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by NCR Staff

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A new Pew study highlights the often-distinctive religious beliefs, practices and experiences of the approximate 3 million Black Catholics in the United States — about 4% of the nation's Catholics. The study, says Villanova University professor Tia Noelle Pratt, is critical to national, diocesan and parish leaders in the U.S. church. And our editorial staff says that the church must do more to proclaim its message of racial justice and prioritize racism among other social justice issues.

The best way for Catholics to address racism is to stop being racist. The Catholic response to the Russo-Ukrainian war has again reminded me that white Catholicism and white supremacy are attached at the hip. White Catholicism is racist to the core.



I read recently that 13,000 Afghan newborns have died from malnutrition in 2022. That is an American crime, yet where are all of the Catholics obsessed with Afghanistan the way they are with Ukraine?

It is huge that Cardinal Pietro Parolin praised the racist, genocidal United Arab Emirates in Dubai while lamenting the war on Ukraine in the same speech. Is the Holy See blatant hypocrisy not something that Catholic antiracists should address?

It seems to me that the global decline of white Catholicism is the only real hope for Catholic antiracism. I'm sure that there are many good white Catholics who would like to "prioritize racism." God bless them, but as for this Black Catholic, Ukraine has shattered what little remaining hope I had in the potential of white Catholicism to change.

JEFFREY JONES

Hamburg, New York

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Why Pew's new study on Black Catholicism is critical for U.S. church leaders is a well-written opinion piece breaking down the recent Pew report with an emphasis on the

church hierarchy taking positive action. History tells us this is not going to happen. Why?

Decades ago, there were many more Black Catholics in the church yet they didn't find a welcome home and left taking their progeny with them. This happened and continues among Hispanic, Asian, Indigenous and white Catholics because the church is viewed as irrelevant to their lives in addition to the stream of abuses driving even otherwise reliable Catholics from the church. While the issue is the U.S. Catholic Church has done little or nothing for Black Catholics, many minorities in the church are equally affected. A Pew survey would likely conclude Hispanics mostly attend Hispanic Catholic Churches.

Sadly, the author's fervent appeal will likely fall on deaf ears because the Catholic hierarchy has no vision of what it means to "be church" other than the majority white male model handed down to them by generations of staid, old white males which constructed the church culture in which too many merely exist, mindlessly going through the rubrics of being a "good Catholic" for the purpose of attaining heaven. Little can be done "about the church" if solutions aren't agreed upon and implemented in a cohesive manner.

The Pew report will find itself on the dust heap of many others. It may be useful among academics though bishops and priests won't place value in it. The culture wars need attention. The national eucharistic revival/festival demands their attention. The synod on synods must be endured then resisted in the home dioceses of those who oppose Pope Francis' efforts to reform the "church always in need of reform." Reform doesn't happen if it's not accepted. Black Catholics, no all Catholics, are largely left to find their way to heaven. They reap what they sow.

MICHAEL J. McDERMOTT

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What I find truly sad is while this article talks about how African-Americans are erased from discourse about the Catholic Church, the author and people interviewed

totally ignore the Eastern Catholic Churches. In my church (the Maronite Church) we have African-American priests and one is a professor. Further, we have two Eastern Catholic Churches that are Sub-Saharan based (the Ethiopian Catholic and the Eritrean Catholic Churches).

Though both have a number of parishes, neither have eparchs or exarchs (bishops) to formally organize them here in North America. These Eastern Catholic Churches are the only ones that still have a college on the Vatican grounds; the Ethiopian Oriental Catholic College and Seminary.

My point in writing is that I hope as you bring African-American Catholics to the forefront such as Bishop James Augustine Healy (1830–1900) who was consecrated as Bishop of Portland, Maine, on June 2, 1875, making him the first African-American Roman Catholic bishop in the United States; that you not forget that there are African-based Eastern Catholic Churches that date to the time of the Apostles. And there are other Eastern Catholic Churches that have African-American members who are fully integrated into their churches.

It would be truly wonderful to have many more African-American priests and deacons become bi-ritual, and for the African-American Roman bishops to become patrons of the Eastern Catholic Churches and help them become more firmly established here in the United States and North America. On the flip side of this, it is my hope that Hispanic Catholic community to establish a deeper understanding of the Mozarabic Rite (Bragan Rite in the Portuguese speaking Community) and practice.

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