

Anti-Asian Racism

*Myths, Stereotypes, and
Catholic Social Teaching*

JOSEPH CHEAH

ORBIS  BOOKS
Maryknoll, New York 10545

INTRODUCTION

In an effort to address the evil of racism and its harmful effects, the US Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) issued a pastoral letter, *Open Wide Our Hearts: The Enduring Call to Love—A Pastoral Letter Against Racism*, in its November 2018 General Assembly. This was a long overdue pastoral statement on racism, released four decades after the 1979 pastoral letter *Brothers and Sisters to Us: A Pastoral Letter on Racism in Our Day*, and sixty years after the 1958 statement on *Discrimination and Christian Conscience*. In *Open Wide Our Hearts*, the bishops continued not only the theme of the sinful nature of racism and its violation of the fundamental dignity of the human person, discussed in their previous pastoral letter on racism, but also recognized the Church's failure to reckon with racial injustice over centuries in the Americas.¹

Open Wide Our Hearts is an improvement over previous pastoral statements in its acknowledgment of the Church's complicity in the evil of racism. However, as a pastoral letter against racism, it has rendered the struggles and racialized experiences of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPI) completely invisible. This in part has to do with how the Catholic Church in the United States reflects the larger American society in the ways in which the AAPI are relegated as foreigners or outsiders in their own country and, consequently, their experiences become either subordinated or have been consis-

¹ US Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Open Wide Our Hearts: The Enduring Call to Love—A Pastoral Letter Against Racism* (Washington, DC: USCCB, 2018), 17–18.

tently excluded in the mainstream American history, pastoral letters, and political discourses. This has contributed to the invisibility of AAPI experiences of pain and suffering, xenophobia, and racism in racial discourses in academia, the entertainment industry, and in the Church. Not too many Americans know about the horrific violence and racism suffered by Asian immigrants in the past, and few non-AAPI Americans would take seriously racism and discrimination experienced by AAPI prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Despite the spike in violence in the Asian American community during this pandemic, a recent survey conducted by LAAUNCH (Leading Asian Americans to Unite for Change) reveals that 37 percent of White Americans are not aware of a surge in anti-Asian hate violence and 24 percent of White Americans do not believe that Asian Americans suffer from racism.²

In 2018, the USCCB promulgated not only *Open Wide Our Hearts* but also a pastoral response about AAPI or Asian and Pacific Islanders, *Encountering Christ in Harmony: A Pastoral Response to Our Asian and Pacific Island Brothers and Sisters*. The latter presents AAPI in terms of their identity, generations, leadership, cultural encounter, and dialogue in faith. In addition, *Encountering Christ in Harmony* attempts to respond to racism experienced by AAPI in stating that racism based on language and physical appearance “can sometimes be negative due to racism” and that AAPI are “sometimes portrayed” as “model minorities.” The use of such conditional phrasings trivializes racism experienced by AAPI as if it is not widespread or systemic.³ While the drafter correctly brought up the

² Leading Asian Americans to Unite for Change (LAAUNCH), “Survey Reveals 8 out of 10 Asian Americans Say They Are Discriminated Against and 77% Do Not Feel Respected in the U.S.,” *Associated Press News*, May 10, 2021.

³ US Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Encountering Christ in Harmony: A Pastoral Response to Our Asian and Pacific Island Brothers and Sisters* (Washington, DC: USCCB, 2018), 18–20.

idea that the model minority myth has made AAPI invisible in the politics of US racial discourses,⁴ a discussion of such a complicated myth like the model minority, in passing, without mentioning the ideology of White supremacy that made the model minority trope possible, is entirely inadequate.

In a fifty-eight–page booklet, it spent a seemingly obligatory amount of time—slightly over a page—addressing racism experienced by Asians and Pacific Islanders in the United States, plus four sidebars about racism from the 1979 pastoral letter. The largest of these sidebars provides a definition of racism from the previous pastoral letter and a quote from the late Cardinal Francis George on racism. The other three sidebars are synopses of the previous pastoral letter’s response to racism from personal, Christian, and parish levels. No reference was made to any of the works done by Asian American scholars and theologians on race/racism, Asian American history, experience, and theology.

The document recognizes the role of social structures in reinforcing racism by identifying two disconcerting events in US history. However, it does so in passing or essentializing Asian American history into the worst form of tokenism: mentioning the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act and the incarceration of Japanese Americans during World War II within the same sentence while providing neither context nor sufficient explanation. The sentence reads, “While the experience of racism is not unique to any one ethnic group, two important examples in Asian American history include the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882 and the internment of Japanese Americans during the Second World War.”⁵ What is troubling about this is that not only is the group that had the power to enact the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act and the incarceration of Japanese Americans made nameless, but the conditional phrasing

⁴ Ibid., 19.

⁵ Ibid., 18.

of the sentence trivializes these two horrific events in the history of Asian Americans as a consequence of ordinary racism. Furthermore, the entire section on racism was written in passive voice, except for when the drafter writes about interethnic discriminations between Asian and Pacific Islanders and how they contribute to the racial discourse in the United States. Instead of focusing on the virulent form of racism that resulted in the Chinese Exclusion Act and the incarceration of Japanese Americans, the drafter diverts the attention to interethnic tensions that can be found in almost all groups, especially in a very broad umbrella group like the AAPI.

The big elephant in the room remains: the ideology of Whiteness and White supremacy, which are completely omitted in the document. It is obvious that *Encountering Christ in Harmony* is a compensative product of a committee that attempts to engage in the topic of racism because the racialized experience of AAPI was excluded in *Open Wide Our Hearts*.

This book thus fills a large lacuna in the Catholic Church's understanding and treatment of the racialized experiences of AAPIs. It focuses on the central issue that the bishops' documents do not address, namely, reckoning with the invisibility of AAPI in the church. As a vital part of the ongoing conversation on racial reckoning in the church and country, this volume approaches racism and xenophobia experienced by Asian Americans systematically by examining three destructive and pervasive stereotypes that have negatively shaped the lives of AAPI in general and Asian Americans in particular: yellow peril, the model minority, and the perpetual foreigner. I examine these three damaging stereotypes from the perspectives of history, Asian American Studies, Asian American marginal theology, biblical studies, and Catholic Social Teaching (CST). In addition, I periodically employ the bishops' pastoral letter, pastoral response, and papal encyclicals in my discussion. As such, this book supplements the discussion of race/racism in *Open Wide Our Hearts* and *Encountering Christ*

in Harmony by offering a response to issues of racial injustice confronted by AAPI communities.

Before describing the organization of this book, some introduction to terms and concepts is in order.

Race, Racism, and the Pastoral Letter

Race, racism, and White supremacy are some of the central concepts running through this volume. Race is not a biological reality, but rather a social construction with real socioracial effect. Race is a set of beliefs and practices that gives meaning to the perception of phenotypic differences as essential, and how those perceived essential differences become markers of social and cultural inequality.⁶ In other words, race speaks the language of phenotype, but it is really about the social power exercised by the dominant group over targeted racial groups with relatively less social power in the United States.

According to the 1979 bishops' pastoral letter, *Brothers and Sisters to Us*, racism is "a sin that divides the human family, . . . and violates the fundamental human dignity of those called to be children of the same Father. Racism is the sin that says some human beings are inherently superior and others essentially inferior because of races."⁷ The strength in the first part of this definition is that it makes clear that racism, in all manifestations, is a sin because it violates the fundamental dignity of every human being. A weakness in the second part of this definition is the use of passive voice. It is not a good idea to define racism in terms of generic "races" when race as a categorizing term in reference to human beings first emerged in sixteenth-century Europe, and

⁶ Joseph Cheah, *Race and Religion in American Buddhism: White Supremacy and Immigrant Adaptation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 22.

⁷ US Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Brothers and Sister to Us: U.S. Bishops' Pastoral Letter on Racism in Our Day* (Washington, DC: USCCB, 1979).

by the eighteenth century, it formed a racialized social structure “that awarded systemic privileges to Europeans (the peoples who became “white”) over non-Europeans (the peoples who became “nonwhite”).⁸ This racialized social system is the earliest formulation of White supremacy. While this term seems to cause knee-jerk reactions in many bishops of the USCCB, it is quite appropriate to use it in a document promulgated in part to respond to the resurgence of White nationalism in Charlottesville in 2017. Not only is “White nationalism” not mentioned in the pastoral letter, even the term “White privilege,” as Sister of Mercy Karen M. Donahue noted, is conspicuously missing in the bishops’ pastoral letters and response.⁹

In her honest appraisal of the 2018 pastoral letter, Mary T. Yelenick, a member of the Pax Christi USA Anti-Racism Team, underscores that “the document will necessarily remain unrepresentative, unfinished, and unhelpful” because while the experiences of Native Americans, African Americans, and Hispanics are briefly discussed in the pastoral letter, the voices of the people from those communities, as well as the voices of theologians and other scholars who have spent their careers writing about racism in these communities and in the Catholic Church, are missing. She also noted that the document “does not acknowledge, address, or seek atonement for the unique role of the Catholic Church in perpetuating and practicing racism.”¹⁰

In his interview with the *National Catholic Reporter*, Father Bryan Massingale of Fordham University pointed out that when

⁸ Bonilla-Silva, *Racism without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in America* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2018), 8.

⁹ Sister Karen M. Donahue, “*Open Wide Our Hearts—What I Wish the Bishops Would Have Said*,” Sisters of Mercy.org, January 21, 2019.

¹⁰ Mary T. Yelenick, “An Anti-Racism Perspective on *Open Wide Our Hearts*, the November 2018 Bishops’ Pastoral Letter on Racism,” Pax Christi USA, October 31, 2019.

the document refers to racism it does so in the passive voice.¹¹ We see this in the first sentence under “The African American Experience,” which reads, “As this country was forming, Africans were bought and sold as mere property, often beaten, raped, and literally worked to death.”¹² Who bought and sold Africans as mere property, literally working them to death? This is not an isolated example. Most of the document was written this way. As Massingale puts it candidly: “The document was written by white people for the comfort of white people. And in doing so, it illustrates a basic tenet of Catholic engagement with racism: when the Catholic Church historically has engaged this issue, it’s always done so in a way that’s calculated to not disturb white people or not to make white people uncomfortable.”¹³ Daniel P. Horan, professor of theology at St. Mary’s College in Notre Dame, Indiana, echoes Massingale’s point by challenging the US bishops to leave their comfort zone and acknowledge “the basic truth that racism is a white problem and progress will only be made when church leaders accept and preach this fact.”¹⁴ All these reviewers called out the Church for its lack of acknowledgment of White privilege and White supremacy. They consider the pastoral letter to be ineffective because it “hides behind lofty rhetoric to avoid dealing with uncomfortable truths,”¹⁵ “was written in passive voice,”¹⁶ never mentioned White privilege,¹⁷ and “never names the sinner.”¹⁸

¹¹ Regina Munch, “An Interview with Bryan Massingale: ‘Worship of a False God,’” *NCR*, December 27, 2020.

¹² USCCB, *Open Wide Our Hearts*, 10.

¹³ Munch, “An Interview with Bryan Massingale.”

¹⁴ Daniel P. Horan, “When Will the US Bishops Address the Evil of Systemic Racism Head-on?” *NCR*, June 10, 2020.

¹⁵ Yelenick, “An Anti-Racism Perspective.”

¹⁶ Munch, “An Interview with Bryan Massingale.”

¹⁷ Donahue, “*Open Wide Our Hearts*.”

¹⁸ Horan, “When Will the US Bishops Address the Evil of Systemic Racism Head-on?”

Despite its weaknesses, the general principle or scriptural passage referred to in the pastoral letter can be used to frame the discussion of a topic not directly mentioned in the letter itself. For example, the writer of the educational resource “Examining Our Subconscious Perception,” which is accessible at the USCCB website, took a general statement from the pastoral letter that “[r]acism can often be found in our hearts—in many cases placed there unwillingly or unknowingly by our upbringing and culture”¹⁹ and related it to an implicit bias experienced by Asian Americans in particular. Even though the writer did not name the ethnic group, the phrase, “the common stereotype that certain groups are smart and serious,”²⁰ is usually attributed to Asian Americans. This is a general statement that could have been applied to any racial/ethnic group, but the writer is using it in relation to Asian Americans because of their reference to certain groups as “smart and serious” followed by an example of a person “good at math,” which is another common stereotype ascribed to Asian Americans. As the writer puts it, “For example, if it is assumed that one person is ‘good at math’ because of his or her background, could that assumption preclude opportunities for work in a more creative field? Stereotypes, even when they seem complimentary, are never good because they do not honor people as individuals, created by God, with unique gifts and talents.”²¹ The writer’s point is well taken that even seemingly “good” stereotypes can channel, in this case, Asian Americans to the STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) field. This is a good example of how a general statement or scriptural passage referenced in a pastoral letter can be used to apply to situations not directly mentioned and, perhaps, not explicitly intended, in the pastoral letter itself.

¹⁹ USCCB, *Open Wide Our Hearts*, 5.

²⁰ US Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Examining Our Subconscious Perception* (Washington, DC: USCCB, 2022), 2.

²¹ *Ibid.*

Catholic Social Teaching

CST is a body of teaching on social, economic, and political life from the magisterium of the Church, based on the fundamental principles of the Catholic social doctrine: the Dignity of the Human Person, the Common Good, Subsidiarity, and Solidarity. These are principles listed by the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace in its 2004 doctrinal corpus overview, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*.

The USCCB summarizes the CST into seven basic principles: Life and Dignity of the Human Person; Call to Family, Community, and Participation; Rights and Responsibilities; Option for the Poor and Vulnerable; The Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers; Solidarity; and Care for God's Creation.²² Different Catholic organizations and applications have slightly different permutations of the principles, but they all begin with the foundational principle of the Dignity of the Human Person, because Christians believe that all humans are created in the image and likeness of God.

While the modern history of CST began with the publication of Pope Leo XIII's *Rerum Novarum* in 1891, CST draws upon sources as old as Scripture itself. The first creation story in the book of Genesis is often referenced to support the dignity of the human person. In Genesis 1, God (*Elohim*), out of the dark chaos and formless void, created the heavens and the earth and all living things in six days. On the first day, as the wind of God swept over the waters, God names light and darkness "day" and "night." On the second day, God inserts an immense dome to separate "the water above the dome from the water below it" (Gn 1:8). On the third day, God brings forth vegetation of every kind and fruit trees with seed-bearing fruit. On the fourth day, God makes the sun to

²² Bernard V. Brady, *Essential Catholic Social Thought* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2008), 11–15.

govern the day and the moon to govern the night. On the fifth day, God makes the living creatures in the sea and the birds that fly in the sky. On the sixth day, God brings forth all kinds of living creatures that roam the earth, and the climatic event on that day is the creation of human beings. Unlike the plants, fishes, birds, and other animals, human beings are created in the image and likeness of God.²³

The fundamental principle of the dignity of the human person in the CST is based on this passage in Genesis (Gn 1:27). Human beings are sacred because we are created in the image and likeness of God. In nonscriptural language, this is written as the dignity of the human person. Both sacredness and dignity of the human person is at the heart of CST. Respect and dignity are fundamental God-given rights. This is based neither on an individual's merits nor on one's race, ethnicity, culture, sexuality, or other personal attributes. Respect and dignity require no other rationale than that these are gifts from God.

In the Old Testament, the book of Genesis tells us that human beings are sacred because we are created in the image and likeness of God. In the New Testament, God takes the sacredness of humans to a new level by becoming one of us in Christ. The Incarnation is a message from God who draws near to us and says, "You are bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh" (Gn 2:23). We have common roots with God. The Incarnation tells us that humans matter because our humanity is consecrated by the birth of Christ. In a sense, humans are doubly sacred. Not only are we created in the image and likeness of God, but we are also consecrated by the birth of Jesus. This is why the respect for the dignity of the human person is the paramount principle of CST.

²³ Raymond E. Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, and Ronald E. Murphy, *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary* (Hoboken, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1990), 10–11.

Whiteness and White Supremacy

A final set of concepts to introduce and define before we begin, are these.

Whiteness as a legal construction can be traced back to the 1790 Naturalization Act, which restricted admission into the American national community to “free white persons.” Because “whiteness” or “white persons” was not clearly defined in the act, the Supreme Court judges appealed to “scientific evidence” and “common knowledge” to determine whether the applicant belonged to the “white” race. The enforcement of this act was full of ambiguity as the court, on the basis of their rulings, had difficulty making consistent decisions.

Two famous racial prerequisite cases illustrate this ambiguity and contradiction. Takao Ozawa, an immigrant from Japan, graduated from the University of California at Berkeley and eventually settled in the territory of Hawaii with his family. At a time when Asians were looked upon as unassimilable, Ozawa was one of the most assimilated immigrants in the United States. He converted to Christianity, lived the American lifestyle, and raised his children to speak only English at home. In 1922, he petitioned to the US Supreme Court to grant him citizenship. The Court rejected Ozawa’s application by declaring that he was not “popularly known as the Caucasian race” and that he was of a Mongoloid race, thus invoking both common knowledge and accepted science at that time.²⁴ A few months later, Bhagat Singh Thind, a South Asian man, applied for citizenship based on the argument that Western anthropologists classified Asian Indians as “Caucasians” rather than “Mongolians.” The Supreme Court contradicted its ruling of Ozawa by rejecting the prevailing race science of the time that

²⁴ Ian F. Haney Lopez, *White by Law: The Legal Construction of Race* (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 7.

categorized Thind as racially White; instead, they privileged the common knowledge argument that Thind would not be considered White in the eyes of most people. Moreover, the purity of his genealogical claims of Caucasian and Aryan ancestry depended on his religion. Although Thind was a Sikh, the Court rejected his citizenship application on the basis of his “Hindooism.”²⁵ Hence, the legal and social category of Whiteness was an unstable identity category, subject to inclusion and exclusion based on the biases of the judges.

In 1790, southern and eastern Europeans would not be considered White but, by the 1920s, they could be White for purposes of naturalization, even though they were still considered to be racially inferiors to Anglo-Saxons.²⁶ In other words, White people were not a natural group, but were socially and legally constructed. This concept of Whiteness as it emerged in the courts in their interpretation of the 1790 Naturalization Act is a classic example of White supremacy: the idea that “European,” which served as a synonym for Whites, was privileged in the naturalization process and assumed to be inherently superior to non-White Others in the construction of the American national identity.

Among racial theorists and social reformers of the early twentieth century who claimed that Whiteness had biological and scientific foundation were Madison Grant and Lothrop Stoddard. Both made the racist assertion that reflected the racially biased eugenics of the time: there were naturalized hierarchies of distinction among different races, with Whites on the apex of all these hierarchies. Furthermore, they warned that the hegemony of the

²⁵ Jennifer Snow, “The Civilization of White Man: The Race of the Hindu in United States v. Bhagat Singh Thind,” in Henry Goldschmidt and Elizabeth McAlister, eds., *Race, Nation, and Religion in the Americas* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 261–80.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 104, 106.

White race was being threatened by the growing population of “colored people” in the United States and around the world. Grant drew upon nineteenth-century French thinking on race with its tripartite division of European racial typology—Alpine, Mediterranean, and Nordic—and claimed that the Nordic were the superior race among Whites and argued for the preservation and flourishing of Nordic supremacy through eugenic programs and immigration restrictions.²⁷ Like Grant, Stoddard foresaw the downfall of Western civilization from the rapid growth of “colored” masses, which he artificially categorized into “yellows, blacks, browns, and reds.”²⁸ The writings of both Grant and Stoddard were influential in the conceptions of Whiteness and White supremacy during the period when social Darwinist and eugenicist conceptions of race were prominent in Europe and America. For them, Whiteness had biological and scientific foundations. They did not equivocate in saying that the White race was superior to all others. The rationale for the enslavement of African Americans and the exclusion of Chinese came from these assumptions.

Two definitions of White supremacy that best describe these oppressive situations are offered by George Frederickson, who refers to “the attitudes, ideologies, and policies” associated with the rise of blatant forms of White or European dominance over non-Whites,²⁹ and Robin DiAngelo, who posits “the definition of whites as the norm or standard for human, and people of color as a deviation from that norm.”³⁰ Today, no reputable person

²⁷ Madison Grant, *The Passing of the Great Race* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1916), 20–28.

²⁸ Lothrop Stoddard, *The Rising Tide of Color against White World Supremacy* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1922), 3–10.

²⁹ George Frederickson, *White Supremacy: A Comparative Study of American and South African History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), xi.

³⁰ Robin DiAngelo, *White Fragility: Why It’s So Hard for White People to Talk about Racism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2018), 33.

would claim that Whiteness has biological and scientific foundations. Rather, today, most would regard Whiteness as socially constructed. The social significance of Whiteness is guided not by any biological or scientific foundations but by social meanings attributed to it. When individuals refer to White people, either in self-identification or a reference to a particular group, they are generally referring to Whiteness—that is, a social construct “where white cultural norms and practices go unnamed and unquestioned,” but that has real and tangible effects.³¹

While Whiteness is an unmarked category for Whites, it is quite visible to people of color. Moreover, Whiteness and White people carry separate and nonresembling marks of distinction to the degree that, as George Lipsitz puts it, “opposing whiteness is not the same thing as opposing white people.”³²

Karen Teel, professor of theology and religious studies at the University of San Diego, provides us with a caution that “as a cultural identity, whiteness is not simply coextensive with all racially white people; whites can try to opt out, and nonwhites can try to opt in.”³³ Nevertheless, White supremacy, in all manifestations, has contributed to the widespread disadvantages encountered by people of color in American society. In 1989, women’s studies scholar Peggy McIntosh flipped the script to provide an alternative argument to Whiteness as an unmarked category by interrogating it from the perspective of the unearned advantages that White people carry with them in everyday life.³⁴ She called this White

³¹ Ruth Frankenberg, *The Social Construction of Whiteness: White Women, Race Matters* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 10.

³² George Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998), 8.

³³ Karen Teel, “Whiteness in Catholic Theological Method,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 87, no. 2 (2019): 9.

³⁴ Melissa Stein, “Whiteness—African American Studies,” *Oxford Bibli-*

privilege. Unlike Grant and Stoddard, who assumed the superiority of the White race, McIntosh, in her classic article, “White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack,” focused on the unearned advantages or privileges that Whiteness conferred upon White people: “I realized I had been taught about racism as something that puts others at a disadvantage, but had been taught not to see one of its corollary aspects, White privilege, which puts me at an advantage.”³⁵ McIntosh reflects on how she was implicated in perpetuating invisible systems of Whiteness: “I was taught to recognize racism only in individual acts of meanness by members of my group, never in invisible systems conferring unsought racial dominance on my group from birth.”³⁶

Other Terms and Their Uses When We Talk about Race and Racism

A few final introductory words, before we begin.

In following the *Chicago Manual of Style*, the word “Black” will be capitalized throughout this book when referring to people of African descent. This is also in line with the capitalization of other racial and ethnic groups like Asian, Latinx, and Native. To keep it consistent, the word “White” will also be capitalized when referring to racial and ethnic identity. This includes concepts such as “Whiteness” and “White supremacy.”

The term “Asian American” was coined by Yuji Ichioka, American historian and civil rights activist, in 1968 when he and Emma

ographies, February 27, 2019, <https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780190280024/obo-9780190280024-0063.xml>.

³⁵ Peggy McIntosh, “White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack,” *Peace and Freedom* (1989):1, https://psychology.umbc.edu/files/2016/10/White-Privilege_McIntosh-1989.pdf.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

Gee founded the Asian American Political Alliance to unite Japanese, Chinese, and Filipino students at the University of California, Berkeley.³⁷ Asian American was originally conceived not simply as an umbrella term but as a political category of building solidarity across a wide variety of increasingly diverse ethnic groups from East Asia, South Asia (such as Desi), Southeast Asia, and other parts of Asia (such as Singaporean, Malaysian, and Indonesian).

While the label Asian American remains a political and essential category today, issues confronted by Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders are often ethnic group specific. Thus, henceforward this book will most often use “Asian” or a Pacific Islander ethnic-specific group (e.g., “Chinese American” or “Chamorro American”), rather than the umbrella term Asian American or AAPI to refer to Asian and Pacific Islander victims of hate crimes. While the USCCB use the collective political identity, Asian and Pacific Islanders, in their documents, the term, as Dawn Lee Tu points out, “does not reflect the experience of Pacific Islanders who have and continue to experience a unique set of struggles relating to sovereignty and decolonization, and do not fit into the model minority stereotype which paints Asian Americans as successful, assimilated into the American mainstream.”³⁸

And as this book examines the toxic stereotypes of the yellow peril, model minority, and perpetual foreigner, and many of these issues are more salient to Asian Americans than are the unique set of issues and struggles confronted by Pacific Islanders, I will focus mainly on Asian American experiences with an emphasis on Chinese American history. Discussion of the history and unique experiences of Pacific Islanders is beyond the scope of this volume.

³⁷ Caitlin Yoshiko Kandil, “After 50 Years of ‘Asian American,’ Advocates Say the Term Is ‘More Essential than Ever,’” *NBC News*, May 31, 2018.

³⁸ Frances Kai-Hwa Wang, “Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders—a FAQ” *NBC News*, May 1, 2019.

Organization of This Volume

The book is divided into four chapters. This introductory chapter has provided a brief overview as well as an explanation of the style, terms, and concepts essential to a fruitful discussion of racism today. It has also provided critiques by various reviewers of the pastoral letter against racism, *Open Wide Our Hearts*, and my own critique of the pastoral response to Asian and Pacific Island Americans, *Encountering Christ in Harmony*.

The next three chapters investigate toxic stereotypes that shape the life and experiences of Asians in the United States, namely, the yellow peril, the model minority, and the perpetual foreigner. These three stereotypes are not mutually exclusive. They reinforce not only feelings of exclusion, marginalization, and a decreased sense of belonging in American society among Asian Americans but have also contributed to an upsurge of anti-Asian hate and violence during the recent pandemic.

Chapter 1 provides a historical examination of the portrayal of the Chinese and other Asians as yellow peril, the racialized stereotype that they are “disease-ridden,” “unfair competitors,” and that Asians are unassimilable and a threat to the White American way of life. This stereotype negatively impacted the lives of Chinese immigrants in the nineteenth century not only in their interimmigrant relationship with Americans of Irish descent but also in the public health arena. The chapter examines how Irish Catholics, who were persecuted for their Catholic faith when they first arrived in the United States, within a few decades became the oppressor by adopting the nativist racism of Anglo-Saxon Whites and persecuted the Chinese to better their position in the American racial hierarchy.

In public health crises, the yellow peril myth was routinely evoked by elected officials as well as by the federal government to justify hatred and mistreatment of Asian Americans. The moral

virus of hate and racism has been a part of the United States even before the Chinese arrived in significant numbers in the mid-nineteenth century. In this way, COVID-19 has simply brought to the surface sinful deeds of our collective past that we had ignored and not adequately dealt with. This sort of moral evil, deeply embedded in the ideology of White supremacy, what James Cone³⁹ and Jim Wallis⁴⁰ have called “America’s original sin,” goes against what the US bishops’ pastoral letter on racism discussed by emphasizing that the dignity of every human person is to be respected because we are created in the image and likeness of God.

Chapter 2 employs methodology from current Asian American studies to examine the model minority myth and the racial positioning of Asian Americans in the dynamic of the Black/White relationship. The difference in how Black and Asian Americans are racialized stems from the positions Black and Asian Americans are placed at in comparison to the dominant group. African Americans are placed in the bottom of the Black/White binary where they are seen as inferior to Whites, whereas Asian Americans are placed on an insider/outsider spectrum, where they are perceived as either perpetual foreigners, a model minority, or both at the same time. Claire Jean Kim clarifies that racial triangulation occurs when the dominant group pits Asian Americans against African Americans in particular on cultural and/or racial grounds. While Whites valorize Asian Americans relative to Blacks, the dominant group also constructs Asian Americans as immutably foreign and unassimilable to the American context. This portrayal as forever foreigners has left Asian Americans vulnerable to cycles of aggres-

³⁹ James H. Cone, “Theology’s Great Sin: Silence in the Face of White Supremacy,” in *Soul Work: Anti-Racist Theologies in Dialogue*, ed. Marjorie Bowers-Wheatley and Nancy Palmer Jones (Boston: Skinner House Books, 2003), 2.

⁴⁰ Jim Wallis, *America’s Original Sin: Racism, White Privilege, and the Bridge to a New America* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2016), 33–34.

sion from Whites but also from Blacks, Latinx, and other people of color. Here, distinction must be made between the individual violent crimes committed against Asian Americans from the deeper systemic racism embedded at institutional and structural levels. The chapter concludes by examining personal and corporate failures to “walk humbly with your God” (Mi 6:8) that goes against the grain of the long-standing emphasis of the biblical notion of justice put forth in the pastoral letter against racism.

Chapter 3 uses Jung Young Lee’s theology of marginality to explore the perpetual foreigner stereotype, a permanent fixture in American society that has marked Asian Americans as unassimilable aliens and perpetual foreigners since the first wave of Asians stepped foot on American soil. The forever foreigner stereotype is how White supremacy operates through the model minority myth and is intimately linked with almost every anti-Asian xenophobia and violent crime committed against Asians and Asian Americans. This has been manifested in the current outbreaks of hate and violence against Asian Americans, bolstered by the insistence of former President Trump’s reference to COVID-19 as the “Chinese virus” or “Kung Flu.” The use of such ethnic slurs or racially charged terms has further shaped the perception of Asian Americans as forever foreigners. It does not matter how many generations Asians have been in the United States, or what positions of authority they hold, the perpetual foreigner stereotype prevents us from being embraced as true Americans. From the perspective of the Christian faith and Catholic Social Thought, more than just a sense of belonging to America is involved here. To repudiate the view of Asian Americans as foreigners is to recognize the inherent dignity of Asian Americans as persons in Christ.

The concluding chapter explores the biblical depiction of Jesus’s experience of the three toxic stereotypes experienced by Asian Americans, followed by a theological reflection on the

good news for the poor, and the magisterium's formulation of the preferential option for the poor. The chapter will conclude by looking at the various ways in which many elements of CST are already reflected in the practices of community-based organizations working with the marginalized in AAPI communities. While the encyclicals of the Catholic Church and pastoral letters of the USCCB do not directly address the social issues confronted by Asian Americans, the value of the CST principles is reflected in community-based interventions of Stop AAPI Hate, Asian Americans Advancing Justice—Los Angeles, Chinese for Affirmative Action, and other Asian American organizations that build bridges with the African American community and activist organizations. Together they establish allyship with other people of color, embracing a restorative justice model in resolving racial and ethnic conflicts, and promote social justice and peace.