

# Black History Month celebrated by American Bible Society with release of Good News Bible African-American Jubilee Edition for Catholics

SPECIAL TO THE CHRONICLE

The estimated 3 million African-American Roman Catholics in the United States are the focus of a new scriptural publication of the American Bible Society. The Good News Bible African-American Jubilee Edition is being launched in celebration of Black History Month. This Bible was created with black Catholics in mind and documents the rich tradition of finding hope through faith. This is the first such resource created specifically for Roman Catholic African Americans.

Articles by African-American Catholic scholars chronicle the history of black Catholics, discuss racial reconciliation, and review the evangelization and education of Catholics who are African American. A wealth of supplemental materials traces African culture, explores the role of Africans in the Bible and their religious experience during times of slavery, and gives a context for revering Scripture's Jubilee tradition. This special edition verifies the history and traditions of black Catholics and encourages pride and an investigation of their religious roots.

"There is excellent material in this Jubilee Edition that sets the context of the Bible within the Catholic African-American religious experience," said Dr. Eugene Habecker, president, American Bible Society. The Good News Bible is ideally suited for devotional Bible study, Sunday school, group meetings, cultural awareness, heritage celebrations and multicultural programs. Black History Month offers the perfect opportunity to celebrate this new edition.

The Good News Bible Jubilee Edition addresses the biblical understanding of jubilee (a time detailed in the book of Leviticus when, every 50 years, freedom is declared to captives and property is restored to the original owners or descendants, and the spiritual journey that led Africa Americans to discover jubilee.

Rev. Cyprian Davis, a leading authority on black Catholicism, served as the senior adviser for the project. Fr. Davis is a founding member of the National Black Catholic Clergy Caucus and the author of several articles and books including the comprehensive work "The History of Black Catholics in the United

States." A Benedictine monk, Davis is professor of church history at St. Meinrad School of Theology in St. Meinrad, Ind.

Articles by African-American Catholic scholars include "Black and Catholic: Elements of African-American History"; "Racial Reconciliation and the Challenge of Jubilee Justice in the United States: A Black Catholic Perspective"; and "Ethiopia Will Stretch Forth Her Arms: The Evangelization and Education of African American Catholics." These articles focus on black Catholicism within a religious, social, historical and spiritual context, along with an additional 300 pages of text and full-color illustrations.

The Roman Catholic Church has been encouraging its faithful to increase their knowledge of the Bible by establishing Bible study groups and other means of improving biblical appreciation.

African-American Roman Catholics are viewed as having a greater understanding of the Bible than other Catholics and can be seen as a source for raising such awareness throughout the entire church. The American Bible Society believes the Good

News Bible Jubilee Edition will help to enhance this process.

The Rev. Dr. James C. Okoye, assistant professor of biblical languages and literature at the Catholic Theological Union in Chicago, wrote one of the articles. Fr. Okoye notes that the persistence of blacks in the Catholic faith demonstrates "an ongoing struggle to balance black pride with Catholic truth." The Roman Catholic Church was appealing, he stresses, because of the sacramental nature of the church, which bore a similarity to the African heritage of a symbolic approach to life.

Further, says Fr. Okoye, religion, as a vital part of the identity of the African American, enabled slaves to understand their suffering in the context of a loving God sending Jesus to help ease their burden. He wrote, "All through their history Black Catholics in America have held together the quest for God and the quest for human dignity. The situation of segregation has allowed them to draw upon the African village ethos to provide for the temporal and spiritual needs of the members."

See Bible on D11



Jacob Lawrence, "The 1920's...The Migrants Cast Their Ballots." Courtesy The Newark Museum, Newark, N.J., Art Resource, N.Y.

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