

# Issue Bulletin

Examining Critical Issues in Faithful Catholic Education

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## Background on Critical Race Theory and Critical Theory for Catholic Educators

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Catholic education offers a truthful and morally sound framework for considering issues of race, human dignity, and social justice, yet cultural norms, historical developments, commonplace and novel assumptions, and associated passions all have some influence over Catholic education—sometimes for the good, but often distorting and even contradicting sound Catholic teaching. The human condition and social inequities and injustices can and should be addressed in Catholic education, with confidence in the Church’s wisdom and the ability of societies to respectfully unify around racial and cultural differences. In times of heightened concern and emotion, it is necessary that Catholic education inform and guide students’ understanding with great caution against divisive ideological and political influences.

Today emotional and heated discussions and protests focused on these issues seem to fill social media, endless news cycles and opinion journalism. Concepts like “wokeness,” “intersectionality,” and “systemic racism” are implicitly or explicitly present and terms like “racist,” “hate,” “intolerance,” and “oppression” are sometimes wielded in righteous indignation as powerful rhetorical weapons.

Some parents, including some Catholic ones,<sup>1</sup> are surprised and concerned with both overt and covert hostile interpretations of established culture, values and even history that new diversity,

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<sup>1</sup> Joel Currier, “White Villa Duchesne Student and Parent Accuse School of Discrimination,” St. Louis Post-Dispatch (Jan. 2021) at [https://www.stltoday.com/news/local/crime-and-courts/white-villa-duchesne-student-and-parents-accuse-school-of-discrimination/article\\_ff6417ce-d5dc-5083-9a38-426ec91c0302.html](https://www.stltoday.com/news/local/crime-and-courts/white-villa-duchesne-student-and-parents-accuse-school-of-discrimination/article_ff6417ce-d5dc-5083-9a38-426ec91c0302.html) (accessed on July 3, 2021); Mary Miller, “As Catholic Schools Jettison Truth, They Succumb to Progressive Ideology,” Catholic World Report (Dec. 15, 2020) at <https://www.catholicworldreport.com/2020/12/15/as-catholics-schools-jettison-truth-they-succumb-to-progressive-ideology/> (accessed on July 3, 2021); “Catholic School Students Expelled for Using ‘Racist’ Acne Medication Sue for \$20 Million,” 100PercentFedUp.com (Mar. 4, 2021) at

equity, and inclusivity programs, approaches, and ideologies are introducing into schools. Efforts like the 1619 Project in history,<sup>2</sup> new ‘anti-racist’ science curricula, art classes focusing on ‘de-centering of whiteness’, white supremacy and sexuality in health classes,<sup>3</sup> DEI (diversity, equity, and inclusivity) clubs, cancelling of classical literature because of racism and bias,<sup>4</sup> and even the banning of some whimsical Dr. Seuss books<sup>5</sup> for perceived insensitivity and racist content, seem to leave no class or subject untouched, even mathematics.<sup>6</sup> All are seemingly being re-written to restructure perspectives away from traditionally understood truths in a perhaps well-meaning, but misguided effort to counter racism and bias against African Americans, other minorities, and others perceived to have been ill-treated by the dominant American culture, past and present. An example of such re-writing and re-framing is the 1619 project’s claim that the American Revolutionists fought for independence from Britain in order to protect the institution of slavery.<sup>7</sup> In some cases, teachers are being pressured or even required to attend diversity and sensitivity training and to advocate for historical interpretations or political positions they believe are untrue, and simultaneously being forced to persuade their students to publicly advocate for these positions as well.

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<https://100percentfedup.com/catholic-school-students-sue-for-20-million-after-expulsion-for-racist-acne-medication/> (accessed on July 3, 2021); Marlo Safi, “‘Dig Deep’: Students at Catholic School Instructed to Describe How They Benefit from White Privilege,” *Daily Caller* (Mar. 30, 2021) at <https://dailycaller.com/2021/03/30/loyola-academy-jesuit-catholic-school-white-privilege-assignment/> (accessed on July 3, 2021).

<sup>2</sup> Tom Ozimek, “National Parents’ Group Opposes Teaching of ‘1619 Project’ Revisionist History,” *The Epoch Times* (Nov. 16, 2020) at [https://www.theepochtimes.com/national-parents-coalition-opposes-teaching-1619-project-revisionist-history-in-schools\\_3580701.html](https://www.theepochtimes.com/national-parents-coalition-opposes-teaching-1619-project-revisionist-history-in-schools_3580701.html) (accessed on July 3, 2021); Hannah Farrow, “The 1619 Project Curriculum Taught in Over 4,500 Schools – Frederick County Public Schools Has the Option,” *Frederick News Post* (July 20, 2020) at [https://www.fredericknewspost.com/news/education/the-1619-project-curriculum-taught-in-over-4-500-schools-frederick-county-public-schools-has/article\\_a2921b75-d012-5e9e-9816-8e762539f1d4.html](https://www.fredericknewspost.com/news/education/the-1619-project-curriculum-taught-in-over-4-500-schools-frederick-county-public-schools-has/article_a2921b75-d012-5e9e-9816-8e762539f1d4.html) (accessed on July 3, 2021).

<sup>3</sup> Alex Nester, “Parents at Elite NYC School Push Back Against Faculty’s Antiracist Demands,” *Washington Free Beacon* (Jan. 28, 2021) at <https://freebeacon.com/campus/parents-at-elite-nyc-school-push-back-against-facultys-antiracist-demands/> (accessed on July 3, 2021).

<sup>4</sup> Padma Venkatraman, “Weeding Out Racism’s Invisible Roots: Rethinking Children’s Classics,” *School Library Journal* (Jun. 19, 2020) at <https://www.slj.com/?detailStory=weeding-out-racisms-invisible-roots-rethinking-childrens-classics-libraries-diverse-books> (accessed on July 3, 2021); Charles Coulombe, “Stupiditas Omnia Vincit,” *Crisis Magazine* (Dec. 30, 2020) at <https://www.crisismagazine.com/2020/stupiditas-omnia-vincit> (accessed on July 3, 2021).

<sup>5</sup> Sarah Schwartz, “The Dr. Seuss Controversy: What Educators Need to Know,” *Education Week* (Mar. 2, 2021) at <https://www.edweek.org/teaching-learning/the-dr-seuss-controversy-what-educators-need-to-know/2021/03> (accessed on July 3, 2021).

<sup>6</sup> Jarrett Stepman, “Woke Math Spreads to Oregon,” *The Daily Signal* (Feb. 23, 2021) and <https://www.dailysignal.com/2021/02/23/woke-math-spreads-to-oregon/> (accessed on July 3, 2021).

<sup>7</sup> Sean Wilentz, “A Matter of Facts: The New York Times’ 1619 Project Launched With the Best of Intentions, but Has Been Undermined by Some of Its Claims,” *The Atlantic* (Jan. 22, 2020) at <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/01/1619-project-new-york-times-wilentz/605152/> (accessed on Mar. 25, 2021).

## What Is Critical Race Theory?

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Much of this paradigm shift is a result of the influence of critical race theory (CRT).<sup>8</sup> Critical race theory asserts that America's legal framework is inherently racist and that race itself, instead of being biologically grounded and natural, is a socially constructed concept that is used by white people to further their economic and political interests at the expense of people of color. Critical race theory is predicated on the belief that race is the fundamental pivot point of injustice and oppression with whites as the oppressors. It asserts that all non-whites in the United States are victims of racism, even when it is not apparent, and that even supposed legal advances against racism like the those during the 1960s civil rights movement ultimately protect a system that benefits whites. The concept of color blindness, for example, rendered American society insensitive to the more subtle and systemic racism in our society.

Critical race theory is a modern offshoot of “critical theory,” which has long been championed by some progressive Catholic educators. Critical theory began with the 1920s Frankfurt School in Germany and the writings of Max Horkheimer.<sup>9</sup> Horkheimer distinguished critical theory from a “traditional” theory in that a critical theory has a “specific practical purpose.” It is “critical to the extent that it seeks human ‘emancipation from slavery,’ acts as a ‘liberating... influence,’ and works ‘to create a world which satisfies the needs and powers of’ human beings.”<sup>10</sup> Thus critical theory can be applied to any social circumstance with similar principles and objectives, including feminism, race relations, law, economics, and politics.

Critical theory's principles of fighting for freedom over oppression to effect equity in societal and economic structures harken back to Karl Marx and Frederick Engel's writings in *The Communist Manifesto* (1848). While Marx did not write extensively on education, per se, he and Engels demanded free public education for the “proletariat” (the oppressed working class), whose labor, they saw, kept the “bourgeois” (the social and financial elite) in control. “In place of the old bourgeois society,” they wrote, “with its classes and class antagonisms, we shall have an association, in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all.”<sup>11</sup> Society would become classless and socialist.

Because of critical race theory's broad reach within the economic, political, sociological, and legal contexts, it can more appropriately be defined as an “ideology.”<sup>12</sup> Whereas a theory is a

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<sup>8</sup> “Critical Race Theory,” Encyclopedia Britannica at <https://www.britannica.com/topic/critical-race-theory> (accessed on Apr. 22, 2021).

<sup>9</sup> “Critical Theory,” Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy at <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/critical-theory/> (accessed on March 3, 2021).

<sup>10</sup> “Critical Theory,” Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy.

<sup>11</sup> “Critical Theory,” Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy.

<sup>12</sup> Tanya Granic-Allen, “Prof. Bruce Parly Explores Critical Theory, Its Roots, and How It Has Permeated Canadian Universities,” The News Forum at <https://www.newsforum.tv/videos/cp053> (accessed Apr. 21, 2021).

“statement that proposes to describe and explain why facts or other social phenomenon are related to each other based on observed patterns,”<sup>13</sup> an ideology looks to change the social-political, economic, or cultural context wherein those facts and social phenomenon (or social realities) are situated. An ideology includes both practical *and* theoretical beliefs and philosophies of a person or group and proposes how these beliefs and philosophies can effect change within the specific context.<sup>14</sup> Identifying critical race theory as an ideology invites close scrutiny of its agenda and how it relates to the mission and goals of Catholic education.

## Critical Theory as Critical Pedagogy

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Contemporary critical theorists in the field of education include Paolo Freire, Henry Giroux, and Peter McLaren,<sup>15</sup> who draw on “Marxist concepts of class conflict and alienation to analyze social and educational institutions.”<sup>16</sup> The concept of critical theory, or critical pedagogy as applied in education, involves sensitizing students to the inequalities and exploitative power arrangements around them, so as to effect “equity, fairness, and social justice.”<sup>17</sup> The argument is that traditional education systems suppress specific groups of people—such as people of color, women, and those living in poverty or low socio-economic status—and retain a dominant and superior economic, social, and political class.<sup>18</sup> The dominant groups send their children to prestigious schools, while the oppressed groups are left to accept the circumstances that disempower them. The objective of this approach is to change society for those who see themselves as suppressed, exploited, or alienated, and is generally pointed toward school, neighborhood, or community issues attainable by the student and teacher. A teacher using the critical theory approach works with students to raise consciousness of suppression and assists them in changing the inequities in society, politics, the economy, and their educational choices. Learning is through investigation and discussion about political, social, economic, and educational topics, in which issues of power and control are recognized, and then joint efforts by the teacher and student to change these suppressive systems.

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<sup>13</sup> “Definition of Theory,” Open Education Sociology Dictionary at [https://sociologydictionary.org/theory/#definition\\_of\\_theory](https://sociologydictionary.org/theory/#definition_of_theory) (accessed Apr. 22, 2021).

<sup>14</sup> “Ideology: Meaning, Types, Right, Left and Centrist Examples,” Sociology Group at <https://www.sociologygroup.com/ideology-meaning/> (accessed on Apr. 22, 2021); “Ideology,” Wikipedia at <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ideology> (accessed on Apr. 22, 2021); Lee Harvey, “Ideology,” Social Research Glossary, Quality Research International at <https://www.qualityresearchinternational.com/socialresearch/ideology.htm> (accessed on Apr. 22, 2021).

<sup>15</sup> See Rage and Hope at <http://www.perfectfit.org/CT/freire1.html> (accessed on July 3, 2021).

<sup>16</sup> A. Ornstein, D. Levine, G. Gutek, and D. Vocke, *Foundations of Education* (Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth, 2014) 208, 210; Douglas Kellner, “Marxian Perspectives on Educational Philosophy: From Classical Marxism to Critical Pedagogy” at <https://pages.gseis.ucla.edu/faculty/kellner/essays/marxianperspectivesoneducation.pdf> (accessed on July 3, 2021).

<sup>17</sup> A. Ornstein (2014) 208, 210.

<sup>18</sup> A. Ornstein (2014) 210.

Freire (1921-1997), a Catholic<sup>19</sup> from Recife, Brazil, is perhaps the best known of the critical theorists in education. His seminal text, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1968), is an excellent example of the philosophy, principles, and pedagogical concepts of critical theory in education. At the time it was published, it was first received as controversial and “humanistic.” He was highly critical of traditional education in capitalist countries, which he said used the “banking concept” of transferring knowledge from the teacher, who “owns” the knowledge, and “deposits” it into the students, who know nothing.<sup>20</sup> This type of relationship, he wrote, perpetuates oppression and the alienation of the student, who is maintained “like the slave in the Hegelian dialectic.”<sup>21</sup> Freire advocated a more horizontal, interactive, and dialogical pedagogy of mutual learning between the teacher and the student, where there is “no longer merely the one who teaches, but one who is... taught in dialogue with the students, who in their turn while being taught also teach[es].”<sup>22</sup> In a banking concept of education, Freire believed the teacher-student relationship was one of authority and submission. In his horizontal relationship, the teacher is directive and authoritative—but not an authoritarian—and respects the student’s autonomy.<sup>23</sup>

Freire’s critical theory approach embraces classlessness and the need for the oppressors not to feign generosity toward the oppressed.<sup>24</sup> The oppressed, once liberated, also cannot use the same suppressive methods as the oppressor.<sup>25</sup> This translates into classroom practice, as teachers must “enter into the position of those with whom one is solidary.”<sup>26</sup> It is within this equitable relationship that true dialogue develops between a teacher and student, who synthesize and construct knowledge as equal participants to solve problems effecting their social reality. Dialogue itself is insufficient. Reflection and action or “praxis,” so as to “act together upon their environment... to transform it through further action and critical reflection,” humanizes all those involved.<sup>27</sup>

Freire claimed that this problem-based approach enacts the critical consciousness of students to analyze their social, economic, and political environment. Through mutual dialogue, the teacher and student re-form the problem to arrive at the deeper unveiling of reality. It is expected that students, as “critical co-investigators in dialogue with the teacher,” would eventually feel challenged to act on problems. Freire believed that, through this process of inquiry and “praxis,”

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<sup>19</sup> Lesley Bartlett, “Dialogue, Knowledge, and Teacher-Student Relations: Freirean Pedagogy in Theory and Practice,” *Comparative Education Review*, Vol. 49, No. 3 (Aug. 2005) 346.

<sup>20</sup> Lesley Bartlett (2005) 344-364.; Douglas Kellner (2006).

<sup>21</sup> Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (United Kingdom: Penguin Classics, 1970) 45.

<sup>22</sup> Paulo Freire (1970) 53.

<sup>23</sup> Paulo Freire, M. Gadotti, and S. Guimaraes, *Pedagogia: Dialogo e conflito* (Sao Paulo: Cortez, 1985) 76.

<sup>24</sup> Paulo Freire (1970) 29.

<sup>25</sup> Paulo Freire (1970) 31.

<sup>26</sup> Paulo Freire (1970) 23.

<sup>27</sup> “Concepts used by Paulo Freire,” Freire Institute at <http://www.freire.org/paulo-freire/concepts-used-by-paulo-freire> (accessed on July 3, 2021).

individuals would become truly human<sup>28</sup> and that alienation of the oppressed—kept in check through an educational system based on a balance of oppressor and oppressed—would be relinquished and freedom attained.

## Critical Theory and Liberation Theology

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Critical theory is tied closely in principle to “liberation theology,” a predominantly Jesuit<sup>29</sup> religious movement in Latin America that arose at about the same time and “sought to apply religious faith by aiding the poor and oppressed through involvement in political and civic affairs. It stressed both heightened awareness of the ‘sinful’ socioeconomic structures that caused social inequities and active participation in changing those structures.”<sup>30</sup> Its lens is fixated on the liberation of the poor from worldly political and economic tyranny, to such a degree that the liberation that Christ purchased through the cross to pay for personal sinfulness is overshadowed.<sup>31</sup> Liberation theology and critical theory both see class struggle as necessary for human freedom. In liberation theology, this struggle moved religion into the realm of politics, with priests working alongside activist educators and other liberators to overthrow an oppressive governmental regime.<sup>32</sup>

Liberation theology has many such problematic elements, not only in common with critical theory<sup>33</sup> but also with Marxist thought.<sup>34</sup> The dangers and errors of liberation theology were highlighted in 1984 by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, then prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and the future Pope Benedict XVI, in the *Instruction on Certain Aspects of the ‘Theology of Liberation.’* He referred to it as a “novel interpretation of both the content of faith and of Christian existence which seriously departs from the faith of the Church and in fact actually constitutes a practical negation.”<sup>35</sup> With the fall of Communism in the 1980s and the

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<sup>28</sup> Paolo Freire (1970) 45.

<sup>29</sup> Peter McLaren and Petar Jandric, “From Liberation to Salvation: Revolutionary Critical Pedagogy Meets Liberation Theology,” *Policy Futures in Education* (June 2017) at <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/epub/10.1177/1478210317695713> (accessed on July 2, 2021); John Wilkins, “Jesuit: Liberation Theology Will Endure and Grow,” *National Catholic Reporter* (June 7, 2012) at <https://www.ncronline.org/news/jesuit-liberation-theology-will-endure-and-grow> (accessed July 2, 2021).

<sup>30</sup> “Liberation Theology,” *Encyclopedia Britannica* at <https://www.britannica.com/topic/liberation-theology> (accessed on Mar. 5, 2021).

<sup>31</sup> Congregation for Doctrine of the Faith, *Instruction on Certain Aspects of the ‘Theology of Liberation’* (1984) 3 at [https://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_19840806\\_theology-liberation\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19840806_theology-liberation_en.html) (accessed on Mar. 5, 2021).

<sup>32</sup> Cindy Wooden, “Pope Reflects on Changed Attitudes Toward Liberation Theology,” *Crux Now* (Feb. 14, 2019) at <https://cruxnow.com/vatican/2019/02/pope-reflects-on-changed-attitudes-toward-liberation-theology/> (accessed on Mar. 8, 2021).

<sup>33</sup> See Thomas Oldenski, *Liberation Theology and Critical Pedagogy in Today’s Catholic Schools* (New York: Routledge, 2013) xii.

<sup>34</sup> Congregation for Doctrine of the Faith (1984), VI 10.

<sup>35</sup> Congregation for Doctrine of the Faith (1984), VI 10.

long tenure of anti-communist Pope Saint John Paul II, liberation theology waned on the Church scene.

Recently Pope Francis has emphasized themes in Catholic teaching that have been abused by liberation theology, such as the Church's preferential option of the poor, social and economic justice, and an inclusive ministry that serves the marginalized. These themes present an opportunity for educators to clearly distinguish Catholic principles from liberation theology, critical theory, and critical race theory, but Catholic teaching is always at risk of being coopted by forces hostile to the Gospel. For although there may be common identification of the problem (racism and injustice) and common cause to correct it (shared indignation), the means of correction and the philosophies underlying the correction may be at odds. Catholic educators should be wary of proposals advanced by secularists. Despite shared humanity and shared good will, the underlying philosophies and understandings of the human person may be quite different—and if the foundation is not strong, the project can get swept away by emotion or politics, leading to unintended and unhelped for results.

## **Fraternal Humanism**

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A recent Vatican emphasis which provides a locus for dialogue on these issues is the Congregation for Catholic Education's *Educating to Fraternal Humanism: Building a 'Civilization of Love' 50 Years after Populorum Progressio* (2017). The document, tied directly to Vatican II's main social encyclical "on the development of peoples," intends to move education beyond the four walls of the school building to effect change in the surrounding culture and promote the "humanization" of mankind. The document states that, in order "to build bridges and... to find answers to the challenges of our time,"<sup>36</sup> we must build a culture of dialogue in which ethical principles are linked to social and civic choices. The document encourages educators to "lay the foundations for peaceful dialogue and allow the encounter between differences with the primary objective of building a better world."<sup>37</sup>

The document's opening paragraphs describe contemporary scenarios with an emphasis on action-based, problem-solving pedagogies. It describes a "humanitarian emergency" of "inequities, poverty, unemployment and exploitation,"<sup>38</sup> where "wars, conflicts and terrorism are sometimes the cause, sometimes the effect of economic inequality and of the unjust distribution of the goods of creation;"<sup>39</sup> where migration leads to "encounters and clashes of civilizations;"

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<sup>36</sup> Congregation for Catholic Education, *Educating to Fraternal Humanism: Building a 'Civilization of Love' 50 Years After Populorum Progressio* (2017) 12 at [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/ccatheduc/documents/rc\\_con\\_ccatheduc\\_doc\\_20170416\\_educare-umanesimo-solidale\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccatheduc/documents/rc_con_ccatheduc_doc_20170416_educare-umanesimo-solidale_en.html) (accessed on Mar. 8, 2021).

<sup>37</sup> Congregation for Catholic Education (2017) 15.

<sup>38</sup> Congregation for Catholic Education (2017) 4.

<sup>39</sup> Congregation for Catholic Education (2017) 3.

where “both fraternal hospitality and intolerant, rigid populism... highlights decadent humanism... [and] marginalization and exclusion... leading to both encounters and clashes of civilizations... [and] the paradigm of indifference.”<sup>40</sup> These economic and political threats to peace and the desire for a “globalization of solidarity” inspire hope for “a new humanism, in which the social person [is] willing to talk and work for the realization of the common good.”<sup>41</sup>

This new approach “humanizes” education (a goal of Freirean pedagogy), so that not only “an educational service” is provided, but also an education which “deals with its results in the overall context of the personal, moral and social abilities of those who participate in the educational process.”<sup>42</sup> Pope Francis sees the method of this humanized education as one “that is sound and open, that pulls down the walls of exclusivity, promoting the richness and diversity of individual talents.” It extends “the classroom to embrace every corner of social experience in which education can generate solidarity, sharing and communion.”<sup>43</sup> It moves beyond the traditional student-teacher relationship to create social, inter-personal, and “interdependent” connections, in order to create “a framework of relationships that make up a living community... bound to a common destiny.”<sup>44</sup> This humanized education “does not simply ask the teacher to teach and student to learn, but urges everyone to live, study and act in accordance with the reasons of fraternal humanism,”<sup>45</sup> which—the reader is told in the same paragraph—is the framework of interdependent relationships bound by a common destiny, with the person at the center.

This equitable social relationship which brings everyone to the same common destiny is the hallmark of Freirean pedagogy. Like Freire, the Holy Father invites dialogue and co-investigation among the teacher and student, with the aim of raising critical consciousness and invoking action.

To fulfill their purpose, formation programmes geared towards education to fraternal humanism aim at some fundamental objectives. First, the main purpose is to allow every citizen to feel actively involved in building fraternal humanism. The instruments used should encourage pluralism, establishing a dialogue aimed at elaborating ethical issues and regulations. Education to fraternal humanism must make sure that learning knowledge means becoming aware of an ethical universe in which the person acts. In particular, this correct notion of the ethical universe must open up progressively wider horizons of the common good, so as to embrace the entire human family. (*Educating to fraternal humanism*, 20)

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<sup>40</sup> Congregation for Catholic Education (2017) 4.

<sup>41</sup> Congregation for Catholic Education (2017) 7.

<sup>42</sup> Congregation for Catholic Education (2017) 10.

<sup>43</sup> Congregation for Catholic Education (2017) 10.

<sup>44</sup> Congregation for Catholic Education (2017) 8.

<sup>45</sup> Congregation for Catholic Education (2017) 10.

As this mutual, leveled collaboration in learning and praxis should exist between the teacher and the student, it should also exist among all those who work in the field of education, where a “preference” should exist for “integrated research groups among teachers, young researchers and students.”<sup>46</sup>

Education to fraternal humanism develops cooperation networks in the various fields of education, especially within academic education. Firstly, it calls for educators to take a reasonable approach to collaboration. In particular, one must prefer joint efforts of the teaching staff in preparing their formation programmes, as well as cooperation among students as regards learning methods and formation scenarios. Moreover, as living cells of fraternal humanism, interconnected by an educational pact and intergenerational ethics, solidarity between teachers and learners must be ever more inclusive, plural and democratic. (*Educating to fraternal humanism*, 25)

The ethical requirements for dialogue, as explained in the document, are freedom and equality of the participants who recognize the dignity of all parties.<sup>47</sup> Freire’s critical theory pedagogy articulates this requirement as the need for the oppressors not to feign generosity toward the oppressed,<sup>48</sup> or the oppressed, once liberated, to use the same suppressive methods as the oppressor.<sup>49</sup> This translates into classroom practice as teachers who would maintain authority over students, but when using critical theory must “enter into the position of those with whom one is solidary,”<sup>50</sup> much like the emphasis of fraternal humanism (see paragraph 25 above).

Like Freire, who saw the requirement for an education in hope<sup>51</sup> in order to pursue and sustain the struggle toward social equity among the oppressed classes in Latin America, the *Fraternal Humanism* document sees the necessity to “Globalize Hope” as “the specific mission of an education to fraternal humanism.”<sup>52</sup> An entire section is set aside to discuss the necessity of globalizing hope. Freire saw it as necessary for the educator to find opportunities of hope to sustain the fight for social equity.<sup>53</sup> Here we see the document highlighting the salvation wrought by Christ on the cross as the source of hope for an education to fraternal humanism.<sup>54</sup> It is this hope of salvation that will fuel educational initiatives to address the progress of globalization

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<sup>46</sup> Congregation for Catholic Education (2017) 26.

<sup>47</sup> Congregation for Catholic Education (2017) 12.

<sup>48</sup> Paolo Freire (1970) 29.

<sup>49</sup> Paolo Freire (1970) 31.

<sup>50</sup> Paolo Freire (1970) 23.

<sup>51</sup> Paolo Freire, *Pedagogy of Hope* (New York: The Continuum Publishing Company, 1992).

<sup>52</sup> Congregation for Catholic Education (2017) 18.

<sup>53</sup> Paolo Freire (1992) 3.

<sup>54</sup> Congregation for Catholic Education (2017) 17.

gone awry, inequality and exploitation, and those suffering “a forceful exclusion from the flow of prosperity.”<sup>55</sup>

An education to fraternal humanism intends for education to be the means of creating interdependent networks throughout the world and cultures of dialogue, hope, and inclusion<sup>56</sup> whose aim is the integral and transcendent development of the person and of society.<sup>57</sup> This mirrors Freire’s critical theory method of using education as the means for the “humanization” of all people and for the transformation of society.

### **Concerns about Critical Theory, Critical Race Theory in Catholic Education**

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There are aspects of critical theory and critical race theory about which Catholics and non-Catholics can agree, including the importance of confronting racism, assisting the poor and underprivileged, addressing social and economic inequalities, fighting human exploitation. These are all core elements of Catholic social justice teaching and should already be addressed in Catholic education without embracing CRT. The crux of the matter is how to go about confronting such evils as educators and refuting and correctly interpreting ideological beliefs from a Catholic perspective.

The immediate focus of Catholic education is the integral formation of the human person, pursuing the particular good of maximizing the student’s individual potential and leading the student to Christ, Who is their salvation. Catholic education also serves the common good, by directing those particular goods toward the well-being of others to the greatest degree possible.<sup>58</sup> The goal is not to manipulate students into social activism; we must remember that Freire’s approach was originally designed for adults. Yet, this is not meant to say that young students are not capable of service, or that they should not be formed in service. Quite the contrary: the focus or intention of their service, while they are in formation, is to apply a synthesis of faith with life, so that once understood their free will may guide them to a life of service.

Just as Pope Benedict and St. John Paul II condemned liberation theology for co-opting religion for political and social change, so too must education not become simply a tool for scripted social change by those who are charged with forming students for freedom. As schools increasingly adopt various diversity, equity, and inclusivity programs, Catholic educators must ensure that social activism does not become the be-all and end-all of education. That pride of place belongs to truth and freedom.

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<sup>55</sup> Congregation for Catholic Education (2017) 19.

<sup>56</sup> Congregation for Catholic Education (2017) 31.

<sup>57</sup> Congregation for Catholic Education (2017) 15.

<sup>58</sup> Pope Paul VI, *Gravissimum educationis* (1965) 1. “For a true education aims at the formation of the human person in the pursuit of his ultimate end and of the good of the societies of which, as man, he is a member, and in whose obligations, as an adult, he will share.”

As Catholics we are taught not to judge other people, but that actions are worthy to be judged. Looking at the act, intention, and circumstance, we can determine the culpability of a behavior, and in so examining it and our own consciences, we can live within the moral laws of the Beatitudes and the Ten Commandments. There is only one rule applied to others, and that is to love our neighbors as ourselves and to love God above all things.

The gift of Catholic education to the body politic is a transcendent understanding of the human person and a philosophical realism founded in objective truth and natural as well as divine law. Catholic educators must remain faithful to their charism while encouraging dialogue, not for its own sake, but in pursuit of the truth, which alone can provide both the unity and the freedom that is longed for.

When addressing issues of race and justice, carefully defining terms is a good first step. It is important to be cautious about using terminology pushed by critical race theory—including “oppressor and oppressed,” “marginalization,” “systems of power,” “white supremacy and domination,” “colonial beliefs,” and “deconstruction”—as common parlance throughout the school or college. These terms, if ill-defined or used disingenuously, can be divisive and harmful to the minds and hearts of young people. Their use is encouraged as a means to political ends. Students taught with critical race theory materials can become racists in the literal sense of the word: they may treat others (the perceived oppressor race) unfairly because of skin color or background.<sup>59</sup> Division into categories of good and bad based on skin color is a reversal of Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s and antithetical to a Catholic understanding of human dignity and equality.

If these terms are used, they should be placed within the proper context of Catholic classroom instruction, avoiding the political and social ideology advanced by critical race theorists. Scripture, tradition, and the Church’s social teaching should inform and inspire the discussion. Catholic social teaching promotes the solidarity of mankind as one human family (this is basic Christian anthropology), with the goals of justice and peace.<sup>60</sup> This context is essential and helpful in proposing the preferential option for the poor and marginalized and situating decisions within the common good.

Catholic education is also Christocentric and based on the Gospel message of unity and communion, which Jesus taught when he said, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God” (Matt 5:9) and “Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy”

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<sup>59</sup> “Racism,” Encyclopedia Britannica at <https://kids.britannica.com/kids/article/racism/632495> (accessed on Apr. 26, 2021). “Racism is when people are treated unfairly because of their skin color or background. It is a kind of discrimination, and it causes great harm to people.”

<sup>60</sup> United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, “Seven Themes of Catholic Social Teaching” at <https://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/what-we-believe/catholic-social-teaching/solidarity> (accessed on Apr. 26, 2021).

(Matt 5:7).<sup>61</sup> Critical race theory harms the unity of all people that Jesus prayed for: “that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you” (John 17:21). St. Paul taught this in Ephesians 4:3-6, in encouraging all to “strive to preserve the unity of the spirit through the bond of peace: one body and one Spirit as you were also called to the one hope of your call; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all.”

Some who push critical race theory call slavery America’s “original sin,” in an attempt to co-opt a fundamental Christian dogma. Traditionally original sin describes the disobedience of our first parents in the Garden of Eden, which marks the whole of human history. It is the only “collectivist” sin in the sense that all people are born in a state of original sin which can be removed through the Sacrament of Baptism. Catholic educators should ensure that students understand that sins are committed by individuals through their own free will and must be acknowledged and repaired to balance social harmony and communion. According to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, “Sin is a personal act” (1868). St. John Paul II in *Reconciliatio et paenitentia* clarifies that, “A situation—or likewise an institution, a structure, society itself—is not in itself the subject of moral acts,”<sup>62</sup> but the collective actions or omissions of individuals within certain social groups or even countries are the result of an “accumulation and concentration of many personal sins.”<sup>63</sup> This is not to dismiss the incredible harm and evil that accumulated personal sins can effect, or the need for entire societies to challenge injustices and evils at work within their structures.

Catholic educators should also teach that the sin of one person does not extend to their progeny, since their progeny, too, have free will. “You ask: ‘Why is not the son charged with the guilt of his father?’ Because the son has done what is right and just, and has been careful to observe all my statutes, he shall surely live” (Ez 18:19). CRT improperly attempts to assign the responsibility and burdens for sins committed by others in the past to persons today who happen to share a skin color with a past sinner. However, as taught by Pope Benedict XVI, “In the field of ethical awareness and moral decision-making, there is no similar possibility of accumulation for the simple reason that man’s freedom is always new and he must always make his decisions anew. These decisions can never simply be made for us in advance by others—if that were the case, we would no longer be free.”<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Matthew 5:1-10.

<sup>62</sup> St. John Paul II, *Reconciliatio et paenitentia* (1984) 16. See also St. John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (1987) 36-37. “If the present situation can be attributed to difficulties of various kinds, it is not out of place to speak of ‘structures of sin,’ which, as I stated in my Apostolic Exhortation *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia*, are rooted in personal sin, and thus always linked to the concrete acts of individuals who introduce these structures, consolidate them and make them difficult to remove... is the fruit of many sins which lead to ‘structures of sin’.”

<sup>63</sup> St. John Paul II (1984) 16.

<sup>64</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi* (2007) 24.

Catholic social teaching calls on each Christian to care for victims regardless of personal responsibility for the sins committed, and CRT proposes reparations for past injustices. This complex request must be handled carefully in order to ensure that new injustices are not committed in the process of attempting to right a past wrong. The restoration of a proper order of equality and dignity of persons should not indiscriminately target people based on the power they hold, the wealth they possess, their race, their nationality or place of birth, their religion, their family relationship, or friendship. To distribute resources according to such criteria is considered a sin of the “respect of persons,”<sup>65</sup> according to St. Thomas Aquinas. Distributive justice requires that resources are awarded based upon a person’s merits, ability, personal needs, or needs of the family.<sup>66</sup>

The idea of equality of men in the Catholic worldview is that man possesses an inherent dignity as made in the image and likeness of God, not that all men possess an equal amount of material things or talents. Jesus said you will always have the poor with you (John 12:8). How could he say this if, being omniscient and prescient, he could see a time where we would all be “equal” in this world? Each person possesses a diversity of talents and goods by God’s design so that we can learn the virtues of generosity, kindness and magnanimity. God allows some of us to be poor so that others might have the opportunity to give – freely, and thus grow spiritually. To demand an ‘equity’ of outcomes through force puts in place a barrier to God’s design and can cause resentment and frustration.

While critical race theory might appear to be a timely theory that corrects societal wrongs through equity, some of its underlying assumptions are not in harmony with Catholic teaching. The mission of Catholic education is to prepare students to fulfill God’s calling in this world and to attain the eternal kingdom for which they were created. While students are called to become leaven for society, they are not called to become the political social activists that CRT requires, nor are they to be formed with a philosophy that looks to man, and particularly one’s race, as the lens for all knowing. Catholic educators teaching authentic Catholic moral and social teaching as well as the practice of Christian charity should not need to appropriate elements of CRT, including its pedagogical approach, but instead should confidently retain the core influence of the Gospel in all of their efforts to educate and form young people.

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<sup>65</sup> See St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica II-II*, q. 63.

<sup>66</sup> Dominicans of the Central Province of St. Albert the Great, *Responding to God* (River Forest, IL: Priory Press, 1998) 214-215.