

**CHRISTOPHER J. BAKES**

October 27, 2020

**VIA UNITED STATES MAIL AND EMAIL**

Scott Santarosa, S.J.  
Provincial

Michael Gilson, S.J.  
Socius

Jesuits West Province

Re: Errant Jesuits West website

Dear Scott and Michael:

Attached please find my letter to the Jesuit High School Board of Trustees, dated October 6, 2020. I understand that a parent group also sent a letter to Jesuit the same day. This confluence brings me peace. How extraordinary of the Holy Spirit to separately motivate two such different forces to write letters that arrived on the same day. (I suspect that cynics won't see the Holy Spirit. They'll suspect a collaboration. Please do credit the Holy Spirit. It was not a collaboration.) I am pleased that the faithful are in rebellion. It is the fate we hope awaits all false teachings.

I hadn't intended to send my letter to the Province office. However, subsequent reaction to my letter on the part of an administrator at Jesuit High School, along with my own subsequent research into materials the Province is now promoting and releasing to schools and parishes – promoting as teaching values “white privilege” “wrestling with whiteness” and “systemic racism” – have prompted me to change course. (The Province in registering participants in one such program asks each registrant to supply their preferred “personal pronoun,” rejecting Adam, Eve, Creation's main human construct [man and woman], and Genesis.)

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In addition to transmitting the attached letter, this cover letter shares with you my strongest possible rebuke of current Society messaging.

In the statements, postings, and content of the Jesuits West website (in turn incorporated into Jesuit schools' and parishes' websites), I see false teaching, misleading the faithful, factionalizing, committing the unpardonable sin of abusing parental trust, and abruptly departing from millennia of Christian teaching while – another unpardonable sin – falsely presenting the departure as an expression of legitimate theology and moral teaching. What I am about to describe is manifestly not Christian, not Catholic, and presents the modern American iteration of the Society of Jesus in full pastoral failure. It should cause great unease that a loyal alumnus of two Jesuit schools who then directed the founding of a third should now take this position. The Jesuits West website content and messaging appears, implausibly, to be the work of unfiltered exuberance, without benefit of the wisdom, deliberation, and reflection that must underpin all truth. Unfiltered exuberance feeds mobs, lowers the collective IQ, and places wisdom below slogans.

Supplementing the attached letter, I am now more fully aware of the Province's "teaching" materials. Their availability to schools and parishes on the Province website indicate full endorsement by the Province. I am aware that spread throughout these materials are the writings of Fordham academic Bryan Massingale, a "black gay priest" (as he identifies himself) whose lengthy CV fails to mention that none of his writings have the imprimatur or nihil obstat of the Church. His ostensible "theology" writings are not genuine analysis or genuine studies. They are accusations proceeding on the assumption that the accusations ("systemic racism" "white privilege", "white supremacy", these being the nation's "tragic insanity") are not only factual, but *theological*. Some of his titles are simply strange, such as this one selected for listing on his Fordham bio page: "The Erotics of Anti-Blackness: Police Sexual Violations of Black Bodies." (2017).

He is now the Province's "go-to" authority on race matters? The Province urges his works as fixed theological truths? What they actually are is factional, divisive, anti-pastoral, and foolish, unrooted in human experience, pastoral reality, or the actual teachings of Christianity and the Church. The only fixed truths are those of God's scriptural revelation, not Bryan Massingale's Erotics, white supremacy, or other racist phrasings. He forsakes the color-blindness of Scripture and all faithful teaching, in favor of the anti-pastoral slander that "white America" (his phrasing) is actually a diminished and culpable state of being, responsible for all racial distress.

The particular social slanders in which Massingale engages, embraced now by the Jesuits West Province, is that the totality of Scripture is irrelevant to the pathologies of communities of the poor, including poor African-Americans. Destiny is not the result of individual choice informed and guided by stable families and faithful schools. It is not unfaithfulness to a lived life based on Scripture that is the problem, but rather it is "white people" who are the problem – systemically

and historically oppressive, along with the nation they inhabit. This pernicious theory would corral all of America into a holding pen until just punishment and reformation can be imposed on those who have committed no sin. In other words, Massingale proclaims a new Original Sin, without theological imprimatur. This is what the Province now teaches.

With this as context, the Province website exhorts readers to vote a particular way. I've seen links to an organization called "PICO," whose main web page proclaims that Americans prefer segregation – an outrageous calumny. The Province website, containing significant errant content of its own, then links to content that can only be described as insidious. One of many such links is to the Ignatian Solidarity Network, which holds anomalously to the worst forms of racism by presuming to issue punishment and penance to "white people." "White people" are assigned links of their own to click on. In link after link, these "white people" are called to extra penance and extra contemplation, imposed for their national racism, as beneficiaries of a corrupt system and as perpetrators in their own right. I even found my own status penalized at <https://ignatiansolidarity.net/ignatian-racial-equity-challenge/#toggle-id-18>, where I read this about those with degrees from Jesuit universities (I have two): "FOR WHITE PEOPLE [caps original]: If you have a degree from a Jesuit or other Catholic university, reflect on the relationship between this privilege and your whiteness. How does your degree demonstrate dynamics of privilege, power, and white supremacy? What does it ask of you in return in the work for racial equity?" (This is just a sample. There are many more "Whites Only" links on the site.)

I barely know how to counsel any who would come up with spurious content like this, and then name it after Ignatius of Loyola. The content is neither serious nor credible. If you presume to speak to those holding degrees from Jesuit institutions, then let me speak to those contemporary Jesuits who would rewrite my Jesuit training in order to come up with preposterous nonsense like this. What I am owed is your continued allegiance to the values I was taught during the 11 schoolyears I spent at the schools of the Society, taught there by 23 different priests and scholastics, guided and inspired through my ceaselessly positive interactions with still more Jesuits as administrators. They were all wrong? I was that misled? Am I to now believe that the 476-year period between the founding of the Jesuits in 1534 and my last volunteerism for the Jesuits in 2010 (including overseeing the founding and opening of a new Jesuit school) has now been overwritten by a brand-new theology? One that proclaims it is good to classify based on race, to punish the innocent based on race, to impose unique penance based on race, and with a new form of Original Sin that operates as a permanent taint on "whites only"?

Neither I nor those 476 years of Jesuit history have ever heard of such a dreadful proclamation of our faith.

My working-class parents' purpose in sending me to Jesuit schools, and my purpose in overseeing the opening of another one, was not to partake in a new creed imposing new

punishments on those who have committed no sin. It was to shape me as a Roman Catholic in service to Humankind, informed by the Gospel under the expert guidance of what we used to think of when we used the term “the Jesuits.” The Province, location of multiple Jesuit schools, universities, and parishes, is assumed by most to be sending forth its priests to proclaim the Gospel, presumably in order to better teach society’s young and inform us all. The Society surely must do this on the basis of a 500-year tradition of transmitting the Word the world over, earning Jesuits *the trust of parents* who send their children to these schools expecting their sons and daughters to be educated in this full and rich context.

But that is not what the Province is doing. The Province has abruptly determined that it will transmit reckless new creeds to the young, bypass their parents, and perhaps most cynically, bypass the sensibilities of many donors. If I send my child to a Jesuit high school, am I expecting a transcendent form of learning that connects my child to the sacred lessons of the millennia, presented by a religious congregation with centuries of faith-based education experience? Or, am I expecting my child to be indoctrinated with secularized and radical Left political messaging, coined a figurative five minutes ago – using ways and methods that would be unknown to any responsible Jesuit of any century all the way back to 1534?

Parents expect the former, but the schools of the Province are delivering the latter. Trusting parents now see a school not in harmony with their values. And with such a high-value now placed by these teachings on creating and exacerbating race *factions*, these trusting parents now see a repudiation of their values. They see defamations of their nation, their own teachings of faith and patriotism, their duty and loyalty, their duty of service to God and country.

The Province has abused parental trust, and in misleading the young, *you* are inflicting a most insidious form of angry abuse on children and youth.

In the Province’s “teaching” materials, including the “white supremacy” writings of Bryan Massingale, the Province’s new absolute authority, I see no reference to any of the following:

- the failure of Church and society to immersively teach the sacred and social value of commitment to family and spouse;
- Church and society’s tolerance for the collapse of the family structure, turning a blind eye when it is this failure that contributes most heavily to youth isolation, waywardness and criminality;
- the Church and its Orders’ tolerance of the collapse of the Catholic parochial school system in the neighborhoods of the poor and working class (where no such schools remain virtually *anywhere*), a point on which I have more to say below;
- the proliferation of music “entertainment” messaging that brings to impressionable young ears the triumph of violence against women, society, and each other, over civility and virtue;

- the proliferation of high school teaching – in literature, social studies, and other subjects – that society is *bleak*, life is *bleak*, the nation is *bleak*, and that collective repentance for past race sins is now long past due and is *the* chief and primary moral imperative – but for “whites only.” And we wonder about teen suicide?

I end with three anecdotes. They demonstrate the emptiness of current Province teaching.

In 2006, I was invited to participate in a meeting at Immaculate Conception Parish School, Sacramento. The Bishop urgently called the meeting to respond to the possibility that Immaculate Conception School might be forced to close at the end of the schoolyear for financial reasons. Immaculate Conception School was located in the Oak Park neighborhood of Sacramento, heavily Black. I was invited because of my well-known commitment to saving the Sacramento schools then in service to the poor, Immaculate Conception School being one of them. The meeting had an air of crisis. The Diocese had not closed any schools in many years, and it was feared this would just be the first domino. The way had to be paved for a solution that would save this school and the others. Each of the local Catholic high schools was represented at the meeting. Key pastors and Diocesan school officials were present. The meeting was held onsite at Immaculate Conception. At the meeting, ideas were exchanged, concepts were offered, and an overall strategy was called for. Unexpectedly, one person attending spoke unkindly about the meeting, the prospects for saving the school, and what a waste of time it was for this important person to even be there. She abruptly walked out, leaving those who remained in shock.

She was the Jesuit High School representative.

In 2007, the Diocese of Sacramento anticipated the opening of the new Cristo Rey High School (a process I directed and oversaw at Tom Smolich’s request). The Diocese wished to create an overall educational solution for the area’s poor, with the existing All Hallows Parish School being the K-8 complement to the new 9-12 Cristo Rey High School. Since both schools were located on the grounds of the newly consolidated All Hallows-St. Peter Parish, here was a rare opportunity to design a full K through 12 option for the poor and marginalized. The Bishop asked the Society, co-sponsor of the new Cristo Rey, to send a Jesuit who could assist with this brand new form of multi-faceted ministry. The Bishop had a particular Jesuit in mind, and asked for him. The Society took no interest in this “solution for the poor” as a project, and instead sent (I will be candid) a troubled priest who the Diocese later asked be removed due to a series of troubling incidents, not the least of which was his diligent *opposition* to creating in the elementary school a preferential option for the poor.

All Hallows School closed. Its tuition aid program benefiting 300 children of the poor, gone.

So you see, Scott and Michael, when the poor came calling, the Society refused to answer the door.

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I viewed Scott's recent video where he describes his "epiphany" at learning that a Black brother priest saw only skin color when he looked in the mirror, while Scott in looking in a mirror didn't see skin color at all. This, to Scott, was the alpha and omega of racial strife today, a stark contrast between what he saw versus what the Black priest saw.

What a lost teaching opportunity, Scott. Had I been you, I would have shared a moment of solidarity with the priest. I then would have invited both of us outside of ourselves, and invited the two of us as priests to reflect on a far broader panorama. I would have shared my gratitude that we both were priests of the Society, ordained into the priesthood to carry on God's work in the spirit of the teaching and tradition that reach back to Ignatius, Jesus, Moses, and Genesis (meaning, of course, infinity and the infinite Word). How minor a moment a mirror reflection would have become had the perspective of the both of you been enlarged.

It's not about either of you, or me, or Michael, or the Jesuits. It's about the salvation of souls and *the teaching of truth*.

*the teaching of truth*

I will leave you on that note.....

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, enclosed in a rectangular box with a thin black border. The signature reads "Christopher J. Bakes".

Christopher J. Bakes

Enclosure