

BISHOPS OPPOSE RACISM

MARCH 6, 1989

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Louisiana Blessed by Racial and Cultural Diversity

Louisiana has been richly blessed by the racial and cultural diversity of its citizens. The recognition of this diversity as a blessing has been largely responsible for the progress towards a caring and vibrant society. Conversely, wherever there has been or is lack of racial justice and harmony, there has been stagnation or even regression in development.

The recognition of the value of a culture and cultural diversity rests ultimately on our faith in God as our Creator. Culture is the expression of a group's belief in its worth and the dignity of every person in that group. Our heritage as Catholics includes the basic truth that the dignity of every group and of every person is derived directly from God as one of His children. We are God's people by creation.

That fundamental truth involves equally basic responsibilities. The Bishops of Louisiana stated these responsibilities on May 1, 1984, "As God's people, we are called to care for and to help one another achieve the fullness of life that the gift of salvation promises. As Christians, we see through external characteristics to the bond of our common heritage as children of God; He has called us into existence and sees each person as His own" ("Confronting with Courageous Hearts").

As disciples of Christ we proclaim Him as the unique "image of the invisible God" (Col. 1:15) and rejoice that He manifested God's being by assuming "the condition of a slave and became as men are" (Phil. 2:7). Jesus assumed our human nature so that we can share in His divine nature. To question the full equality of any person is to deny the reason for the Incarnation.

The Holy Father, by his travels to every continent and to practically every nation, has emphasized our belief in the equality of all persons. In his recent visit to this country and specifically by his visit to New Orleans, he proclaimed brilliantly our belief in the equality of all persons in the Church – "there is no white Church, there is no black Church, there is no American Church; there is only the Church of Jesus Christ" (Address to the Black Catholics, Sept. 12, 1987).

The Church asserts this equality as a creative bond for the human family. The Holy Father proclaimed this fact to the whole world when he addressed the United Nations on July 7, 1984, in these words, "For the Church, this equality, which is rooted in man's being, acquires the dimension of an altogether special brotherhood through the Incarnation of the Son of God...In the Redemption effected by Jesus Christ, the Church sees a further basis of the rights and duties of the human person." The importance of this statement was emphasized by its inclusion in the recent special letter issued by the Pontifical Commission on Justice and Peace entitled, "The Church and Racism, Towards a More Fraternal Society."

We can attain and enjoy the "more abundant life" that Jesus offers to us only if we strive together, as equals, in that pilgrimage of life.

Bishops of Louisiana

Most Rev. Francis B. Schulte
Archbishop of New Orleans

Most Rev. Philip M. Hannan
Former Archbishop of New Orleans

Most Rev. Nicholas D'Antonio, OFM
Vicar General
Archdiocese of New Orleans

Most Rev. Harold R. Perry, SVD
Auxiliary Bishop of New Orleans

Most Rev. Lawrence P. Graves
Former Bishop of
Alexandria-Shreveport

Most Rev. Warren L. Boudreaux
Bishop of Houma Thibodaux

Most Rev. Gerard L. Frey
Bishop of Lafayette

Most Rev. William B. Friend
Bishop of Shreveport

Most Rev. Jude Speyrer
Bishop of Lake Charles

Most Rev. Stanley J. Ott
Bishop of Baton Rouge

Most Rev. John C. Favalora
Bishop of Alexandria

Most Rev. Harry J. Flynn
Coadjutor Bishop of Lafayette