

Catholic Theologians Lack Self-Reflection on Race

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by Bill Donohue

A remarkable document, “Statement of Catholic Theologians on Racial Justice,” released Dec. 8, is a clear window into the thinking of those who are teaching on Catholic campuses. It is not a pretty picture. Signed by hundreds of professors, the statement evinces a wholesale disregard for the truth. Just as bad, the phony hand-wringing is nauseating.

What prompted this moralistic outburst are the deaths of Michael Brown and Eric Garner. To make sure the reader gets the point they want to make, the theologians write about the killings of “Black” persons by “White policeman”; the capitalized letters are done for racial effect. What angers the professors are “the failures of the grand jury process to indict some of the police officers involved” – and other instances of alleged racial injustice.

They need to be specific. Where is the evidence that the grand jury failed in either the Brown or the Garner case? After all, the scholars believe that the two cops involved, Darren Wilson and Daniel Pantaleo, should have been indicted, so either the classroom experts have evidence that the grand jury didn’t hear or they simply didn’t like the decision.

Here are some inconvenient facts:

- Ten minutes before the encounter between Wilson and Brown, Wilson learned of an emergency call about a two-year old who was having trouble breathing. EMS was supposed to respond but the police officer volunteered

to go because he could get there sooner. The child he attended to was African-American.

- Ten minutes before they met, Brown was robbing a store, flying high on drugs. On his way back from the emergency call, Wilson spotted Brown walking in the middle of the street and told him to use the sidewalk. This provoked Brown who then assaulted Wilson. Brown fled, Wilson pursued him, and then the 6-foot-four, 292 pound Brown lunged at the cop with his head down. Wilson saw him put his hand on his waistband and fired.
- Brown was never shot in the back and all the forensic evidence supported Wilson's account, as did many witnesses. There were three blacks on the 12-member grand jury.
- The chief officer on the scene of the Garner confrontation was a black female cop, though few media outlets have said so. She supervised Pantaleo and the other police officers, and at no time did she order them to stop doing what they were doing. Garner, like Brown, resisted arrest, and given his size—he was 6-foot-3 and weighed 350 pounds—he was not easy to take down.
- For nine weeks, the grand jury heard from 50 witnesses and assessed 60 pieces of evidence. There were nine non-whites on the 23-member panel of jurors. In order to indict Pantaleo, they had to conclude that he knew there was a substantial risk that Garner would have died if he pursued him.

Do the Catholic theologians have evidence that these mixed-race jurors got it wrong? Do they think the jurors are just as racist as the cops? I am a sociologist who has taught Criminology. I also worked in a high-crime neighborhood with blacks and Hispanics. From my research and experience, most people of color are good, law-abiding persons, but they are plagued by a minority of young men who threaten their security. It is the innocent who deserve our empathy – not the thugs who prey on them.

The theologians got one thing right. They should examine themselves for their complicity in the sin of racism. There is much to ponder, but it is not racism against blacks they need to consider; rather, it is their racism and their classism against white police officers that should command their attention. One passing positive reference to the police doesn't cut it.

Similarly, it is a cheap throwaway line to say, "We commit ourselves to placing our bodies and/or privileges on the line in visible, public solidarity with movements of protest to address the deep-seated racism of our nation."

If they had any guts, they never would have given themselves an option. It's time they took to the streets to see what the urban anarchists are really like.

Dr. William Donohue is the president of and CEO of the Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights, the nation's largest Catholic civil rights organization. The publisher of the Catholic League journal, Catalyst, Bill is a former Bradley Resident Scholar at the Heritage Foundation and served for two decades on the board of directors of the National Association of Scholars. The author of five books, two on the ACLU, and the winner of several teaching awards and many awards from the Catholic community, Donohue has appeared on thousands of television and radio shows speaking on civil liberties and social issues. Read more reports from Bill Donohue – [Click Here Now.](#)