

race or ethnic stock is superior to another. It denies the equal dignity of all members of the human family.”⁸ Despite this teaching, significant challenges remain for us to address in our time.

Our Nation’s “Original Social Sin”

The founders of our nation were unable to come to agreement with regard to the issue of slavery. Hence, the Constitution failed to address it and our nation was born into what some have called America’s “original sin of racism.” Slavery became a focal point of political debate in 1818 when Missouri made application for admission to the Union. The debate raged for the next forty years. The election of Abraham Lincoln as President marked a significant turning point. Unfortunately, the tensions eventually spilled over into a violent war that almost tore

our nation permanently apart. In January 1863,⁹ President Lincoln promulgated the Emancipation Proclamation that freed the slaves in the areas still under Confederate control.

In 1864, Congress passed the 13th amendment to the Constitution, legally abolishing slavery. The amendment was ratified the following year. The Northern victory in the Civil War preserved the nation, but did not resolve the painful struggles that were yet necessary to realize what the Emancipation Proclamation and the 13th amendment to the Constitution guaranteed.

Although freedom had been won in principle, a new phenomenon of institutionalized racial segregation took over. It was established by law in the South. It existed in housing, educational and economic patterns throughout the country. Not until the 1960s did the civil rights movement gain momentum. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. provided the heroic leadership (along with other courageous citizens of all races) that led to the development of legislation and judicial decisions that finally secured the “legal” rights of those who had been deprived of them because of the color of their skin.

Continuing Disharmony

“What happens is that I do, not the good I will to do, but the evil I do not intend.” (Rom 7:19)

Unfortunately, today as in the past, we in the Church have been slow to

appreciate the full depth and breadth of the meaning of Divine Revelation that each human person is made in the image and likeness of God. Christ, through His cross, has granted us the grace to live a new life in Him. Racial

and cultural differences are no longer to be causes of division (Gal 3:26-28).

In “Brothers and Sisters to Us,” the bishops tried to draw attention to the relationship between racial and economic justice. This description seems to be particularly apt for today: “In an era characterized by limited resources, restricted job markets and dwindling revenues, the poor and racial minorities

