

others from different social locations, and to become familiar with African American culture.<sup>161</sup>

John Connolly possessed a very good grasp of the challenge that black theology posed for American Catholic theology, Catholic ecclesial life, and American society. There is much to value and admire in this article, but two omissions strike me—the lack of a discussion of responsibility and the absence of a discussion of conversion. Connolly did not discuss the notion of responsibility,<sup>162</sup> although he did use the word “commitment.” Still, a clarifying analysis of the oppressor’s responsibility for and connection to the oppressive situation that entangles Blacks, Indigenous peoples, Hispanic/Latinos, women, and poor people of all racial-ethnic cultural backgrounds would have been a significant contribution.

On Bernard Lonergan’s account of conversion, Connolly himself experienced moral, religious, and intellectual conversion. This three-fold conversion manifests itself to this reader in Connolly’s serious critique and acceptance of black theology and his move to rethink American Catholic theology. Indeed, Connolly understood and took on the challenge that James Cone put to American Catholic theology. Connolly wrote:

In the final analysis American theology’s omission of the category of liberation from oppression from its definition of revelation is not just a minor theological flaw but a serious threat to the very essence of the Christian message. . . . Whenever theologians neglect to include the notion of liberation from oppression in their theologies, not only do they fail to do Christian theology, but they are doing the work of the antichrist.<sup>163</sup>

This was and remains the challenge for American Catholic theology. As Cone and Connolly insist, whether we meet this challenge is a matter of the essence of the gospel.

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### **The Good, Segregationist Catholics: A Meditation on John R. Connolly’s “Revelation as Liberation from Oppression”**

For this final installment of *Horizons*’s fiftieth-anniversary celebration, the editors have chosen to reprint John R. Connolly’s 1999 article “Revelation

<sup>161</sup> Connolly, “Revelation as Liberation from Oppression,” 252.

<sup>162</sup> In “Revelation as Liberation from Oppression,” Connolly mentioned the word only once, and then he is citing Dulles (247).

<sup>163</sup> Connolly, “Revelation as Liberation from Oppression,” 240.

as Liberation from Oppression: Black Theology's Challenge for American Catholic Theology." Connolly wrote this article because he had been reading (or perhaps rereading) *God of the Oppressed*, a systematic theology that had been published by Black Protestant scholar James Hal Cone almost twenty-five years earlier.<sup>164</sup> In essence, Connolly asked, "Shouldn't white Catholic theology prioritize liberation too?" Having originally appeared in *Horizons's* twenty-fifth anniversary volume, Connolly's article now reaches its own twenty-fifth birthday and stands at the midpoint of the journal's history. Reflecting on the achievements and limitations of "Revelation as Liberation from Oppression" can help white Catholic theologians to critically evaluate our collective commitment to Black liberation.

Connolly grew up in the United States in the postwar era, when whites were utilizing the practices of *de jure* segregation and lynching to maintain white supremacy. In Cone's description of the southern whites of his youth, Connolly recognizes his own white Alabama Catholic family's historically segregationist behavior. When reading Cone's words, he says, "I saw myself."<sup>165</sup>

Connolly recounts specific practices demonstrating his family's explicit commitment to *de jure* and *de facto* segregation. They obeyed statutes requiring racial separation in schools and public facilities and attended Sunday Mass only with other whites.<sup>166</sup> Connolly also remembers their relationship with Marylam, their Black maid. He reports that Marylam did the Connolly family's cleaning, ironing, cooking, and childcare, including such intimate tasks as bathing and caring for the children during parental absences.<sup>167</sup> He reflects, "At the time it seemed to me that we treated Marylam nicely and that we loved and respected her."<sup>168</sup> For example, "She ate well when she was at our house. We gave her food and clothes to take home, as well as presents at Christmas and Easter, and other holidays. It seemed as though she was a part of our family. But," he explains, "it was clear she was not considered an equal member. She never ate at the same table with us and, when we gave her a ride home, she sat in the back of the car."<sup>169</sup>

In retrospect, this mundane aspect of Connolly's white Catholic upbringing strikes him as troubling. Recalling that "we all considered ourselves to be good Catholics" and that this sentiment was confirmed by religious sisters,

<sup>164</sup> James H. Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, rev. ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997; originally published by Seabury Press, 1975).

<sup>165</sup> Connolly, "Revelation as Liberation from Oppression," 233.

<sup>166</sup> Connolly, "Revelation as Liberation from Oppression," 233.

<sup>167</sup> Connolly, "Revelation as Liberation from Oppression," 234.

<sup>168</sup> Connolly, "Revelation as Liberation from Oppression," 234.

<sup>169</sup> Connolly, "Revelation as Liberation from Oppression," 234.

the parish priest, and the archbishop, Connolly asks, “What type of gospel was preached to us which allowed us to condone and support a situation that oppressed millions of black people? Was there something wrong with our theology?”<sup>170</sup> Connolly grasps that something was amiss not only with his family’s behavior but with their theology of revelation, their sense of God’s guiding presence in their lives.<sup>171</sup> This important insight is not only intellectually disconcerting but affectively painful: “My presumption of my family’s moral virtue was shattered.”<sup>172</sup> Connolly laments what he now perceives to have been a devastating moral failure: “How could we have believed that as segregationists we were nonetheless good Catholics?”<sup>173</sup>

Connolly’s retrospective outrage notwithstanding, such beliefs were common. Historian Matthew J. Cressler has illuminated white Catholic racial attitudes during the postwar era, when Marylam worked for Connolly’s family.<sup>174</sup> Through archival research analyzing hundreds of letters that white Chicago Catholics sent to their bishops between 1965 and 1968 protesting archdiocesan plans for integration, Cressler documents how white Catholics conflated their racial and religious identities. The Chicago letter-writers assumed a continuity of virtue between being “real good and sincere Catholics” and practicing segregation.<sup>175</sup> Far from expressing any hint of moral conflict, they asserted confidently that racial segregation was the will of God.<sup>176</sup> The Connollys, then, were not unusual, and anti-Blackness was not confined to the South. It was and remains a white problem.

Grappling with his dismay over the ease with which his white Catholic upbringing had endorsed segregation, Connolly extends his insight to his chosen theological profession. Given his new perspective on his family and faith community, it now strikes Connolly as “interesting”—a word my mother used to use, in a certain tone, when she was deeply skeptical of something—that mainstream theology of revelation, including the paradigmatic work of Avery Dulles, omits “the category of liberation from oppression” as part of God’s will for humanity.<sup>177</sup> Connolly not only affirms that this omission creates

<sup>170</sup> Connolly, “Revelation as Liberation from Oppression,” 234.

<sup>171</sup> Connolly, “Revelation as Liberation from Oppression,” 234.

<sup>172</sup> Connolly, “Revelation as Liberation from Oppression,” 234.

<sup>173</sup> Connolly, “Revelation as Liberation from Oppression,” 234.

<sup>174</sup> See Matthew J. Cressler, “‘Real Good and Sincere Catholics’: White Catholicism and Massive Resistance to Desegregation in Chicago, 1965–1968,” *Religion and American Culture* 30, no. 2 (Summer 2020): 273–306.

<sup>175</sup> “Real good and sincere Catholics” is a direct quote from a letter by a white Chicago Catholic; see Cressler, “Real Good and Sincere Catholics,” 275–76.

<sup>176</sup> Cressler, “Real Good and Sincere Catholics,” 274.

<sup>177</sup> Connolly, “Revelation as Liberation from Oppression,” 235.

“an obstacle to overcoming racism in the United States,” but he suspects “that this theology might function as a contributory cause of the racism that exists among US Catholics.”<sup>178</sup> In a word, though he does not say so directly, Connolly realizes that white theology itself is segregationist.

To his credit, Connolly does not shake his head in despair, heave a regretful sigh, and move on to a less dismal topic. Nor is he deterred by the institutional church’s open antagonism toward liberation theologies.<sup>179</sup> Determined to intervene, he undertakes careful research. His resulting proposal for developing a white Catholic theology of revelation informed by Cone’s insistence on the urgent need for Black liberation becomes *Horizons*’s first peer-reviewed article to engage substantively with Black theology and to hint that anti-Blackness is a serious theological problem.

### ***Compatibility and Transformation***

It does not take Connolly long to comprehend that conventional theology is ill-equipped to solve this problem. Mirroring whites’ segregation-era insistence on occupying the front seats of public and private vehicles, the dominant white theological method dictated that Connolly first examine white theology of revelation and then ask what Cone’s ideas might add. Moreover, Cone himself had asserted that white theology of revelation, lacking the category of liberation, was not so much wrong as “inadequate,” so weak that “even a racist could accept this theology of revelation.”<sup>180</sup> Connolly could have tokenized Cone by treating his ideas as optional or supplemental to white theology. Instead, he considers Cone’s thought in its integrity, striving to interpret it on its own terms.

Connolly’s investigation leads him to grant the validity of Cone’s argument that God’s self-revelation is liberation and, consequently, to challenge Dulles’s thought-system to incorporate Cone’s insight. Noting a recent conservative turn in the trajectory of Dulles’s thought, Connolly observes that Dulles himself is unlikely to incorporate “the category of liberation from

<sup>178</sup> Connolly, “Revelation as Liberation from Oppression,” 235.

<sup>179</sup> As is well known, at that time, with now-Saint John Paul II as pope and Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger (later Pope Benedict XVI) heading the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, the tenor of the 1984 *Instruction on Certain Aspects of the “Theology of Liberation”* still prevailed. See [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 September 4, 2024. Pope Francis has signaled greater openness to liberationist views, for example, by his amicable meeting with Gustavo Gutiérrez shortly after becoming pope in 2013 and by his personal friendship with Sr. Jeannine Gramick, the cofounder of New Ways Ministry.

<sup>180</sup> Connolly, “Revelation as Liberation from Oppression,” 233.

oppression into his theology of revelation.”<sup>181</sup> Fortunately, another influential “American”<sup>182</sup> theologian, Francis Fiorenza, has already advocated for “contemporary Catholic theologians to consider the ‘hermeneutical role of the oppressed’ in their paradigmatic reconstruction of the Christian tradition for today.” Further, Fiorenza identified “the significance of liberation theology for systematic theology today.”<sup>183</sup> Thus, Connolly can conclude on behalf of white theologians generally that “an inclusion [of the category of liberation] would be compatible with an American Catholic understanding of revelation.”<sup>184</sup>

But Connolly does not stop at declaring compatibility. That language still implies that incorporating this theme into theology is optional rather than crucial. Instead, Connolly calls for transformation. He offers a new definition of revelation that prioritizes liberation: “Revelation is ‘God’s symbolic communication of liberating and reconciling love which rejects all forms of oppression.’”<sup>185</sup> With this definition, Connolly not only accepts Cone’s insight about the need for liberation for Black people but insists that this insight must shape white Catholic theological reflection if that reflection is to be “adequate,”<sup>186</sup> that is, if it is to stop endorsing segregation and begin to champion liberation. Moreover, he proposes that “a living faith commitment to work to overcome oppression should precede any theological reflection.” He explains:

Liberation cannot simply be an idea added to the concept of revelation. The notion of revelation should include an active commitment to social transformation. In this way the oppression of blacks and others would be explicitly denounced and American Catholics would thereby become involved in the work of overcoming the social, political, and economic structures of United States society that support oppression.<sup>187</sup>

To embrace Cone’s insight and hold white theologians accountable to it is to assert Black theologians’ right to shape the field. Connolly’s argument

<sup>181</sup> Connolly, “Revelation as Liberation from Oppression,” 247.

<sup>182</sup> Following Cone’s usage, Connolly uses the term “American” to denote the racial identity we now refer to as “white,” even as he acknowledges the problems with claiming a continental identity for whiteness. See Connolly, “Revelation as Liberation from Oppression,” 232n1.

<sup>183</sup> Connolly, “Revelation as Liberation from Oppression,” 235.

<sup>184</sup> Connolly, “Revelation as Liberation from Oppression,” 247. The language of inclusion is still common, but because it can perpetuate a problematic us/them binary, it is not universally embraced. For a now-classic treatment, see Sara Ahmed, *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012).

<sup>185</sup> Connolly, “Revelation as Liberation from Oppression,” 248.

<sup>186</sup> Connolly, “Revelation as Liberation from Oppression,” 235.

<sup>187</sup> Connolly, “Revelation as Liberation from Oppression,” 251.

gestures toward the audacious step of relinquishing white theology's historical insistence on its exclusive authority to determine the scope and parameters of the discipline. To champion liberation, white theology must renounce its commitment to segregation and racism. Demonstrating awareness of liberation theologies in footnotes or brief passages—merely acknowledging compatibility—is not enough. The entire white theological approach requires transformation. This is a step that white Catholic theology collectively, including the field as represented by *Horizons*, has yet to take.

Today, the academy concedes the relevance of Black theology (as evidenced, for example, by the recent proliferation of job openings prioritizing this specialization), and anti-Black racism is increasingly acknowledged as a theological problem, including in *Horizons*. It would be a stretch, however, to say that “Revelation as Liberation from Oppression” opened the journal's floodgates. When I first met him in 2006, Connolly remarked to me that he had tried to bring attention to Black theology with this *Horizons* article, but no one seemed to have noticed.<sup>188</sup> Receiving no response, he went on to other projects.<sup>189</sup> As far as I could ascertain, the present roundtable constitutes the first time since its publication that “Revelation as Liberation from Oppression” has been mentioned in *Horizons*, and citations elsewhere are scant.<sup>190</sup> By contrast, Brown, Gutiérrez, and Schneiders are recognized as giants in the fields represented by their respective fiftieth-anniversary-celebration articles; in particular, Schneiders's featured article “has become a classic and is the most cited article of the *Horizons* corpus.”<sup>191</sup> This begs the question: Why have *Horizons*'s editors chosen as fourth in their catalog of “greatest hits”<sup>192</sup> an article that until now has had virtually no measurable scholarly impact?

<sup>188</sup> Conversation with the author, Catholic Theological Society of America banquet, San Antonio, TX, June 10, 2006.

<sup>189</sup> In a phone conversation, Connolly confirmed that he never returned to Black theology in any subsequent academic publications, largely due to the near-total silence with which the academy greeted “Revelation as Liberation from Oppression.” He pivoted to other scholarly interests until his retirement twelve years later. Conversation with the author, September 3, 2024.

<sup>190</sup> As of September 1, 2024, an ATLA search yields one scholarly use of Connolly's article: Christopher Pramuk references it multiple times in “Strange Fruit: Black Suffering/White Revelation,” *Theological Studies* 67 (2006): 345–77. According to Google Scholar, which is not comprehensive (here, it misses at least the *Theological Studies* citation) but is used by many as a starting point, “Revelation as Liberation from Oppression” is cited in a handful of dissertations and books, none of which went on to become bestsellers. See [https://scholar.google.com/scholar?cites=1464759612972512809&as\\_sdt=2005&scioldt=0,5&hl=en](https://scholar.google.com/scholar?cites=1464759612972512809&as_sdt=2005&scioldt=0,5&hl=en).

<sup>191</sup> Elena Procaro-Foley, “Editor's Introduction [to the Anniversary Roundtable],” *Horizons* 51, no. 1 (Spring 2024): 163–64, at 163.

<sup>192</sup> Elena Procaro-Foley, “From the Editor,” *Horizons* 50, no. 1 (Spring 2023): iii–viii, at iii.

It seems that the editors wished to encourage theological reflection on anti-Black racism—in their words, they recognized that “we need to keep working on the challenge of Black theology”<sup>193</sup>—and Connolly’s 1999 article was the best *Horizons*’s archives had to offer. I say this not to criticize Connolly’s valiant effort but to offer a matter-of-fact explanation. There was nothing older. Since the journal’s inception in 1974, Black theology had been mentioned in passing and occasionally discussed in book reviews but, as noted, Connolly was the first to engage it at length. Afterward, six years passed before Christopher Pramuk’s article on the theology of M. Shawn Copeland appeared in 2005, along with a brief “editorial essay” in which a senior scholar reflected on his own white privilege.<sup>194</sup> A ten-year gap followed<sup>195</sup> before Katie Grimes published an article on Peter Claver and white supremacy in 2015, Michael Jaycox published an article on the Black Lives Matter movement in 2017, and Lincoln Rice published an article on racial justice and the Catholic Worker movement in 2019.<sup>196</sup> At the time of the watershed events following George Floyd’s murder in 2020, then, *Horizons*’s treatment of Black theology and anti-Blackness consisted chiefly of a smattering of articles by early-career white scholars.<sup>197</sup>

<sup>193</sup> Email communication to the author, June 12, 2024.

<sup>194</sup> Christopher Pramuk, “Living in the Master’s House’: Race and Rhetoric in the Theology of M. Shawn Copeland,” *Horizons* 32, no. 2 (Fall 2005): 295–331; Charles E. Curran, “White Privilege,” *Horizons* 32, no. 2 (Fall 2005): 361–67. According to the editor, articles are peer-reviewed; editorial articles, roundtables, review symposia, and the like usually are not. Email communication to the author, July 27, 2024.

<sup>195</sup> Some might divide the ten years by “counting” the 2010 review symposium of Bryan Massingale’s *Racial Justice and the Catholic Church*: Laurie Cassidy, Charles E. Curran, James H. Evans, Jr., Jana Bennett, and Bryan N. Massingale, “Review Symposium [*Racial Justice and the Catholic Church*],” *Horizons* 37, no. 1 (Spring 2010): 127–42. Cassidy’s review stands out for its sophisticated engagement with Massingale’s claims, but not all reviewers understand the book, and none of the four are Black Catholics. Massingale’s brief response largely clarifies his argument.

<sup>196</sup> Katie Walker Grimes, “Racialized Humility: The White Supremacist Sainthood of Peter Claver, SJ,” *Horizons* 42, no. 2 (December 2015): 296–316; Michael P. Jaycox, “Black Lives Matter and Catholic Whiteness: A Tale of Two Performances,” *Horizons* 44, no. 2 (December 2017): 306–41; Lincoln Rice, “The Catholic Worker Movement and Racial Justice: A Precarious Relationship,” *Horizons* 46, no. 1 (June 2019): 53–78. Also in this period, John P. Slattery briefly discussed antebellum white Catholics’ proslavery positions as “dissent” in a 2018 roundtable: “Examining Theological Appropriations of Problematic Historical Dissent,” *Horizons* 45, no. 1 (June 2018): 149–54. Regarding the latter discussion, new research suggests that “dissent” is too strong a word; see Christopher J. Kellerman, SJ, *All Oppression Shall Cease: A History of Slavery, Abolitionism, and the Catholic Church* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2022).

<sup>197</sup> Only Connolly and Curran were senior scholars when their essays were published.

Recently, it appears that the editors have successfully directed more energy toward this topic, generating a surge in invited contributions on themes related to Black theology and anti-Black racism. In 2021, *Horizons* published a roundtable on teaching and antiracism; in 2022, an editorial essay on race in late antiquity; and, in 2023, a roundtable on white womanhood.<sup>198</sup> No further peer-reviewed articles appeared, however, until 2024, when the June issue included two: one by Cyril Orji on the Joseph story and contemporary race-discourse and the other by John P. Slattery on racism in the writings of Teilhard de Chardin.<sup>199</sup> What this brief literature review reveals, pun intended, is that the architects of this fiftieth-anniversary celebration could not choose to reprint an article on Black theology or racial liberation by a giant in the field because *Horizons* has never published one.

For many white Catholic scholars, this journal's fine achievements in numerous areas represent a source of pride. Our shared commitment to excellence now compels us to admit that race is not one of those areas. The dominance of white voices in *Horizons* generally, the scarcity of voices treating Black theology and anti-Black racism, and the fact that so few of the relevant peer-reviewed articles and invited essays are authored by Black scholars—this evidence indicates that, at best, the theological community represented by *Horizons* operates according to a compatibility model. Regardless of our intentions, the impact is clear: *Horizons* continues to practice racial exclusion. Meditating on this sobering lesson, I invite white theologians to join me in lamenting with Connolly: How can we have believed that as segregationists we are nonetheless good Catholics?

### ***White Theology***

Our lament must not yield to despair. Connolly's experience suggests that there is hope even for senior white scholars. After all, Connolly achieved

<sup>198</sup> Joseph Flipper and Christopher Pramuk, "Teaching Antiracism," *Horizons* 48, no. 1 (June 2021): 155–94; Vince L. Bantu, "'Is a Cushite Made in the Image of God?' Christian Visions of Race in Late Antiquity," *Horizons* 49, no. 1 (June 2022): 152–73; Jessica Coblenz, Kate Ward, and Megan K. McCabe, "Critical Reflections on White Womanhood in US Catholic Theology," *Horizons* 50, no. 1 (June 2023): 180–207.

<sup>199</sup> Cyril Orji, "A Reappropriation of the Joseph Story in Genesis 39 and Surah 12 for Contemporary Race-Discourse," *Horizons* 51, no. 1 (June 2024): 1–32; John P. Slattery, "The Extent and Impact of Racism and Eugenics in the Writings of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, S.J.," *Horizons* 51, no. 1 (June 2024): 33–71. The June 2024 issue also includes an editorial essay article by Kathleen Holscher documenting clergy abuse against mostly Hispano boys in New Mexico: Kathleen Holscher, "A Priest, a Ranch, and *los Muchachos*: A Study of Race and Clerical Abuse from New Mexico," *Horizons* 51, no. 1 (June 2024): 195–207.



his insight into the segregation of theology when he was almost thirty years into his career. It is also worth noting that he began his research using a conventional white theological method; he was a Dulles scholar long before he comprehended Cone's relevance to his work. Yet, when he decided to advocate for Cone's liberationist priorities to shape white Catholic theology of revelation, he became the scholar who broke *Horizons's* silence on Black theology and anti-Blackness.<sup>200</sup> At the time, his colleagues ignored him; a generation later, the editors have plucked his article from obscurity to ignite what may turn out to be a robust and ongoing discussion of white Catholic responsibility for anti-Black racism.

Connolly's work in "Revelation as Liberation from Oppression" models the initial attempt of a white Catholic theologian to describe how their own racialization as white has shaped their life and thought. Integrity demands that we white theologians follow his example. Exhorting "white American Catholic theology to begin to work to overcome its social situation and to respond to the challenge presented by black theology,"<sup>201</sup> Connolly offers a word of caution that remains instructive today:

An American Catholic theology of revelation cannot claim to be speaking for blacks, women, the poor, Native Americans, U.S. Hispanics, or any other oppressed peoples. It must see itself as speaking primarily to white American Catholics who find themselves on the side of the oppressor and in support of unjust and oppressive societal structures.<sup>202</sup>

In addition to refraining from speaking for others, white Catholic scholars also must learn to speak for ourselves. This requires coming to grips with a more personal truth, one that Connolly could scarcely bring himself to name: Not only do we speak primarily *to* white Catholics who oppress, we speak primarily *as* white Catholics who oppress. Our "social location" is that of "oppressor."<sup>203</sup> This is the realization that shattered Connolly's "presumption of [his] family's moral virtue," and of his field's as well.<sup>204</sup>

One white theologian who has begun to process this realization constructively is Maureen H. O'Connell, who is currently working at LaSalle University

<sup>200</sup> I borrow this turn of phrase from Bryan N. Massingale, "Has the Silence Been Broken? Catholic Theological Ethics and Racial Justice," *Theological Studies* 75, no. 1 (March 2014): 133–55; Laurie M. Cassidy and Alex Mikulich, eds., *Interrupting White Privilege: Catholic Theologians Break the Silence* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2007); and Cone, "Theology's Great Sin: Silence in the Face of White Supremacy."

<sup>201</sup> Connolly, "Revelation as Liberation from Oppression," 252.

<sup>202</sup> Connolly, "Revelation as Liberation from Oppression," 252.

<sup>203</sup> Connolly, "Revelation as Liberation from Oppression," 252.

<sup>204</sup> Connolly, "Revelation as Liberation from Oppression," 234.

in her home city of Philadelphia. In her recent book *Undoing the Knots: Five Generations of Catholic Anti-Blackness*, O'Connell investigates her white Philadelphia Catholic family's complex history of immigration and assimilation. At times, contemplating the details of her ancestors' participation in white supremacist social dynamics causes her to feel profound regret. It is no easy task "to probe the wounds that whiteness inflicted upon [my ancestors] and attend to the damage and hurt that reverberates down the generations and beyond the branches of my family into the wider Body of Christ."<sup>205</sup> Rather than shy away from this pain, however, she metabolizes it to develop a deep theological understanding of Catholic anti-Blackness. She models how white Catholics can take responsibility for cultivating "racial mercy," by which she means "a willingness to enter into the chaos of racism," "reject the empty promises of whiteness," and "accept our remarkable status as God's beloved."<sup>206</sup> If we are sincere, then we will take action: "Racial mercy gives us the empathy and courage to get down to the reckoning work of justice."<sup>207</sup> O'Connell purposefully drives her lament toward transformation.

White theologians have long referred to Black theologies, womanist theologies, Native American theologies, Latinx theologies, *mujerista* theologies, LGBTQ+ theologies, and Asian American theologies, to name a few, as forms of liberation theology. It is time we accustomed ourselves to describing our own work as white theology, a form of oppressor theology.

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<sup>205</sup> Maureen H. O'Connell, *Undoing the Knots: Five Generations of Catholic Anti-Blackness* (Boston, MA: Beacon Publishing, 2022), 15.

<sup>206</sup> O'Connell, *Undoing the Knots*, 37.

<sup>207</sup> O'Connell, *Undoing the Knots*, 37.