



National Black Sisters' Conference

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“HOLD UP THE LIGHT”

(Statement issued by the National Black Sisters' Conference declaring that the Catholic Church in the United States is still a racist institution.)

Introduction

Webster's Dictionary defines racism as prejudice, discrimination or antagonism directed against a person or peoples on the basis of their particular racial or ethnic group.

This definition, however, fails to address the role that systems and institutions play in keeping racism alive and well. A more precise definition would be that **“racial prejudice plus the misuse of power by systems and institutions equals racism”**.

Webster goes on to define a “racist” as someone who feels and shows their discrimination, their prejudices or antagonism against a person or a group”.

This is more accurately a definition for someone who may be prejudiced but not necessarily racist.

In order for someone to be a racist, that person has to have the backing and enforcement of laws and customs that continue to relegate people of color to second class citizenship, restricting their access to the guaranteed rights of all citizens under the Constitution of the United States. Therefore, people of color can definitely be prejudice but they cannot be racist.

NBSC Issues a clarion warning to the Catholic Church

In the old Negro Spiritual, "Hold Up The Light", the light is held up to expose the darkness of evil and sin, thereby destroying its power.

The National Black Sisters' Conference is compelled, as members of the Body of Christ, to once again issue a clarion warning to our Church by holding up the light against the sin of racism that is still alive and well in the Catholic Church today.

We are holding up the light.

White Catholics have perpetuated racist acts and practices since the first Catholics set foot on this continent, armed with Papal Bulls sanctioning and blessing the enslavement of Africans, and the removal of Native Peoples from their lands, all in the name of Christianity.

During the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 60s, Black Catholics continued to confront racism, segregation, Jim Crow laws, disenfranchisement, police brutality and socioeconomic inequality in society and in the Catholic Church.

The leadership of the Catholic Church for the most part remained silent and disinvested.

We are holding up the light.

In this moment of dual life-threatening pandemics; COVID 19 and RACISM, the voice of the Church in America is, for the most part, eerily silent when it comes to the racial unrest in this country. Very few bishops have spoken out in support of the peaceful demonstrations by the Black Lives Matter Movement; very few have called out the racism and hypocrisy of many white Catholic priests and laity. Sadly, the leadership of the church is not addressing the slaughter of Black lives in the streets of our cities by those sworn to serve and protect as a pro-life issue.

Pope Francis has stated emphatically that: "We cannot close our eyes to any form of racism or exclusion while pretending to defend the sacredness of every human life." To be pro-life must include all violations against the sacredness of life, and not just life in the womb.

We are holding up the light.

Why hasn't the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) publicly issued a strong statement in support of the courageous actions of their brother bishops, Archbishop Wilton Gregory of Washington, D.C., and Bishop Mark Seitz of El Paso Texas, as well as other bishops and priests, who support the Black Lives Matter movement by "holding up the light" on the sin

of racism that is being perpetrated against Black Americans and other people of color in this country?

Every January tens of thousands of Catholics gather in the nation's Capital to demonstrate against abortion. Will we ever see the day when tens of thousands of Catholics will gather to protest the sin of racism, which aborts the lives of millions of people of color every day in this country?

If we, as Catholics, are to truly "Open Wide Our Hearts", we must hold up the Light of Christ against the sin of racism. We must speak the truth not only in love but we must speak the truth forthrightly about the complicit, systemic, and structural racism that continues to exist in the American Catholic Church today.

We must hold up the Light to it, expose it, condemn it and eradicate it, or it will make a fallacy of all that we profess as members of the one body of Christ.

Until that day comes, we, The National Black Sisters' Conference, will continue to hold up the light against the sin of racism in our Church, which we love; and to which we have dedicated our lives.

We will hold up the light for all to see!

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