the culture of blacks.[115] One thing seems certain: it is imperative for white American Catholic theology to begin to work to overcome its social situation and to respond to the challenge presented by black theology. Is it not, as Cone suggests, a matter of the essence of the gospel?

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**Recalling Black Theology's Insistent Challenge to American Catholic Theology: A Response to John Connolly's "Revelation as Liberation"**

When John Connolly's "Revelation as Liberation from Oppression: Black Theology's Challenge for American Catholic Theology"[116] appeared in the pages of *Horizons*, African American clergy, scholars, and theologians, although mainly Protestant, had been formulating and explicating, disputing and debating black theology for more than three decades. In spite of the Second Vatican Council's accent on ecumenicity, black theology barely registered on the agenda of American Catholic theology.[117] Quite likely, Rosemary

[115] *Ibid.*, 225.

[116] Connolly, "Revelation as Liberation from Oppression," 232–52. Earlier critiques by Protestant theologians were published in other Catholic journals: John J. Carey, "Black Theology: An Appraisal of the Internal and External Issues," *Theological Studies* 33, no. 4 (December 1972): 684–97, and "What We Can Learn from Black Theology," *Theological Studies* 35, no. 3 (September 1974): 518–28; and G. Clarke Chapman Jr., "American Theology in Black: James H. Cone," *Cross Currents* 22, no 2 (Spring 1972): 139–57.

African American ethicist and Harvard professor Preston Williams was invited to speak at the 1973 meeting of the Catholic Theological Society of America under the rubric, "Religious and Social Aspects of Roman Catholic and Black American Relationships," *CTSA Proceedings* 28 (1973): 15–30, https://ejournals.bc.edu/index.php/ctsa/article/view/2756/2391. Williams spoke only sparingly of theology but concluded that "the Roman Church [must] take more seriously the black experience and culture . . . and educate more blacks to be doctors of the church," (24). In 1974, at the request of CTSA President Richard McBrien, African American Catholic biblical scholar Joseph Nearon, SSS, prepared a preliminary report to the CTSA on black theology, and followed up at the 1975 annual meeting with a detailed presentation, "Challenge to Theology: The Situation of American Blacks," *CTSA Proceedings* 30 (1975): 177–202.

[117] CTSA President Walter J. Burghardt, SJ, in his 1968 presidential address challenged Catholic theologians to formulate an American theology. He positioned his remarks between "two symbols of [his] discontent . . . Resurrection City and the Pentagon." For Burghardt, these were "symbols of the theological impotence of a radical failure within the CTSA—failure to produce or even initiate an American theology . . . a theology whose neuralgic problems arise from our soil and our people," Walter J. Burghardt, SJ,

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Radford Ruether was the first Catholic scholar to substantively respond to black theology in her *Liberation Theology*.[118] Quite likely, Daniel Brown was the first to mention black theology in the pages of *Horizons* in his 1988 review of *The Way of the Black Messiah* by Theo Witvliet. A Dutch journalist and theologian, Witvliet was the first White scholar to provide a book-length critique of black theology.[119] Brown's review was appreciative of the breadth and depth of Witvliet's discussion but pointed out its lack of interchange with Catholic authors, particularly in the areas of theological method, ecclesiology, and public theology. Brown concluded that *The Way of the Black Messiah* was "provocative, informed, and constructive."[120]

In 2024, it is disappointing to recall that the first mention of black theology appeared in *Horizons* nearly two decades *after* its emergence; and it is disappointing to admit that the first discussion of black theology in *Horizons* did *not* grapple *directly* with it, but rather with one of its interpreters. The twenty-fifth anniversary of John Connolly's thoughtful and confessional contribution provides an opportunity to engage directly with black theology and its chief proponent, James Hal Cone. From the outset, Connolly acknowledged that black theology challenged him as a person, as a White man, as a Catholic Christian, as a theologian; further, Connolly understood that black theology presents a crucial test for American Catholic theology, the American Catholic Church, and American society. In the article, Connolly painstakingly reconstructed Cone's theology of revelation, set out Cone's challenge to American theology, and grappled with Cone's criticisms. Perhaps, seeking to find a bulwark in the prevailing theology of revelation, Connolly turned to the work of

"Presidential Address: Towards An American Theology," *CTSA Proceedings* 23 (1968): 20, 21, https://ejournals.bc.edu/index.php/ctsa/article/view/2656.

[118] Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Liberation Theology: Human Hope Confronts Christian History and American Power* (New York: Paulist Press, 1972). Ruether spent the summer of 1965 in Mississippi working for civil rights as a Delta Ministry volunteer; later that year, she accepted a faculty position at historically black Howard University where she taught until 1976 [see Patricia LaRosa, "Finding Aid for Rosemary Radford Ruether Papers, 1954–2002," The Archive of Women in Theological Scholarship, the Burke Library Union Theological Seminary (March 2008), https://library.columbia.edu/content/dam/libraryweb/locations/burke/fa/awts/ldpd_5632346.pdf]. Ruether's assessment was published three years after Cone's, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 50th anniversary edition (1969; Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2019), and two years after his *A Black Theology of Liberation* 50 anniversary edition (1970; Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2020). Citations in this article are from the 50th anniversary editions.

[119] Daniel A. Brown, review of *The Way of the Black Messiah: The Hermeneutical Challenge of Black Theology as a Theology of Liberation* by Theo Witvliet, *Horizons* 15, no. 2 (Fall 1988): 411–12.

[120] Brown, review of *The Way of the Black Messiah*, 412.

Jesuit theologian Avery Dulles, whose "widely regarded" notion of revelation continues to influence American Catholic theology.[121] But Connolly's deep engagement with black theology allowed him to perceive shortcomings in Dulles's work and the theology of revelation that work inspired. Connolly concluded by posing a revision of American Catholic theology of revelation and by urging American Catholic theology to stretch beyond its current philosophical and cultural parameters for the sake of the gospel.

Three sections comprise this response: The first recalls the social, political, and cultural context from within which black theology arose;[122] the second sketches James Cone's black theology as prophetic denunciation of the antiblack racism gnawing at the heart Christianity; and the third, considers Cone and Connolly on revelation as liberation and concludes with comments on suggestions that Connolly advanced for American Catholic theology.

### *The Social, Political, and Cultural Context*

Black theology irrupted from Black people's impatience and resistance to racist cruelty and segregation, to gradualism and political disenfranchisement, to daily indignities and cultural humiliation. The 1954 Supreme Court decision to desegregate public schools and the 1955 lynching of fourteen-year-old Emmet Till in Drew, Mississippi, function as remote catalysts in the revival of the modern civil rights movement. The arrest of Mrs. Rosa Parks in Montgomery, Alabama, shaped the immediate catalyst for the operational revival of the movement.[123] Mrs. Parks refused to comply with the segregated

121 Connolly, "Revelation as Liberation from Oppression," 234. See Dulles, "Faith and Revelation"; Avery Dulles, *Models of Revelation* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1983).

122 Black theology is a protean global theological phenomenon that appeared almost simultaneously in the late 1960s and early 1970s in the United States, South Africa, and the Caribbean, and manifest itself in Britain in the late 1980s. In each locale, black theology expressed distinct concerns and asserted its particularity—*theologies*. Yet each version took up the struggle for full emancipation, liberation, and humanization of Black peoples. From their inception these theologies interpreted the gospel of the Black Christ as the harbinger and guarantee of liberation, opposed antiblack racism in church and society, endorsed black power, and embraced black cultural and psychological consciousness.

123 Rosa Parks "had deep roots in the [Black] protest tradition.. . . In 1943, she joined the NAACP, became its secretary and worked in voter-registration campaigns. . .. She had attended one of Ella Baker's leadership training conferences in the 1940s and had spent a week at the Highlander Folk School in 1955," where she most likely interacted with Septima Clark (see Charles M. Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle, With a New Preface*, 2nd ed, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 416, http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/j.ctt1ppcgt.

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seating ordinance that regulated protocols for accommodation of Black and White people riding public transportation in Montgomery. In response, organizers quickly formed the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA) and selected as its leader the young and relatively new pastor of Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Under his direction, the MIA carried out a nearly year-long citywide boycott of Montgomery's bus lines. In November 1956, the US Supreme Court ruled Alabama's state and local bus segregation unconstitutional.

This victory was grounded in the unflinching fidelity of the historic black church to Black peoples' divinely ordained humanity, in the unseen and unsung work of everyday Black women and men for justice, and in the legal work of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). King's creative religious sensibilities, acute theological insights, and commitment to Gandhi's nonviolent strategies, which he infused with the Christian notion of *agape*, prepared him to equip and fortify Black people in building a distinctively religious-oriented social protest movement. Their fortitude and resolve inspired Black college students and some of their White peers to stage sit-ins at lunch counters; by the end of 1960, more than fifty thousand people throughout the South had joined in civil disobedience demonstrations.[124] Yet over time, many Black Christian clergy, laity, and student workers and volunteers grew weary of King's doctrine of nonviolent protest and praxis of suffering love.

Despite the passage of the Civil Rights Acts of 1957, 1960, and 1964, and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, the masses of Black people, particularly in the Southern states, remained disenfranchised, discriminated against, and mired in poverty. The Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC or "Snick") was quick to recognize the betrayal of black interests by White liberals. When in 1966 SNCC chairman Stokely Carmichael called for "black power," he decisively disrupted the ethos of the civil rights movement and captured the frustration that so many Black people had begun to feel about nonviolence as a strategy for black social empowerment.[125]

124 Cornel West, "The Paradox of the Afro-American Rebellion," in *The 60s without Apology*, ed. Sohnya Sayers et al. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 44–59, at 46.

125 The term "black power" may have originated with minister and congressional representative Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., who in an address at Howard University on May 29, 1966, stated that "Human rights are God given . . . to demand these God-given rights is to seek black power, the power to build black institutions. . .." Quoted in Floyd B. Barbour, ed., *The Black Power Revolt: A Collection of Essays* (Boston, MA: Extending Horizons Books, 1968), 189. Stokely Carmichael, chairman of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), drew national media attention to the phrase when

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Black power mediated both cultural and political meanings. In its *cultural denotation*, black power proved a bracing tonic in dislodging the psychic trauma of slavery that fueled Black peoples' internalized self-hatred and self-denigration. Among its most notable proponents were Ron Karenga and LeRoi Jones/Amiri Baraka, who defined "blackness" as color, culture, and consciousness. James Brown shouted its slogan—"Say It Loud, I'm Black and Proud" and Aretha Franklin sang its demand—"Respect." These recordings captured the *Zeitgeist* of the times, animating existential conversion, proud self-presentation, and value transformation. In its *political denotation*, black power called for black ownership and control of economic and institutional resources in black communities—housing and schools, businesses and industries, banks and health care, land or real estate. On the one hand, the cultural wing of the black power movement understood that the exercise of civil rights without economic resources consigned Black people to a peculiar form of colonial subjugation and exploitation; they were suspicious of rhetoric that rang with socialist phrases. On the other hand, strategists of the political wing of the movement were suspicious of simplistic and romanticized affirmations of culture; they insisted that culture alone could not liberate black people.

### *Black Theology as Contestation of "White" Christianity and "White" Theology*

Throughout the decade of the 1960s, Black Christian clergy endeavored to articulate a gospel-rooted message that would address the rapidly shifting social, political, and cultural meanings shaping the contemporary situation. The precise origin of the term "black theology" is difficult to pinpoint, but James Hal Cone is acknowledged as the first person to use the term in publication. Cone, along with other early thinkers, particularly Albert Cleage Jr., and J. Deotis Roberts, insisted that the gospel of Jesus provided the religious theological foundation for black liberation and that the realization of that liberation required the dismantling of structural antiblack racism.[126]

he used it in a speech after his release from arrest during the "March Against Fear" that had been initiated by James Meredith, who was grievously wounded during his 220-mile walk from Memphis, Tennessee, to Jackson, Mississippi, in 1966. See also Stokely Carmichael and Charles V. Hamilton, *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America* (New York: Vintage Books, 1967).

[126] These three differed in their approaches to the formulation and advance of black theology. Albert Cleage Jr. (Jaramogi Abebe Agyeman) an ordained minister in the Congregational Christian Church turned Black Christian Nationalist, adopted a cultural-aesthetic approach through sermons and artistic representation. Cleage founded Detroit's Shrine of the Black Madonna (renamed Pan African Orthodox

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In his first work, *Black Theology and Black Power*, Cone reasoned:

> While the gospel itself does not change, every generation is confronted with new problems, and the gospel must be brought to bear on them. Thus, the task of theology is to show what the changeless gospel means in each new situation. . .. The task of Black Theology, then, is *to analyze the black man's* [sic] *condition in the light of God's revelation in Jesus Christ*.[127]

Cone identified "*liberation* as the heart of the Christian gospel," located "*blackness* as the primary mode of God's presence," and reclaimed the gospel from the thralldom of white racist supremacy.[128] Cone weighed the meaning of Christian doctrine against the stark powerlessness of Black people, and doctrine came up wanting. Despite the brusque tone of *Black Theology and Black Power*, Cone's theology was and remained a thoroughly Christian theology. He firmly insisted on God's enduring, intimate presence in Jesus of Nazareth, the Black Liberator, who stood beside oppressed Black people "whose existence is threatened daily by the insidious tentacles of white power."[129]

Cone's theology risked being dismissed by Black Christian clergy and laity, many of whom had acquiesced reflexively to segregation and were alienated from their original inspiration;[130] at the same time, that theology risked being misread and misunderstood by American and European Christian clergy and laity. On the one hand, black theology prodded the historic black

Christian Church), which featured in its sanctuary a mural of a Black Madonna and Child. At its unveiling, he declared: "Now we have come to the place, where we not only can conceive of the possibility, but we are convinced, upon the basis of our knowledge and historic study of all the facts that Jesus was born to a black Mary, that Jesus, the Messiah, was a black man who came to save a black nation. It would have little significance if we unveiled a black Madonna and it had no more meaning than just another picture in a church. Our unveiling of the Black Madonna is a statement of faith," Albert Cleage Jr., *The Black Messiah* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1969), 85; see also, Angela D. Dillard, *Faith in the City: Preaching Radical Social Change in Detroit* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2007), especially 237–85, 288–91.

In formal theological analysis, J. Deotis Roberts centered liberation and reconciliation, developed a critique that synthesized faith and ethics, and called for the change of social systems and structural power; see his, *Liberation and Reconciliation: A Black Theology* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1971) and *A Black Political Theology* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1974).

[127] Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 35.

[128] Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, "Preface to the 1989 Edition," xxv; italics in the original.

[129] Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 37.

[130] Gayraud S. Wilmore, *Black Religion and Black Radicalism: An Interpretation of the Religious History of African Americans*, 3rd rev. ed. (1973; Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1998), 163–95.

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Christian churches to repudiate their deference to the values of the dominant (white) society and culture. On the other hand, white Christian churches and theologians were complicit in the nation's historical amnesia that obscured more than three centuries of physical, cultural, political, economic, and legal brutality inflicted on Black human persons; black theology sought to startle them from forgetfulness and apathy.

The very term "black" theology signified opposition to the "theology" that paid patronage to white supremacy, segregation, gradualism, and liberal benevolence. Indeed, black theology unmasked that "theology" as "white" and exposed its blasphemous blessing of the sin and crime that this putatively Christian nation had perpetrated against Black people from its founding. As Cone's analysis of the failure of theology in the face of virulent white racist supremacy expanded and deepened, he named this silence as "theology's great sin."[131]

Primarily, black theology addressed Black people and their religious, cultural, social, moral, and existential condition under protracted white racist supremacy; at the same time, black theology contested the professed authenticity of the mission and praxis of the institutional "white" church. On Cone's account, it is the task of black theology "*to analyze the black man's* [*sic*] *condition in the light of God's revelation in Jesus Christ with the purpose of creating a new understanding of black dignity among black people, and providing the necessary soul in that people, to destroy white racism*."[132]

In the passionate, blunt language so characteristic of his literary style, Cone asserted that the "white" church "illustrates the values of a sick society which oppresses the poor."[133] Not only had the "white" church neglected the poor and marginalized, it had "failed miserably in being a visible manifestation to the world of God's intention for humanity and in proclaiming the gospel to the world."[134] The historical involvement of the "white" church in slavery and its self-abasement to white racist supremacy could not be overstated. The "white" church has:

> Not only failed to preach the kerygmatic Word but maliciously contributed to the doctrine of white supremacy. . .. Racism has been a part of the life of the Church so long that it is virtually impossible for even the "good" members to recognize the bigotry perpetuated by the Church. Its morals

[131] James Cone, "Theology's Great Sin: Silence in the Face of White Supremacy," *Black Theology: An International Journal* 2, no. 2 (2004): 139–52.

[132] Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 132; italics in the original.

[133] Cone, "The White Church and Black Power," 118, in *Black Theology: A Documentary History*.

[134] Cone, "The White Church and Black Power," 118.

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are so immoral that even its most sensitive minds are unable to detect the inhumanity of the Church on the black people of America.[135]

"Theology," Cone maintained, "can never be neutral or fail to take sides on issues related to the plight of the oppressed."[136] He repeatedly confronted Black and White theologians, urging them to address America's original sins of genocide and white racist supremacy. To do this, both Black and White theologians must make an option for freedom. "To be human," he wrote "is to be free, and to be free is to be human" and "*freedom is the opposite of oppression, but only the oppressed are truly free*."[137] To be free, Blacks must embrace and affirm their blackness and reject (the social construct of) whiteness; to do otherwise is to sin. To be free, Whites must embrace and affirm blackness and reject their whiteness; to do otherwise is to sin. The liberation of the oppressed (Black people) and the liberation of oppressors (White people) is linked inextricably. When the oppressed resist the oppressors, they affirm their freedom in God. In this way, the oppressed "not only liberate themselves from oppression, they also liberate the oppressors from an enslavement to their illusions."[138] "If the Gospel of Christ . . . frees a man [or a woman] to be for those who labor and are heavily laden, the humiliated and abused," Cone concluded, "then it would seem that for twentieth-century America the message of Black Power is the message of Christ himself."[139]

### *Cone and Connolly on Revelation as Liberation*

*Cone*: Black theology, like other contemporary Christian theologies, accepts the notion that "God's self-disclosure is the distinctive characteristic of divine revelation" and that "revelation has to do with God as God is in personal relationship with humankind effecting the divine will in our history."[140] Yet Cone contends that for black theology revelation means more: "Revelation is God's self-disclosure to humankind *in the context of liberation*.[141] To know God is to be in right and loving relationship with God; thus, to know God means to join in God's work of liberation on behalf of oppressed peoples. Black theology affirms "God's revelation [as] liberation, [as] emancipation from death-dealing political, economic, and social structures of society. This is the essence of biblical revelation."[142]

135 Cone, "The White Church and Black Power," 119.
136 Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 4.
137 Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 92, 93; italics in the original.
138 Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 110.
139 Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 43.
140 Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 47.
141 Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 47–48; italics in the original.
142 Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 48.

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Liberation, black theology argues, constitutes "an indispensable ingredient" and "is inherently biblical"; the priority given to liberation may be understood in analysis of the dynamic, interactive "relationship of revelation, faith, and history."[143] Thus, in theologizing revelation, black theology finds a first hermeneutical clue in the Book of Exodus. The Hebrew Scriptures conserve and narrate the history of the prolonged enslavement and brutal oppression of the ancient Israelite peoples and YHWH's loving self-disclosure as a divine warrior who acts for and with them in history in the context of their liberation. Black theology finds a second clue in the Christian Scriptures. Here, God manifests loving self-disclosure in history *in-the-flesh*. The Jewish rabbi Jesus of Nazareth "is the event of God, telling us who God is by what God does for the oppressed.... He is the plenary revelation of God."[144] Moreover, for black theology "*revelation is a black event*—it is what blacks are doing about their liberation."[145] Revelation for black theology is consigned neither to thirteenth century BCE nor to the first century CE. The resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth from the dead signifies, Cone declares, that Christ "is present today in the midst of all societies effecting his liberation of the oppressed."[146]

Finally, Cone argues, "because God has made the goal of blacks God's own goal," black theology insists that God is Black.

> The blackness of God means that God has made the oppressed condition God's own condition. This is the essence of biblical revelation.... God's election of Israel and incarnation in Christ reveal that the *liberation* of the oppressed is a part of the innermost nature of God. Liberation is not an afterthought, but the essence of divine activity. The blackness of God means that the essence of the nature of God is to be found in the concept of liberation.[147]

The import of black theology's formulation of revelation is, at once, simple and complex: To know God, in spirit and in truth, means to accept the gift of God's revelation as the liberation of Black children, youth, women, and men from white racist supremacy. "Knowing God means being on the side of the oppressed, becoming one with them, and participating in the goal of liberation. *We must become black with God*."[148]

*Connolly*: In what I perceive as genuine personal and scholarly humility, Connolly accepted Cone's criticisms, scrutinized his own life and work, and

143 Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 48.
144 Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 31.
145 Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 31; italics in the original.
146 Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 31.
147 Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 67; italics in the original.
148 Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 69; italics in the original.

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translated his personal, existential, religious, and social questions into theological interrogation:

> Is a definition of revelation that does not include the category of liberation from oppression adequate to meet the challenges which racism presents to Christian faith today? It appeared that my American Catholic understanding of revelation, an understanding akin to the theology which Dulles articulates, might actually be an obstacle to overcoming racism in the United States. Even more seriously, it occurred to me that this theology might function as a contributory cause of the racism that exists among US Catholics. Is it possible for the American Catholic theology of revelation to include the category of liberation from oppression in its definition of revelation in a way that would address the oppression of blacks and other subjugated groups in the United States?[149]

Connolly's perception of the glaring dissonance between black theology and American Catholic theology stemmed from the recognition that he and Cone were brought up within the same Southern psycho-socio-political geography; he grasped the crucial implications of black theology for American Catholic theology, for Catholic ecclesial life, and for American society, and from thorough and patient reading and reflection.

Cone's insistence that liberation is an "indispensable ingredient" in revelation provoked Connolly to search the theological writings of Avery Dulles. Connolly found neither explicit evidence that Dulles incorporated the category of liberation from oppression in his theology of revelation nor made references to "the ethical and social implications of revelation as symbolic communication."[150] Connolly maintained that although it would be unlikely that Dulles would ever incorporate liberation from oppression in his theology of revelation, he had commented positively about the role of liberation in the mission of the church. On the strength of this opening, Connolly observes, that inclusion of the notion of liberation from oppression "would be compatible with an American Catholic understanding of revelation."[151] He proffers a rethinking of American Catholic theology.

Here I want to focus on three aspects of Connolly's revision. First, in concert with the prevailing theological consensus, Connolly argued that "revelation is primarily personal, God's self-disclosure.[152] At the same time, he reconfigured the notion of symbolic communication as "God's symbolic communication of

[149] Connolly, "Revelation as Liberation from Oppression," 235.
[150] Connolly, "Revelation as Liberation from Oppression," 235.
[151] Connolly, "Revelation as Liberation from Oppression," 247.
[152] Connolly, "Revelation as Liberation from Oppression," 248.

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liberating and reconciling love which rejects all forms of oppression."[153] This restatement condemned spiritual, psychological, political, cultural, social, even religious forms of oppression and the "situation" of oppression.[154] Thus, God stands with oppressed children, youth, women, and men in their oppression and struggles with them for their liberation. While God's revelation is judgment of the oppressor, it does not condemn "the oppressor as a person because it will offer the oppressor liberation from the situation of being an oppressor."[155]

Second, Connolly tackled the notion of reconciliation in black theology. He did not focus on the differences between Cone and J. Deotis Roberts; rather, Connolly featured their agreement that (1) priority be given to the task of liberation and (2) insistence that "reconciliation is part of the essence of the Christian gospel."[156] Connolly pointed to Cone's rejection of "what Helmut Gollwitzer refers to as 'reconcilism,' a distorted view of reconciliation that aims at demobilizing blacks, makes them passively accept oppression, and eliminates their motivation and desire to participate in the revolutionary struggle for liberation."[157] Restating Cone, Connolly contended that reconciliation meant that Blacks would "insist on their dignity and work for their liberation"; reconciliation for Whites would mean giving up their "whiteness," or in current sociological terms "white privilege." Whites would relinquish "their situation as oppressors and, becoming black, siding with oppressed blacks and working for their liberation."[158]

Third, Connolly understood that liberation in the context of a theology of revelation "should include an active commitment to social transformation."[159] Such commitment would explicitly denounce all forms of injustice and oppression; moreover, such a denunciation would prompt and support American Catholics to become "involved in the work of overcoming the social, political, and economic structures" in the country that continue to support oppression.[160] At the same time, following suggestions by Mark Kline Taylor, Connolly urged white American Catholic theologians to examine their own social locations, to broaden the range of their interpretative capacities by engaging differing even conflictual textual and cultural interpretations of

[153] Connolly, "Revelation as Liberation from Oppression," 248.
[154] Connolly, "Revelation as Liberation from Oppression," 248.
[155] Connolly, "Revelation as Liberation from Oppression," 248.
[156] Connolly, "Revelation as Liberation from Oppression," 251.
[157] Connolly, "Revelation as Liberation from Oppression," 249–50.
[158] Connolly, "Revelation as Liberation from Oppression," 251.
[159] Connolly, "Revelation as Liberation from Oppression," 251.
[160] Connolly, "Revelation as Liberation from Oppression," 251.

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others from different social locations, and to become familiar with African American culture.[161]

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,[162] 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.[163]

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

[161] Connolly, "Revelation as Liberation from Oppression," 252.

[162] In "Revelation as Liberation from Oppression," Connolly mentioned the word only once, and then he is citing Dulles (247).

[163] Connolly, "Revelation as Liberation from Oppression," 240.

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