

**REFLECTIONS BY
AFRICAN AMERICAN
CATHOLIC and
PROTESTANT CLERGY**

**HOW HAS OUR HISTORY
LED US
TO DO JUSTICE?**

Archdiocese of Cincinnati
Office of African American Catholic Ministries
100 East Eighth Street
Cincinnati, Ohio 45202

How Has Our History Led Us to Do Justice?

Rev. Mr. Royce Winters

Director, Office of African American Catholic
Ministries
Archdiocese of Cincinnati

As America and the rest of the world prepared for the inauguration of the 44th President of the United States [President Barack Obama] on the twentieth day of January, in the year of our Lord two thousand and nine, we've all had to pinch ourselves to make sure that we're not dreaming. Millions of Americans awoke from their slumber to actively participate in the political arena and to take hold of a new vision for the future. Though pressed on every side, this awakening was not dampened by the current economic crises nor the various military conflicts around the world. It became a movement to help satisfy the thirst and hunger for justice and peace.

Peoples of every race, ethnicity and culture were called forth to challenge Washington to hear the voice of the people - a people who sought and demanded change in the way America had treated its citizens. Their hopes were bound together through a simple yet profound acclamation, "Yes, We Can!" It was as if people were waiting for a leader whose presence, whose demeanor, and whose words summed up what we always knew – that America is in need of change.

In order to dream, one has to believe. Christian believers, though empowered by this relatively young African American man must always take a step back to ask the question, "Where is God?" It is important that we not throw away our words of faith for sentiment or for change.

We understand that no matter how powerful the words, that no matter how many people travel miles to see their champion of peace and justice, we must place our faith, our trust in our Lord and Savior. We are careful not to anoint Barack Obama as the chosen one. But, Scripture reminds us that we must have a 'right' relationship with authorities.

*"Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities,
for there is no authority except which God has established...*

"For he is God's servant to do you good." Romans 13:1, 4
So in this sense, Barack Obama has been ordained by God to be the president of these United States. The mantra, "Yes, We Can" helps each of us to place in perspective our duty as Christian believers and our responsibility in society.

"In human society one man's natural right gives rise to a corresponding duty in other men; the duty, that is, of recognizing and respecting that right. Every basic human right draws its authoritative force from the natural law, which confers it and attaches to it its respective duty.

[Pacem in Terris no. 30]

...Man cannot be exempted from his divinely-imposed obligations toward civil society, and, the representatives of authority have the right to coerce him when he refuses without reason to do his duty.
[Pope Pius XI. Divini Redemptoris [1937], no 30.]

So the brilliance of "Yes, We Can" helped us to reclaim our voice in serving all of God's people.

It was the impetus we needed to once again abandon the fringes of life and to do the will of God – “To love God with all [our] heart and with all [our] soul and with all [our] mind...Love your neighbor as yourself..” [Matthew 22: 37-38]

So with great fervor we look upon this historic event with the eyes of faith. It has been an amazing experience to witness history with our own eyes. This is not to belittle or devalue the significant historical events of the past. But in this America, we haven't seen anything like this.

In 1776 when the fathers of our country wrote,
*“We hold these truths to be self-evident: That all men are
created equal;
that they are endowed by their Creator with certain
unalienable rights;
that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of
happiness; that, to
secure these rights, governments are instituted among
men,
deriving their just powers from the consent of the
governed...”*

They didn't see a day coming that a Negro would be the elected leader of this country.

Even as Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., shared his dream:

*“I still have a dream. It is a dream rooted in the American
dream...
I have a dream that one day even the state of Mississippi,
a state
sweltering with the heat of injustice, sweltering with the
heat of oppression,
will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice...
I have a dream today...”*

*..With this faith we will be able to hew out of the mountain
of despair
a stone of hope. With this faith we will be able to
transform the jangling discords of our nation into a
beautiful symphony of brotherhood
I have a dream today.
If America is to be a great nation this must come true.
So let freedom ring from the prodigious hilltops of New
Hampshire.
Let freedom ring from the mighty mountains of New
York.
Let freedom ring from the heightening Alleghenies of
Pennsylvania...
From every mountainside, let freedom ring."*

Martin didn't dream of a black man as the president of the United States. As Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. delivered his "I Have a Dream Speech," thousands upon thousands of people dared to dream with him. They dared to dream of an America where our children's children could receive a quality education. They dared to dream that black children and white children would drink from the same fountain and eat at the same diner. They dared to dream that the various peoples of America would realize their collective power to help transform this country into the "land of the free and the home of the brave."

As far reaching as the prophetic dream of Martin has carried us, I'm not sure if Martin dreamed this. Martin's dream was about having access to America's power and wealth.

Martin's dream led us to believe that men and women - the diversity of humanity would have a voice in America's future. But not even Martin dreamed of a day, that a black man, the son of a white mother and an African father would be inaugurated as the president of the United States.

The prophets are prevented from seeing all that God has in store for his people. In Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s speech, "I've Been to the Mountaintop," we get a glimpse into Martin's soul as God took him upon the mountain to see the "Promised Land." At that historic moment in time, Dr. King was no longer looking at the problems in the world. Through faith, he began to focus on the promises of God – salvation.

On April 3, 1968, in Memphis, Tennessee, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., understood that his mission on earth was coming to an end and he began to profess the assurance of faith that the victory has been won.

*"Well, I don't know what will happen now;
we've got some difficult days ahead.
But it really doesn't matter with me now,
because I've been to the mountaintop."*

The genius of it all was that not only Martin, but all of us were transformed by God's Spirit to recognize that the Christian journey leads us to heaven. When we are focused on doing God's will there is nothing that can take away our joy. While we are down here on this earth, our duty is to do justice and to seek peace.

So what will we tell our children and children's children about this historic day, the twentieth day of January, in the year of our Lord two thousand and nine?

Hopefully, we'll look to the past and follow in the footsteps of ancestors by spending time with our youth to tell the story of America. For there is no greater an expression of history passed on, than that of the oral history of our people. A history remembered by those men and women [eyewitnesses] who saw it with their own eyes. An oral history told by elders who appreciate the gift of being 'the

historians" of their peoples' rich and diverse heritage. Men and women whose role is to assist the community to understand that a God could fashion them into an army from "Dem Dry Bones."

*"This is what the Sovereign Lord says; I will make breath enter you,
and you will come to life." [Ezekiel 37:5]*

Yes, history has a way of opening the eyes of the soul to acknowledge the best and worst of humanity's efforts to move toward a just society. We are quite aware of America's greatness and America's failings. In this great nation of America –and there is no greater a nation – "We have come over a way that with tears have been watered."

We've come along way since September 22, 1863, when President Abraham Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation:

"Whereas, on the twenty-second day of September, in the year of our lord one thousand eight hundred and sixty-two...on the first day of January, all persons held as slaves within any State or designated part of a State... thenceforward, and forever free.

We have come treading our path thro' the blood of the slaughtered; Out from our gloomy past, till now we stand at last. Where the bright gleam of our bright star is cast" [Lift Ev'ry Voice and Sing].

America, O America your greatness has provided a land of refuge for many peoples of this earth. Early in this 21st Century, we stand together as diverse people to acknowledge that "America has not been static." But America has been transformed by the hand of God.

“Where Do We Go From Here?”

**Rev. Kai Horn Cole, MDiv.
Phillips Memorial CME Church**

The recent victory of President Barack Hussein Obama, as the 44th president of the United States of America, marks a stellar victory for the people of the Americas and for those who believe in God. I say the people of the Americas because we are many; and, as the people of the Americas, our influence is so vast. It is vast and now it is victorious, for there are people who believe in us that span the globe. There are those that live across the boundaries of space and time as family, as friends and even as our enemies. We hear their words. We hear the echoes of the voices of our Latino, French, British, Indian, African, Black, and White sisters and brothers shout with resounding joy: Yes, we can! We hear the response of all people of God, “With God, I know that we can.”!

This moment in history marks the redemption of unearned suffering. It is the moment when the echoes turned to voices that espouse the blessing of redemption and forgiveness and the riches of his grace. (Ephesians 1:7) With America’s decision to elect the first African and American president, this vision of unearned suffering, from the “I Have a Dream” speech of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. is ransomed by the blood of many people. It reconciles the people back to each other, and to God; and brings to fruition the possibility for a United States, a united land. Those who were listening to him speak, were encouraged to go back to their various places of residence in the South and “continue to work with the faith that unearned suffering is redemptive.”

"For 232 years, at each moment when those words were in jeopardy, ordinary men and women-students, soldiers, farmers, teachers, nurses, janitors- found the courage to keep this faith alive." (... From *Barack Obama's Acceptance Speech*, pg 1.)

Forty-two years ago, Dr. King authored and delivered a speech that reveals the fruit of unearned suffering. The speech is entitled, "Where Do We Go from Here?" The question posed by the title is not just any question, it is a challenge. It is a call. It poses what every American is asking in their hearts and in their minds today, past the victory of his acceptance of Barack Obama and past the blessing of his inauguration, "Where do we go from here?"

Dr. King cited many victories in 1967 for the Negroes; the ability to eat at lunch counters, and for men who had businesses to be able to bid on city contracts, and more jobs through Operation Breadbasket and civil rights dominating every state as an issue for all. He also saw the reality of the situation. "With all the struggles and all the achievements, we must face the fact that the Negro still lives in the basement of the Great Society. He is still at the bottom, despite those who have penetrated slightly to higher levels...And so, we have a long way to go before we reach the promised land of freedom." (Where Do We Go From Here? P.3)

Barack Obama's Acceptance speech has a remarkable parallel. His implied notion of civil rights speaks to the issues of healthcare, the economy, American jobs, and American workers, taxes, veterans who come back from Iraq and Afghanistan. He speaks to the students who struggle in school and pay student loans.

He advocates for the unsung heroes, whose songs are never played but they have suffered so that ordinary people like him can one day sing their celebrative songs of victory.

"The promise that says each of us has the freedom to make our own lives what we will...living up to the promise of sick pay, and equal pay, and health care, and ending the war, amongst others and justice for us all!" (pg 6)
Suddenly, it is apparent to me where we go. We go forward. Both men issue to us a challenge and a call.

It is the call of a Native American who can no longer refer to this place as home. It is the call of watery and earth hewed graves of slavery, when millions of people lived and died at the hands of their oppressors. It is the call of the Reformation, when immigrants struggled with what it would be like for them in this newly reformed land. It is the call of the Black Civil Rights movement, when Dr. King informed Black people that they had no rights and the ones that they had were less than civil. It is the call of Apartheid, when many struggled for inalienable rights of which their government neither designed nor designated that they have. It is the call of struggle of the streets where young men feel emasculated, and young women are willingly degraded, such that their family becomes the gang; their life becomes the game; and, there is no real place to call home. It is the call of the Black church where bombs are no longer taking children's lives; but men are taking their innocence; the people are drowning in spirit and no one seems to care. It is the call of Iraq in their movement towards democracy. It is the call of Darfur and Cincinnati, where children are sold into slavery and there are places that are so impoverished that they feel that they even in 2009 slavery is an option.

It is the call of world that comes together to invoke their civil rights and elect a man of color and in doing so make a prophetic statement that says, not only, "Yes we can; but, we care." And, we are challenged.

We care about unearned suffering. We are challenged to do something about it. We are challenged to change for the promise of an inheritance. A promise where people of every creed and color, from every walk of life—that in America, our destiny is inextricable intertwined; and, that together, our dreams can become one.

What will be the results? The results will be the assertion of dignity and worth; individual responsibility and mutual responsibility; the belief that we cannot walk alone; and the hope that we confess, life, liberty, the pursuit of happiness and truth and justice for all.



“How Has Our History Led Us to Do Justice?”

Alfred B. Winters, Jr.- Pastor
Mt. Olive Church Ministries
Camp Dennison, OH

Intent: To answer the question, “How has our history led us to do justice?”, harmonizing both spiritual (Christian) and historical considerations...

Purpose: To communicate the consistent, unchanging nature of God as present in the experience of the Americanized African.

Objective: To demonstrate the importance of a godly example, godly instruction and the power of a godly commitment...

Goal: To put us in remembrance of the unfeigned faith that dwelt first in our grandparents, and in our parents, and must dwell in us, and in our children, lest our deposit fail in the earth...

He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?
Micah 6: 8 [KJV]

In order to answer the question from the perspective of Americanized Africans, “How has our history led us to do justice?”, I am particularly impressed with the necessity of first defining terms Biblically for the sake of clarity. There is a modern and secular usage as well as a clerical or theological usage. Consistent, I believe, with Christian Orthodoxy in general and the theology of our local

Church, in particular, allow me to pose the following definitions:

'History':

- 1) A chronological record of significant events, often including an explanation of their causes..

'Lead':

- 1) To direct or advance the course of one's life by going before and showing the way; to go before and show the way...

'Justice':

- 2) The destruction of evil works... (1 John 3:8)

'Righteous':

- 1) A declared position in Christ (justification); being placed in right-standing with a holy God...
- 2) A personal disposition, in which those declared righteous act righteously...

I begin asserting my conviction that justice is foremost an effect of the just; and, that God is the only arbiter of that which is truly just. Just is not a position that is either earned or acquired, it is rather imputed. Please note:

Therefore being justified (declared righteous) by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord, Jesus Christ...

Romans 5:1 (KJV)

He that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as He is righteous...

For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil... 1 John 3:7b & 8b (KJV)

If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone who doeth righteousness is born of Him... 1 John 2:29 (KJV)

Second, there is both a position of righteousness and a disposition of righteousness. Position: in salvation, as new converts experience the new birth, they are fully considered to be righteous by God. Disposition: as new converts are taught the doctrine of the faith their conduct should conform to the Gospel: that is, they should act righteously...

I have stumbled onto a golf course a few times in my life. After an indiscriminate number of chops the ball has in fact found hole. What I have achieved cannot in any way be confused with what Tiger Woods does, even were I to use the same clubs or wear the exact apparel. Likewise, man may appear to do just things, he cannot however act justly.

I love that the question is phrased in this manner: "what has lead us?" Intrinsic and inherent in man's nature is our need both to follow and be led. We all are as sheep and stand in need of a Shepherd. Before Christ, we were all subject to passions, lusts, temptations, walking according to a course not of our own choosing (Ephesians 2:1-4). The seal of our salvation is that we are now capable of being led by God's Spirit (Romans 8:14). In Biblical terms, we are either led by the Spirit of God or our father the devil (according to Jesus in John 8:42). How then, does God lead us to do justice? First of all, He does so by means of...

Godly Example: Necessary to the implementation of justice is the example of the Christ: the Just One...

For even hereunto were you called:
because Christ also suffered for us,
leaving us an example, that you should
follow in His steps ... 1 Peter 2:21 (KJV)

In Genesis, God created a man in His own image and likeness. This man, Adam, being the father (literally pattern) of all mankind, fell by transgression. This necessitated sending another example into the earth in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ- our example.

Established in the body of Christ is a spiritual rote system: a system of learning passed on from one generation to the next: the earthly ministry and lifestyle of Jesus being the foundation. This example He passed on to the apostles, the apostles to those they shepherded, and so it continues unto the present day.

Those things, which you have both
learned and received, and heard, and
seen in me do: and the God of peace will
be with you ... Philippians 4: 9 (KJV)

As we reflect on the inauguration of this country's first President of African descent, I think it incumbent upon us to reflect on the sacrifices of past generations, whose labors we reap today in the benefits, privileges and rights we enjoy. Those sacrifices established the infrastructure for the strongest of our families; undergirding the greatest of our leaders.

I'm referring to the countless individual sacrifices that shaped everyday family life for the 'Americanized' African.

The parents who suffered indignities in the workplace in order to purchase a different future and greater opportunities for their offspring. I'm alluding to the elder siblings like John H. Washington, who labored, foregoing higher education, in order that his younger sibling Booker T. might have access. People like Sis. Josephine Hill, whose entire salary went to the support of her parents and underage siblings because her father's salary as an itinerant preacher was insufficient to fulfill the needs of a household. People like Lillie Mae Adams who gave herself to mentor, counsel, encourage, feed and pray for the youth of her Community. People whose sacrifice was rooted in their faith and whose faith was rooted in Christ Jesus: the rocks of their families; the strength of their Churches; pillars of their communities; salt of the Earth...

The barometer of the nation is the spiritual climate within the Church. Likewise, the health and well-being of the family is predicated upon the unyielding determination of its leadership to live outside of its own personal interests and 'be what they want others to become'.

Except the LORD of hosts had left unto
us a very small remnant, we should have
been as Sodom, and we should have
been like unto Gomorrah... Isaiah 1:9 (KJV)

I believe in every family God reserves a strand; and that in every society God reserves for Himself, a strand: someone He can use as substance of those things hoped for and evidence that the unseen God does exist. They being instruments He employs to effect godly change-people of justice; of high moral standards and godly character, of irreproachable Christian conduct, possessing an unwavering commitment to their faith; whose very lifestyle enjoin us (in Paul's words) to:

“Follow me as I follow Christ!” We are led to do justice by means of:

Godly Instruction: Necessary to the implementation of justice is the instruction of Christ.

All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness... 1 Timothy 3:16 (KJV)

God shows us what to do through godly example: He shows us how to do via the instruction of His most holy word. There is a power in a godly example, in that it compels others to follow. It commands respect; verifying that the instructions given are working in the life of the instructor. It is impossible to instruct others in areas that we are not perfected (first examples of). The most significant instructions we receive are not necessarily from those who speak the loudest or have a public forum—rather, those whose lifestyles exemplify that which they speak. There have been tens of thousands of unheralded Mary Bethune’s, Olaudah Equiano’s, Richard Allen’s and Jerena Lee’s, whose Christian walk and teaching advanced the kingdom of God and the cause of justice by impacting the lives of those around them. Godly instruction cements us in Christ-like conduct.

Our families have been served well by those individuals who have set themselves apart as examples of God’s kindness, forgiveness, compassion and holiness; who gave of themselves, imparting what they have learned into receptive hearts and minds via instruction.

We continue to do justice to the extent that our godly examples continue to train the younger and inexperienced in the way they should go to the end that when they mature, they will do likewise, ensuring the godly deposit never fail in the earth.

Godly Commitment: Necessary to the implementation of justice is the indwelling power of Christ.

I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day... For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith... 2 Timothy

1:12b & 2 Timothy 4:6-7 (KJV)

One can make a commitment to God, but it cannot be kept without the power of God. This power enables the believer to conform to the image of Christ, the exemplification of true commitment. Through it we can destroy ungodly habits, motivations and attitudes, and construct godly virtue and discipline in their place. Our community must never fail those who demonstrate the capacity to remain committed, patiently enduring life's challenges, hardships and disappointments.



Have We Overcome?

Deacon Arnold R. Weathers
New Prospect Baptist Church

Considering our past history, and our journey into the year 2009, I ask the question, Have, we overcome? Have we overcome the pain and suffering of the system of slavery? The dehumanization experienced by the enslaved Africans brought to this country is too difficult to imagine. When Presbyterian clergyman Elijah Lovejoy (1802 – 1837) left the pulpit, he returned to the printing presses in order to reach more people. After witnessing a lynching, Lovejoy committed to fighting the injustices of slavery. His life was threatened by hateful mobs, but this did not stop him: “If by compromise is meant that I should cease from my duty, I cannot make it. I fear God more than I fear man. Crush me if you will, but I shall die at my post.” Four days after these words, he was killed at the hands of another angry mob. Have we overcome?

Everyone desires justice. But we must recognize that our human frailty makes it challenging to mete out true justice. And we can be bent toward revenge, making a casualty out of the pursuit of it.

It's helpful to remember that perfect justice can be found only in God. Abraham described Him with the rhetorical question, “Shall not the judge of all the earth do right?” (Gen. 18:25). The necessary answer is yes. But even more, His courtroom is the one and only place where we can be certain that justice will prevail.

In a world filled with injustice, we can take the wrongs done to us, submit them to the Judge of all the earth, and trust Him for ultimate justice.

– Bill Crowder

Concern about justice for the oppressed is evident throughout Scripture. It was especially clear when God established the rules for His covenant people after they were released from Egyptian bondage (Deut. 24:18) "You shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt, and the Lord your God redeemed you from there."

Moses emphasized concern for the underprivileged. Repeatedly, the Israelites were reminded that they had been slaves in Egypt and should deal justly with the underprivileged in their community. They were to love strangers ("aliens") because God loves them, and the Israelites had themselves been aliens in Egypt. God desires that His people affirm the supreme worth of every individual by fighting against injustice. – Marvin Williams

Have we overcome the Jim Crow laws, and the Civil Rights era of the fifties, and sixties. As I reflect on the past and look forward to the future, there have been so many historical challenges, injustices, and changes along this journey to overcome in order to keep going forward.

The dream is still alive. On January 19, 2009 we celebrated the Dr. Martin Luther King holiday. We honored the memory of a man who stirred the conscience of a nation. Dr. King, through word and deed, galvanized Americans to commit themselves to building a community where every person is respected; where people are judged not by the color of their skin, but the context of their character.

Now, as we celebrate the inauguration of the 44th President of the United States of America, Barack Obama, the name Barack means "blessed" and indeed, Barack Obama is blessed in many ways. He will be the first elected African American in the history of this country to lead this great nation.

The Inauguration of President Barack Obama

Celebration of African American Month - February

Rev. Mr. Dennis Edwards
Saint Mark Catholic Church
Cincinnati, Ohio

Yes, "How has our history led us to do justice?"

Our history has led us through many test and points of decision in our traveled crossroad of life. We are sojourners in a land that was not ours, however, has become our land by our work and contributions in education, science, poetry, music, sports, medicine, business, government and leadership ability in each century. The soul and spirit of African Americans are marching to a destination of peace and justice in a land that wants peace and justice however elusive it is to achieve.

"We the People of the United States, in order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defense promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America." Preamble of the United States of America Constitution.

"No one who lights a lamp conceals it with a vessel or sets it under a covering" [Luke 8:16]. As America 'lights' the month of February to celebrate the life achievements of its African American people, what a moment of joy for a people who struggled through many tests and difficulties to stand before a nation to proclaim;

we are here, we are alive, we are marching, , we are seekers of peace, we are seekers of justice and we are a people of hope.

Our March

*Our history is the steps I hear
Whose steps do I hear?
The steps of the first African men and women
The steps of new Americans
The steps of uncertain and fear
The steps of hope and love
The first steps of life from our descendants
The steps are numerous as the stars of heaven
Many the stars of heaven shine upon our numerous steps
of history
Celebrate your steps
Your steps of history on earth
Love to all on earth.
America the steps are marching, are marching!
Marching to peace and love before God*

The march to the Inauguration of President
Barack Obama

The south swirling winds tell a story of new beginning of hope. The east swirling winds tell us of change for the future. The west swirling winds tells us people need words of a brighter future and the north swirling winds tell us of joy for living life. The swirling winds have come to rest upon the dreams of many Americans. America the beautiful is living in its radiance with the inauguration of Barack Obama as president of a nation that has struggled to achieve its Preamble of the United States of America Constitution.

When we tell our children that they can be president, they can be, not words without meaning or weak hope, *but are words built upon truth.*

I have lived to see in person a nation transform itself to honor its promise that People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, Tranquility, provide for Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity. May we thank God for this blessing of seeing and hearing these promises fulfilled on January 20, 2009.

Lex Orandi (law of prayer)
Lex Credendi (law of belief)

