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The Canada Catholic Church and the Indigenous Canadians of African Descent, 1867–1900

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“Blacks are not represented because right from the starting line there’s discrimination.”
[Patrick Loze, A13]

Abstract

The invisibility or near absence of peoples of African descent in the Canadian Catholic Church remains a curiosity that needs exploring. There is hardly any information on why this is the case. As a matter of fact, little or no studies have been done, not even by Canadian Catholic historians, to address this concern. Furthermore, the religious experience of indigenous African Canadians is often, if not always, discussed within the context of non-Catholic, especially Baptist, religious affiliation. It is as if African Canadians are allergic to Catholicism or never existed on the Canadian soil or, if they existed, their presence and experience are not worth the attention and mention in the historical consciousness of Canadians and Canadian Catholic Church. The paper, therefore, is a precursory enquiry into this anomaly. Also it is a modest attempt to sensitize and create, in the Canadian Catholic Church and society, the necessary awareness of the anomaly and then suggest possible ways of redressing the anomaly.

Keywords: Catholic Church attitude, African Canadians, Canadian Catholic historians

Introduction

The invisibility or, at best, near absence of indigenous Canadians of African descent and their descendants in the Catholic Churches in Canada remains a curiosity that needs to be explored. Excepting a very brief attention to the matter in Comiskey’s (1999) doctoral thesis, there is a dearth of the experience of people of African descent in the ecclesiastical histories of the Canadian Catholic Church. This is something akin to what obtains also in Canada’s secular histories despite almost four hundred years history of the presence of peoples of African descent in Canada (Walker, 1980, 3; Mensah, 2002, 43). As a matter of fact, interest in African Canadian studies is a most recent development within the North American academia in general

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and Canada in particular. Unlike in its neighboring United States of America where studies on people of African descent are advanced and varied, Canada's witness of the admission of African Canadian studies into the inner circle of its academic institutions was as recent as in 1996 with the establishment of The James R. Johnson Chair in Black Canadian Studies at Dalhousie University, Halifax. There is hardly any information on why this is the case. It is as if indigenous African Canadians and their descendants, never existed in the Canadian Catholic Church; and if they existed, their presence and experience are not worth the attention and mention in the historical consciousness of Canadian Catholic Church. Furthermore, the religious experience of Canadians of African descent is often, if not always, discussed within the context of non-Catholic, especially Baptist, religious affiliation.

The preceding context, however, is a limited one, leading to an equally limited understanding of the religious experience of people of African descent in Canada and beyond. In my decades of experience of the Canadian religious terrain, I have had the opportunity of meeting and associating with some indigenous Canadian Catholics of African descent whose ancestors were Catholics. As I will try to demonstrate in the paper, these "ancestors" had been in what would later become Canada and long before the emergence of what is known today as the Canadian Catholic Church.

Thus, the paper begins with a question: could the dearth of the presence of indigenous Canadians of African descent in the contemporary Canadian Catholic Church be because they and their descendants were and still are allergic to the Catholic Church or could it be for some other reasons that are yet to be open for academic discourse? An attempt to address this question, even if from the point of view of a precursory enquiry, is the main objective for this paper. It is my hope that the paper will invite the Canadian Catholic Church not only to begin an introspective examination of its historic attitude towards indigenous Canadians of African descent but also how and where it places African Canadians as a whole in its contemporary pastoral calculations and plans. Also, it is my hope that the paper will provide an avenue towards the emergence of a more creative, inclusive and dynamic Canadian Catholic Church.

The underlying hypothesis for the paper is this: the state and quality of the Canadian Catholic Church's pastoral outreach today to African Canadians can best be ascertained by examining the pastoral approach that formed the foundation for the Church's outreach to the indigenous Canadians of African descent and their descendants during the early years of the Church's contact with them. Hence, the paper is periodized to cover mainly the years between the birth of Canada as we know it today and the end of the nineteenth century that ushered in the beginning of the influx of non-indigenous Canadians of African descent into Canada (see Pachai, 2007, 152). Ultimately, the aim is not only to write indigenous African Canadian Catholics into Canada's Catholic ecclesiastical history but also to open up some tracks for

future research into the subject of their contributions to the development of Canada in general and the Canadian Catholic Church in particular.

Canadian Catholic Church and Earliest Contact with People of African Descent

The birth of Canada is more or less a result of the logic of force and violence, the struggle for power and dominance between France and Britain. Add to this the system of slavery which, long before the birth of Canada, had been institutionalized into what is akin to “a relationship between two persons, where the master, or slaveholder, suppresses the will of the slave and directs it towards the master’s own good” (Capizzi, 2002, 1). Many Canadians often present a Canada that had little or nothing to do with slavery. Canadian historians, more often than not, would present a Canada that was more of a safe and reliable refuge for runaway slaves from the American Revolution or the War of 1812 or the Abolitionist days. This, however, is a false picture; the truth is that Canadians were engaged in the buying and selling of slaves. Writing in one of the major Canadian French-language Newspapers, “Le Soleil,” Louis-Guy Lemieux noted how Marcel Trudel, a historian, was chased out of Laval University in 1960 for having the audacity to write on the taboo-subject about some prominent French-speaking Canadians having slaves in their family genealogy (Lemieux, 1977, 1). Lemieux goes further to state clearly:

Our ancestors bought, sold and owned slaves. Quebecois have American Indian slaves or those of African descent in their genealogy....

The French had 2679 slaves, of which four fifth of the owners were known. It is interesting to note that French Canadians preferred largely American Indian slaves, while the English bought black slaves....

Slavery here [in Quebec] in the 18th century was practiced and accepted at all levels of society. All professions [merchants, military officers, Catholic and non-Catholic clergy, lawyers, notaries, judges, doctors, innkeepers, blacksmiths, etc] partook in the slave trade....

Some slaves were owned collectively [as was exemplified by some religious] groups like the Recollet and the Sulpician [Fathers], Congregation of [Sisters] of Notre-Dame, Hospital-General and of the Hotel-Dieu of Montreal and of Quebec (Lemieux, 1977, 1-7).

Thus, long before the Canadian Catholic Church as we know it today first came in contact with people of African descent, its members were not only already engaged in the business of slavery but also were well disposed, as will become clearer in the following account, to buying and selling of slaves of African descent.

The first person of African descent to set foot in New France was one Matthieu da Costa (Hill, 1981, 219). That was between 1604 and 1606 and it is possible to assume that,

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given his name “Matthieu,” he was already a Christian by the time he set foot in New France. And given that his reason for being there was far from being religious, it is doubtful that the Catholic Church had any contact with him. Any contact between the Catholic Church in New France and a person of African descent had to wait until 1628. It all started with the arrival of a lone six-year-old African child from Madagascar, a property of one David Kirke, a famous British privateer (Hill, 1981, 3). After passing through some French masters, the slave lad was finally sold to another French settler, Guillaume Couillard, who ensured that the lad was taught Catholic catechism (Hill, 1981). Five years later, the young slave lad was baptized by the then Jesuit Order’s Superior for the New France mission, Father Paul LeJeune; at baptism the lad was given the names Olivier LeJeune -- the Christian name ‘Olivier’ as his first name and, for his last name, “LeJeune” which was Father LeJeune’s own last name (Hill, 1981). It is most likely that Father LeJeune has a strong influence on Guillaume Couillard, especially when one considers the role he played in the baptism of the young lad; and besides, shortly before he returned to France, Father LeJeune saw to it that Couillard set Olivier free. Olivier’s freedom notwithstanding, he apparently remained in the service of some white master, most likely Guillaume Couillard. This is because by 1654 when Olivier died, still a young man, he was recorded in the colony’s burial register as having been a *domestique* (Hill, 1981).

Obviously, it would be the members of the elite class of the time like Guillaume Couillard—as we have already noted—that would have the means to buy and sell slaves. Also, it would be the same class that would need a household servant, which was one of the roles many slaves used to render for the rest of their lives to their enslavers. With specific reference to Canada, members of its elite class had complained about the shortage of servants and workers and had requested for a legalization of slavery for New France despite the law of France that forbade slavery, and, more particularly, Pope Urban VIII’s teaching that forbade slavery again in 1639. Their request was granted on May 1, 1689, when Louis XIV gave limited permission to “inhabitants of Canada” for the importation and use of people of African descent (Hill, 1981). The permission became unlimited twenty years later when Louis XIV gave full permission to colonists in the Catholic New France to own slaves “in full proprietorship” (Hill, 1981). Later in 1760, the British conquered the French and annexed New France. To pacify the French settlers the British assured them that the slave system of Quebec would not be altered in the British regime. As General Jeffrey Amherst of the conquering British forces put it to the Marquis de Vaudreuil, the last Governor of New France: “Negroes and panis [Indians] of both sexes shall remain in their quality of slaves in the possession of the French or Canadians to whom they belonged; they shall be at liberty to keep them in the colony or sell them” (Hill, 1981, 6). Although the number of slave-owners among the French settlers was less when compared to their neighbouring English counterparts in the mostly Protestant south, the French settlers’ attitude to slaves was similar: slaves or, better, people of African descent, were counted

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on the same scale as animals; they were so much everywhere that there was no astonishment or surprise to find them in bondage (Ibid, 3-4).

With regard to the spiritual welfare of these slaves and their descendants, the mostly Catholic French-Canada paid little or no attention to them. Following the leadership of the Catholic Church of the time, the matter or decision was left to the goodwill of individual slave owners. And when such attention was given, it was largely limited to merely having the slaves and their descendants baptized into Catholicism and then having the Bible craftily interpreted to them in a manner that encouraged them to uphold a spiritual life that internalized their status as slaves. Herein one locates the merging of the issue of slavery and the racial ideology behind it within the Canadian Catholic Church. Being the children of their age, time and culture, most of the missionaries in what later became Canada were of the conviction “that the triumph of the [European] ways was not only inevitable but right” (Grant, 1988, 35). This conviction was rooted in the European racial ideology of slavery and its perception of Africa and Africans, especially as advanced since the eighteenth century Europe. Anderson (1995) has aptly discerned this ideology to have the following three functions: (1) a justification of the supremacy of European consciousness, (2) a provision of historical and moral rationalization for European imperialism throughout the world, and (3) a justification of the exclusion of Africans and other colonized peoples from civic republican citizenship (Anderson, 1995, 2).

Early Attempts at Pastoral Outreach to People of African Descent in the Canadian Catholic Church: Squandered Opportunities

Ironically, as the population of Catholics was growing in Canada—thanks to the influx of peoples of European descent, especially the Irish and the Scots—so too did slavery continue to thrive, especially in Upper Canada and among the wealthy class. This was despite the efforts of “abolitionists,” individuals who stood out to oppose slavery which had long been abolished in the British Empire, including Canada. To say that commerce in slavery was thriving, however, is not to suggest that abolitionists were making no progress in their efforts. The contrary was the case, especially in Upper Canada. Already William Osgoode’s judgment in 1803 against slavery, that set free the 300 slaves in Lower Canada, set into motion the eventual decline of commerce in slavery in Lower Canada (Hill, 1981, 18). As a growing number of sympathizers joined the abolitionists, public opinion against slavery and in assisting freedom-seeking slaves who found their way especially into Upper Canada began to rise sharply. Thus, by the end of the nineteenth century, interest in slavery, for all practical purposes, had completely declined.

Meanwhile, the presence of many people of African descent in Canada had become a definitive reality—a reality which had become stabilized by the 1860s with major concentrations of them in three present-day ecclesiastical locations of London, Halifax and

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Toronto. By this period, Canada had on its soil the presence of “an estimated 40,000” people of African descent who had come to make a new home and a new life of freedom (Comiskey, 1999, 99). These would include mostly fugitive slaves of British and United Empire Loyalist settlers, and some from the West Indies, but by far the largest proportion of the population were immigrants from the United States who joined their counterparts in Canada to establish a number of sizeable settlements of African people in places like Toronto and South-West Ontario cities like Lake Simcoe, London, Chatham, Windsor, Dresden, and Amherstburg—all in the present day Catholic Diocese of London (Shadd, 2002, 2-3). For instance, as far back as 1865 alone, there were more than two thousand people of African descent who had settled in downtown Toronto and on its outskirts alone; there they developed rich and complex communities, “served by active, social, intellectual, political, charitable and religious institutions and organizations” (Ibid). By the time one adds this population to those from their other sizeable settlements in Nova Scotia, especially “about half the [Africans] of Canada” who live in Halifax alone (Handy, 1977, 233), one comes to realize that Canada had a significant presence of indigenous Canadians of African descent, even if their number was not as high as in the neighboring United States of America.

What eventually emerged as the first outreach to indigenous Canadians of African descent happened in the diocese of London, Ontario, making it the first Catholic diocese in Canada to witness such an enterprise. It was at the instance of one Father Dean Wagner, making him arguably the pioneer of Catholic ministry to African Canadians, if not in the whole of Canada, certainly in the London diocese. While serving as pastor of St. Alphonsus Church in Windsor, he noticed the plight of people of African descent who had come to Canada to seek refuge. Moved by their plight, Father Dean Wagner in the 1880s recognized “the need not only to evangelize among the [African] people of the city, but also to offer basic education, healthcare and a community centre” (Comiskey, 1999, 98-100). By January 1887, Wagner’s effort, assisted by Father C. MacManus and with the support of Bishop John Walsh, had materialized into what Comiskey cited *The Catholic Record* to have noted as “The First Catholic Negro Mission Opened in the Dominion of Canada” (Comiskey, 1999, 99).

From all indications, the so-called ‘Catholic Negro Mission’ was making remarkable success. Within a matter of six months, “quite a number of adults” out of the population of about 1,000 people of African descent in Windsor were received into the Church as well as a class of twenty children that were under instruction for baptism (Ibid). By Holy Saturday of 1887, the number of “the total congregation” of Africans had risen to “nearly one hundred persons. Meanwhile, in the course of time, arrangements were being made to start “a Catholic free school for colored children” which would be run by a group of Nuns, the Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary, by September” of that year. Along with the arrangements, was

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an appeal for funds to assist the ‘Mission’ meet the welfare of the African people it was meant to serve (Comiskey, 1999). The Sisters actually ran the free school as envisaged.

There is no clarity, however, as to why the sisters discontinued the ministry. What is quite clear is that another group of Nuns, the Religious Hospitallers of St. Joseph, who were to “found a school and orphanage for [African] children, took up the task in August 13th 1888” (Comiskey, 1999, 98-100). Apparently, this was an added responsibility the Nuns took upon themselves, having already opened an orphanage, also in Windsor, for the African children. Not long thereafter—barely six years to be precise—and one year after Bishop John Walsh had left London to assume the position of Archbishop of Toronto, both the school and the orphanage were closed. According to the annals of the Religious Hospitallers of St. Joseph, the reason for the closure and abandonment of the ministry is as follows:

the difficulties concerning which were previously mentioned were always stemming from the same problems, especially the disobedience and inconsistency of the children. The day school was made up of only two or three children who attended at a time and who brought their undisciplined habits with them, and their contact was pernicious to *our children in the orphanage*. Moreover, we saw no hope of teaching them how to pray to God and the principal truths of our religion, because they would make fun of this in front of those who had been baptized, by *repeating what their parents and others from outside had told them*. On the other hand, those who we had as regulars for a more or less short period of time during the year, were forbidden by their parents to take religious instruction except for four of these children. This state of affairs forced us to take certain measures; either to discontinue the work with black children or to change it into something else.... the failure was painful to the Parish Priest (Dufault, 2007).

This decision, under Bishop Denis O’Connor who replaced Bishop Walsh as the new Bishop of London, was final and definitive. As for the Religious Hospitallers, their “main objective... was [to] ensure a successful foundation of the Hotel-Dieu hospital;” to this objective they returned. Meanwhile, there is no recorded evidence that the diocese showed further interest in the ministry to people of African descent; there was no attempt to “change [the ministry] into something else” or to transfer its management to another Religious Congregation or to relocate the ministry to any of the other settlements of people of African descent within the diocese.

As the foregoing pastoral outreach was abandoned, a new and the second attempt was in the offing in the Digby County area of the then Halifax diocese in Nova Scotia. It was at instance of the Eudist Fathers, a French Acadian Catholic Male Religious group who had started to reach out to the African Canadians in their midst. Like the outreach in the London diocese before it, that of the Eudists was equally making remarkable success. Unlike the Bishop of London diocese, however, the Eudists did not give up on people of African descent, leading

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to the emergence of a thriving indigenous African Canadian Catholic community. In fact, the records of St. Joseph Church, Weymouth, Nova Scotia, have it that by 1898, the African Canadian Catholic community was already rapidly expanding. Bishop E. J. McCarthy eloquently testifies to the vitality of this community. In his entry in the St. Joseph's Parish Church records in 1907 he stated:

On this date I paid my first visit to Weymouth Bridge Parish as Archbishop. On the next morning we administered confirmation to seventy souls. At 3:00 PM a procession of nearly a quarter of a mile was formed at the church when we proceeded to the new cemetery and solemnly consecrated it accompanied by the pastor and Father Masse a young Eudist priest from Halifax (McCarthy, 1907).

The rapid growth of the number of indigenous African Canadian Catholics in the area necessitated the establishment of the first all-African Canadian Roman Catholic Church in 1935 which is still in existence—the St Theresa's Roman Catholic Church in Southville, Nova Scotia. Openness to Catholicism by people of African descent and their descendants was not limited to Southville. This is because, years later, further outreach to them spread beyond Southville to include the Guysborough County where Father Anthony Henry, an Augustinian priest of St. Augustine's Monastery, built on this openness. The result was the establishment of a second all-African Canadian Roman Catholic Church, St. Monica's Catholic chapel in Lincolnville, a nearby village to the Monastery. Father Henry, we are told, "was a charismatic man" who left a tradition in which celebrations in the Lincolnville church is always uplifting by the wonderful atmosphere" wherein "everyone takes part enthusiastically" (Milsom, 2000, 3).

In the then New France (now Quebec), however, notwithstanding its predominantly Roman Catholic populace and a significant slave population, outreach to people of African descent in the period under our study was minimal at best. If anything, Lemieux cites M. Brown, a historian and specialist on the question of people of African descent in Canada, as noting that rather than attract people of African descent to Catholicism as would be expected in such a predominantly Catholic environment, they were ostracized. On this, Philip Daniels and Wyeth Clarkson are blunt; in their documentary titled *Seeking Salvation*, they stated that although the Roman Catholic colony of New France had a significant slave population since the 1600s, no indigenous African Canadian Catholic tradition would arise in Canada (Daniels & Clarkson, 1996). Again, Lemieux cites M. Brown to have driven the point home when he stated:

It is by the grace of the Anglican clergy that [African Canadians in Canada] were empowered to feel proud. They instilled in the young blacks the necessity of education. In this regard, the Catholic clergy committed a grave error. I am not that old, but I can remember when we were

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named Brown in the 50s, we could not enter the Catholic Church. We are told that we are Anglophone. I say Yes, but I also say that you [Catholics] did not want us during that time (Lemiux, 1993, 3).

Whether the foregoing observation has changed for the better is a matter that deserves a separate and needed study.

From Slavery to Bigotry and Racial Prejudice Toward African Canadians

From the foregoing accounts and observations, it is possible to discern a number of common attitudinal traits in the Canadian Catholic Church's overall pastoral vision and mission. These traits, as I will try to show shortly, would eventually form the bedrock for the Canadian Church's perception of African Canadians and its enduring highly limited attentiveness and response to their material and spiritual welfare. Seven of these traits are worth highlighting.

First, there is the attitudinal trait that closely borders on what I describe as social silence. By this I mean a direct or indirect exclusion of an idea or, for the purposes of this paper, a people's presence/existence from social discourse and interaction. From a historical and psychological perspective, "social silence" is a conscious or unconscious decision to obliterate a people's experience from historical and mental consciousness, culminating into a form of systemic racism. Concretely in practice, it is very close to what some authors have described as a lived-out systemic perception and treatment of some people as socially dead or, at best, non-persons (Patterson, 1982, 5). The picture becomes clearer when one recalls, as already noted in the "introduction" to the paper, the paucity of African Canadian Catholic experience in the ecclesiastical histories of the Canadian Catholic Church. Apart from a few references, often brief and scattered, no quantitative reference to, or studies exist of, outcome of pastoral outreach to people of African descent even in those dioceses with their significant population.

An official history of the Catholic Church in not just Halifax but also in Nova Scotia (Hanington, 1984) typifies the reality of social silence over indigenous African Canadian Catholics and their descendants in the Canadian Catholic Church. The book has the official endorsement of the then Archbishop of Halifax, James Martin Hayes, who wrote its "Foreword." And revealing enough, there was a thriving African settlement, the Africville, in Halifax by the time the diocese was created and the book was being written. Also, as we noted above, there was the existence of thriving indigenous African Canadian Catholic communities in the Digby and the Guysborough counties of the then diocese. Yet, nowhere in Hannington's book was any mention made of the presence of people of African descent, talk less of any

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pastoral outreach to them in and by the diocese. The only thing close to a mention in the book was in the negative: a reference to “an epidemic of cholera” which was said to have swept partly from Africa through North America, and “in which more than 1,000 died” in “July and August 1854” in “the city of Saint John”(Hannington, 1984, 111).

The second attitudinal trait is the other side of the preceding one. This is with regard to the general perception among the missionaries, like their fellow Europeans, that Africans are an inferior race—a perception which was made worse by their slave-status at the time. As such, they did not place much premium on converting Africans into Catholicism. Worse still, it would appear on a number of occasions that winning over Protestants of European descent to Catholicism held a higher premium than retaining in the Catholic faith peoples of African descent who were already Catholics. For instance, in the spring of 1873, with their parish priest’s and later the bishop’s support respectively, Mother Mary Xavier LeBihan, the foundress of the Ursuline Religious sisters of the Chatham Union—a religious group of women dedicated to the education of girls -- and her sisters took in two little white Protestant girls from Ridgetown, near Chatham, to live with them (Pray, 1991, 2). Despite their financial poverty at the time, the sisters had to take in the girls not necessarily because they had just lost their mother but rather primarily “in order to prevent [the girls] being sent to Protestant families” (Pray, 1991, 53).

Ironically, while Mother Xavier and her sisters were concerned about the possibility of losing the two Protestant girls and, therefore, the opportunity to convert them to Catholicism if they were not accepted to live with the nuns, the same concern was not shown by Mother Xavier and her community some years earlier when it was the case regarding Catholics of African descent who had approached her to admit their children into her school. The following record of Mother Xavier’s decision on the matter speaks for itself:

The [people of African descent] occupy a quarter of the town that people call “Little Africa”. There are four or five families among them who are Catholics and are industrious and respectable. I wish it were in our power to establish a class for their daughters. For that we would have to rent a house at the far end of our property so that these little black girls would not come in contact with the white girls. Here such care is taken by parents to keep their children from all contact with the [Africans] that if we did not take that precaution we would not have a single white child in our school. We would easily find a house to rent but we do not have the money. These [four or five Catholic families] who have the greatest desire to have their daughters come to us would gladly make some sacrifices but they are so few of them that what they would give us would not be enough to pay the rent (Pray, 1991, 32).

The third attitudinal trait was the reality of a selective and discriminatory vision in pastoral ministry in the then Canadian Catholic Church. The trait is the offshoot of a

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“maintenance” rather than an “evangelistic” approach to pastoral ministry by the early and later missionaries. By “maintenance” I mean an approach to pastoral ministry that is focused and geared at those who are already believers as different from an “evangelistic” approach that is largely focused on attracting new believers into the faith. Excepting the First Nation Peoples (known in the United States as “Native Peoples”) who were outreached for conversion into Catholicism—thanks largely to the Oblate missionaries and the Jesuits to some extent—most of the early and later Catholic Church missionaries in Canada had the common objective of exclusively and primarily serving their ethnic/linguistic kith and kin almost all of whom would be Europeans. With time, however, the interest and welfare of the French, the Scots and the Irish—but particularly the Irish (in the English-speaking parts of the country)—became the hub around which missionary enterprise revolved and rebounded in the Canadian Catholic Church. Being already Catholics, these fellows (the French, Scot, and Irish) were the ones who counted; as such, the missionaries were largely concerned and concentrated mainly in helping them maintain and retain their faith in the face of the threat of a largely dominant Anglo-Saxon Protestantism.

Whether it is the fight against “the raging typhus of 1847” or “the building of the House of Providence in 1856” in Toronto during the episcopate of Bishop Armand Francis Marie Charbonnel, or Toronto’s Archbishop John Joseph Lynch’s episcopacy that was largely marked by his “dispelling prejudice and creating a spirit of harmony where strife and animosity had long prevailed” or “the perplexing and serious question of Separate Schools the material and spiritual welfare of the Irish was the determining factor for any outreach” (Teefy, 1892, 154-160). In this same vein, one calls to mind the Episcopal leadership of two men in the life of the Archdiocese: one, Edmund Burke, the first Bishop of Halifax whose missionary zeal took him to travel about the whole of Nova Scotia showing special concern to the poor, and the other, Thomas Louis Connolly, the Archbishop of Halifax (1859-1876) who was said to be nationally and internationally well-known for being, among other things, a “caring churchman of the first historical order” (Teefy, 1892, 133). Burke, prior to his becoming a Bishop, was well known for the exemplary role he played in the settlement of many poor and penniless Scot and Irish immigrants who fled into Halifax in the early 1880s, after abandoning “all their possessions in Europe in the midst of revolution, persecution and war” (Teefy, 1892, 67).

The fourth attitudinal trait is a discriminatory investment of interest, time and resources. In the period under study, Canadian Bishops used to go to Europe in quest for personnel, priests and nuns alike. It is only fair to imagine that in making these trips the Bishops were prepared to make material, financial and physical sacrifices. When it comes to people of African descent, however, the Bishops were not even aware of the need to serve, talk less of making similar sacrifices toward, their spiritual welfare. This failure becomes even more evidenced when one looks at it side-by-side with the commitment and dedication to the cause of

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the people of African descent by some Protestants. Here one recalls the example of people like Rev. King of the Buxton Mission fame. When the Presbyterian Church could no longer wholly finance his mission, he decided to take his own savings, mortgage his land and traveled in Europe and North America to find new support for his mission (Hill, 1981, 85). What is more, unlike the Catholics of European descent who, as of 1890s and beyond, were still unwilling to financially support both a racially desegregated Catholic school and even an all-black school, half of Buxton's school comprised of white students as far back as 1854.

One may counter the preceding remarks with the reality of a Catholic Church that was in a predominantly and virulent anti-Catholic Protestant environment and, as such, was under threat. Along this line of thought, the memory of the deportation of the Acadian Catholics in 1755-6, one may argue, was not lost to the Church. Thus, in the face of these threats, the Canadian Catholic Church's priority and preoccupation could be said to have been largely rested on how to survive and thrive under the threat. The reality of the threats, however, was not a sufficient excuse for the Church's failure to be an evangelizing agent or, more specifically, for its abysmal failure to minister to the people of African descent. I say this against the backdrop of the daring efforts which individual Catholics in the United States made to evangelize and convert the African Americans in their midst even though the threat faced by the Canadian Catholic Church was similar to, if not even less serious than, that faced by the Catholic Church in the United States. Here one recalls individuals like Herbert Cardinal Vaughan, Katherine Drexel, and also Archbishop Martin Spalding of Baltimore, Bishop Edward Fitzgerald of Little Rock, Bishop Augustin Verot of the city of St. Augustin, and Anglo-Belgian Canon Peter Benoit—to name a few in their visionary rank—who, because they “never dismissed [people of African descent] in the United States as pathetic creatures without honour, without respect, and without resolve,” went out of their way to work for the evangelization and ministry to people of African descent (Davis, 1998, 116-136). Both the Canadian and American Catholic Church leaders at this period in time largely depended on their counterparts in Europe for personnel to serve the faithful in their respective dioceses. While some church leaders in the United States, as just noted, were either welcoming into their dioceses members of the Mill Hill society—a missionary society founded in England for the evangelization of African people—or inviting from Europe other religious orders with similar pastoral mission, the Canadian Catholic Church leaders showed little or no interest in this mission and vision. Their interest and priority were toward inviting to Canada only European priests and nuns of their ethnic and linguistic background for exclusive ministry to their European kith and kin.

The fifth attitudinal trait is the reality of a racially segregated Church environment. Of note here is the failure of the Canadian Catholic Church and its members to racially integrate the people of African descent into the Church's fold, pastoral vision and mission. As a matter of

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fact the Church tended to perpetuate or, at best, to condone racial segregation. A case in point is the following prejudicial, if not racist, remark by Mother Mary Xavier LeBihan as is clearly evidenced in her following letter to her Mother Superior in Brittany, France:

By the last news received from the States the Southerners had the advantage. I hope it will not be always thus. I would like the people of the South [United States] to be forced to renounce the right of arresting their fugitive slaves in the States where slavery does not exist. The result would be that we would have fewer negroes in our Canada. They are a race that steal and are lazy. The Canadians are tired of them, however, every year they see several hundreds of them arriving. I shall give you a sample of their ability in matters of theft. A part of our wood shed had been left at our first house for lack of time to cart it all before we left. The Mister Niggers went and took it by day and by night and told the neighbours that the ladies had sold it to them. 'You are liars,' said an Irish woman whose husband had cut our wood, 'if the ladies had intended to sell their wood, they would not have had it cut.' That woman had the charity to inform us; otherwise, they would not have left a single piece (LeBihan, 1861).

It was bad enough that someone of Mother Mary Xavier's status and vowed commitment had no qualms in perceiving people of African descent in such negative light, which explains why one of her European Canadian school children could not imagine herself having as a neighbour "that old N. [i.e., Negro] ... [who] smells frightfully bad" (LeBisha, 1861). It is even worse when Catholic priests who were supposed to be fathers to all would refuse to have people of African descent in their Church. A case in point is the following story which Gwendolyn Robinson narrated to have been told to her by one Mr. Orville Wright:

When Saint Joseph's Catholic Church in Chatham, Ontario, was being renovated in the early 1900s, the European Canadian contractor hired artisans/craftsmen of African descent, one of whom was Mr. Orville Wright. The pastor, a priest belonging to the religious order of Saint Francis (Franciscans), said he did not want people of African descent in his Church. The contractor told the priest that if that would be the case, then, it meant he (the pastor) did not want him (the contractor) too because the African artisans were the best around to do the job (Robinson, 2007).

Even now in living memory, a number of Canadian Catholics who were born and raised up in areas with settlements of people of African descent have no lived-experience of any effort on the part of the Catholic Church to reach out to them at least so as to give them a chance to convert to Catholicism and thus have a proof, should they decline, that they are irredeemably anti-Catholic. For instance, in a March 24, 2007 interview with Rev. Father Vincent J. Gleeson who was born and raised up in Buxton—the home of the famous Elgin Settlement/Buxton

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Mission School, near the city of Chatham with a significant number of people of African descent—he had this to say:

As a kid growing up at Buxton, we always had contact with [people of African descent] -- in fact our neighbour was a farming family like ours and we related very well with them. But at same time, I had no knowledge of them or any [person of African descent] around us being Catholics. In 1940 one Miss Shreve, an [African] lady, was hired by my school, Sacred Heart in Fletcher near Buxton, to teach my class for the two months my teacher, Mrs. Murphy, who was away probably on maternity leave. Being a Catholic school those days, it is most probable that Miss Shreve must have been a Catholic but I didn't know. Really, the first Catholics [of African descent] I met -- and that is at my 78 years of age -- were Sudanese Catholics who were refugees in 2000 in Windsor while I was pastor of St. Alphonsus. But I am not aware of any outreach to [people of African descent] as I was growing up as a kid. In one sense, Canadian Catholic Church never specifically reached out to them, mainly because there were really not many Catholics [of African descent] (Gleeson, 2007).

Gwendolyn Robinson, a non-Catholic of African descent and director of the Woodstock Institute in Chatham, Ontario, speaks in the same light:

I am seventy five years old now. I was born, raised up, married and have lived in this city [Chatham] all of my life. I did not see any priest welcoming [people of African descent] or mounting any programme targeted to welcoming them in the Catholic Church (Robinson, 2007).

The sixth attitudinal trait arises from its preceding counterpart, namely, a lack of interest in the education of people of African descent. This had been a common and enduring trait in the Canadian Catholic Church in general and those dioceses with settlements of their race in particular. For the time slavery lasted, the situation was hardly questioned or challenged. The Abolitionist years, 1830-1860s to be precise, called the situation into serious question, unmasking in the process the Canadian Catholic Church's real attitude toward Africans as far as education was concerned. The era was characterized, among other things, by the fight for educational rights (Knight, 1997, 269-284). The Canadian Catholic Church and many African people of the era, each with justifiable reason, found themselves on the opposite camps of the fight. While the Catholics, faced with a situation where their children were exposed to enter public schools where they were taught anti-Catholic doctrines, could not help but demand for separate schools, people of African descent were not only racially denied access to public schools they also were equally and for more familiar reason denied access to the Catholic separate schools. All that the Africans were interested was simply to have access not just to education but one whose quality will help them to escape a cycle of poverty that goes with illiteracy (Knight, 1997, 271). Thus, it stands to reason that had the Catholic Church and its

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white members guaranteed people of African descent such access into the Church's separate school system, they most probably would not have opposed the Catholic separate schools.

It was bad enough for Catholics, like their fellow Europeans, to racially discriminate against the people of African descent, it was worse for the Catholics to present themselves in opposition to Africans having access to the only "entry key" for them to escape from the effects of slavery. And Catholics of African descent, including even those who were up in social and economic standing, were not spared of this level of discrimination. Recall, as already noted, Mother Mary Xavier LeBihan's refusal in the summer of 1861 to open a class for African children in her all-girls school in Chatham because of her fear of a possible racially-based opposition to the idea by white Catholics in the city. Also one recalls the untenable reason—the "undisciplined habits" among African children—which the Hospitallers gave for the closure of the Catholic-run school and orphanage for African children in Windsor. It is as if "undisciplined habits" were peculiar or unique only to the Catholic-run school/orphanage; in fact, they were noticeable even among the students at the Protestant-run schools like the Elgin Settlement/Buxton Mission School.

A case in point here is the experience of one James Rapier. While living and studying at the Elgin Settlement/the Buxton Mission School, he got himself involved in all sorts of youthful undisciplined habits like fighting, drinking, entertainment of loose women and, what is more, habitual absence from attending church (see Rapier, 1857). With time and while still at the Buxton Mission School, he experienced a spiritual transformation that eventually led him into dedicating his life to the upliftment of people of African descent in the United States and thus becoming one of the most successful products of the Buxton Mission School. This, however, was not enough reason to warrant the closure of the school or give up on educating the African youth as the Catholics did. On the contrary, authorities at these schools had the patience, tact, and determination not only to form their students into becoming highly successful men and women of their time but also into making Buxton Mission school the best in the region—a success story of "Canada's only self-supporting all-Black community" and "lit a strong beacon of hope during a critical time in the history of a people struggling from slavery to freedom" (Hill, 1981, 76-89).

The seventh trait was the abysmal failure on the part of the Canadian Catholic Church and its members to be involved in the anti-slavery movement and the resettlement of the runaway slaves. Here one recalls the members of "Abolitionist" group who provided runaway slaves "a complete and relatively safe route of travel from the American South into and through the northern states that would lead to Canada;" the whole system which came to be called the "underground railroad" was largely organized by the abolitionists one of whose prominent members was Harriet Tubman, herself a runaway slave of African descent (Comiskey, 1999, 98). But for people like Father Dean Wagner in the London Catholic diocese, there is no

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recorded evidence of Catholic involvement in this life-and-death, do-or-die, struggle by the people of African descent. Even at that, by 1888 when Catholics like Father Wagner came on board in the struggle, it was too late for any significant impact by the Canadian Catholic Church on the people of African descent. Also, what the Catholic Church provided to them --a segregated school and orphanage—was nothing in comparison to the quality of attention and commitment offered to them by a number of Protestant-inspired groups, namely, a double concern of (1) eliminating slavery and (2) elevating the social and economic welfare of people of African descent. For while the Canadian Catholic Church and its members might have been opposed to slavery, the inferior importance they gave to the imperative of elevating the social and economic status of the people of African descent betrayed them to have lacked sufficient concern about this second concern (Handy, 1977, 189). The ripple effects of these failures have remained durable till today. A recognition of their historical antecedents could not be lost to the people of African descent and their descendants.

Concluding Remarks

The paper began with a hypothetical concern about why there is the paucity of people of African descent in the Canadian Catholic Church. As far as one can see from the foregoing discussion, it was largely a matter of race and colour. Recall particularly the absence of the Canadian Catholic Church from or passivity in the cause that mattered most to the Africans at a time they were in their weakest condition. Add to this the opposition which Catholics posed to a racially desegregated school system -- a system that would have given people of African descent easy access to education. One can only conjecture as to how the Canadian Catholic Church's public explicit engagement in the then African Canadian cause, especially by the dioceses with a significant populace of indigenous African Canadians, would have resonated in the minds of the Catholics and surely the African Canadians. Inevitably, such an engagement would not have been lost to historians who would have recorded it accordingly if it had taken place. And that the contrary was the case goes to explain the mutually negative perception that had existed and still exists in the contemporary period between the Canadian Catholic Church and most of the African Canadians. The mutual perception is actualized in the bigotry, racial prejudice and stereotyping toward African Canadians on the part of the Canadian Catholic Church and, on the part of the majority of African Canadians, a deep-seated perception that the predominantly European Canadian Catholic Church historically is inimical to their freedom and progress, leading to their resentment toward Catholicism or, at best, disinterestedness in most things Catholic.

A number of suggestions are discernable from the paper. If taken by the Canadian Catholic Church, the suggestions could positively begin to redress or, better, melt away the

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disinterestedness which people of African descent have in most things Catholic as just noted. Three of these suggestions, at least, are worth noting. First, there is the imperative for an introspective self-evaluation on the part of the Canadian Catholic Church. The paper offers the Canadian Catholic Church some historical data towards understanding why there is a paucity of African Canadians within its fold. In this regard, recall the pastoral successes recorded in the Ontario and Nova Scotia areas by some individual priests -- Father Dean Wagner in Windsor, Ontario, and the Eudist and the Augustinian Fathers in the Digby and Guysborough Counties of Nova Scotia. Those instances of success, limited as they were, demonstrate that people of African descent and their descendants in Canada were not allergic to Catholicism after all; if anything, they were open to it. Hence, it stands to reason that a significant number of indigenous Canadians of African descent would have embraced Catholicism if the Canadian Catholic Church had invested much interest, time and resources on them as it invested on their European counterparts in the period covered by this study. Thus, brought to bear on contemporary situation, the paper suggests to the Canadian Catholic Church the pastoral wisdom in undertaking an introspective examination of how it has fared in outreach to people of African descent, culminating in the Church taking to a general and specific attitudinal adjustment for a more effective pastoral outreach to contemporary African Canadians.

The second suggestion flows from the imperative for the general attitudinal adjustment noted in the preceding lesson. Here, the Canadian Catholic Church ought to correct its currently standing discriminatory apology to victims of its past injustices. Already the Canadian Catholic Church, through its bishops, has publicly apologized to Canada's First Nations and to the Jewish people for the role the Canadian Church played directly or indirectly in the injustices that were historically visited on these peoples. The Canadian Catholic Church is yet to see the wisdom in extending similar apology to African Canadians for their direct or indirect enslavement by the general membership of the Canadian Catholics of European descent and the resultant enduring bigotry towards African Canadians both within the Canadian Catholic Church and the larger Canadian society. Until this discriminatory apology is corrected, the Canadian Catholic Church's ministry of justice for all in the Canadian and the larger global community will remain hypocritical or tainted at best.

The third and final suggestion borders on the specific attitudinal adjustment. In this regard, the Canadian Catholic Church is called to establish endowment Chairs in Canadian institutions of higher learning like Universities, Colleges and research Institutes for the promotion of and interests in African Canadian religious studies. The urgency of this suggestion arises from the fact that there still exists in the Canadian Catholic Church a significant level of disinterestedness in outreach to people of African descent. Here, one calls attention to the spirit of multiculturalism that has acquired a life of its own in the Canadian polity. Taking a cue from this spirit, the Canadian Church ought to begin to redress its pastoral

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initiatives that are largely attentive to its European-Canadian constituency to include the religious specificities of other cultural groups, especially those of the people of African descent. At present, the Canadian Church tries to solve the problem by inviting into its pastoral ministry priests from Africa -- a development that deserves a separate study. This attempt, even if it were aimed at reaching out to peoples of African descent, could still tend towards the old pastoral approach where people of African descent were expected to surrender most aspects of their cultural mode of worship and melt into the dominant European-influenced liturgical practices as a condition of achieving the status of authentic Catholicism. Thus, any interest in pastoral outreach to people of African that does not go hand-in-hand with an equivocal openness to the study of African Canadian history together with its religious culture and mode of worship is nothing short of religious imperialism.

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