuit novitiates in Massachusetts, Oregon, Ohio, New York, Pennsylvania, California, and Missouri (242). The Jesuit provinces that were known to have accepted Black candidates did not publicly identify their number of Black Jesuits or these men at the time. The first publicly known Black candidate accepted into the order was a young college student named Carle W. Shelton in 1946 ("Admit First Negro" 1946, 23). The culture of racial animus against Black men is clearly supported by the white Jesuit hierarchy in the Society of Jesus. M. Shawn Copeland (2016) poignantly states, "Thus, the normative denotation of who was (and is) human referred exclusively to white human beings, although this was expressed concretely as white" (7).

Massingale explains, "Hence, the 'soul' of essence of white culture is a worldview that—when it averts itself—sees itself as the measure of what is real,

standard, normative, and/or normal" (Massingale 2010, 22). In this context, Jesuit whiteness is the unnamed force that demands the erasure of Black Jesuits' lived experiences "for the greater glory of God," or *Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam,* the Ignatian motto to thank and praise God's goodness and unity and to serve others with the resources that God provides us.

For these reasons, the slow and quiet integration of Black candidates throughout Jesuit history required white assimilation. As a result of external forces from racial justice activism in the early twentieth century, some of the Jesuit provinces (geographic regions headed by provincials appointed by the Superior General in Rome) in the United States quietly admitted Black-identifying men.

The American Jesuits admitted approximately sixty-five Black men, beginning as early as the 1930s. These included Jamaicans and Belizeans who were under the jurisdiction of the New England and Missouri Provinces, respectively. Bernard (1949) reported that the following novitiates were known to admit Black applicants: Shadowbrook, Massachusetts (New England Province); Sheridan, Oregon (Oregon Province); Milford, Ohio (Detroit Province); St. Andrew-on-Hudson in Poughkeepsie, New York (New York Province); St. Isaac Jogues in Wernersville, Pennsylvania (Maryland Province); Sacred Heart in Los Gatos, California (California Province); and St. Stanislaus Seminary in Florissant, Missouri (Missouri Province) (242). Black candidates in the Oregon, Detroit, New York, and California provinces have not been identified from Bernard's report. Based on my correspondence with The Black Jesuits, the American Jesuits have twenty-two Black members and eleven former Black

members. The twenty-two Black Jesuits represent less than one percent of the American Jesuit membership.

## Statement Of the Problem

Scant research exists about the anti-Black experiences of the American Jesuits' Black men. The researcher identified eight non-qualitative resources, which are discussed later in this section. According to John W. Creswell and J. David Creswell (2018), "qualitative research is an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem" (4). With that in mind, the controlling images of Black men's sexuality amplify white America's fear, hatred, and envy of the Black male body. Stephen J. Ochs (1990) noted,

> Moreover, most Catholics, northern and southern, lay and cleric, absorbed the widespread racism of American society and regarded Afro-Americans as their intellectual and moral inferiors, incapable certainly of mastering the academic requirements of the seminary or of remaining celibate as priests. The relatively few white Catholics who delt with Afro-Americans often viewed them as passive children to be supervised and cared for rather than as potential partners and leaders. (loc. 202)

Before delving into anti-Blackness, it is necessary to examine the complicated history of what it means to be Black in America.

Africans who arrived in America came from a multitude of empires and communities in sub-Saharan West Africa. These Africans practiced a variety of religions and spoke several languages (Gates 2021, 15-16). At the genesis of the slave trade in the fifteenth century, Islam had already penetrated West Africa for over six hundred years. The Portuguese introduced Christianity to the Kongo Empire during this time (*The Black Church* 2021). Many Africans who endured the horrific Middle Passage were not Christians; Henry Louis Gates (2021) notes that about eighty percent of Africans who

came to the new world practiced indigenous African religions, ten percent were Christians, and ten percent were Muslim. The Europeans called them *Black* when they arrived in the Americas.

The Europeans intentionally erased African people's cultural specificity and forced the "ungodly beast" who looked human to work their lands for their riches. Isabel Wilkerson (2020) states, "To justify their plans, they took preexisting notions of their own centrality, reinforced by their self-interested interpretation of the Bible, and created a hierarchy of who could do what, who could own what, who was on top, who was on the bottom and who was in between" (23). The Europeans intentionally stripped African people of specificity and created the concept of Blackness, believing that they must subjugate, subdue, domesticate, and enslave Africans for their religious, economic, and sexual self-interests. Europeans assigned this Blackness to Africans because they believed it was their divine right to strip them of meaning, context, and value.

Consequently, Africans throughout the diaspora forged a new collective identity from their shared history as bondspeople. While European descendants enforced the Black racial category, a reimagination of Blackness became necessary to exercise self-determination and disrupt the prevailing anti-Black forces within society. To self-identify as Black became an act of resistance and a sense of African pride. For the sake of this project, Black refers to "having origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa" (United States Census Bureau 2022).

My research did not identify any qualitative research studies about Black Jesuits, and the literature review revealed only non-empirical studies including essays, letters, and interviews about their lives and experiences. This lack of data is consistent with the

Jesuits' historical tendency to neglect its Black population. The following examples were retrieved from research databases and the Jesuit Archives.

Patrick Healy was born in Macon, Georgia, in 1834. His mother was enslaved and his father was a slaveholding Irish immigrant. Healy was enslaved because of his mother, but his father was able to finance his Catholic education despite Healy's enslaved condition (Woodstock 1910). Passing as white without publicly disclosing his mixed-race heritage (Green 2020), Healy entered the Jesuit novitiate in the Maryland province on September 17, 1850, and he was ordained a priest in 1886. He also became president of Georgetown University (Woodstock 1910).

Albert Biever, SJ, (1930) was the minister of the Grand Coteau novitiate in Louisiana. He kept a diary and wrote about a Black Guyanese man named Hermann Koch, the first Black man to enter the novitiate in 1875. Biever wrote, "When dinner bell sounded, the students refused to enter the dining hall, stating they would never sit at the same table with a Negro. In fact, Mr. Koch was of dark complexion, had kinky hair and possessed other clear symptoms peculiar to the negro race" (no pagination). Hermann Koch was examined by the house doctor, determined to be of the negro race, and dismissed seven days later.

Numa Rousseve, Jr., was interviewed about his experiences as a young Black man in the Society. The article identified Rousseve as the first Black Jesuit in the New Orleans province in 1956, but he was second to Hermann Koch. When asked about his experiences of racism during his formation, Rousseve disclosed an awkward experience about his academic abilities (Anderson 2010, 27) in which his teacher doubted that he wrote a Shakespeare paper for which he earned a high grade. This is one of the few

explicit anti-Black experiences he disclosed (25). In addition, his novitiate classmate, Jerry Fagin, talked about witnessing white racism in Rousseve's presence (27). Fagin recalled entering the laundry room and seeing two bins labeled "white" and "colored," and Rousseve asking him whether he had to put his clothes in the "colored" bin (25). Throughout the article, Rousseve's superiors and classmates are the primary voices of Rousseve's anti-Black experiences. Rousseve left the Society of Jesus in 1965.

In the last fifty years, a few interviews and stories have been published about Black men's racist experiences within the Society of Jesus. The following synopses include a conversation between Ted Cunningham and Barthelemy "Bart" Rousseve, a personal essay by Gregory Chisolm, and Henoch Fente Derbew's letter to the Jesuits' Superior General.

Ted Cunningham, an ordained Jesuit priest, and Bart Rousseve, SJ, a Jesuit scholastic, discussed the meaning of "thinking Black" and the inability to "think Black" as Black men in the Society of Jesus. Cunningham and Rousseve never met each other, but they exchanged their comments by responding to each other's transcribed interviews with George Riemer (Riemer 1971, 235-36). When asked whether they would recommend the Jesuit vocation to a young Black man, both men expressed reservations and caution. Rousseve stated, "The hardest things probably would be cultural isolation and the insensitivity of some men. He might discover he was wasting valuable time and psychic energy trying to save his fellow students from their lack of soul, from their cultural deprivation and ignorance" (269). Cunningham and Rousseve left the Society of the Jesus.

Father Gregory Chisolm (2001) decided that he had to approach Jesuit formation as if he were a guest when he encountered “ethnic humor and a professed Jesuit father’s lamentation about the lack of Irish men entering the Society of Jesus” (13). He stated that Black Jesuits “have a proprietary interest in Black students, or Black families, or Black communities that derives from their own cultural identity” (14). Currently, Chisolm is the rector of Loyola University in Maryland.

As one of three Black Jesuits selected by the Black Jesuits Gathering, Henoch Fente Derbew met with Father General Arturo Sosa and the American provincials in Montreal, Canada, on May 23, 2018. The other two Black Jesuits were Fr. Greg Chisholm and Fr. Joseph A. Brown. Derbew recounted enduring incendiary anti-Black experiences at the novitiate from a classmate in front of the staff. He lamented that the staff did nothing to address this classmate’s comment, “those Africans stink,” and other disparaging caricatures (Derbew 2018, 1). He argued that the Jesuit “way of proceeding when it comes to Blackness, is then based on neither Ignatian discernment nor the Jesuit charism, but on the prioritization of White comfort” (2). Derbew illustrated a litany of white-Jesuit hypocrisy and revisionist history in perpetuating their own “savior complex” and their gradualist approach to racial solidarity as a cloak for inaction (2-3). Henoch left the Society of Jesus shortly after his address.

William Critchley-Menor’s, SJ, (2021) master’s thesis is the only one that “examines whiteness as an organizing principle in one specific subset of the Catholic Church—the Jesuits” (Menor 2021, 5). Menor’s work focuses on the historical legacy of Jesuit anti-black beliefs and practices that dehumanized Black Jesuits.

Essentially, Blackness is the liberative conscience of feeling and thinking Black in any space without duress. In other words, as Ted Cunningham aptly explained to Riemer, "To think Black means that I can go into a white institution and come out thinking like a white person might think, but at the same time continue to think Black. It's the ability to feel and think and sense as a Black person that will allow me to be effective in a Black community" (Riemer 1971, 240). Blackness is committed to the authenticity of the Black self.

Formal study of these anti-Black experiences is needed to elucidate common themes and propel individual, community, and structural transformation in the everyday lives of Black Jesuits in a multitude of contexts. The underlying question explores the barriers to centering Blackness as a "Jesuit way of proceeding."

## Purpose and Significance of the Study

The purpose of this heuristic inquiry is to illuminate Black Jesuits' anti-Black experiences through a qualitative methodological research project. Father Bryan N. Massingale focuses his research on the Roman Catholic Church's anti-Black racism. He suggests that racism is a culture (Massingale 2010, 1) and states, "Racism then refers to the underlying set of meanings and values attached to skin color, a way of interpreting skin color differences that pervades the collective convictions, conventions, and practices of American life" (1). This is significant because culture is a meaning-making activity that involves symbolizing our experiences. Massingale calls this internal understanding of culture "soul" (18). The culture of Black people in America reflects "the experience of being regarded and treated as less than fully human" (20).

For this project, anti-Black racism will be generally defined as the belief that Black people and/or people of African descent have "inferior and volitional practices (for example, poor work ethic and a proclivity for criminal behavior) and that this explanation alone is sufficient to justify these existing inequalities" (Bobo, Kluegal, and Smith 1997, cited in Tunstall 2009, 42). Jesuit formation (novitiate, first studies, regency, theology, and tertianship) is arguably a white-male-centered culture that inevitably marginalizes or ignores Black culture. Its formation explicitly and implicitly prepares Black men to imitate the "civilized" white value system. In doing so, a Black man's fitness for ordination to the priesthood or becoming a vowed religious Brother may have extraordinary psychospiritual consequences.

This project is significant because there are limited studies on how Black Jesuits fulfill their ministerial call in a religious tradition that devalues the Black body, the Black mind, and the Black spirit. In addition, the Society of Jesus has yet to commission a research project that collectively asks Black Jesuits about how the color of their skin impacts or impacted their vocation. This project is for the Black Jesuits and the leadership of the Society of Jesus in the United States so they will begin meaningful conversations to respond to the cultural and structural barriers that perpetuate anti-Black racism within the order.

## Research Question

The research question for this project is: How do Black Jesuits experience anti-Black racism in the Society of Jesus? The research question underlies the meanings and symbols that arise from being othered within the white spaces of the Society of Jesus. This racialized meaning-making activity inherently constructs the world that Black

Jesuits face. Creswell and Creswell (2018) state, "Social constructivists believe that individuals develop subjective meanings of their experiences—meaning directed toward certain objects or things" (8). In other words, individuals are conscious subjects who navigate through experiencing, understanding, judging, and ultimately making some decisions about the object or thing in question. The struggle for individuals as conscious subjects in this constructivist activity is to articulate their lived experiences of the *universality* as a shared knower and their *particularity* as a differentiated knower. This project hypothesizes that the participants will have shared experiences as members of the Society of Jesus and particular experiences as men of African descent. In addition, regional and generational differences as well as citizenship and immigration status may impact the participants' understanding of anti-Black racism.

## Context of the Study

To understand the context of this study is to understand the Society of Jesus' role as segregationists who denied Black people's humanity. American Jesuits documented a paternalistic, segregationist history in which they were merciful segregationists. For instance, in 1932 Jesuit priests John LaFarge and John Markoe "approached white supremacy with a more long-suffering attitude than their black partners" (Johnson 2015, 267). Johnson poignantly emphasizes that "…both men thought education—teaching white people that racism, discrimination, and segregation were morally wrong—would end those evils, but they thought racial equality would take time" (Johnson 2015, 267). La Farge and Markoe's gradualism approach is typical of merciful segregation.

Black Catholics resisted racial discrimination through their own organizations, such as the Federated Colored Catholics (FCC), during the 1930s, but whether they

would be controlled by Black Catholic people was another matter (Johnson 2015, 264). Johnson examined the complicated history of Black Catholics' efforts to control their own narrative within a church controlled by white priests. Johnson analyzed the necessity for Black Catholics to forge partnerships for civil rights outside of the Church. Black Catholics such as Arthur Falls "turned to the Chicago Urban League and helped his fellow Catholics build bridges with non-Catholics" (Johnson 2015, 280). Black Catholic and attorney Norman Francis specialized in civil rights litigations. The attorneys at his firm "were extremely active in representing members of the New Orleans Chapter of Congress or Racial Equality (CORE)" (DeCuire 2016, pg. 320). The CORE members of New Orleans "staged the first sit-ins New Orleans at the Woolworth's lunch counter on Canal Street" (DeCuir 2016, 321). These Black Catholic activist movements within and outside of the Church centered the Black voice that had often been suppressed by the white clergy perspective. They subsequently forced the Church to deal with the race question and more Black Jesuits like Ted Cunningham and Bart Rousseve received attention about what it means to be Black, Catholic, and Jesuit. The earliest known twentieth-century, Black-identified man born in the United States whom the Society of Jesus allowed to enter the novitiate was nineteen-year-old Carle Shelton. He entered the St. Stanislaus Novitiate in Florissant, Missouri (Missouri Province), in 1946 while he was a student at St. John's University in Collegeville, Minnesota ("Admit First Negro" 1946, 23). He left the Society during formation. Theodore "Ted" Cunningham is the second known, Black-identified man who entered the soon-to-be-established Wisconsin Province in 1952. He taught African American culture and history at Creighton University and he was known as a grassroots organizer in Omaha, Nebraska. He was a priest when he left

the Society in 1969. The first known Black Jamaicans allowed to enter the Jesuit novitiate in Massachusetts were Charles and Sydney Judah (brothers) and Dionysius "Dennis" Crutchley. They entered in the 1920s. These three men were ordained and spent most of their Jesuit vocation in Jamaica after formation. Since the 1920s, African Americans and Jamaicans have accounted for roughly equal shares of Black vocations.

In 2017, the Society of Jesus in the United States had 2,446 members within its four geographical provinces: Central and Southern Province, East Province, Midwest Province, and West Province (Alksankary 2018). This includes twenty-two Black men or 0.9 percent of its members. Non-Hispanic Black men accounted for six percent of the US population in the 2010 census. In the last twenty years, eighteen Black men were in formation, but fifty percent of them left the Society. This study offered some Black Jesuits the opportunity to share their struggle as "the antithesis of character and properties of the white man" (Myrdal 1962, 100). Chapters four and five will explore their responses in depth.

# CHAPTER 2

# THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

## Presupposition

My theological presupposition is that thinking about God is a mystical phenomenon that is contextual and inspirational bounded by human limitations in silence. Indian Jesuit Anthony de Mello (1978) states, "Many mystics tell us, in addition to the mind and heart with which we ordinarily communicate with God, we are, all of us, endowed with a mystical mind and mystical heart, a faculty which it makes it possible for you to know God directly, to grasp and *intuit* him in every being, though in a dark manner, apart from all thoughts and concepts and images" (de Mello 1978, 29). Moreover, contemplating God implies experiences about the divine grounded in our own experiences, in which the word of God must be relatable and meaningful to the believer(s). Nevertheless, the believer struggles with the divine as something that can be known and unknown because it is indirect. God is mysterious, and we access God through imagination with poetry, music, dance, prose, and science. The Bible is a myriad of expressions of how individuals articulate what God has to say to the world—good or bad. The Bible is a product of the human experience inspired by God through human reason that reflects mind, body, and spirit. Unlike some Christian theologies, I do not fragment and compartmentalize certain ways of our knowing as more sacred than others. I genuflect to the womanist idea "where systems of race, gender and class domination converge" (Crenshaw 1991, 1246), which shares this praxis with Black feminism. Queer theology emphasizes sexual identity as a significant aspect of thinking and knowing God as well. Theology is an embodied experience of knowns and unknowns.

The unknowns about God are known as *mystery*. The mystery creates anxiety when we try to articulate the reasons bad thing happen in the world. As believers, when the world suits our needs we dissolve ourselves in the divine mystery like a day at the spa. On the other hand, we are anxious about bad things that are beyond our control such as natural disasters, death, homophobia, patriarchy, and racism. We lament this injustice like the Israelites in the Hebrew Scriptures. The theology of evil and suffering is underdeveloped and overwhelming.

Theodicy questions the goodness of God in an evil and suffering world. Wendy Farley (1996) states, "sin is an evil in human existence because it undermines ethical relationships between individuals and in community life" (44). So, what is sin? Farley answers that "sin is the betrayal of obligations rooted in the relationships that exist among human beings" (50). She presupposes that human beings make a conscious or unconscious decision to oppress other people. For Farley, evil is embodied in everyday situations of "ambiguity, pain, and suffering" (52). Sin, such as racial oppression, is social; it is nurtured and perpetuated in family systems and institutions. Social sin is the active participation of people with good and bad intentions, and they are convinced that they are doing God's will (Gomes 255). Social sin is a system that uses its power to dehumanize and harm individuals through self-deception, callousness, bondage, and guilt.

Farley's social sin argument is poignant given that renowned black gay theologian, Peter Gomes (1996), states that the Christian understanding of homosexuality has more to say about culture than what the bible actually has to say about homosexuality. Gomes laments that biblical culturalism is an estranged and distorted

participation in systematic structures that oppress, exploit, and murder people because their way of life is perceived to be a threat to society. Gomes confesses that culturalism is the notion that we read scripture through the lens of a particular way of being in the world and defend that culture without critically considering the sin of those prejudices.

Brian Massingale is the first African American Catholic priest to come out as a gay man in 2018. During the July 2019 Dignity Conference in Chicago, he said,

> At the heart of this story is that to be Catholic is to be straight. 'Catholic' = 'straight.' Official Catholicism tells a story where only heterosexual persons, heterosexual love, heterosexual intimacy, heterosexual families—only these can unambiguously mirror the Divine. Only these are truly sacred. Genuinely holy. Only these are worthy of unreserved acceptance and respect. All other persons and expressions of love, family life, intimacy, and sexual identity are sacred (if at all) only by toleration or exception. In effect, we are told that we are 'afterthoughts' in the story of creation, not part of the original plan. In other words, we are 'children of a lesser god.' " (Massingale 2019)

Father Massingale emphasizes that the problem is not sexual ethics but idolatry. He insists that the LGBTQ+ community must rethink God (Massingale 2019).

Farley's (1996) self-destructive analysis for radical suffering aligns with Father Massingale's false god analogy because this false god is the deepest reason for both social persecution and inner estrangement and struggles with self-acceptance. Massingale (2019) states,

> For how can we love ourselves if we don't believe we are worthy of God's love? If we believe that, at best, 'God' only tolerates us and our pursuits of love? But that 'god' is a false god, an idol: a human construct made to justify exclusion and injustice. Therefore, the issue of idolatry is not a matter of interest only for theological 'geeks' like me or for those nostalgic for childhood Bible stories about golden calves being dramatically destroyed by Moses.

For Farley and Massingale, the systemic oppression justified by faith is evil and idolatrous, and it undermines oppressed people's "capacity to be more fully self-

actualized and able to engage in communion with the world around us—this is thinking of love as an action and not a feeling" (hooks 2000, 44).

James Cone (2018) struggles with theodicy. He does not have a response about a God that liberates Black people from white supremacy but argues that they remain oppressed after slavery and racial segregation (90-91). Cone suggests that theodicy is for philosophers—the rational thinkers. Theology is "transcending the world of rational discourse and pointing to a realm of reality that can only be grasped by means of imagination" (91).

On the other hand, biblical inerrancy, or the literal translation of the Bible, is the dominant perspective of most Christians, including the Black Church. This fundamentalism kills the imagination and distorts the symbolism that Cone believes is necessary for Black liberation. Fundamentalism's response to theodicy is that a good God does what is necessary to protect the saved from its enemies and the unsaved deserve punishment. Theodicy reflects the us-versus-them dichotomy. It is a powerful and seductive tool for religious-justified oppression of non-males, non-whites, non-Christians, non-heterosexuals, and non-gender-conforming people.

Cone's (2018) underlying desire for Black theology is to free self-hating Black Christians from the bondage of white supremacy. He does not draw a direct correlation between theodicy and internalized black racism but argues that the cruelty of anti-Black racism in the United States is rooted in white Christianity's interpretation that Noah's son, Ham, had black skin and Noah's curse against him was against all black-skinned people. This inevitably justified African slavery; therefore, Black people were cursed to

be enslaved. Cone believed that God liberates humanity through Jesus, who was crucified under Pontius Pilate to deliver humanity from its sins and suffering.

Womanist theologian, Delores Williams (1993), disagrees with Cones. She does not believe that God liberated everyone from suffering. Williams contends that Black theology and white-feminist theology inadequately address Black women's experiences. She illustrates her point through a triangular relationship between Hagar, Abram, and Sarai in the Book of Genesis. Motherhood is important for Sarai, but she is unable to conceive. Sarai lashes out at Abram and believes that the only way she can become a mother is for her husband to impregnate their slave, Hagar, and for Hagar's child to become hers (Genesis 16:2-4a). Hagar is forced into motherhood by her slaveholders because Yahweh promised Abram many descendants (Genesis 15). Hagar's sexual violation by Abram and Sarai exploits her reproductive capacity, and Williams argues that these acts were evil. Hagar did not deserve to suffer because of her status as a slave and a woman. God did not save her from sexual assault; yet Cone (2018) conveys Williams' observation that Yahweh "was present with her in the wilderness, enabling her to procure survival and quality of life with her son, Ishmael" (120).

Williams emphasizes that "Hagar becomes the first female in the bible to liberate herself from oppressive power structures" (Williams 1993, 18) after she runs away from her slaveholders when Sarai treats her badly (Genesis 16:6b). When the angel of Yahweh says to Hagar, "Go back to your mistress and submit to her" (Genesis 16:9), Williams argues that Yahweh appears to support slavery as a condition for Hagar and Ishmael's survival and Abram's bloodline to be fulfilled. Williams (1993) states, "The angel of Yahweh is, in this passage, no liberator God" (20). According to Cone (2018), Williams

views his liberation theme as problematic because “Moses and Israel’s liberation out of Egypt led to the genocide of the Canaanites, and this is what happened to Native Americans in the United States” (Cone, 121).

In other words, Black theology’s liberative theme of breaking the chains of bondage of Black people often negates the ways that this uncritical freedom leads them to unwittingly oppress other people for their own salvation. Williams is arguing that Black liberation is contextualized as a heterosexual Black man’s enterprise that devalues the freedom of Black women and Black non-heterosexuals.

For Williams, imagination cannot be stretched beyond what the text declares. There is a tension between our imagination that transcends our flawed condition and what is in the text. Williams interrogates the contradiction between the liberative lens of the oppressors and the oppressed from their lived experiences.

From the inception of the American republic, white Christians, both Catholics and Protestants, placed themselves in a high racial caste through their distorted interpretation of the Bible. Essentially, they “would become the divine and spiritual foundation for the belief in a human pyramid willed by God, a Great Chain of Being, that the founders would further sculpt in the centuries to follow, as circumstances required” (Wilkerson 2020, 104).

Theodicy suggests that we pay for our individual sins through atonement and guilt. Farley (1996) emphatically rebuffs the idea that the radical suffering of the oppressed is relieved by this theodicy. Classical theodicy is bereft of pastoral ministry for people who endure systemic oppression. Theodicy needs a social analysis of tragedy that

is more substantive than the simplistic anti-tragic fall metanarrative that posits sin as the source of evil with an eschatological return to the Garden of Eden.

Farley (1996) explains that "radical suffering is precisely the feeling of hopelessness; it cannot be redeemed by hope. Further, future vindication does not erase the wrongness of being made inhuman by suffering" (Farley 64). It seems that Farley equivocates hope with optimism. Hope endures through pleasure and pain with a deep anticipation of rightness and justice that may not happen during her lifetime. Hope may not make it to the mountaintop but actively works to fulfill that vision. On the other hand, optimism seeks immediate gratification and reward for justice that is more concerned with the pleasure principle than love and justice.

Farley (1996) challenges the theodicy of free will, which postulates that everyone has a choice to choose between evil and good. Free will operates like the story of Noah, who believed that if he chose good, then God would reward him. In other words, we must be faithful and pious enough to win God's favor. But free will presupposes that everyone has equal access to choose from the better or worse, and this is not the case. Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987) is based on the real-life story of enslaved woman Margaret Garner who ran away to free territory. Her owner found her, and he had the right to take her back. Margaret took her four children and killed one of them and seriously injured the other two. She said in several interviews that she would rather kill her daughter than for her to live in slavery (Slave Tragedy 1856).

I recall a philosophy class at Saint Louis University during which some of my white classmates argued that Garner's decision to take her child's life was immoral and selfish. The argument was grounded in free will, but I argued that Garner was dealt a bad

hand—a choiceless choice. Slavery was an irrational institution, and one cannot expect the enslaved to have acted "sane" in an insane situation. Free-will discourse lacks conversation about the ways that privilege informs the justification of evil and suffering. Roman Catholicism has a unique understanding of facing evil through sanctification.

Roman Catholic religious women and men have historically practiced the soul-making theodicy—a form of asceticism that believes in a process of continuous sanctification. Analyzing John Hick's soul-making theodicy, Mark M. Scott (2010) observes, "our development as persons requires the presence of obstacles to overcome and incentives to grow" (318). This theodicy supposedly leads the faithful to greater strength through physical suffering. Roman Catholic religious men and women believed that physical self-harm, sleep deprivation, social isolation, and extreme fasting were edifications to be closer to God. St. Ignatius of Loyola spent several weeks living in the mountains of Spain as a beggar to repent after he was injured in a battle against the French.

Ignatius believed that God allowed bad things to happen to him to demonstrate how Satan deceived his conversion through pride and vainglory. These experiences informed Ignatius's examination of conscience meditations in the *Spiritual Exercises,* which were rooted in "their [human beings'] fall from grace through original sin" (Ganss 1992, 1). Like many European noblemen who converted during the sixteenth century, Ignatius felt the need to expunge his affluent upbringing that emphasized physical appearance, wealth, social status, and military service as impediments to getting closer to God. Ignatius spent several weeks sleeping in caves and gave up maintaining appropriate hygiene such as taking baths. The soul-making theodicy was the obvious path to embark

on his conversion. Fortunately for Ignatius, he recognized later that this soul-making theodicy was a part of the journey—but not the whole journey—to imitating Christ.

For the sake of this theodicy conversation, some of the project findings underscore the ways Black Jesuits resist racial oppression in all its forms with a multitude of challenges from the Society of Jesus. Anti-black racism is a social justice issue that denies Black Jesuits full recognition as human beings and relinquishing it must be addressed as a Christian duty. Racial justice is a realized eschatology, requiring moral imagination rooted in Biblical criticism, which does not glorify or justify anti-Black suffering as a rite for Christian discipleship.

## Spiritual Discernment

In a culture that values expediency over depth, discernment is co-opted as a continuum in decision making. It is important to make a clear distinction between spiritual and non-spiritual discernment. Spiritual discernment is a conscious, participatory, reflective activity that values deepening one's prayer life with God. Non-spiritual discernment values expediency for quick and easy answers for the sake of productivity. Eventually, a person must make the courageous leap to act by which they take self-possession for making decisions. Self-possession is a conscious commitment to take responsibility for one's life. Decision-making is an action; therefore, by making a decision one has taken the courageous leap from self-reflection (the contemplative activity) to doing something.

The Society of Jesus (Jesuits) aptly describes experiencing this creative tension as being *contemplative in action*. Fr. Nicholas Adolfo, SJ, (2010), a former Superior General for the Society of Jesus, emphasized that the Catholic Church demands depth in

their way of proceeding in a secular world that is "…posed by the globalization of superficiality" (3). The Jesuits recognize that depth is a necessary condition for prayer life before making decisions. These core discernment practices of the Jesuits were also part of my Black heritage with the elders.

Elders are given reverence in the Black community, and we seek their wisdom and presence. The women are traditionally the bearers of wisdom. My grandmothers were the first elders that I paid attention to when I was a child. I found their conversations far more interesting than anyone else's. Black women's discernment is a gathering.

My paternal grandmother kept a family Bible. The family celebrates and remembers the past in our family bibles, and they are often shared at family reunions. The family bible is passed down through several generations. In my family, the oldest family bible came from one of my great aunts in the late nineteenth century. This family bible is the main attraction at our family reunions every two years. The book includes spiritual hymns and pictures of our ancestors' funerals with open caskets, marriage records, and baptismal records. It also includes pictures of them working in the fields, in factories, and as housekeepers. It is not unusual to find "secular" materials such as references to an ancestor's favorite juke joint and moonshine. The family bible is a traveling religious and spiritual museum that we all look forward to opening because new questions arise when we see it with fresh eyes every two years. My paternal grandmother was a teacher of this Black Christian spirituality filled with mystical narratives that are called by many names such as "getting the holy ghost," speaking in tongues, and "seeing visions."

My maternal grandmother was not a religious woman, but she had a lot to say about religion and God. She suffered physical abuse in both of her marriages and she believed that religion treated her like a slave because she was not a man. When she called for help, the church and her family condemned her for speaking her truth about her husbands. She called marriage a form of slavery for women. She suffered a lot, but she never directly condemned God for her plight.

I visited her in 2007 a few weeks before I entered the Jesuit novitiate because I wanted to tell her in person about my desire to be a priest. I knew her tumultuous history with religion and I was anxious about the conversation because I did not want to traumatize her. When I told her about my journey of becoming a Jesuit she said, "I don't know what God thinks or says in the Bible, but I have known many men who believe that he knows what God thinks and says in the Bible and it ain't never been in my favor. Since I know your mama raised you right, I know you will be a good preacher for the womenfolk." My maternal grandmother had her own sense of spirituality outside of churches and offered a safe space to talk about God without judgment. I was amazed by her openness when she listened supportively and without judgement to the incredible experiences of Christians while remembering the psychological trauma she endured from the religion. She died a month later while I was in the Jesuit novitiate. At the novitiate, I learned about a word that described my maternal grandmother's way of being about religion—*orthopraxy*. Orthopraxy emphasizes right action rather than correct belief and presupposes one's suspension of judgments and asking of open-ended questions.

For me, Christian spirituality is the liminal space between the self and the divine as revealed in scripture and the lived experience. In other words, spirituality mediates the

creative tension between our human faculties and intangible objects. My grandmothers recognized that our desire to belong to one another dwells within this liminal space through family stories, sharing ideas, exploring generational trauma visually and verbally, and making sense of these contradictions through the personal narrative.

While writing this chapter, I looked at a picture of my grandmothers standing together in my paternal grandmother's living room—the devout Christian and the religious skeptic. They were friends long before my parents were married. They were poor Black women in the rural South who survived the tyranny of white-Christian racial terrorism and patriarchy in the Black Church. I recalled my first faith-sharing experience at the Jesuit novitiate in which we bore our souls to each other. I had never experienced that kind of intimacy with a group of men. I felt like I was with my grandmothers who bore their souls together while peeling green peas from the shells on the front porch, rocking back and forth, unbothered by the flies and gnats that swarmed around them.

## Embodied Theology

I agree with James Cone's (2018) statement that "systematic theology is a specialized and challenging discipline, and an excellent tool for interpreting the Christian gospel" (59). Systematic theology lands as a disembodied cerebral exercise that preaches to other scholars. For instance, Paul Tillich (1951) believed that the existence-of-God question is a tension between the concrete and the abstract, but the ultimate concern to answer the God question "must transcend the whole realm of finitude in order to be the answer to the question implied in finitude (Tillich 1951 211). The body/mind dualism incoherently permeates in systematic theology. Given its particular prejudices for the sake of universality, this discourse creates the delusion that white theologians operate

beyond or outside their cultures of origin. It is a white-male, self-validating, hermeneutical circle.

When I was a Jesuit studying to be a priest, the hostility I met when raising the Black experience in my theology classes revealed the power of biblical interpretation through the white male gaze. We reduced God to logical propositions and conclusions propagated by white theologians. In other words, biblical interpretations from the Black experience were nothing more than relativist and subjectivist inquiry. But my white Jesuit brothers suffered, too, because they inevitably were forced to objectify their whiteness as an abstract concept. James Baldwin (1984) aptly states that "America became white—the people who, as they claimed 'settled' the country became white—because of the necessity of denying the Black presence, and justifying Black subjugation" (2). But the scriptures state, "God created mankind in his image: in the image of God, he created them; male and female he created them" (Genesis 1:7). In other words, God reflects the diversity of the human experiences because we apprehend the divine through our cultural contexts, but Black Catholics are forbidden to see God in themselves.

With special permission from my advisor who was a Jesuit, I registered for a Black theology class at Saint Louis University after hearing about it through the African American Studies program. Delores Williams' *Sisters In the Wilderness* (1993) and James Cone's *God of the Oppressed* ([1975] 1997) became bookends for my ministerial education. Williams speaks like my paternal grandmother who was my first religion teacher; Cone's work has the passion and fire of my father's unapologetic Black pride.

James Cone's Black theology emerged around the time when the Second Vatican Council's liturgical renewal affirmed that the Holy Spirit embodies a people's cultural

particularity. In the spirit of the Second Vatican Council, the pope and the members of the Council decided that the church must be able to speak to the diversity of God's people from social locations that are familiar and meaningful to them:

> The Church, when it is not a question of the Faith or the common good, does not intend to impose, even in the liturgy, a rigid uniformity. Moreover, it respects and promotes the characteristics and gifts of various races and peoples. It looks favorably on everything in the customs of these people that is not inseparably bound up with superstition and error, and, if it can, protects and conserves them. Thus sometimes it admits these customs into the liturgy itself, provided they can be harmonized with the authentic liturgical spirit. (Paul VI 1963)

According to a biography of Sister Thea Bowman, "The liturgical renewal of the Second Vatican Council encouraged Sister Thea to rediscover her African-American religious heritage and spirituality and to enter her beloved church 'fully functioning' " (Sister Thea Bowman Cause for Canonization). She said, "Think about your mama, your grandparents, your god parents, the uncles and the aunts, the brothers and sisters, the grands and great-greats, the ones who led you in the storm, who set a welcoming table for you, who taught you to say 'precious Lord take my hand,' who convinced you that you were God's child when the world told you you were nobody and would amount to nothing" (Bowman 1988, 307).

Thea Bowman and James Cone were born and raised in the Jim Crow South, Mississippi and Arkansas respectively. They grew up in the Black Methodist traditions that valued the sayings of the old folks as spiritual wisdom. Bowman converted to Roman Catholicism while attending a Catholic school in her hometown and decided at the age of fifteen that she was called to be a nun. She was the only Black person in her religious community (Sister Thea Bowman, n.d.). Cone grew up to become a pastor but later focused his energy as a theologian because "no theology of dead or living white men

could control the spirit of blackness" (Cone 2018, 63). Bowman and Cone were scholars, but they had *street cred* because they talked about God like regular Black folks at home. They preached the beauty and gifts of the Black experience as the good news of Jesus Christ beyond the sanctuary where Black people would most likely listen to them. For the sake of this research project, I will utilize the Black Catholic tradition in conversation with womanist and Black theology.

**Thea Bowman, FSPA, PhD: Black Catholic Theology**

In 1989 Sister Thea Bowman spoke before the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), which at the time was a 260-member, predominately white male institution of the leaders of the Roman Catholic Church in the United States. Sister Thea was invited by Bishop John H. Ricard, one of ten Black bishops at the time, to discuss the state of Black Catholics. Sister Thea opened her presentation by asking the bishops, "What does it feel like to be Black and Catholic?" Answering her thematic question, she sang, "Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child." Sister Thea's mezzo-soprano voice invoked the tumultuous relationship between white Catholics and Black Catholics. After finishing the song, she says that she is a pilgrim in the journey, looking for a home and that Jesus told her that the church was her home. Jesus told her that heaven is her home, and she has an everlasting city. She tells the bishops in the audience to help her get home (Bowman 1989, 1). She continues, "I bring myself, my Black self. That doesn't frighten you, does it? I bring my whole history, tradition, experience, culture. I bring my African American song, dance, gesture, movement, preaching, teaching, healing, responsibility" (Bowman 1989, 1).

Reflecting on Sr. Thea's presentation, African American Jesuit priest Father Joseph Brown (1991) states, "Quite clearly it was Thea Bowman's firm belief that all Catholics should be exposed to the gifts of the authentically Black and truly Catholic children of the journey" (82). In 2011, Black Catholic clergy and Black religious women reminded Black seminarians of our history at the National Black Catholic Congress (NBCC). Every Black seminarian, including me, were given copies of Sister Thea Bowman's prayers and meditations.

Sister Thea exchanged her habit (religious sisters' uniform) for African attire in the 1970s. I recall seeing pictures of her wearing African dresses and headwraps. She wore her Black pride as well as spoke about it. She cofounded the Institute for Black Catholic Studies at Xavier University in Louisiana, which is the only historical Black and Catholic university in the United States. It was established by St. Katherine Drexel and staffed by the religious community she founded in 1915—the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament—who devoted their lives to the education of African Americans and Native Americans. Sister Thea taught Black theology rooted in Black religion, Black literature, and Black arts at the Institute. She was on point when she said, "When we remember from whence we came, then we can look into our souls, our Black souls, and testify to that we have seen with Black eyes, heard with Black ears, and understood with African hearts. We can embrace the culture that has enabled us to survive. We can't turn around. We've come too far" (Bowman 1988, 307).

Brown (1991) argues that "to be Black is to be culturally prophetic, to be a Black bishop is to be limited in the exercise of prophetic behavior" (84). He suggests that Sister Thea's role as a woman religious in the church may have afforded her a liberative space

in which she could authentically live her Christian faith as an unapologetic Black person. On the other hand, this does not negate the pervasive racism she experienced in her predominately white religious order and the sexism of the Catholic male hierarchy. Sister Thea's telling of her own story recounts where she came from and how she overcame racism. Her liberation and salvation story are constitutive of the Black prophetic tradition. Sister Thea Bowman was a Black prophetic leader within the Black Catholic church through preaching, singing, conversion, prayer, and testimony.

Sister Thea's ability to preach and sing the universality of the biblical stories through the particularity of the African American story is one of the greatest theological gifts she has given to the Catholic church. She did this through her personal testimony as a Black southerner who survived segregation and who chose the Catholic church, with all its beauty and messiness, as her home. Brown (1991) suggests, "When the personal testimony is given, the call to conversion is implied" (84). He continues, "The call to conversion has a special historical focus, which cannot be overlooked" (84). Sister Thea invokes the wisdom of a Muslim leader in the Black community: "Our history includes enslavement, oppression and exploitation. As Malcolm X phrased it, 'Our people didn't come here on the Mayflower.' Many of them came in slave ships, in chains." (quoted in Bowman 1988, 307). It must be noted that Sister Bowman and James Cone's Black theology recognize the spiritual and religious wisdom of the Black Muslim community, whose members are also our sisters and brothers. Sister Thea prayed with the prophetic voices of all Black people who had something to say about God in poetry, literature, music, religion, dance, and speeches.

## Delores Williams, PhD: Womanist Theology

Alice Walker (1983, xi) coined the term "womanist." Walker states that "womanism" is "committed to the survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female" (xi). Womanism cares about Black men's wholeness. As a Black male seminarian, I found a home in the moral imagination of womanist God-talk literature that gave language to the ways I desired to be a loving, antisexist, Black, gay, Christian man.

I witnessed this moral imagination as "making a way out of no way" by Black Jesuit priests, brothers, and scholastics who asserted their claim to dignity and respect. I do not know what I would have done were it not for their love and support for my well-being while resisting and rising above the anti-Blackness in the Society. Black Jesuits are outsiders/insiders navigating unnamed cultural and political wilderness. We are Christian because of our unwavering faith that God cares for us and protects us from harm, especially white racism.

Womanist God-talk sounds like my grandmother and aunties. Delores Williams (1993) utilizes imagery that I have heard my grandmother and aunties say at home, church, and picnics in rural Georgia. Williams knows the God-fearing voice of the Black country woman. It is this voice that "can see the entire saga of the race" and "provides the context in which the Black experience is appropriated as a female-and-male inclusive wilderness experience" (140). Williams challenges the invisible, androcentric God-talk in Black liberation theology that omits Black women. She suggests,

> that in black theology today, the wilderness experience is a more appropriate name than the black experience to describe African-American existence in North America. This is because the wilderness experience is male/female/family-inclusive in it imagistic, symbolic and actual content; black experience has been described with an androcentric bias in theology; and its perimeters are narrowly racial. (141)

Womanism is the both/and perspective in Black liberative God-talk, like lavender is to purple. The works of Sister Thea Bowman, a Black Catholic nun, and James H. Cone, the father of Black theology, bookend what it means to be a vowed religious male of African descent in a Roman Catholic religious order serving God's people.

### James H. Cone, PhD: Black Theology

My theological presupposition is that talking about God is an inspirational, contextual, and mystical phenomenon. The lived experience births our God image. God talk is born from culture. God is familiar; therefore, God is Black with soul. When Black folks refer to soul, we are talking about a felt experience of the spirit. The felt experience manifests in the way we tell our stories at family reunions and church events, the way we moan and holler in our music, the polyrhythms of our dances, and the "you put your foot in it" down home cooking. Our prophets impart this soulful phenomenon whereby the spirit incarnates through Black religion and culture. Through the Black prophetic tradition, our prophets speak truth to power that sets our souls on fire.

For Black Christians, God is a liberating spirit. God is justice. Liberation is the gospel story. The bible and the lived experience are foundational for discerning what God has to say about a situation before us. Professor Anthony N. Witherspoon's definition of Black theology, which he provided in the 2010 African American Religion class I took from him, encapsulates the spirit of this chapter as "the sum total of African/African American experiences having begun in Africa and come to the new world. It has a past, present, and redemptive future. It has impacted everything, and it is getting stronger day by day."

The National Black Catholic Clergy Caucus proclaimed in 1968 that "the Catholic Church in the United States, primarily a white racist institution, has addressed itself primarily to white society and is definitely a part of that society" (quoted in Davis 2003, 111). At the same time, Cone (2018) said,

> White supremacy is the Anti-Christ in America because it has killed and crippled tens of millions of Black bodies and minds in the modern world. It has also committed genocide against indigenous people of this land. If that isn't demonic, I don't know what is. White supremacy is America's original sin. It is found in every aspect of American life, especially in churches, seminaries, and theology. (54)

After the assassinations of Malcolm X and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Black Catholics and Protestants felt the urgency to respond to Black people's anger and impatience with an American Christianity that failed and ignored Black people's lives. Black Christians needed a constructive, theological reflection that analyzed Black power, the gospel of Jesus, and white and Black churches (Cone 2018, 45). These reflections were foundational in responding to Black suffering and survival through a dialogical conversation between the Christian tradition and texts and the racist conditions that Black people faced every day amid violent political unrest.

Two of Cone's tasks for Black theology are intellectual liberation and the centering of the Black experience. The first task of liberating the enslaved and colonized mind entails deconstructing white theologies that erase Black people's religious history and tradition (41). Professor Witherspoon's Black theology class effectively dismantled the white theologies of my Jesuit education. Many of the white, Jesuit scholastics in my class pushed back against centering Blackness and critiquing white theology as academically inferior and un-Catholic. I recognized that I could not write authentically about the Black religious experience in America with an enslaved mind. The

presuppositions of those white theologians about what it means to be human and how we apprehend knowledge and truths were postulated on the inferiority of the Black body and mind; they rationalized the supremacy of white male bodies in God talk. In doing the work of Black theology, I had to recover the Black Christian experience that had been silenced, distorted, omitted, redacted, and vilified from my Catholic Jesuit tradition. To be a Black Catholic theologian is to catch hell while in purgatory.

The second task of Black theology is claiming Blackness as authority. Cone (2018) discerns that claiming Blackness as an ultimate reality was a shock for white theologians because they had made Christianity white (46). Furthermore, Cone believed that "the Black Christ is the liberating spirit in the Black revolution as defined by Black Power" (47). The established Black Christian clergy could no longer dismiss the criticisms of young Black activists during the Civil Rights Movement who believed that turning the other cheek was the politics of white Christian respectability that undermined Black self-determination and dignity. Martin Luther King and Malcolm X were dead. The nation was literally on fire. Cone needed "a theology that would be *Black* like Malcolm and *Christian* like Martin (60)." In other words, in what ways do the gospels address Black people's struggle and teach them how to love their Blackness? It has been over forty years since Cone decided to center Blackness with the scriptures in talking about God without white Christians' validation. Cone's theology provided the necessary framework to liberate Black Catholic voices that had been traumatized in our white racist faith tradition.

## Conclusion

The Black theology of Sister Thea Bowman and James H. Cone digest the state of Black men in the Jesuit order in the United States. It is imperative for all Black Christians, especially those who worship and serve in predominately white churches, to seek the wisdom of our prophetic tradition in knowing the self with love, alacrity, and perseverance. As a prophetic leader, I am often entangled in several relationships within the communities I serve as the insider and outsider. I like to call this *standing in* because I identify with my community's cultural normativity while feeling like an outsider because the communities squelch my individuality at the mercy of the collective. For instance, I have chosen to stay in an oppressive institution to change it from the inside to realize its resurrection potential. I am a proud, Black, gay, antisexist, Roman Catholic.

# CHAPTER 3

# METHODOLOGY

## Introduction

The purpose of this project is to illustrate diverse perspectives of how Black Jesuits experience anti-Black racism for the Society of Jesus in the United States. The lack of documented historical memory from Black Jesuits about their experiences suggests that their stories are primarily told by people who may not serve their best interests. That is why the central question for the project is how Black Jesuits experience anti-Blackness in the Society of Jesus.

## Background and Role of the Researcher

I attended a Jesuit high school, and when I was asked to consider becoming a Jesuit, I was struck by the question because I was a Protestant. The Jesuit priests and brothers were smart, worldly, articulate, and holy. My respect for them was immeasurable. I was not ready to be a celibate religious at the time. Instead, I decided to become Roman Catholic. In 1993, a year after high-school graduation and with my parents' blessings, I officially converted during the Easter Vigil at Saint Aloysius Catholic Church near my home in Cleveland, Ohio.

Later, while living in Spokane, Washington, I served on active duty in the United States Air Force and was also an actor. In 1998, I landed several roles in a Jesuit production called *The Saint Plays* (McBride 1998, A1), produced by the Jesuit scholastics who studied philosophy at Gonzaga University's Saint Michael's Institute. The production was about homelessness and the murder of six Jesuit priests, their housekeeper, and her daughter at their home in El Salvador (A13). The experience

prompted me to apply immediately for Jesuit candidacy. The Oregon Province of Jesuits delayed my entry for a year with a recommendation for further discernment, and I decided not to reapply the following year.

In 2001, I moved to San Diego, California, and attended a Jesuit parish that was predominately African American. The Jesuits in my parish supported my candidacy to enter the Society of Jesus in 2006. The second round of interviews were profoundly different than in 2000. I disclosed that I was an openly Black gay activist, and my professional career at the time was in the field of sexual health for Black gay and bisexual men. I believed that complete transparency about my Blackness and gayness were crucial to live the Jesuit life authentically. I was interviewed by three Jesuit priests, a Catholic lay woman, and a psychiatrist. They recommended my approval to the provincial. I was accepted unconditionally to be a member of the Oregon Province of the Society of Jesus. In 2007, I entered the St. Francis Xavier Jesuit Novitiate in Portland, Oregon.

Throughout my six-year vocation, the Black Jesuits made tremendous efforts to support my vocation. Fr. Joseph McGowen was the only Black Jesuit in the Oregon Province when I entered. He initiated and cultivated most of my relationships with other Black Jesuits, including the Black priests and Black deacons in the Seattle/Tacoma area. The Black Jesuits taught me the history of Black Catholicism in the United States that I never learned as a Jesuit-educated, practicing Roman Catholic. Their mentorship led me to become actively involved with the National Black Catholic Congress (NBCC), National Black Catholic Clergy Caucus (NBCCC), National Black Catholic Seminarians Association (NBCSA), and National Black Sister's Conference (NBSC). I served as President for the NBCSA in 2013 (Pattison, 2013).

The Oregon Province novitiate and formation gatherings were the most loving experiences I had in the Society. I felt emotionally safe, accepted, and we laughed often. We said that we were brothers from different mothers. When I was away from the province, I missed them, and I could not wait to see them again for the holidays and summer breaks in North Idaho and the Oregon coast. Conversely, I did not always feel safe at the Bellarmine House of Studies in Saint Louis, Missouri, and found every opportunity to escape the racism and homophobia that permeated our way of proceeding there. At those times, my Jesuit brothers from the Oregon Province novitiate welcomed me into their new communities in Chicago and Kansas City. Despite the hatred and unwelcoming behavior from some Jesuit communities, love and acceptance awaited me at others.

Hence, my relationship with the Jesuits is complicated. I am critical of the institution, but I miss my brothers. No one knows me the way they do. Through the Jesuit novitiate leadership of Fr. Tom Lamanna, SJ, and Fr. Paul Fitterer, SJ, I experienced blackness and gayness as normative and beautiful gifts in Christian discipleship. I have a thirty-four-year relationship with the Jesuits whom I love, but I find it necessary to keep some distance for emotional safety.

My role in this project is as a man for others. I am in service to the Black men who chose to serve God in the Society of Jesus with their God-given gifts and talents in evangelizing the world through Christ and to tell their stories with alacrity, grace, and perseverance. The research participants became aware of the project from The Black Jesuits, an organization in which current and former Black Jesuits share information about topics that are relevant to them. Reestablishing my relationship with this

organization was critical. Whether the participants' responses would be biased because of our shared racial identity and religious affiliation was addressed through multiple data collection techniques or triangulations. The project's questions and methods for data collection were reviewed and approved by the researcher's committee to minimize biases.

## Methods for Data Collection

Due to COVID-19 pandemic restrictions, face-to-face interviews were prohibited or severely limited. Zoom became the dominant platform for virtual meetings and classrooms, but "Zoom fatigue" has raised alarms about cognitive health. Jeremy Bailenson's study suggests that seeing oneself all day long like a mirror can be stressful, face-to-face meetings reduce mobility, and the intensity of being stared at onscreen can be daunting (Bailenson 2021, 2-4). For those reasons, I chose to use an interview-style questionnaire of open-ended questions as the heuristic method to conduct the research. In partnership with an investigator, I followed Moutsakas's steps for DMin projects to formulate the survey questions. We included a "list of all aspects of particular interests or topics which represent the curiosities or intrigues" and "cluster[ed] the related topics into subthemes" (Moutsakas 1990, 42). The questionnaire was grounded in social constructivism, which allows participants to develop subjective meanings of their lived experiences. Once the researcher and investigator completed the design questionnaire, the project committee reviewed and approved it.

The project used the single stage sampling procedure because the researcher "has access to names in the population and can sample the people (or other elements) directly" (Creswell 2018, 150). The researcher obtained the names of the thirty-four current and former Black Jesuits in the United States and contact information for twenty-seven of

them from the Black Jesuits of the North American Assistancy. The Assistancy includes Canada and the United States; however, this project excluded Canadian members. Fifteen of the twenty-seven Black Jesuits contacted (forty-five percent of the sample population) participated in the survey.

The online survey was created on Qualtrics, Seattle University's approved survey platform, and the Internal Review Board reviewed and approved the content in September 2021. The researcher sent the survey to the participants through Qualtrics on October 4, 2021, and participants were given until October 18, 2021, to complete it. Participants were sent weekly reminders to complete the survey by the closing date.

Johnny Saldaña's (2016) qualitative research procedures were implemented to code the data and analyze the findings. Tim Sensing (2011) recommends triangulating the findings by "comparing the data perspectives of people with different points of view" (72). The researcher and investigator conducted the triangulation by comparing notes and interpretations with each other to validate the participants' responses (72).

Saldaña states, "No one, including myself, can claim final authority on the utility of coding or the 'best' way to analyze qualitative data" (Saldaña 2016, 2). He believes it is up to the researcher to decide whether coding data is appropriate for their research. Coding is one of many methods for Doctor of Ministry projects (Moustakas 1990, 49). Ministry projects are by their nature about the researcher's faith community in which they usually serve in a leadership role and have been given permission to explore a topic with the people they know. The projects require a high level of trust and accountability between the researcher and the community because the participants know the researcher

as an ordained or lay minister. The collected data are coded and then categorized to solve a ministerial problem.

Saldaña (2016) eloquently articulates, "Qualitative codes are essence-capturing and essential elements of the research story that, when clustered together according to similarity and regularity (i.e., a pattern), actively facilitate the development of categories and thus analysis of their connections" (9). Coding can be a solo or team activity. The researcher chose to work collaboratively with an investigator because "multiple minds bring multiple ways of analyzing and interpreting the data" (36). Saldaña recommends, but does not require, several coding methods for epistemological and ontological questions (71). This project employed *Descriptive, In Vivo* and *Themeing the Data* coding methods.

Descriptive coding "…does not offer the analyst insightful meanings about the participants and their perspectives" (Saldaña 2016, 76), but this method was a sufficient starting point for generating subtopics. It answered the question: What is happening in the story? The descriptive method is the bird's eye view. In Vivo honors the participants' voices "…to ground the analysis in their perspectives" (71). In addition, "In Vivo codes use the direct language of participants as codes rather than researcher generated words and phrases" (71). In other words, this method "tells it like it is" by using participants' terms and concepts. Themeing the data applies "an extended phrase or sentence that identifies what a unit of data is about and/or what it means" (234). This method helped generate the themes or categories for the findings.

Saldaña (2016) emphasizes, "In qualitative data analysis, some interpretive leeway is necessary—indeed, imagination and creativity are essential to achieve new and

hopefully striking perspectives about the data" (234). But that interpretative leeway assumes that the researcher has some knowledge about the population to contextualize the coded data and develop themes. With that in mind, the researcher's coding process unearthed major themes that were particular to Jesuit values and the Black experience when cross-referenced with Jesuit, Black Catholic, and African American scholarship. This cross-referencing was unintentional, but it became necessary to weave the intersectionality of race, gender, and religion for this population. The process was repeated over and over again for a period of three months.

The coded data and themes revealed traumatic events that were unavoidable to address. Being a Black man who served as a Jesuit for six years and spent most of his life in Jesuit education, I had many positive and negative experiences to offer in this conversation with my investigator. Amid coding and categorizing, the experience felt like electric shocks throughout my body, disrupting any delusions that I had some level of "objective" detachment from participants for validation. The way around the hermeneutical circle is the triangulation process discussed earlier. Clark Moustakas (1990) reminds the Doctor of Ministry student that "…verification is enhanced by returning to the research participants, sharing with them the meanings and essences of the phenomenon as derived from the reflection on and the analysis of the verbatim transcribed interviews and other material, and seeking their assessment for comprehensiveness and accuracy" (42). Accordingly, I presented this work to the thirty-three Black Jesuits in the United States.

## Survey Questions

This qualitative research study sought to learn about Black Jesuits' experiences of anti-Black racism within the order in the United States. The questionnaire asked the following questions:

1. What do you believe about the current status of Black Jesuits in the Society of Jesus?
2. What is your opinion concerning the Jesuit leadership to have Black Jesuits serve in Black communities?
3. What do you believe are the needs of Black Jesuits and how is the Jesuit leadership responding to those needs?
4. How do you experience living in communities where you are the only Black person?

## Definitions of Terms

**Coadjutors**. This is one of the grades in the Society's membership that was instituted by Ignatius. The role of coadjutor has changed over time, but prior to the modern era, they commonly assisted the professed member; the professed were assigned the main roles whether in priestly ministry or in governance. The Society established two types of coadjutors: (1) spiritual coadjutors, who are priests that undergo a reduced program in Jesuit formation studies; they receive practical preparation for hearing confessions and, upon completing their formation, engage in less senior ministries than fully professed Jesuits; and (2) temporal coadjutors, who are established as lay religious or brother coadjutors. With the exception of governance roles, they can hold all positions that do not

pertain to the priesthood, for example offices of procurators and administrators (Gramatowski & Russell 2013, 8).

**First Studies**. This is the second stage in Jesuit formation. For the next three years, the Jesuit studies philosophy and theology, while also serving in community (Padberg 1996, 152)

**Jesuit Formation**. This is the training of Jesuits to become priests and brothers. Formation consists of five stages: novitiate, first studies, regency, theology, and tertianship. Formation lasts approximately ten years.

**Novitiate**. The novitiate is the first stage in Jesuit formation and lasts two years. Jesuits in the novitiate share community life, participate in a variety of ministries, and make a thirty-day silent retreat guided by the Spiritual Exercises. After two years, the novices pronounce vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience (Padberg 1996, 107-115).

**Regency**. Regency is the third stage in Jesuit formation. For three years during Regency, the Jesuit works in active ministry such as teaching high school, serving as campus ministers, or conducting parish work.

**Scholastic**. A scholastic is a Jesuit who has completed the first two years of the novitiate and taken vows of chastity, poverty, and obedience. The scholastic is in one of various formation stages before ordination, which include first studies, regency, theology, and tertianship (Padberg 1996, 169). Those Jesuits who are not being trained for clerical ordination are called “brothers” and undergo much of the same training as the scholastics, but they are not obliged to complete the theology training.

**Solemnly Professed**. The “professed” members are those priests who have taken the three solemn vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience as well as the solemn fourth vow.

This is a vow of special obedience to the pope, and it includes the possibility of being sent on missions wherever the pope might choose to send them and where there might be a particular need. These members are known as "professed with four vows." Many senior positions in the Society require the holder to be a professed member (Gramatowski & Russell 2013, 23).

**Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius**. Upon entering the Jesuit novitiate, the novices' primary responsibility is preparation for and participation in this thirty-day silent retreat instituted by the founder, St. Ignatius of Loyola. The novices are invited to meditate and pray central aspects of the Christian faith through various contemplative and imaginative exercises (112).

**Theology**. Theology is the fourth stage in Jesuit formation. The Jesuit spends three years in Theology Studies for this last step toward priestly ordination. Once the Jesuit has received the Sacrament of Holy Orders, he is sent on his first assignment as a priest (153).

## Limitations and Delimitations

While there have been some studies about the Society of Jesus' complicity in anti-Blackness as slaveholders, segregationists, and white supremacists, this study will center and examine the experiences from the perspective of Black men who are or were members of the Society of Jesus in the United States. I am a Black man and a former member of the Society of Jesus; therefore, this investigation is by a Black man for Black men in the largest male religious order in the Roman Catholic Church. My intention for this project is that the North American Assistancy will seriously undertake *cura personalis* (or "care for the whole person") for their Black brothers.

## Summary

As a former Jesuit of African descent, I was privileged to recruit, gather data, analyze the findings, and draw conclusions from Black men's anti-Black racism experiences from a religious community to which they vowed to live in love, alacrity, and perseverance. The researcher notified the participants about the project and sent them informed consents; those who chose to participate were sent questionnaires to complete within a specified period of time. The data was coded according to standardized practices for qualitative research. Chapter four will discuss the findings in depth.

# CHAPTER 4

# FINDINGS

## Introduction

The project participants were identified by the Black Jesuits of the North American Assistancy and the researcher. The project identified thirty-four current and former Black Jesuits in the United States. The project received contact information for twenty-seven potential respondents. In October 2021, the project sent the survey to the potential respondents, and fifteen responded to the four open-ended questions via an online survey. The questions were developed and tested in a ten-week doctoral seminar with peers and professors. *Descriptive, In Vivo, and Themeing the Data* coding methods were used to code the data and develop themes. The findings are connected to the theological reflections and the central question.

## Question 1: What do You Believe about the Current Status of Black Jesuits in the Society of Jesus?

The participants overwhelmingly reported their frustrations about their minority status. As discussed earlier, my correspondence with The Black Jesuits and research of Jesuit province records revealed that there are thirty four current and former Black Jesuits in the United States, and twenty-two are active Black members of the American Jesuits. The Society of Jesus has admitted approximately sixty-four Black candidates in the United States during its 300-year history, mainly as a result of political pressure from the Civil Rights Movement and the legal victories against segregated schools and public accommodations. Prior to the Brown vs. Topeka Board of Education Supreme Court

landmark decision, Jesuit schools, parishes, and retreat centers were exclusionary/segregated. Although the Society never had a formal policy barring Black men from the order, the Jesuits referred Black candidates to other religious orders that accepted them (Anderson 2010, 11).

When the Jesuits were forced to deal with the race question in the 1950s, they quietly accepted a few Black candidates whom they believed would be acceptable to white Catholics. In doing so, Black vocations were not made public for fear of white backlash. Shelton Carle was an exception. Carle's acceptance to the Missouri Province was publicized in a local newspaper that noted he was the first Negro admitted at the Florissant Jesuit Novitiate in 1949 (Chicago Catholic Diocesan, 23). Black Jesuits experience underrepresentation as normalizing indifference, distorting Black pride, and neglect.

*Normalizing Indifference*

Normalizing indifference is simply accepting things the way they are without question through a lack of care and regard. It is common for Jesuit communities to have few or no Black men in their homes. It is common that a high percentage of Black men in formation leave the Society. It is also more likely for a Jesuit community to have a Black man living with them who is not from the United States than one who is. The lack of Black men within Jesuit communities and the normalization of miniscule black vocations has created an atmosphere in which Black men do not seem to matter.

Nine participants wrestled with this invisibility and lack of regard for Black men in the Society. The respondents' deep concern about the unwillingness of the Society to keep Black men from leaving the order makes them apathetic about promoting the

possibility of vocations to other Black men. A participant voiced this concern when he reported, “The needs of Black Jesuits are either ignored or dismissed. Too many have left because of the refusal of those in charge to push back against racist comments and attitudes.” The respondents recognize that those who leave the Society cannot bear the degradation of their Blackness. They also understand that Black men who leave the Society are not necessarily unfit to become priests and brothers, but they have chosen the path of less resistance.

The needs of Black Jesuits are ignored and dismissed, according to ten respondents. They have experienced the refusal of the Society to push back against racist comments and attitudes from other Jesuits, and they feel they are at the bottom of their religious community’s priorities. Some of the men alluded that the Society’s lack of regard for them is indicative of its treatment of Black people in general.

Joseph Brown, an African American Jesuit, states “Since there is little likelihood of the Roman Catholic Church changing its tradition and structure, the ecclesial community will continue to be organized and controlled by its clergy” (Brown 1998, 153). The Society of Jesus shares the same Eurocentric, male-centered structure as the broader church that views its Black congregants and clergy “…as immature and irresponsible in exercise of those qualities deemed essential for successfully fulfilling the requirements of ordained priesthood” (Brown 1998, 153). Brown’s statement mirrors responses from this project’s participants who report that Black Jesuits are forced to submit to the hypocrisy in which the “true” Church and Jesuit identity are aligned with white Catholic values that vilify Black culture. However, the respondents are proud of their Blackness because speaking truth to power is an act of resistance.

In the United States, the Society of Jesus has never elevated Black men to executive leadership positions such as provincial or serving on a provincial's cabinet. The participants in this study raised this concern because Black men are not afforded the opportunities to serve in these roles, yet they desire representation at the highest echelon of the Society. The respondents focused their attention on full incorporation status or fully formed priests. Some respondents feel that Black Jesuits are not given the opportunity to be fully incorporated. To be fully incorporated, a Jesuit must be asked to pronounce final vows after he has completed a second thirty-day retreat, obtained a terminal degree, and fulfilled other requirements. Full incorporation is the highest achievement in the Society, but ambitions for full incorporation are absolutely forbidden. It is an invitation by the Jesuit's superiors.

As mentioned earlier, two types of full incorporation are coadjutor and the solemnly professed. The solemnly professed maintains a higher status because it requires a terminal degree. The solemnly professed Jesuit can be provincial, novice master, and Father General. Black Jesuits experience institutional barriers to achieving full incorporation. A participant disclosed, "I believe that the number of living Black Jesuits of US origin fully incorporated into the Society of Jesus has not increased in twenty years." The Society of Jesus does not have a stated requirement to earn a doctoral degree for full incorporation any longer, but the Black men in this study feel that the historical legacy of this requirement is the implicit social order of the Society. They feel that they are not encouraged to complete terminal degrees and, thus, are excluded from being solemnly professed. Another participant said, "We are small in number. We hold no

internal leadership positions that I am aware of." The absence of Black men in these leadership positions reflects this normalizing indifference.

*Pride Distortion*

Every day, resistance to racism is shaped by these men's context. Essentially, they interrogate whether their desire to claim Blackness is antithetical to relinquishing vainglory or pride. St. Ignatius of Loyola, the co-founder of the Society, stated that pride is the mother of all evil; pride is a sin. White-body supremacy in the Society of Jesus distorts a Jesuit's pride in his Blackness and creates an unwillingness to detach from the black body to serve the will of God. Black self-love is unfit for a Jesuit.

On the contrary, the respondents experience a double standard when their black bodies are put on display as if they are token children. They are in those moments the pride of the Society because they have been formed in Jesuit culture that erases their Blackness for the greater glory of God. For instance, a participant said, "If a Black Jesuit submits to the double standard that equates true Jesuit-ness with white American Catholicism, then he is not equal. In reality, it can get very bad with the double standard." Three participants stated that these cultural forces to fit in and wear a mask inevitably create the conditions for Black self-hatred and forgetting that they are Black for the sake of the Society. Brown (1998) interrogates the duplicity of the vows of chastity, obedience, and poverty that Black men face in Catholic religious life. He engages these vows while reflecting about Black men who aspire to be priests:

> How can men c*hoose* voluntary *chastity* in a system where the underlying assumption concerning their existence demands they be judged as promiscuous, licentious libertines, whose cultural flaw concerns sexual impropriety with women and men of all races and backgrounds? Who of them could choose, voluntarily, to live lives of "apostolic poverty" when the culture has made them, from the very beginning of American history, economic commodities to be bartered, sold, or exploited in whatever marketplace prevails at the time? How can men of African descent enthusiastically promise or vow *obedience* to other men who have been taught and conditioned to expect service and subservience from all African American people, who must—by definition—rest at the bottom of all social systems? To choose such restrictions, based as they are on the prevailing myths of racism and oppression that permeate American culture, is to choose a continuous existence of invisibility, impotence, and insanity. (154-55)

Distorted pride conceals the cruelty of anti-black racism. Distorted pride denies Black Jesuits a safe space to freely discern their status in the Society without having their experiences harshly scrutinized. For Black Jesuits, pride in their Blackness is a liberated conscience in hostile spaces, born from courageous acts of self-love and self-determination necessary to survive in a religious order that has no value for Black people. Black pride honors and cherishes the Black aesthetic, Black language, Black history, Black spirituality, and Black people. Jesuit pride as sin retraumatizes Black Jesuits because Jesuit pride is entangled in the systemic proliferation of the assumption that white maleness is the ultimate concern in religious and civic life.

The social and intellectual pressure to de-blacken or assimilate consistently bears a heavy load on the status of Black Jesuits. They do not see the situation changing soon. The small numbers of Black men entering the Society and the high numbers leaving during formation reinforce their marginalized status and highlight the indifference to their concerns by Jesuit leadership. A participant lamented this situation when he stated, "There is no real effort in vocation promotion or formation for Black people." Another respondent echoed, "Jesuits have not attempted to 'recruit' Black men as they have other

non-Black men. This complex situation does not seem to be changed in the future." They see active efforts at the province and national levels to recruit other racial minorities, but not Black men.

Those who remain in the Society grapple with advocating for more vocations and being honest about the struggles that Black men will face in their formation. This internal conflict of recruiting Black men for the Society for the glory of God and protecting them from the racialized trauma they will endure are real challenges for vocation promotion.

During interviews with George Riemer (1971) over fifty years ago, Ted Cunningham and Bart Rousseve reflected on this dilemma about Black vocations. When asked what they would tell a young black man if he were interested in being Jesuit, Cunningham said, "I couldn't recommend the Society without great caution. I'd have to see what's happening to the black power movement in Christianity. So far, all that the Church has done was pay my way to the black caucus" (269).

Rousseve replied, "I'd have to promise them a hard road" (269). He continued, "The hardest thing would be the cultural isolation and the insensitivity of some men. He would have to watch very carefully what he says lest he be misunderstood and thus jeopardize his long-range effectiveness" (269). Fifty years later, Black Jesuits experience the same struggle as their predecessors: the Society ultimately belongs to white men.

Racism is an isolated phenomenon from a body and mind dualistic epistemology in Jesuit training. Jesuit training inevitably perpetuates the idea that racism is an individual Jesuit problem and not a Jesuit systemic problem. Black Jesuit protests challenge the Society's European hegemony for the common good. In other words, their

resistance is an expression of their Black, Jesuit, and Catholic authenticity that transcends our common humanity.

### Question 2: What is Your Opinion Concerning the Jesuit Leadership to Have Black Jesuits Serve in Underserved Black Communities?

The participants reflected upon their desire to be missioned for any apostolic works through discernment. The 33rd General Congregation states, "If we are to fulfill our mission, we must be faithful to that practice of communal apostolic discernment so central to our way of proceeding, a practice rooted in the Spiritual Exercises and Constitutions. This way of proceeding calls for a review of all our ministries, both traditional and new" (Institute of Jesuit Sources 1990, 81). A participant reinforced this way of proceeding by stating, "I think this should be taken into discernment as with any other matter. I think that the needs of the province and the Jesuit's needs need to be balanced, but typecasting is not in order." In other words, discernment is a conscious, participatory, reflective activity that values deepening one's prayer life with God in order to make a decision that integrates the mind, body, and spirit. Jesuits are asked to be concretely involved with the people in their ministries and those experiences should be taken into consideration in communal discernment. But Black Jesuits do not want to be stereotyped in this process and sent to work in certain settings because of their race.

"The Jesuit community is a community of discernment" (Institute of Jesuit Sources 1990, 109). They are sent for mission after they pray and discuss with each other where the will of God has moved them to serve. These discernment practices can be deeply intimate and life-changing because this is the spiritual space where Jesuits dispose of their self-interests and take the leap of faith, as their Jesuit brothers have done, and

respond to where God desires the man through this collective prayer. Discernment is not a one-time event. It is a compilation of personal and communal prayer over an unspecified period. The Jesuit takes this prayer seriously before making a decision with his community.

However, discernment does not always serve the best interest of the Jesuit. When this happens, he must discern whether the decision from his superiors was earnest. Jesuits have a saying when discernment is merely an instrument to satisfy the needs of leadership and not of God: "you discern, he discerns, and he decides." A Jesuit's heart may be broken when his hope for a particular mission is crushed because he put his heart and soul into his personal and communal prayer for apostolic effectiveness. He relents and moves on, searching for meaning through God's grace about where he is sent to serve the greater glory of God.

Black Jesuits responded to this question through the lens of *to be sent* at the heart of this spiritual practice. They responded in three distinct ways through this context. Six respondents believe that serving Black communities is a good idea because representation matters. Four participants stated that it should not be a policy for them to serve the Black community because missions need to be discerned for apostolic effectiveness. Three participants do not want to serve in Black communities because of stereotyping. Two participants are resigned to accept the status quo and make the best of the situation.

*Opportunity*

The respondents who answered in the affirmative believe that Black Jesuits should be given the opportunity to work in Black communities if that is their desire. The desire to do this work should be respected by their community and the leadership, and

Black Jesuits who want to work in underserved Black communities should have the support to do so with pure intentions. They believe that Black communities need leaders who look like them, especially in predominately white institutions. A participant reported, “Black communities need leaders, especially in a white institution like the Catholic Church, who look like them.” Given that most Black Jesuits live and work in predominately white institutions, the opportunity to serve their own people is immeasurable and their visibility may positively impact Black vocations.

Conversely, this same group of respondents is also critical about the Society’s openness to having them serve in Black communities. They have not experienced any concerted effort by their Jesuit communities to prioritize ministering to Black people even though they are one of the most oppressed groups of people in the nation. For example, two participants stated, “I would love to see this occur but I am not holding my breath,” and “This is a matter that was supposed to happen yesterday. It is late, but never too late.” The Society does not invite leaders from the Black community to become Jesuits. Some of the respondents sense the Society prefers to display them in predominately white institutions like prizes.

*Institutional Priorities*

The respondents emphasized discernment and balancing the needs of their provinces. They recognize that working in underserved Black communities requires special skill sets. Those skill sets require not only the lived experience as a Black person, but also the ability to navigate the generational racialized trauma through social analysis. The Black experience is not a monolith. The Black experience must include Black people who were not born in the United States.

In addition, the respondents expect the Jesuit leadership to be more discerning of missioning Black Jesuits to underserved Black communities where their gifts are most suited. These men do not want to be strictly defined by race, but their Blackness is an important part of their identity. They demand that the Society live up to the principles and foundations of the Spiritual Exercises.

*Stereotyping*

Black ministry implies racial reconciliation and healing activities. Some Black Jesuits do not want to carry the burden of racial reconciliation works for the Society of Jesus. They believe that anti-Black racism is a white problem. Historically, Black Jesuits have, by default, been given the responsibility to work on diversity issues because of their race. A participant interrogated this issue when he emphasized, "My only concern when I learn that Jesuit leadership are having Black Jesuits serving in underserved Black communities is [that they are] delegating the work of racial healing and transformation (or simply anti-racism) to Black Jesuits. Especially when our skin tone is thought to be a major reason or a 'feature' that increases apostolic effectiveness." These men feel that it is unjust for the Society to delegate racial healing and transformation to them or the Black community at large.

Delegating this type of work to Black Jesuits implies racial stereotyping. The frequent assumption is that Black Jesuits automatically relate to Black communities because of the color of their skin. Some of the men discussed being placed in impoverished Black communities by their superiors because they were Black, even though they did not relate to the Black communities that they served. The respondents also disclosed that white Jesuits are not placed in underserved Black communities

because of safety concerns, but Black Jesuits are placed in those communities without question. These respondents believe that the Society fears Black people because of where they live and believe some of those places are unsafe for white Jesuits.

*Resignation*

For some Black Jesuits, working in predominately white institutions is par for the course because the Society of Jesus is white, bourgeois, and academic. The Society is known primarily through its universities, colleges, and high schools, and these are the places where most Black Jesuits are missioned. Apart from the Cristo Rey and Nativity Schools, Black Jesuits are minorities at their places of work. A participant reported, "The reality is that Black folks in leadership in PWIs [predominately white institutions] will almost always find themselves speaking about diversity and serving the smaller number of Black constituents in special ways." These men have accepted that they will be the spokesperson and support the diversity initiatives of their institutions because they are Black, and they will serve the small number of Black students, faculty, and staff in such a way that will affirm their presence and lived experiences.

The participants believe that if a Black Jesuit expresses personal interest in serving this community and he is willing to make the case before his superiors, he is highly unlikely to be assigned to a ministry serving Black communities. They are resigned to having this desire deferred indeterminately. For a white Jesuit superior to discern whether his Black "brother in Christ" ought to work among his own people may be his own kind of suffering according to one respondent.

### Question 3: What do You Believe are the Needs of Black Jesuits and How is the Jesuit Leadership Responding to Those Needs?

Black Jesuits are usually the only men of African descent in their religious communities. They are fundamentally the "they" and not the "us" under the relentless and unwanted attention of the white male gaze that defines the conditions in which they have to live. In addition, they are living in an institution that has only recently confronted its legacy as a slaveholding and segregationist institution. Due to its anti-Black history, the underrepresentation of its Black members is unsurprising. When the Jesuits were forced to integrate by Superior General Janssen in 1954, the American Jesuits were determined to maintain the conditions of appropriate physical appearance and assimilation that would be necessary to have Black men living with them until Janssen rejected both conditions (Anderson 2005, 499).

From the onset, the Jesuits viewed the Black male body and mind as physically and intellectually inferior to the white male body and mind. Stephen Ochs' (1990) study illustrates that "opposition to black seminarians and priests was particularly insidious in that it was usually voiced privately in chanceries, rectories, and seminaries and was couched in terms of 'qualifications' or 'unfavorable social conditions' rather than in terms of race" (loc. 228). Black men's facial features had to be similar to those of white males. Black candidates had to appear physically respectable to whites and also behave and think like white men. These constructions were displayed for the benefit of the white male gaze.

Superior General Janssen (1954) rejected these efforts in a letter to the New Orleans Jesuits when he wrote, "I cannot approve that a Negro be rejected because he

rather displeases us because of his appearance. Whether he black or white, it is necessary that they have a respectable appearance; but this appearance cannot be judged according to our narrow norms as white men" (Anderson 2005, 499).

In their 1971 interviews with George Riemer, Ted Cunningham and Bart Rousseve discuss the inability for Black Jesuits to "think black" as Black men. Rousseve suggests that thinking Black is deeper than a shared experience of oppression; rather it is "the inability to 'think black' means not being able to sense, in some way, what it means to those who've had it. If a man can't think black he's dead" (Riemer, 240). For Cunningham, "thinking black" is the ability to navigate in white spaces without compromising his black culture (240). Together, Rousseve and Cunningham argue the troublesome dilemma that Black Jesuits have limited spaces to be their black selves, and their worthiness is measured by their ability "to work among and with white people" (241). Rousseve and Cunningham's reflections on being Black and Jesuit over fifty years ago resonate with today's Black Jesuits, who lament human disregard, indifference, underrepresentation, and fear. They desire to experience a sense of belonging among themselves that is free from wearing "the white mask."

*Sense of Belonging*

A body of literature that focuses on the sense of belonging for Black Jesuits is limited, but Baumeister and Leary's (1995) extensive research provides insights about how the need to belong is a fundamental human motivation. They assert that the need to belong is innate and universal to all human beings, and they seek to demonstrate how this need drives our overall motivation and behavior.

Baumeister and Leary indicate that some criteria for the need to belong for human motivation "have affective consequences and lead to ill effects (such as on health or adjustment) when thwarted and affect a broad variety of behaviors" (1995, 498). The Baumeister-Leary study concludes that psychology has underappreciated a sense of belonging through the intersectionality of cognitive processes, emotional patterns, behavioral responses, and health and well-being (Baumeister and Leary, 1995). These cognitive processes and emotional patterns are inextricably bound through cultural currency that gives meaning rooted in a person's history.

White-male-body supremacy is the normalizing cultural currency for American Jesuits. It dominates the Jesuit space and controls the movements and language of Black Jesuits. Because of its anti-Black legacy, it conceals and perpetuates a narrative of mistruths and distortions about the Black male mind and body. This distorts a sense of belonging and inevitably compels Black Jesuits to seek recognition and psychological safety where they can "think black" and essentially be human.

Sixty-seven percent of Black Jesuits in this study desire to have safe spaces to experience connection among Black Jesuits, and seventy-three percent report that the Jesuit leadership is uncommitted to supporting this effort. They emphasize coming together to support each other, organizing their priorities, and talking about racism and how to confront it collectively without the pressure to console white Jesuit sensibilities. Responses from three participants reflect the importance of this. One observed, "I think we need a forum to take the pulse of the Black Jesuit experience presently. I pray that this survey can capture some of that." Another respondent noted, "I think support in gathering as a cohort is important," and a third response called for "better support for affinity

spaces for Black Jesuits to be Black and not have to assimilate." They feel debilitated and exhausted by the pulverizing expectations to quell fears about raising anti-Black comments and practices within their communities. A participant stated, "Jesuit leadership seems incapable of responding to the needs of Black Jesuits because leadership appears to be insensitive to black men if not afraid of them."

In this space, the participants reported the urgency of developing a strategy to promote the Jesuit vocation to Black men. They do not see any effort from their provinces to target Black men, but they do see marketing campaigns geared toward other racial minorities. The participants feel a heavy burden in talking about race and the lack of acknowledgement that systemic racism persists within the order. Coming together with other Black men to talk about racism is healing because the usual code switching required when white men are in the room would not be necessary, and honest conversations about the cruelty of anti-Black racism can occur. The participants seek wholeness in the context of Black men's lives.

Emilie Townes states that a womanist ontology's "primary concern is concrete existence (lived life) and the impetus for a coherent and unified relationship between body, soul, and creation" (Townes 1993, 94). When Black Jesuits desire an affinity space for themselves, they intrinsically understand the radical nature of their particularity as Black men grounded in the lived experience, but it is essentially at odds with the universalism and objective reality from their religious formation. Townes recognizes the former as a split between the self and other and "advocates for self-other relationship, for it is in the relational matrix that wholeness can be found for African Americans" (Townes 1993, 95).

Black Jesuits recognize that their coming together is an act of spiritual wholeness where they can love their bodies, their color, their minds, and their language in a sacred space—where they can simply be themselves. It is the pulse of the Black Jesuit experience where love can be the unspoken felt experience. To listen and serve among their own is a beloved act. The Black Jesuits began meeting in 1977 and continued the annual meetings until 1995. In 1991, the Black Jesuits wrote a letter addressed to the ten Jesuit provincials at the time. They asked the provincials to encourage Black Jesuits in formation to attend Black Jesuit meetings, encourage formation personnel to be aware of Black Catholic organizations that can support Black Jesuits, and circulate the names of Black Jesuits in formation to the Black Jesuit organization (Black Jesuits letter, 2). The meetings resumed (with sponsorship from the Jesuit Conference) in 2012.

But this coming together has been challenging. Forty percent of Black Jesuits stated that fear and indifference are typical responses from the leadership about the need for Black men to come together on a regular basis. Black Jesuits reported that the leadership does not understand the complexity of the Black experience in civil society, the leadership is insensitive to Black men's needs, and the leadership is afraid of Black men. What this means is that Black Jesuits' psycho-spiritual needs are unmet in some Jesuit discernment practices.

Faith sharing, examination of conscience, and manifestations are individual and community discernment practices that nurture a sense of belonging in Jesuits as companions with Christ. Black Jesuits report that they lack the emotional safety, respect, and acknowledgement of systemic racism within the Society to fully participate in these fraternal discernment practices, which the Constitutions of the Society of Jesus state

should embrace with "sincerity and trust, at the level of grace, those gifts of God with which our companionship began and by which it is maintained" (The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 112).

*Discernment*

Spiritual discernment is a conscious, participatory, reflective activity that values deepening a Jesuit's prayer life with Jesus. The Jesuit makes the courageous leap to act by making decisions in a triune discourse between himself, his community, and God as an act of self-possession. Self-possession is a conscious commitment to make an election to act on behalf of God's will. The decision marks the Jesuit's courageous leap from contemplation to action. The Jesuits recognize that spiritual depth is a necessary condition for apostolic effectiveness and their prayer life as constitutive to making decisions. Communal spiritual discernment is a sacred space with the greatest potential for Jesuits to experience the beloved community as brothers in Christ. When carried out with unconditional love and active listening, discernment has the potential to deepen a Jesuit's a sense of belonging in uncharted terrain of identities, cultures, and experiences accompanied by emotional safety. Faith sharing and the manifestation of conscience are the primary spiritual discernment practices for Jesuits.

*Faith Sharing*

Faith sharing is a spiritual activity that is attentive to each Jesuit's lived experience. It is a sacred space where the Holy Spirit reveals Christ's calling to the Jesuit through his deepest desires and gifts and in the presence of his brothers. Faith sharing centers the collective forces of the community to animate the Jesuit's unforeseen potentiality as a man for others. In doing so, the Jesuit listens to the will of God through

his brothers' stories and prayers and reciprocates this gift of active listening as a service to them. Faith sharing supposedly opens the door for difficult conversations within the community, and Jesuits would expect their leadership to hold the tension when a Jesuit discusses the ways that someone or some people in the community have caused him harm. When leadership fails to hold this tension and remains silent about racism during faith sharing, it is a violation of the Black Jesuits' dignity and respect for speaking with their authentic voices.

Black Jesuits are usually the only Black men in faith sharing sessions. Fifty-three percent of the participants reported that they face insurmountable pressure to assimilate and are often burdened with the responsibility to avoid appearing angry and threatening during discernment. They experience frustration and impatience about their institution's racism against Black members of the Society. The leadership appear dismissive about these difficult conversations regarding racism, and their frequent response is to offer ineffective training programs.

Overall, Black Jesuits recognize that discussions about anti-Black racism within the Society are controversial and that responses can be slow. One respondent lamented that the Society's governance structure constrains meaningful opportunities for Black Jesuits to come together and have frank conversations about what it means to be Black men in a religious order controlled by white men. Spiritual discernment requires that they sacrifice their dignity for a false sense of peace about race matters. They are expected to wear masks that "grin and lie" to comfort their white brothers' fragility. The respondents make clear that they lack power to claim a space where they can remove the masks and dance to their own drum. The Jesuits are known for addressing systematic racism as an

external force while remaining silent to some of the cruel ways it "others" its Black brothers when they cry for an unconditional, loving space where to be Black, male, and Christian is God's gift to creation.

## Question 4: How do You Experience Living in Jesuit Communities Where You are the Only Black Person?

Black Jesuits represent less than one percent of Jesuits in the United States. A Black Jesuit is more likely than not to be the only Black man living in his religious community. He may be the first Black person that some white Jesuits have ever known in a meaningful way. Menakem states, "Perhaps the most damaging, yet least visible assault on black hearts is an ongoing lack of human regard" (Menakem, 75). In this study, forty percent reported that the Society of Jesus is a white institution, and eighty percent described the ways in which they do not feel a sense of belonging. The Society fails to show regard to Black Jesuits by not taking them seriously and refusing to acknowledge their experiences. White fragility, assimilation, double consciousness, and white allies emerged as the most common themes in the responses.

### *Confronting White Fragility*

Twelve respondents reported that they have lived in Jesuit communities where they were the only Black man. They reported significantly more covert racial microaggressions than overt racism. They also reported a lack of meaningful conversations about Jesuit racism within their communities but noted several conversations about racism in civil society. There is a line that Black Jesuits cannot cross with the white leadership and their white peers when holding them accountable for racist behavior. Robin states, "White fragility is a state in which even a minimum amount of

racial stress becomes intolerable, triggering a range of defensive moves" (DiAngelo (2016, 247).

The most frequent comments regarding white fragility surrounded the decision by some Black Jesuits to defy expectations that they would speak on behalf of Black people about race by refusing to do so. Speaking on behalf of the race as the Black "poster child" is an emotionally unsafe experience as reported by these men. Four respondents referred to that expectation as tokenism. One participant reported, "There is an unspoken expectation to make others comfortable at the expense of your own comfort or even emotional safety. There can be (rarely) overt racism, but it's often more subtle such as having you speak for the race or facing double standards from peers and superiors on how to live." They expressed that they are put on display as the ideal role model for the Black race. What is supposed to be a celebratory event of Black male excellence is one of the most dehumanizing experiences of their vocation.

In addition, this tokenism often serves to distance white Jesuits from complicity. Black Jesuits are aware of anti-Black forces within the Society and their small representation appears to be a racialized progression as members of an elite white institution who know that their minority status has nothing to do with Black excellence. Their minority status is due to the Society's disregard for Black men's lives and its unwillingness to promote vocations in Black communities.

In speaking truth to power about racism, respondents are subjected to being the "bad guy" when they criticize covert racist practices and comments. When Black Jesuits refuse to fall prey to this troublemaker narrative and fight against tokenism, they violate the terms and conditions that make white Jesuits feel comfortable at the expense of Black

Jesuits' emotional safety about anti-Black racism. Two respondents were accused of being racist and troublemakers after they confronted racist comments about them and other Black people. A participant recalled that he felt "misunderstood, judged and standards lowered because I was black. When I [spoke] up, I was labeled a 'racist.' When I kept silent, I was labeled the angry black man. In the end, I just be me and let the chips fall where they will." Another participant stated, "In these spaces, I have to be 'the bad guy' and push back against the covert racist practices and comments." The Society creates a hostile space where Black men cannot speak their truth because the Society fears Black men's brutal honesty about racial animus that disrupts the narratives of lies of a racially indifferent organization.

The fear of Black men's authenticity and exercising their dignity are understood as countercultural to what it means to be truly Jesuit and truly Catholic as reported by forty percent of the participants. Tokenism exposes an apathetic cultural dissonance between Black Jesuits and the white Jesuit hierarchy about Black men's lives. A participant stated, "You feel like a token Jesuit and you have to think twice before asking permission from the superior. Most times there are microaggressions from other brothers and in some cases from the superior. You do find a few Jesuits who treat you with dignity." The participants experience white fragility from their communities as indifference, self-denial, and detachment from Black men's lives. They report that Black men's lives are merely tolerated and that closes opportunities for deep awareness and sensitivity about the diversity of Black men's experiences.

*Assimilation*

Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, former superior general for the Society of Jesus emphasized, "Given the diversity of cultures, of science, of ideologies and social movements, priests of the Society have to be men who manifest balance and breadth of view in their thinking, and who can communicate to others with credibility their own convictions regarding meaning and values" (Kolvenbach 2003, 72). Kolvenbach was correct to insist that Jesuits have a moral and ethical responsibility to respond to God's diverse creation, but the American Jesuits' white male cultural bias falls short of authentically seeing Black men as fully formed human beings in the image of God.

Thirteen respondents reported that they are expected to conform to white male cultural norms and attitudes, and they acknowledge that this is the way of proceeding as a Jesuit. Resmaa Manekem calls this assimilation by a more poignant name—de-Blackening. Manekem states, "In the presence of white bodies, many of us dress, speak, and act in deliberately 'non-threatening' ways" (Menakem 102). He continues to say that "when talking with white people, we may carefully avoid topics we think might trigger their defenses, such as inequality, oppression, social issues, and especially race. Some of us never veer from small talk. We try to protect ourselves by protecting white people from their own fears about us" (102). In this study, the respondents described de-Blackening as a conscious and unconscious practice that delegitimizes Black culture as truly Catholic and Jesuit.

Menakem states, "Oppressed people often internalize the trauma-based values and strategies of their oppressors" (79). The respondents disclosed that being forced to become "white" in a Black body raises concerns about losing a sense of their blackness.

Every day, Black Jesuits must learn about their religious history and tradition from the perspective of white men. They are under constant scrutiny to keep faith with the white norms of the Society. This unnecessary burden may cause cognitive dissonance in which they feel responsible for the anti-Black racist experiences because they did not pray or work hard enough to be spiritually indifferent in those circumstances. The success of their formation is the ability to master white men's history, philosophy, and theology.

Black Jesuits face an irreconcilable choice between desiring to fit in as members of this religious community and recognizing their distinctiveness from the rest of the members. This conundrum is not unique to Black Jesuits because every Jesuit wrestles with the ontological polarities of participation and individuation. He is asked to distinguish his personal desires from God's will for him. The difference for Black Jesuits is that these ontological polarities in God-talk are racialized. They relinquish their blackness as an act of detachment to the whole Society and simultaneously deny what makes them unique as Black men. These distorted de-Blackening prayer practices reinforce that to be truly Jesuit and Catholic is to not be Black.

De-blackening presents concrete challenges for Black Jesuits in the way they proceed in a religious order cultivated by white male norms. To be fit for the Society, they must master white men's binary ways of apprehending the divine, interpreting texts, and demonizing others. This way of knowing through academic training is heavily policed by the leadership as academically rigorous to be a fully formed Jesuit.

Furthermore, Black Jesuits must deemphasize their Blackness when making truth claims by becoming the unattached inquirers of their racialized experiences. To bring attention to their Blackness violates some core Jesuit discernment practices in *The*

*Spiritual Exercises*: abnegation, self-denial, and detachment. Collectively, these conditions for prayer require that a Black Jesuit "must first deny himself so that, shedding his own personal inclinations, he may have that in mind which is in Christ Jesus" (Institute of Jesuit Sources 1990, 90). To be in Christ is self-emptying to the will of God but demonstrably for the sensibilities of white men.

Assimilation exacerbates the racialized trauma that Black Jesuits endure. They are constantly reminded that their ministry is to soothe the fears that white Jesuits have about them as a form of self-preservation. Self-preservation constrains the anger. To be fully formed in the Society of Jesus is to assimilate to this choiceless choice. One participant lamented, "I felt alone. I felt like an outcast. It was as though I was a stranger or I had to fight to fit in. That's why I left."

*Double consciousness*

The Society of Jesus is a white space that defines the terms and conditions of what it means to be Jesuit. The respondents report the internal conflict they experience regarding the double standard that equates Jesuit identity with white American Catholicism. In other words, Black Jesuits understand that the American Jesuit vocation is defined by a culturally white male institution. When Black Jesuits advocate a space for themselves, they are asking the white hierarchy for permission to center the Black experience and decenter the white power dynamic that demands that Black Jesuits conceal their story and have their story told by the white Jesuit hierarchy.

Living in Jesuit communities as the only Black person means navigating between the intersectionality of race and church. Black Jesuits experience this intersectionality as irreconcilable because of the Jesuits' complicity with white supremacy. Bryan

Massingale confirms this sentiment: “the Roman Catholic Church had the opportunity to depart from the structures of racism so rigidly imposed by the dominant society [and] to affirm the humanity and dignity of black people…it has backed off in deference to the sensitivities of the white Catholic community” (Massingale, 50). The respondents in this study feel the weight described by W.E.B. Du Bois*:*

> One ever feels his twoness--an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife--this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self. In this merging he wishes neither of the older selves to be lost. He would not Africanize America, for America has too much to teach the world and Africa. He would not bleach his Negro soul in a flood of white Americanism, for he knows the Negro blood has a message for this world. He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American, without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without having the doors of Opportunity closed roughly in his face. (Du Bois 1986, 364-365)

Afro-Caribbean Jesuits experience a lack of awareness of their Blackness that is radically different from African American Jesuits. They have been pushed to assimilate in the same racialized structure as their African American brothers, but they do not necessarily share the same experiences of anti-Black racism because of their Caribbean roots. A participant stated that “Another need for me is to know that there is a good awareness and sensitivity in terms of the diversity that exists within provinces among Black Jesuits. There is a significant difference between Afro-Caribbean Jesuits and African American Jesuits.” For Afro-Caribbean Jesuits, de-Blackening is a strange experience because some of them never had to police their “Black” behavior in a white supremacist institution before arriving in the United States and because they are phenotypically black like African Americans, they inherit the cruelty of anti-Blackness because of their skin color and hair texture.

*White Allies*

Institutionally, the Catholic Church has a history of colluding with white supremacy and excluding their Black Catholics from their full participation in the Church. Nevertheless, the Black Jesuits who participated in this project disclosed individual acts of antiracist behavior by some white Jesuits. What is remarkable about these encounters is that Black Jesuits recognize that to be a white antiracist Jesuit is a remarkable disposition and institutionally countercultural. The few white allies are primarily the younger men in formation who are studying to become priests and brothers. The Jesuit Antiracism Sodality (JARS) was a response by young Jesuits in formation to dismantle long term racism within the Society of Jesus.

Jose Camacho, S.J., Billy Critchley-Menor, S.J., Patrick Hyland, S.J., Jack McLinden, S.J., Joshua Peters, S.J., Patrick Saint-Jean, S.J., and Damian Torres-Botello, S.J. formally requested to have JARS officially recognized by the Provincial of the Midwest Province by convening a task force. These men in formation stated, "This task force would analyze where systemic racism is at work in our current way of proceeding and advise leadership on how to make systematic decisions to deepen our accountability to people of color. It is our hope that our work with Chicago ROAR will transform the Midwest Province, and in turn our apostolic works, into a truly anti-racist organization" (JARS Letter, 2019).

It is helpful to note that the institutionalization of JARS occurred at the height of the Jesuit controversy concerning its slave history. Better known as the GU272 Descendants Association, the Jesuits were forced to reckon with selling, owning, and contracting enslaved African Americans at Georgetown University (GU272 Descendants

Association). This is a truth, racial healing, and transformation effort in preserving the history of these people (GU272 Descendants Association). JARS coordinates its work with the GU272 Descendants Association. The Black Jesuits also formally aligned with these initiatives in their 2019 resolutions (*The Black Jesuits Resolutions* 2019)

According to Judith Herman, “to study psychological trauma is to come face to face both with human vulnerability in the natural world and with the capacity for evil in human nature. To study psychological trauma means bearing witness to horrible events” (Herman 1992, 1). The Black Jesuits have given an opportunity to white Jesuit allies in groups such as JARS to truly see what it is like to be a Black man in a religious order that cares so little about their humanity and the people they come from. As Paul said to the Corinthians, “We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed..." (2 Corinthians 4:8).

# CHAPTER 5

# SUMMARY

## Introduction

The purpose of this herusitic inquiry is to illuminate Black Jesuits' anti-Black experiences through a qualitative methodological research project. The fifteen participants responded to four open-ended questions within a three-week period via an online survey platform. The research questions, which asked the participants to reflect on their lived experiences, are as follows:

1. What do you believe about the current status of Black Jesuits in the Society of Jesus?
2. What is your opinion concerning the Jesuit leadership to have Black Jesuits serve in Black communities?
3. What do you believe are the needs of Black Jesuits and how is the Jesuit leadership responding to those needs?
4. How do you experience living in communities where you are the only Black person?

## Conclusions

This is the first study that examines the lived experiences of black men who are members of the largest religious order in the Roman Catholic Church. The study revealed that systemic distortion and restoration are the overarching themes that the Society of Jesus ought to consider to address anti-Black racism with its members and leadership.

## Systemic Distortion

Kwok Pui-Lan (pg. 56) says that "the assumption that the human experience of Western people is the norm for all people is not just an intellectual blind spot, but heavily influenced by the colonial experience." She also interrogates the Christian white male gaze that "downplayed the historical agency of Chinese people as they were acted upon and not actors." Pui-Lan's analysis of theological distortion resonates with Black Jesuits' statements that their church and religious community scandalizes the heart and soul of the Society of the Jesus.

For centuries, the Jesuits used the Bible and the Christian faith to justify chattel slavery and white supremacy. Pui-Lan cites that Europeans justified colonial aggression based on Jesus's commission to go and make disciples of all nations in Matthew's gospel (Matthew 28:19) and the Acts of the Apostles. She makes the case that the Bible was eventually employed as a function to support Western beliefs about the inferiority and deficiency of "heathen" cultures (61). Historically, the Jesuits regarded Black people as essentially foreigners who had to be converted and assimilated into the white Catholic church. The men in this study speak to this dynamic when they describe the ways their Blackness has been distorted through the exploitation of their race and culture.

That exploitation disorients and sometimes imprisons these men, who tried or are trying to live up to a racialized standard they can never meet: to be and act white. One's distorted self-perception is a prison accompanied by philosophical gymnastics to satisfy the white male gaze. This distortion creates the conditions by which Black Jesuits are forced to live in their communities.

When describing their anti-black racism experiences in their communities, Black Jesuits use words similar to those used for Jesuit discernment. The racialized trauma from assimilating is described as *detachment* from the Black community, *self-denial* of their Blackness, and an *indifference* to the Black struggle for civil rights. Those same words—detachment, self-denial, and indifference—are the heart and soul of the spiritual life for Jesuits.

These conditions for prayer prepare Jesuits to suspend any misguided self-interests and self-fulling prophecies in serving the greater good of Christ. Detachment is a disinvestment of the self (The Institute of Jesuit Sources 1990, 91). Self-denial constrains personal desires (91). Indifference is the readiness for service without opposition (101). These interior dispositions align with the Jesuits' three vows: poverty, chastity, and obedience. The three conditions of prayer prevent preaching and serving the poor from becoming entangled with midguided desires, so that the Jesuit is ready to be missioned anywhere at any point in time.

These discernment distortions perpetuate St. Ignatius's preoccupation with pride as a sinful disposition. Pride as sin influenced much of Western Christianity as a dominating force needing constraint. Twentieth-century Christian theologians such as Reinold Niebuhr believed that pride fuels the drive to dominate others and demanded that the oppressed, such as African Americans, patiently wait for their liberation (West 2006, 10). But pride is in the eyes of the privileged. This distortion of pride conceals cruelty and paternalism against non-white male persons. Niebuhr's view of pride as a sin conceals the privilege of dominant cultures, such as the American Jesuits. For the oppressed, pride is self- and communitarian-love that are necessary conditions to survive

in a society that has no value for their lives. The Eurocentric perspective of pride retraumatizes Black self-actualization where self-love and racial pride are perceived as a threat.

St. Ignatius's instruction to empty one's soul to Christ as a way of proceeding has been used to silence Black men's uncomfortable truths about racist behavior from white Jesuits or to dismiss those concerns as a lack of will for apostolic effectiveness. Apostolic effectiveness takes place in communal discernment. It is the sacred space where Jesuits are missioned for new ministries where they have real contact with the people of God to preach the Gospels. Sometimes, this process distorts the fact that Black Jesuits have a racial and cultural particularity that impacts their relationship with the community and the white leadership who mission them to new ministries.

## Oppression and Suppression

*Oppression* and *suppression* are not synonymous but are often referenced interchangeably. Oppression and suppression damage and distort the capacity for individuals to fully live their lives with integrity and dignity. What distinguishes oppression and suppression are the social and psychological traumas that burden an oppressed persons' mind, body, and spirit.

Oppression—a social phenomenon—is the harsh and unfair treatment of a group of people as the result of power dynamics in society. Isabel Wilkerson understands that oppression does the dirty work of a caste system. She states,

> A caste system is an artificial construction, a fixed and embedded ranking of human value that sets the presumed supremacy of one group against the presumed inferiority of other groups on the basis of ancestry and often immutable traits, traits that would be neutral in the abstract but are ascribed life-and-death meaning in a hierarchy favoring the dominate caste whose forebears designed it. (Wilkerson 2020, 17)

James Cone centered the Jesus of Nazareth as the liberative lens for Black people—the lowest people in the American caste system—because "He is the liberator whose life was shaped by God's coming justice for all, especially the poor" (Cone 2018, 67). Ultimately, Jesus was crucified for humanizing the oppressed. Suppression is the internalized harm that oppressed people harbor within themselves as a way to preserve their sense of dignity while exuding the false impression that their social condition is palatable.

Suppression—a psychological phenomenon—is a conscious effort to prevent oppressed people from expressing their emotions and lived experiences by force. Moreover, *suppression* prevents truths from being known and invariably creates a narrative of lies about the conditions of the oppressed. The oppressed become invisible through the vestiges of suppression. Joseph Brown, SJ, states that Black Catholics experience racial suppression that demands the erasure of their African cultural values (Brown 1991, 86). He describes this suppression as "placing a strain on the psychic health system of countless women and men who sought to realize a calling within the American Roman Catholic Church. In order to be true to the calling of the Spirit, the individual had to suppress her or his voice" (86). This suggests that suppression is an internal dehumanization compounded by the external forces of oppression whereby the lowest caste of people negotiate between public and private debasement.

The American Jesuits' troubled history with Black Americans says something about this religious order's successful ascension from a despised religious community to being indistinguishably American. Today, it seems unimaginable that the Society of Jesus came from the lowest caste of European immigrants in the eighteenth century and

elevated itself to the white-dominant caste in the United States. In becoming white, they became white supremacists. They became white supremacists with theological and political convictions that African people were inferior, demonic, unintelligible, and lacking moral aptitude. In becoming white, they bought, sold, and contracted African people for their labor. They were slaveholders and not abolitionists. James Baldwin (1985) poignantly called this the "price of the ticket." He noted that "The price the white American paid for the ticket was to become white and in the main, nothing more than that, or, as he was to insist, nothing else. This incredibly limited not say dimwitted ambition has choked many a human being to death here: and this I contend, is because the white American has never accepted the real reasons for his journey" (Baldwin 1985, 12). For these reasons, it was unconceivable for former human property and supposedly culturally depraved men to receive holy orders to become Jesuit priests. Through external political forces of the Civil Rights Movement, the Jesuits reluctantly desegrated their institutions and admitted a few Black men for the first time beginning in the 1940s. These Black vocations were not made public.

In 1971, the racism experiences of two Black Jesuits were published for the first time. This candid discussion between Ted Cunningham and Bart Rousseve, facilitated by George Riemer (a former white Jesuit) and Paul J. Weber (then a current white Jesuit), illustrated the dynamic relationship between the oppression and suppression of "being Black" and "thinking Black" as a Jesuit (Reimer 1971). The Black Jesuits in this study expressed the ways that racial oppression and suppression created a double burden as they strove to fulfill their religious vocation authentically.

The common area of concern for the respondents in dealing with harsh treatment based on race and color is the normalization of their marginalization and neglect. Fourteen out of fifteen respondents identified marginalization as a form of cruelty and consider it the most significant issue for this question. The respondents described this cruelty as tearing apart their experiences and causing estrangement and isolation within the community. When sharing their experiences of racism, they discussed the distortion of living a vowed life while accommodating the fragility of the white Jesuit hierarchy. The abuse of power manifests as perpetual, excessive neglect within Jesuit communities. They consider their experiences to be distortions of what it means to be truly Jesuit and Catholic.

Half of the respondents discussed being tokenized. This tokenization displays a double standard and an active, conscious effort by Black Jesuits to bury their challenges with smiles and guiles. Half of the respondents described these conditions within the Society as the un-naming of anti-Black racist truths to protect the Jesuit way of proceeding. This dishonesty suggests racial justice and solidarity with the Black experience in the Society of Jesus is propaganda. Tokenization creates an institutional cognitive dissonance between the cruelty these men face from within the Society and the public persona of recognition and acceptance. These respondents state that tokenism demands that they relinquish their cultural identity and experiences to be accepted as fit for the white power structure of the Society.

This estrangement causes loneliness because Black Jesuits are up against generations of distortions about their sexuality and race. This is the space where they experience a balancing act between self-love and shame because their personal salvation

is bound to the ontological polarity between individuation and participation. Moreso than Black theology, womanist and feminist theology directly interrogate the interrelationships between gender, race, class, and sexuality. This theological perspective interrogates the whole person without diminishing particularities for a false sense of universalisms.

## Restoration

Restoration implies a return to the whole; and somewhere along the way, the whole splintered into tattered pieces of clothing scattered across the ground; carried by the wind; soaked in rain; hardened in snow and ice; scorched in the summer heat, while I waded in the river. When I pick up one of these pieces, I only see a small part of its original story. I do not know exactly where the other pieces ought to go, and if I found them I would not know exactly where to stitch them. When I stitch several pieces together, it does not look like the way I imagined. Restoration is both heartwarming and alarming. It is a journey that asks, "Who am I? Where do I come from? Where do I go from here? Where is God in all this restorative drama? I propose that restoration begins with knowledge of how a person arrives in history, a connection with a place of significance, and the holy envy that inspires them in their search for truth.

Black Jesuits are mindful of this restoration through the cultures of their birth and the Christian faith. Delores Williams (1993) says that we must be mindful that our cultural heritage of slavery "patterned by biblical motifs, is the context of the early Christian origins of African Americans" (132). This is a hard pill to swallow because slave history is entangled with distortions about Black bodies, Black sexuality, Black intellect, Black religion, and African traditional cultures. Black Jesuits are members of an institution that used their ancestors' bodies as economic commodities and distorted

African culture and religions by institutionalizing white body supremacy as the body of Christ. When Black Jesuits report that the Society needs to respect Black culture, they seek biblical affirmation of their history and culture "that transmitted to slaves the hope for liberation and the belief that God's power sustained their survival struggle" (132).

For Black Jesuits, the ultimate concern as religious Catholics in the Society of Jesus comes directly from its founder, St. Ignatius of Loyola. Jesuit spirituality is grounded in the reality that God loves us fiercely, passionately, and unconditionally. Because of this love, God's desires and hopes for us are based on who we are: our gifts, talents, preferences, and joys. What God wants for us is the same as our deepest desires. The *who we are* is our cultural particularity in a church that too often vigorously erases our African and enslaved histories. Black Catholics in the United States believe in the mystical body of Christ that posits us as rightful beneficiaries of the universality of Christ's love and salvation.

Thea Bowman was a proud African American Catholic nun when she made this statement before the Catholic Bishops in 1989:

> What does it mean to be Black and Catholic? It means that I come to my Church fully functioning. That doesn't frighten you, does it? I come to my Church fully functioning. I bring myself; my black self, all that I am, all that I have, all that I hope to become. I bring my whole history, my traditions, my experience, my culture, my African-American song and dance and gesture and movement and teaching and preaching and healing and responsibility—as gifts to the Church. (Bowman 1989, 3)

The gifts, talents, preferences, and joys are our myriad sensate responses of our true selves. We have been involved in this ultimate concern within the Roman Catholic Church while it does not love us back. Black Catholics are not monolithic, but our shared history of chattel slavery, racism, mass incarceration, and police brutality has much to say

about what it means to struggle, sacrifice, and survive as priests, brothers, and scholastics, and this takes place in the same space with all Jesuits. The Jesuit community ought to be the restorative place of their shared history.

The first Jesuits, led by their charismatic leader, St. Ignatius of Loyola, were Francisco Xavier, Alfonso Salmeron, Diego Laínez, and Nicolás Bobadilla from Spain; Peter Faber from France; and Simão Rodrigues from Portugal (O'Malley 1993, 29-32). Their stories are the first ones Jesuits learn about when they enter the novitiate. When they arrive at the novitiate, they become part of an extraordinary history of men who simply desired to imitate Christ by serving the poor and vulnerable—to give themselves completely to the will of God in community with men for others through faith.

Barbara Brown Taylor states that "engaging the faith of others is the best way to grow your own" (Taylor 2019, 187) because relationships are more valuable than religion. She suggests that Jesus was more interested in how people lived than what they believed. The gospel of Matthew states that Jesus envisions goats and sheep grazing together, sleeping under the same stars, and drinking from the same streams (Matthew 25:31-46). In the end, "the criteria for telling them apart will have nothing to do with their beliefs or their allegiances and everything to do with how they have treated the least important people in their lives" (Taylor 2019, 209).

Black Jesuits bring the richness of their cultures of origin to the banquet. God knew them when they were in their mother's womb. They were fully formed, created in the image of God, and felt a calling to serve as disciples of Christ. By the power of the Holy Spirit, they made that awesome decision to enter the Society to become one in the tapestry of the body of Christ.

In the end, restoration is cyclical. Restoration is a recalibration of the past, present, and future. It entails making peace with our cultures of origin and returning to the places that embody the wisdom of our faith and cultures. The men in this study often reflect the necessity and grace of being in touch with their whole selves as cultivated in the *Spiritual Exercises* through imagination, study, prayer, and reflection. I believe this is the essential meaning of St. Ignatius' principles and foundations.

The divine mystery has a profound sense of humor in the wilderness because laughter mocks the absurdity of racial oppression. The healing is the laughter. We have many humorous stories regarding the ways my people made a way out of no way in this restorative drama. Laughter reunites us and helps us become whole.

## Research Contributions

The Jesuit Archives and Research Center (JARC) is the only institution in the United States that houses the complete records of American Jesuits. The JARC's five functions are as follows:

- Serves an essential function of the intellectual apostolate of the Society as a 'place of memory.'
- Provides a secure, organized repository for the patrimony of documents and artifacts. This preserves the history of a province, its communities, and apostolic works, as well as the lives of its members. Thus, the Society of Jesus may understand its past and animate its present and future endeavors.
- Supports the current administration of a province and its apostolic mission.
- Makes resources of history and spirituality available to help with the cultivation of Jesuit identity and the evangelization of cultures.
- Preserves the patrimony of the Society of Jesus in order to transmit it to future generations of Jesuits, who will act as emissaries to the culture at large (JARC)

This study is one of few projects that undertakes the preservation of Black men's narratives in the Society of Jesus. Black men's stories are the Jesuit story. Black men's

history is Jesuit history. Black men's spirituality is Jesuit spirituality. Black men's lives matter in the collective memory of American Jesuit history.

In the summer of 2016, *The Journal of African American History* published a special issue about the activism of African American Catholics for civil rights. The issue published essays about notable Black Catholic organizations and figures such as the Oblate Sisters of Providence and the Josephite Father (Morrow 2016, 261-287); priest and social activist Fr. Boniface Hardin (Chism & Walton 2016, 288-311); long-serving president of Xavier University in New Orleans, LA Norman C. Francis (De Cuir 2016, 312-334); and numerous Black, Catholic, racial-justice campaigns. This publication was a significant milestone for Black and African American studies because the Black Catholic narrative is limited in the collective memory of Black/African American life and history. This project aims to close that gap in the discourse of Black/African American studies.

## Areas of Research for Further Inquiry

Black Jesuits are a diverse group of men. They are native US citizens, immigrants, and first-generation US citizens. These identities were expressed in a variety of circumstances that this study did not undertake.

The non-US-born Black Jesuits emphasized the nuance required to articulate their blackness and racist experiences because of their foreign status. For these men, what it means to be Black and to have a racist experience is dominated through the lens of Black people who were born in the United States. They have psycho-spiritual needs that are not addressed because of this dual identity. Some of them come from Black-majority nations and coming to the United States provides their first genuine experience of white

supremacy and black hatred. Without their choosing, they become *Black* and are forced to understand their identity through a racialized lens because of their skin color and hair texture. This issue requires further investigation.

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# APPENDIX A

# INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

SEATTLEU
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

Admin 201 | 206-296-2585
irb@seattleu.edu

September 28, 2021

Lorenzo McDuffie
School of Theology and Ministry
Seattle University

Dear Lorenzo,

Your study **Fully Formed: To Be Black and Jesuit** meets exemption criteria from IRB review in compliance with **45CFR46.104(d)**:

2) Research that includes only interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if (i) the investigator records information in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects cannot readily be ascertained (directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects); (ii) any disclosure of the data outside the research would not reasonably place subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or damage the subjects' financial standing, employability, educational advancement, or reputation; or (iii) the investigator records information in such a manner that the participant's identity can readily be ascertained, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review.

Note that a letter of exemption does **not** mean IRB "approval." *Do not include statements for publication or otherwise that the SU IRB has "reviewed and approved" this study*; rather, say the SU IRB has "determined the study to be exempt from IRB review in accordance with federal regulation criteria." Please retain this letter with your study files.

If your project alters in nature or scope, contact the IRB right away. If you have any questions, I'm happy to assist.

Best wishes,

Andrea McDowell, PhD
IRB Administrator

cc: Dr. Erica Martin, Faculty Adviser