



# 2010 SANTA CLARA LECTURE

BRYAN N. MASSINGALE

SANTA CLARA UNIVERSITY

NOVEMBER 11, 2010



**IGNATIANT CENTER**  
FOR JESUIT EDUCATION

**2010 Santa Clara Lecture**  
**Cross-Racial Solidarity: Insights from and Challenges to Catholic  
Social Thought**

Bryan N. Massingale  
Santa Clara University, November 11, 2010

Wow, thank you, Paul. Thank you all. Look at the room tonight. This is really awesome. And good to see so many students here even though I know you're here because you're kind of blackmailed because you had to write a reflection paper or something like that. Don't worry, I'm going to make it easy for you. I'm going to outline and tell you exactly what you need to say to get an "A" on that reflection paper, so just listen carefully. First, I just want to thank you all for being here. I want to especially thank the Ignatian Center here at Santa Clara University for this wonderful opportunity, and for this distinguished lecture series.

When I looked at the list of past lecturers, it really does read like a who's who of Catholic theology, and I just want to salute the Santa Clara University for providing this forum for Catholic intellectual discourse which is a such a valuable and necessary service for the church, for our society, and for the academy.

Tonight's lecture is entitled "Cross-Racial Solidarity: Insights from and Challenges to Catholic Social Thought." This lecture tonight represents a bit of a risk for me, and therefore, a bit of a risk for you as well. Rather than simply take something off the shelf or off the computer that I've already done, I wanted to do something which represents the next frontier among my own theological thinking.

I have long wrestled with how to reflect upon and help achieve an authentic cross-racial solidarity. Now, the impetus for this concern is both intellectual and existential. I teach a course at Marquette entitled "Malcolm, Martin, Baldwin, and the Church." It's very popular, but it's very unusual. Each of these three seminal figures from the American

---

Civil Rights Movement articulates the challenge that inspires my current thinking and preoccupation in the topic for tonight's lecture.

First, there are the final thoughts authored by Martin Luther King in a work published after his death where he spoke of the challenge of building a world of justice. He said, "There is no easy way to build a world where men and women can live together, where each has his own job and house, and where all children can receive as much education as their minds can absorb. But if such a world is to be created in our lifetime, it'll be done in the United States by Negroes and whites of good will."

Then there's a summons given by James Baldwin, who at the end of his classic work, *The Fire Next Time*, after a searing exposition of American race relations, placed his hope in an interracial crusade to rescue the nation from the fate for which it is responsible. He writes, "If we, and now I mean the relatively conscious whites and the relatively conscious blacks, who must like lovers insist on or create the consciousness of others, if we do not falter in our duty now, we may be able, handful that we are, to end the racial nightmare, and achieve our country and change the history of the world."

Even Malcolm X, a figure much misunderstood as a purveyor of racial hatred, realized that the hope for racial justice lay in a multiracial coalition of blacks and whites who would work together toward a common goal.

He writes, "I tell sincere white people 'work in conjunction with us—each of us working among our own kind.' Let them work trying to convert other white people who are thinking and acting so racist. ... Working separately, the sincere white people and sincere black people actually will be working together. In our mutual sincerity, we might be able to show a road to the salvation of America's very soul."

Now, what each of these seminal figures expresses is the conviction that the unfinished work of racial justice and equality, the solution to

American's racial tensions, the visions, and injustices, depended upon achieving an interracial community engaged in a joint and common struggle. I paraphrase this in the book that Paul Crowley just quoted from, raising the question, "How do we struggle together against an evil that harms us all, though in different ways?"

That question, and the effort to address it in more precise and helpful ways, represents the frontier of my current thoughts and reflections and the challenge of racial justice in a light of religious faith. I've already written a book on this topic, and tonight's lecture is my way of feeling my way into the next step.

Now, I'm going to admit at the outset that what I will offer this evening is not an entirely finished product, which, when I came off the plane and someone gave me the copy of last year's lecture, I said, "Oh my God, I gotta measure up to this." My thoughts are still forming, and what I offer is more a suggestion than definitive.

To put this in the vernacular, what you're getting tonight is really breaking news, parts of which I was editing even before I came today. So you're getting the latest breaking news on what I'm thinking. Now, I want to develop my thoughts tonight in four moves.

Those of you who have to write the reflection paper, this is your moment here. This is the outline. I'm making it easy for you. First—and you can see them all of a sudden scribbling it down right now—first, I'm going to highlight the continuing challenge of racial tensions and divisions among us, even post-Obama, and describe the encroaching tribalism that seems to be shadowing us in the United States.

Second, I will present the vision of solidarity that emerges in Catholic social teaching as a response to a world of both deep interdependence and worrisome fragmentation. Third, I will show how that vision of solidarity, as important as it is, is not deep enough to facilitate the kind of joint struggle envisioned and called for by King, Baldwin, and Malcolm

because it doesn't take into account the deep racial malformation that we all receive as members of American society and western culture.

And then finally, I will highlight my own schema of racial justice conversion and discuss one aspect of cultivating the cross-racial solidarity that's needed for effective common struggle and deep social transformation. Now, in case you missed that, before each part I'll tell you this is Part One, Part Two, Part Three, Part Four. You can say thank you. Gratitude is a Christian virtue too.

Now, one further note before I begin, and that concerns my reasons for using the term cross-racial as opposed to the more common interracial. Interracial all too often refers only to the black-white relationship, and this challenge is still real.

The black-white divide, as I argue in my book, is an archetypal divide in the U.S. experience, and that divide has decisively shaped our nation in ways not matched by the estrangement between whites and other racial ethnic groups or even the tensions existing among various groups of color.

Yet in view of the emerging trifold division in America, and the growing complexity of racial and ethnic relationships, cross-racial seems to better describe the summons, task, and challenges of this emerging future. A handout I prepared has a chart of the trifold division [including Latinos], with a schema copyrighted by Eduardo Bonilla Silva. It's his contention that the category white is undergoing redefinition and expansion.

He talks about the Latin Americanization of American race relations, and he argues that the black-white binary is expanding to a tripartite divide. First, there are whites—now expanded to include the “new” whites such as Russians and Albanians, assimilated white Latinos, some multiracial groups, a few Asian-origin groups. Beneath that, a category he calls honorary whites is groups such as light-skinned Latinos, Japanese-Americans, Korean-Americans, Middle Eastern Americans, Filipino-Americans, and most multiracials. Then at the bottom is a group he calls

collective blacks who are comprised of blacks, dark-skinned Latinos, Native Americans, and African and West Indian immigrants.

And so America's racial divide is much more complex than simply a black-white binary. Yet there is still a deep continuity in current race relations despite our growing trifold division because as you notice, even in this Latin Americanization, whiteness still remains the privileged category and identity, and blackness is still the stigmatized marker for social burden and disadvantage.

So the term cross-racial signals complexity, yet without denigrating the importance of the black-white divide. It's a great influence in American culture. So that's just a reason why we're using cross-racial instead of interracial.

So with that, let's get to work. The first part: the contemporary challenge of the dark-skinned other. In the aftermath of the election of President Obama as the first person of African descent to our nation's highest office, many hailed the arrival of a post-racial America. This event symbolized for some a decisive turn away from the nation's ugly and tragic racial past, a past of racial exclusion, and the beginning of a new chapter marked by full inclusion of all citizens in the American project.

Now, in my book, I strongly disagree with and debunk that assessment, and I'm not going to repeat all that analysis now. I simply raise three points that mark America's current racial quagmire, one that represents both continuity with, and difference from, previous forms of U.S. racial stratification.

The first point I want to lift up about how racism is present in the U.S. today is looking at foreignness as the new cloak for racism. Any discussion of racial justice in America today must take into account the seismic shift occurring in the composition of our population. At least one out of every three Americans now, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, is Latino or nonwhite. Almost half of the nation's children under the age

of five are racial minorities. Many of our nation's urban centers are now majority minority—another bureaucratic term which means that not only are people of color the majority of the population, but also that no single racial or ethnic group comprises a numerical majority.

And because of immigration patterns and differing birth rates among the various racial and ethnic groups, it appears likely that by the middle of this century, if not sooner, whites will no longer be the majority race in the United States. Now, we say the middle of the century as if that's so far away. How many of you expect to be alive by the year 2050?

You can raise your hands higher. Let's get the visual here. This is important to realize, because most of the students that we are teaching now in colleges and universities, this is the world into which they will be living. This world, this future is not so future, and indeed, is already here.

Now, not only is an American society becoming more racial and culturally diverse, it is also becoming more religiously diverse. National Public Radio reported recently that there are now more Muslims than Jews living in the United States, and indeed the Muslim population is now more numerous than many Christian denominations whether taken singly or in combination. The same source also notes that Hindus and Buddhists are an ever more significant presence in the United States. Thus the landscape of U.S. society is being, and already has been, decisively altered. Our schools, our workplaces, our colleges, our universities are more racially, ethnically, and religiously varied in ways that many have never imagined, dreamed, hoped or longed for.

It is increasingly difficult to assert that the United States is a white, Christian nation. But if we're not a white, Christian nation, then who or what is really American? Frankly, many white Christians are anxious. A Pew study recently found that 56 percent of high school educated voters see newcomers as threatening.

Thus, while anti-black racism is still alive, as the face of America is

changing, so also is the face of American racism. Race still matters in America because for many Americans, dark skin is now also associated with a dangerous foreignness—one which is alien, if not hostile to, genuine American identity.

Now let's look at this and how this plays out. Consider how racial anxieties about a black president have been and continue to be discussed in coded reference to his foreignness. Consider the following incidents. Recall that late in the 2008 campaign, at a campaign rally for Senator McCain, someone objected, saying, "I don't trust him [meaning Obama]. He's an Arab." And recall Senator McCain's response: "No, ma'am. He's a decent family man." Think about that. As if Arab and decent family man were mutually exclusive and incompatible. Throughout that campaign and even continuing to this day, there's a similar voice to the effect that he, meaning Obama, doesn't see America the way "we" do—as if it's self-evident who we are and how we see America.

Therefore, in the rhetoric of the just-concluded political campaign, we need to take back our country and reclaim America. Note also the persistent yet false email-circulated rumors that Obama took his oath of office as a senator on the Qu'ran. Or the anxious reservation conveyed in the sentiment that his name is just too much like Osama. Or finally, in the most recent and most stubborn manifestation of this trend, the often-proven false but still persistent belief that Obama was born in Kenya, that he's not a native-born citizen, and that therefore he was elected illegally and exercises no legitimate authority—the so-called birther controversy.

All these events illustrate that it's now more acceptable to express reservations about President Obama's so-called foreignness than to express a direct racial prejudice. Foreignness, and increasingly Muslim, have become the new placeholders for race and black.

Now, the ways this dark-skinned foreignness is at play in the current immigration debates is almost too obvious to point out: the fervor over increasing our border security—though only one border is ever

mentioned, and last I checked, we had two—the passage of restrictive identity paper laws reminiscent of apartheid South Africa, or the scapegoating of undocumented workers for this country’s unemployment rate.

In all of these, it’s the face of the darker immigrant who is held up as the threat to our nation’s welfare and our nation’s value. This despite the fact that in several major U.S. cities, the majority of undocumented workers are Europeans from Ireland and Poland. Again, anxiety of foreignness is the new placeholder for race in 21st century America.

Now, it’s tempting to dismiss all of this as either naïve or ignorant bigotry, beyond the serious consideration of lawful persons, but to do so would miss the deeper point. Dark-skinned foreigners have become the living Rorschach inkblots upon which many whites project their deep-seated fears, resentments, and anxieties.

I’m using Rorschach here. It’s some of the most projected—any psych majors here? Okay, a couple, okay. So they show you these cards with these ambiguous little symbols on them and you read into them and tell them what you see. I had to take one for admission to the seminary, and I gave a wrong answer, I think, where I was getting frustrated. I said, “I see Donald Duck there and he’s having lunch with Minnie Mouse.”

They let me in anyway, so go figure. Just making sure you were listening yet. But the point is that dark-skinned foreigners become the living inkblots upon which many project their anxieties, their fears, over the U.S. no longer being a white, Christian nation.

A second way in which race is played out in America is the emergence of racial and ethnic tribalism. Given this anxiety about the dark-skinned others, it’s no surprise that it invokes from some a kind of tribalism, a kind of defense of self and group interest of what’s ours over against those others who are seen as threats to one’s entitlements.

This is the dynamic and fear at play over calls to reclaim America and take back our country that were so often heard this fall. Such tribalism, such defense of group interest of what's ours against these encroaching others carries the danger of social fragmentation and division, if not worse.

One noted social commentator put it this way: "My biggest fear as the nation moves into an inevitable browning is that there will be a very powerful minority overwhelmingly composed of Euro-Americans who will see themselves in significant danger as a consequence of the way democracy works, winner take all, and so they will begin to renege on some of the basic principles that created the United States and made it what it is.

This challenge of tribalism and fragmentation, defending what's ours against these others, is a reason why cultivating cross-racial solidarity must become a priority concern for Catholic social reflection and action.

And the final way I want to lift up how race still matters—even after the election of a black president—is the threat to American white identity. For some, the changing complexion of America is not only materially and economically threatening to defend what's ours against these others, it's also profoundly personally disorienting, a source of visceral fear and unease.

Many it seems are experiencing a sense of culture shock, and I use that term deliberately and intentionally. Culture shock refers to the anxiety, the confusion, the surprise, the disorientation, the uncertainty that's felt when people have to operate in an entirely different cultural or social environment, such as a foreign country.

As you heard, I got my doctorate in Italy, as I lived in Rome for three years, and it was really quite an exhilarating experience. I became very familiar with the way they pronounced my last name—"Mossin-gall-ay." It's very musical. I became kind of adept at mastering the bewildering

Roman traffic that when you step out in the street you just keep walking and you don't worry about the cars.

Friends of mine would visit, and we'd say, "Okay, we're gonna take the bus to the Vatican to see the Pope for a papal audience, and we're going to push our way onto the bus because it's going to be very crowded." They said, "What?" "Push." "But there's a nun sitting right there." "Don't worry, she's pushing too. Just push."

And so they're all having fun, "Oh, wow, this is so great," and it's great until you have to live there and then you go through a period where you begin to get very frustrated and upset and you want to know "why don't they do things the right way?" Meaning, the way we do them at home. That's a sense of culture shock—the anxiety, the disorientation, the confusion of having to negotiate an environment where you're not sure what the rules are.

Many Americans, I argue, because of the changing complexion of America's faces and voices, are experiencing culture shock in their own homeland as this country is being transformed into something strange, unfamiliar, foreign and threatening to them. So they react with confusion, anger and even disgust, sometimes heard in a sentiment, "I resent having to speak Spanish in my own country."

They feel that America is being morphed into something they don't understand and desire even less, and such feelings of unease, disorientation, confusion, and resentment are often manipulated by the unscrupulous demagogues that always arise in times of cultural upheaval and uncertainty. This is a constant dynamic in U.S. history: White Americans, especially those of a lower social economic class, are manipulated by social elites in order to maintain their class advantages by appealing to a spurious white privilege or white advantage.

In the state of Wisconsin we just elected a new senator, ousting Senator Feingold, who is a very fine public servant, I believe. Senator-elect Ron

Johnson said he was motivated to run for office because of President Obama's call to transform America, responding, "I don't want to transform America; I want to reclaim it." And so this multibillionaire was elected by a coalition of poor, anxious whites by appealing to their visceral unease over the changing voices and faces of America. Unfortunately, as I was telling someone earlier, we've seen this movie before.

My point is that the emerging multiracial, multicultural society is an America we've never been, and for some it's a profoundly disorienting source of visceral fear and existential unease which motivates passive and even active resistance. It makes manifest a latent anxiety among many: "Whose country is this? Who are we and what is America if we are not white and Christian?" And so even post-Obama, race still matters and the challenge of cross-racial solidarity still remains.

So with that then, let's go to Part Two and look at solidarity in Catholic social teaching.

Solidarity has emerged as a pivotal concept in Catholic social thought, especially during the pontificate of Pope John Paul II. He views solidarity as a moral and social virtue which stems from a reflection upon both the fact of human interdependence now that global societies are more interconnected than ever before, but also on the tragic reality of social and economic divisions in an interconnected world.

Thus, he defines solidarity as a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good, that is, to the good of all, and of each individual, because we are all really responsible for all. He further argues that solidarity is not a mere sentiment of vague feeling of distress in and of his plight. It is not, in other words, only sympathy or empathy for someone else's distress. Rather, Pope John Paul taught that solidarity's commitment to action will lead individuals and communities to recognize one another as persons, and then to work to overturn the structures of sin which embody the human vices of a desire for profit and thirst for power.

In other words, solidarity is based upon the deep-seated conviction that the concerns of the despised other are intimately bound up with our own. In the words of Martin Luther King, we are all bound together in a garment of mutual destiny. Thus, solidarity is present in a society when, as John Paul declares, “its members recognize one another as persons.”

And since the poor, racial outcasts, and the culturally marginalized are among those whose personhood is most often attacked, questioned, or reviled, the measure of solidarity is our sense of connection with, and commitment to, the poor and the excluded. It’s easy to be in solidarity with, and concern with, those who look like me, think like me, and act like me. The acid test is having that persevering determination to act on behalf of those who are culturally despised and stigmatized. So solidarity, in conclusion, entails a constant effort to build a human community where every social group participates equitably in social life and contributes its genius for the good of all. And in view of the seismic racial and ethnic demographic transformations occurring in the United States, cultivating and promoting the cause of solidarity is a major challenge facing religious believers and institutions.

But we need to talk about the obstacles to solidarity. Why does the call to solidarity often go unheeded? Why does it fall apparently upon deaf ears? Why is it so hard to have a firm and persevering determination on behalf of the excluded and despised? Why is cross-racial solidarity so difficult?

There are many reasons, greed being one, selfishness being another, but I would suggest that among the most pressing reasons for why this solidarity is so difficult and so often unheeded, is because of the effects of our socialization into a culture of racism.

One of the tragic effects of a preconscious racial conditioning is what one author calls social alexithymia, by which he simply means the inability to feel or relate to the suffering of the despised other. Such emotional callousness, such emotional blunting, the inability to feel what a despised

other feels maintains a situation of gross social disparity and widespread, though hidden, suffering.

Others describe this challenge by speaking of what they call a racially selective sympathy or indifference, by which they mean the unconscious failure to extend to a minority the same recognition of humanity, and hence the same sympathy and care, given as a matter of course to one's own group. This is why Jesse Jackson could declare at the height of Hurricane Katrina, "We in America have an amazing tolerance for black pain."

Now what I want to underscore is this. Such selective sympathy and indifference is formed and instilled without conscious awareness or advertence. It is the effect of being socialized in a culture that privileges whiteness and creates negative associations with darkness. We have all been socialized in tacit and hidden ways to associate dark skin with danger, stupidity, incompetence, immorality, promiscuity, criminality, and to be honest, with exotic thrill and erotic excitement.

Through our socialization in American society we have learned at a preconscious level to attach negative associations with dark skin color, associations which induce negative feelings about nonwhites. We know better, yet we still tense up as a black man or Latino approaches us.

When I wrote my book and I talked about unconscious racism, my students said the most difficult part of the book was when I talked about unconscious racism. They said, "It made me look at myself and admit things I didn't want to admit."

Because Marquette's campus is a very urban campus. The main street of Milwaukee dissects the campus. There are many homeless people in the neighborhood who happen to be young men of color. And even though they have never posed a threat to our students, the students wrote in their reflection papers how they tense up, how they walk the other way, how they walk faster.

That's what I mean about the fact that we've been socialized in unconscious and preconscious ways to associate dark skin color with danger. Another way in which this unconscious racism can manifest itself is in expressions of surprise at black competence or achievement. Some people are laughing; they know this story.

I tell a story that I once was giving a workshop for a community of women religious, and one of the women came up to me after my talk and said, "Father, you're so intelligent and so articulate, you must've been taught by one of our sisters." And I said, "No, I was taught by my mother and my father."

When she looked at me with confusion, I said, "Sister, would you have ever said to a white priest, 'You're so intelligent and so articulate, you must've been taught by one of our sisters.'? Didn't you assume that the only way I could be intelligent and articulate is if a white person taught me that?" She didn't talk to me for the rest of the weekend.

Now, she didn't intend to be racially insensitive. She was manifesting the unconscious racism of being socialized in a culture that attaches stigma to dark skin color. Or another way in which this manifests itself is the often well-meaning remark people have directed to me saying, "Father, when I look at you, I don't see black." Besides the obvious rhetorical, "Maybe you need to go and visit your eye doctor," I ask the question, "Why not?" What does blackness signal that the only constructive way to deal with it is to overlook it or dismiss it? Such associations are not deliberate, and when I'm saying this, please do not think I'm calling anyone bad or evil people. I'm saying, frankly, that we have all been malformed, deformed, and conformed by a society which at times forces us to act in ways that are contrary to our deepest convictions of equality and justice. And this leads to my difficulty with Catholic reflection on solidarity.

The problem is that Catholic teaching on solidarity does not deal with or take into sufficient account this deep culturally induced malformation

which afflicts whites and people of color, though in different ways, because people of color also are malformed by this and also have a sense of internalized racism that debilitates us.

Catholic social teaching on solidarity is overly rational. It's too abstract. It's too sterile. It's too antiseptic to reach the nonrational centers from which racism springs and which shape our personal identities. Catholic social teaching assumes that rational appeals will suffice to move people to racial conversion, authentic concern, and action for justice.

But racism is a system of identity formation. It affects our souls, our beings, and it's fueled by unconscious associations that become part of who we are. As one of my students once wrote in a reflection paper, "To be white is to be normal in a way that other people aren't." I thought that was very perceptive and indeed, then, if that sense of normality is challenged in form, and stems from an unconscious nonrational socialization, rational appeals alone will not suffice.

We need another account of solidarity that's rich enough to shape our deepest selves, to free us from an unrecognized captivity to a bondage at times dimly discerned but which leads to the fourth part toward a cross-racial solidarity.

What then does cross-racial solidarity entail? Nothing less than a decisive break with our racial malformation and our preconscious captivity. As Peruvian theologian Gustavo Gutierrez notes, evangelical conversion, gospel conversion, metanoia means a break with our mental categories, with our social group, our culture, class or race, with our affective attitudes, with our secret complicities with the world in which the poor do not occupy the place that God's preferential and gratuitous love entitles them to.

This conversion, this break with our mental and religious categories is a radical and shattering experience. So how does one facilitate it, and what would move one to undertake that journey? I call your attention to the

handout, to the other side of it now. After I wrote my book, it occurred to me I could summarize the whole thing in one chart, and that's what you have before you.

It's kind of sad that three years of life can be appearing on paper here. And what I want to argue is that the roots of a racial conversion, a conversion of racial justice, lie in the cultivation first of awareness. One needs to have an encounter with injustice, and we do that very well through various kinds of immersion activities and field activities, and service projects and things like that, but that's not enough.

We also need then to, as I call it, engage in lament or grief or mourning over our racial malformation in the presence of injustice. And then we need to cultivate a sense of compassion or transformative love, which is how I'm going to redefine solidarity. I then couple that with a faith reflection putting our experience in conversation with the gospel story, the story of Jesus.

All of that taken together gives us the basis for a racial justice conversion for the truth telling, affirmative redress, and structural changes that are needed. All too often in American society we focus on structural changes such as affirmative action and other policies while neglecting the upper part—the kind of personal transformation that needs to happen for this to be effective.

So what I want to do now is to reinterpret solidarity as less of a rational tool and more as a passion, as a visceral compassion, as transformative love. For cross-racial solidarity, I argue, is a transformation of consciousness and identity that terminates in, and is enabled by, love.

Now, here I'm on some thin ice because love is so often invoked and so poorly understood. Let me illustrate what I mean by transformative love as solidarity by giving us an example. An insightful account of what I mean by solidarity as transformative love is provided by Walt Harrington, a white journalist married to a black woman and the father of two

interracial children.

Harrington was shocked into an awareness of the depth of racism through a casual racist joke uttered in his presence. Moved by this incident, he undertook a year-long journey to discover black America. At the end of his journey, he wrote the following: “But what I discovered while sitting in the dentist chair more than a year ago, what I learned from the dentist who stopped by and casually told a racist joke about a black man who was stupid still remains the greatest insight I have to share. The idiot was talking about my kids.”

He continues, “This kind of understanding changes everything. Only when I became black by proxy through my son, through my daughter, could I see the racism that I had been willing to tolerate. Becoming black, even for a fraction of an instant, created an urgency for justice that I couldn’t feel as a white man no matter how good-hearted.”

Note what Harrington says: “Only when I became black by proxy.” His breakthrough was not the outcome of rational deliberation. He didn’t become an advocate merely because of intellectual conviction. His love for his family, for his son and his daughter, was the catalyst for developing cross-racial solidarity, that firm and persevering determination to act for the good of the dark-skinned other.

But also note that in his story, cross-racial solidarity—what I’m calling transformative love—shatters the dichotomy between us and them. For the other is no longer other, but is indeed me. The idiot’s talking about my kids.

What’s remarkable in testimonies of deep interracial friendship and interracial relationships is how this love can shatter the false personal identities that are built upon the racial framework of meanings that we’ve all been socialized into.

Cross-racial solidarity effects a change of identity, one that is wrought

by love, and such loving, committed relationships give one the visceral courage and outrage and strength and motivation to break free from the rewards of conformity which keep most of us complacent with the way things are.

Transformative love empowers us for authentic solidarity, and thus the challenge of cross-racial solidarity is the challenge of cultivating transformative love, the love that is deep enough to change one's own understanding and perception of oneself.

Now, as I was writing this, I realized I could fall into a danger here, and so let me be clear that I do not at all want to dismiss the need for serious, deep, and significant structural changes and policy shifts in our country. For example, I believe we need to pursue deep and comprehensive immigration reform. I believe we need fundamental changes in our nation's penal system, which disproportionately harms young black and brown men. The disproportionate incarceration of persons of color, chiefly black and Latino, ought to be a national outrage and disgrace, but that it is not shows the power of unconscious racial malformation.

If we believe that darkness is associated with criminality and danger, then it comes as no surprise to us that most of the people locked up are dangerous criminals who happen to be dark-skinned. Until this unconscious association is attended to and remedied by the cultivation of transformative love, public policy proposals will be both inadequate and ineffective.

My argument is that Catholic social teaching needs a more affective understanding of solidarity, one capable of reaching and transforming the nonrational centers of identity formation which fuel racial injustice.

Or as Gustavo Gutierrez says, "Without love, without affection, without, why not say it, tenderness, there can be no authentic gesture of solidarity. Friendship is not enough, but it's absolutely essential."

---

The past 40 or 50 years have shown the inadequacy of political movements and social programs alone. Affirmative action, increased political representation, even a black president, have proven insufficient to redress the deep influence of racial conditioning in our society. King himself pointed out that a truly integrated society demanded a confrontation with the nonrational psychological barriers to unity.

And so as I reach the end of my reflections, which I admit are more suggestive than definitive, I'm still feeling my way here. If you're thinking out loud, you're getting breaking news, and no one else has seen this before, but this much I know, three things: One, the cultivation of authentic cross-racial solidarity is essential if we're going to move beyond the new polarization and tribalism that threaten to consume American life.

Second, Catholic teaching on solidarity is too rational and abstract, lacking the vibrancy, urgency, and passion to move people to act against their own social interest and malformed racial identities. It cannot reach deeply enough to confront and heal unconscious racial bias.

And third, the deep thorough-going conversion required for genuine cross-racial solidarity entails the summons of love, not in a romantic and fuzzy weak-minded sense, but in a sense of quest, daring, maturity, and in an insistence that we confront our fears in the light of truth, and move to a truer and more authentic identity.

What I'm calling for is a more passionate solidarity, an understanding of solidarity as a passion that can transform us and sustain us in the quest for the fullness of humanity which King, Malcolm, and Baldwin believed could only be possible if we all struggled together against an evil that harms us all, though in different ways.

Can it be done? Or is this hopefully naïve? James Baldwin wrote, "We

must not ask whether this is possible. We must believe that it is.” And indeed we have powerful examples of what is possible in the various and many committed cross-racial relationships of deep and authentic love and friendship. We see it happening. It is possible.

Baldwin concludes a work when he utters a deep hope, what I call a blues hope. A blues hope is one that admits disillusionment without defeat. He said “I really do believe in the new Jerusalem. I really do believe that we can all become better than we are, but the price is enormous, and people are not yet willing to pay it.”

But I dare to believe that the cultivation of transformative love, as the essence of solidarity, will make more of us willing to pay the price. Thank you.