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Skin Colour and Priesthood. Debating Bodily Differences in Early Modern Catholicism*

Can people of different skin colours become Catholic priests? What may seem self-evident from today's perspective, Catholic theologians and canon lawyers controversially debated in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. While most authors agreed that colour per se was not a problematic factor, an increasing number argued that non-white individuals should not serve as priests in white communities because of the negative reactions they would provoke there. This article argues that by taking this "perspectivist view" the Catholic Church could claim universality and flexibility in its admission policy whereas, in fact, it incorporated and reinforced anti-Blackness. The article analyses the hitherto unexplored history of this debate, situates it within broader thinking about bodily differences in an increasingly global Catholic world and shows how it intersected with practical issues surrounding the establishment of an indigenous clergy throughout the Catholic empires and missionary zones.

Introduction

"Facial colour in no way disqualifies, be it white, red or black as in the Moor or Ethiopian."[1] This is what the Italian bishop and canon law author Simone Maiolo (1520–1597) stated in 1585 when answering the question whether individuals of different skin colours could become Catholic priests. The quote evokes several categories of human differences based on a person's complexion and ethnic terms. However, Maiolo emphatically included people of colour and other ethnicities within the category of priesthood, distinguishing them from Christian laypeople and from non-Christians all over the world. The Catholic Church and its clergy, seen from this perspective, was universal.

Less than two decades later, Maiolo's inclusive statement on skin colour was to come under attack as an alternative manner of dealing with the topic emerged. While his critics agreed that skin colour per se did not present an obstacle, they argued that the ordination of Black priests in particular could become problematic. As one author wrote, while true that "dark skin in no way disqualifies [them]

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1. "*Color vero faciei sive candidus, sive rubeus, sive niger, ut in Mauro, vel Aethiope, ne quicquam impediunt*," Simone Maiolo, *Tractatus de Irregularitate* (Rome, 1585), p. 53. I have chosen to translate the Latin *Aethiops* as Ethiopian to facilitate better readability. These treatises generally used it as a generic term for Black and it should not be confused with Ethiopian from Ethiopia in the Horn of Africa region.

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among Blacks, it does so among whites among whom a Black priest easily arouses ridicule and dread."[2] From this standpoint, the significance of skin colour with regard to such an important religious and social role as priesthood depended primarily upon the observers' perspective, their individual aesthetic judgements and affective responses. Crucially, given that those observing differed radically around the world, so, too, did their presumed reactions to Blackness. This view, which one can term "perspectivist"—privileging context and point of view—became prevalent among Catholic authors throughout the early modern period, although what one might call Maiolo's original "universalist" viewpoint also retained some support.[3]

In this article, I situate this debate on the significance of skin colour in terms of clerical status within larger frameworks of dealing with human differences at a time of increasing geographical expansion by the Catholic Church during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. While early modern European responses to distant and closer Others have been discussed at length, the history of this exact pattern of thought and how it relates to processes of social transformations, especially the expansion of Catholic Empires and missionary enterprises, as well as the increasing enslavement of Black Africans, has thus far not been explored.[4]

Analysing this debate contributes to two important fields of research, namely race-making throughout the Catholic world and the closely related issue of the history of an indigenous, non-white clergy. Regarding the burgeoning field of histories focused on skin colour, race, and racism, a closer analysis of canon lawyers' and moralists' writings can complement existing and ongoing research that analyses texts produced by travellers and medical practitioners.[5] Taking up recent research on skin colour and early modern Catholicism, the debate over whether to admit people of different skin colours to the clergy can serve to nuance historical narratives on bodily differences and the evolution of colour-coded racism.[6] According to one such narrative, the sixteenth century saw skin colour increasingly turning into a primary marker of human difference, one that was grounded in nature and that served to justify the subjugation of

2. "*Dictum colorem* [i.e., black] *nullo modo facere irregularem apud Gentes nigras: secus verò apud Gentes candidas, inter quas Sacerdos niger facile incutit risum, aut terrorem*." Leander, *Quaestiones morales* (Lyon, 1678), vol. 5, p. 25. See also Bartolomeo Ugolini, *Tractatus de Irregularitatibus* (Venice, 1601), p. 194.

3. Universalist here solely refers to this particular view that skin colour (regardless of social circumstances) is seen as irrelevant when it comes to being admitted to the clergy. For a critical discussion of Christian universalism allegedly transcending all human differences see Denise K. Buell, "Early Christian Universalism and Modern Racism," in *The Origins of Racism in the West*, eds. Benjamin Isaac and Joseph Ziegler (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 109–131.

4. On wonder in the Medieval tradition, see Caroline W. Bynum, "Wonder," *The American Historical Review* 102, no. 1 (1997): 1–26; Stephen Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions: The Wonder of the New World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991). Concerning encounters between new worlds and the intellectual traditions, see, for instance, Surekha Davies, "Science, New Worlds, and the Classical Tradition: An Introduction," *Journal of Early Modern History* 18, nos. 1–2 (2014): 1–13.

5. For the role of medicine, see Hannah Murphy, "Re-writing race in early modern European medicine," *History Compass* 19 (2021): 1–12; Andrew S. Curran, *The Anatomy of Blackness: Science & Slavery in an Age of Enlightenment* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011). For travel writings, see, for instance, Sandra Young, *The Early Modern Global South in Print: Textual Form and the Production of Human Difference as Knowledge* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015).

6. In other words, ordination should form part of larger "questions of inclusion and acceptance" (Olivette Otele, *African Europeans: An Untold History* (London: Hurst & Company, 2020), 7). On Blackness in global Catholicism, see Erin K. Rowe, *Black Saints in Early Modern Global Catholicism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019) who shows that saints of colour were an important element of non-European contributions to early modern Catholicism. On race in the work of Spanish Jesuit Alonso de Sandoval, see Grace Harpster, "The Color of Salvation: The Materiality of Blackness in Alonso De Sandoval's De Instauranda Aethiopum Salute," in *Envisioning Others: Race, Color, and the Visual in Iberia and Latin America*, ed. Pamela Patton (Leiden/: Brill, 2015).

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Black people, particularly in the context of slavery.[7] In a similar vein, works that deal with the question of ordinating members of indigenous populations in the early modern Catholic Church have sometimes argued that an early sixteenth century openness towards admitting indigenous clergy across the Spanish and Portuguese empires transformed into a form of “racial discrimination” regarding clerical status by the end of that century.[8]

In an apparent contrast with contemporaneous processes of social exclusion and enslavement, authors on either side of the early modern debate on skin colour accepted the fact that “Ethiopians” could be ordained—in principle. As I will argue, viewing the significance of skin colour as a matter of circumstance rather than of essence served the important function of navigating between often upholding colour-coded discrimination, on the one hand, and the perceived need for an indigenous clergy, as well as the asserted openness of Catholicism toward non-European groups, on the other. I will also show that despite such claims of keeping clerical ranks open to individuals whose skin colour was not white, authors still construed white Europeans as the benchmark.

The issue of ordination into the priesthood points to the key question of how these statements as found in treatises actually related to social practices. While previous scholarship, especially on the Iberian world, tended to focus more on blood than on skin tone, here, the present article aims to open up questions about whether (and if so, how) the canon law debate on skin colour intersected with questions over ancestry and purity, especially in the Iberian-Catholic context. The concept of *limpieza de sangre* [blood purity] indisputably lies at the very core of debates over human and physiological differences and hierarchies in late medieval and early modern Iberia, but its connection to bodily markers such as skin colour varied in different historical periods and circumstances.[9] Chloe Ireton, for instance, has argued against conflating

7. For an early modern view on the treatment of the enslaved Black populations, see Alonso d. Sandoval, *Treatise on Slavery*, ed. Nicole von Germeten (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2008). For the shifting status of skin colour, see, for instance, Valentin Groebner, *Who Are You? Identification, Deception and Surveillance in Early Modern Europe* (New York: Zone Books, 2007); Dienke Hondius, *Blackness in Western Europe: Racial Patterns of Paternalism and Exclusion* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publ., 2014). For general works on this topic, see also Kate Lowe and Thomas Earle, eds., *Black Africans in Renaissance Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Margaret R. Greer, Walter D. Mignolo and Maureen Quilligan, eds., *Rereading the Black Legend: The Discourses of Religious and Racial Difference in the Renaissance Empires* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008); Francisco Bethencourt, *Racisms: From the Crusades to the Twentieth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013); Francisco Bethencourt and Adrian J. Pearce, eds., *Racism and Ethnic Relations in the Portuguese-Speaking World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012) and Joan-Pau Rubiés, “Were Early Modern Europeans Racist?” in *Ideas of “rRace” in the History of the Humanities* eds. Amos Morris-Reich and Dirk Rupnow (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 33–87.

8. Charles R. Boxer, *The Church Militant and Iberian Expansion: 1440–1770* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 2–38. For a general work on racism that provides competent insights into native ordination, see Bethencourt, *Racisms*. On ordination of non-Europeans from a legal perspective, see Carlos M. d. Melo, *The Recruitment and Formation of the Native Clergy in India* (Lisbon: Agencia Geral Do Ultramar, 1955).

9. On ideas of blood purity, see notably David Nirenberg, “Conversion, Sex, and Segregation: Jews and Christians in Medieval Spain,” *The American Historical Review* 107, (2002): 1065–93; Peter Burschel, “*Weiß und Rein: Zur Kulturellen Codierung der Hautfarbe in der Frühen Neuzeit*,” in *Geschichte(n) des Wissens*, eds Mark Häberlein and Stefan Paulus, (Augsburg: Wißner, 2015): 431–42. For the (often far from seamless) transferal of arguments over *limpieza de sangre* from Castile to Spanish America, see María-Elena Martínez, *Genealogical Fictions: Limpieza De Sangre, Religion, and Gender in Colonial Mexico* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008) and Max Deardorff, *A Tale of Two Granadas. Custom, Community, and Citizenship in the Spanish Empire, 1568–1668* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023), 208–38. The place of skin colour in research on race clearly depends on the period and locality, see Geraldine Heng’s statement that Medievalists were overly focused on colour, Geraldine Heng, *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 42, 181. This can hardly be said for histories of early modern canon law.

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black skin colour with stained or impure blood. While Ireton's focus lies more on the category of *vecindad* [loosely, local citizenship] in individuals' lived experience rather than clerical status, the present investigation concerning arguments about who was eligible to enter the priesthood equally aims at a nuanced view of inclusion and exclusion.[10]

This article is based primarily on the examination of sixty early modern treatises in canon law and moral theology that discuss the eligibility for admission to the priesthood and were analysed in terms of how they broached the topic of skin colour. While most of these works were written in Spain and Italy, I have also included examples written in the Spanish territories in the Americas. Documentation from Curial offices such as the Congregation of the Council and Propaganda Fide also provided insights into how Catholic norms were adapted to specific non-European contexts.[11] It is important to note that these sources were mostly produced by white Europeans, with some notable exceptions of non-European clergy that intervened such as the Indian Brahmin Matteo de Castro. Some excellent works do indeed expand our knowledge concerning how Black individuals lived in Europe and the Atlantic, in particular raising questions of African agency in the face of European aggression and the slavery system (although they rarely focus on clerical status).[12] While the legal and social debates surrounding skin colour and priesthood herein investigated offer only limited evidence of non-European experiences with Catholicism, they furnish an important reflection on the role that non-white individuals could have in an increasingly globalised Church and the restrictions which colour-coded views, in particular anti-Blackness, placed upon these possibilities.

This article proceeds in four steps: The first two sections establish the main elements of perspectivism as a discursive pattern, proceeding from its intellectual genealogy in the psychology of wonder and analogies with other types of bodily markers, followed by how perspectivist and universalist authors treated the topic of skin colour. The article then turns, to more practical issues and traces how perspectivism was used and modified in debates over the admission criteria for non-white individuals to the clergy, namely in legal sources from the Latin American context and in arguments surrounding skin colour and the role of non-white actors in Roman missionary efforts.

Bodily Difference and Clerical Status: From Medieval to Early Modern Perspectivism

At a time of intensified interactions between non-Europeans and Catholic actors from Europe, canon law authors became increasingly concerned with the question of skin colour. A crucial context in which they explicitly addressed this issue was the discussion of which bodily traits would render someone ineligible for clerical office (so-called

10. Chloe Ireton, "They are Blacks of the Caste of Black Christians': Old Christian Black Blood in the Sixteenth- and Early Seventeenth-Century Iberian Atlantic," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 97 (2017): 579–612.

11. The Propaganda Fide established in 1622 was entrusted with the Roman missionary enterprises. The Congregation of the Council was a Cardinals' office established to implement measures determined by the Council of Trent. See the helpful discussion of its procedure in Anne Jacobson Schutte, *By Force and Fear. Taking and Breaking Monastic Vows in Early Modern Europe* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011).

12. A. C. de Saunders, *A Social History of Black Slaves and Freedmen in Portugal: 1441–1555*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1982); For the Atlantic, see, e.g. Jennifer L. Morgan, *Reckoning with Slavery: Gender, Kinship, and Capitalism in the Early Black Atlantic* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2021).

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irregularities).[13] Ever since the heyday of medieval papal and canonist law, a potential negative reaction by the local community had gradually turned into one of the most important legal criteria to evaluate what could constitute an impediment.[14] Crucially, early modern authors treated skin colour as an exemplary case in which nothing in the nature of the bodily condition per se spoke against being eligible for clerical office, and yet it was vital to heed a congregation's potential reaction to a cleric of a different skin colour. This section sets out to trace this view's intellectual genealogy in general terms and show how it applied to skin colour.

The topic of skin colour was a new one within the legal context of canonical irregularities. In fact, one of the arguments for the universal admission of so-called Ethiopians to the priesthood was exactly that this question had not been addressed in authoritative medieval legal texts; hence, there could be no grounds to forbid their admission.[15] Nevertheless, the perspectivist approach to skin colour could be justified by legal tradition by way of analogy. Whilst medieval authors were silent specifically with regard to skin colour, other bodily traits did serve as a blueprint for many of their successors when considering colour difference. Canon law author Bartolomeo Ugolini (died 1610), for instance, stated that an Ethiopian could be ordained "among Ethiopians because the leper is admitted [as a priest] among lepers."[16] The idea that a leprous priest would not have to entirely give up his office was well-founded in high medieval legal and theological thought. In his *Summa Theologica*, Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) espoused the view that a leper priest was not to celebrate Mass in public, because his presence would cause aversion, yet he could do so in private without any worshippers being present.[17] This permission was extended to a situation in which observers were allowed to be present as long as these were also lepers—an idea that early modern authors borrowed from Huguccio (died 1210) and his *Summa* on the Decretum of Gratian. In practice, this may have been a way have lepers serve as priests in leper houses.[18] Regardless of how widespread this practice was in reality, the precedent of leprosy allowed canonists to imagine a scenario in which an individual with an otherwise clearly problematic physical condition could become a priest, under, however, the condition that they live apart in separate communities where their bodies would not cause any negative reactions.

13. For an overview see Irina Metzler, "Then and Now: Canon Law on Disabilities," in *Disability in Antiquity*, ed. Christian Laes, (London, New York: Routledge, 2017): 455–67; Recent works include Ninon Dubourg, *Disabled Clerics in the Late Middle Ages*: *Un/suitable for Divine Service?* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2023) and Brendan Röder, *Der Körper des Priesters: Gebrechen im Katholizismus der Frühen Neuzeit* (Frankfurt, New York: Campus, 2021). Other forms of "irregularity" such as that arising from illegitimate birth, slave status, or recent conversion to Catholicism often involved issues of what we would call race or ethnicity. However, the relevant passages in the sources rarely focus on skin colour, see also Massimo C. Giannini, "Il problema dell'esclusione dei non bianchi dal sacerdozio e dagli ordini religiosi nei cattolicesimi dell'età moderna (XVI-XVII secolo)," *Cristianesimo nella storia*, 42 (2021): 751–92.

14. On the important notion of scandal, see Arnaud Fossier, "Propter Vitandum Scandalum: Histoire D'une Catégorie Juridique (XIIe-XVe Siècle)," *Mélanges de l'Ecole française de Rome. Moyen âge 121* (2009): 317–48; Corinne Leveleux, "Configuré Au Christ? Le Corps Des Prêtres Dans Le Droit Canonique Médiéval," *Revue des langues romanes* 123 (2020): 289–309.

15. For example, in Agostino Barbosa, *Pastoralis Solicitudinis, siue de Officio et Potestate Episcopi*, 1 (Lyon: 1650), 449. This is not to say that concerns about "Ethiopians" were not central to some earlier Christian writers, see, for instance, Heng, 181–256.

16. Ugolini, 194.

17. In the case of leprosy, the simple aversion to a leper's body was complemented by the idea that healthy people could become infected. Both aspects are mentioned by Borgasio, *Tractatus de Irregularitatibus* (Venice, 1674), 114: "*alios inficiant, vel abominationem & horrorem inducant*." While ideas of "staining" through vision could play a role with skin colour as well, they are not mentioned in the relevant passages on Black priests.

18. For the question of leper priests, see Ninon Dubourg, "Being a Leprous Cleric: A Social Rejection?" in *Premodern dis/ability history*, ed. Cordula Nolte (Affalterbach: Didymos, 2017), 272–3.

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Apart from leprosy, height often appears as another analogy to skin colour.[19] As Ugolini writes, "Too small or too large a height only makes a person ineligible, if it causes outrage (*scandalum*) or moves [people] to ridicule, Otherwise it does not [make ineligible], which is the case when they are among equals. Pigmies are therefore not irregular among other pigmies, nor are giants among other giants."[20] As in the case of Ethiopians, skin colour only became a problem whenever people moved outside of their own homogeneous group. Focusing on the reaction "pigmies" would induce, the Spanish Franciscan Leander from Alcalá (died 1663) also concluded that they could be ordained in order to serve their own people, but were unqualified to become priests serving European communities because "they easily move worshippers to disrespect and ridicule."[21] Their smaller stature could be viewed as a deformity in the eyes of some European observers, whereas not among other population groups where being short statured was the norm. This mounting interest in so-called pigmies' physical attributes and behaviour and comparable phenomena intensified over the course of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and such debates should not been seen as either outdated or unrelated to social reality at the time.[22]

One should note that the discursive acceptance of different bodies in certain regions did not mean that canon law authors viewed all types of people as equal. In fact, acceptance restricted to specific localities may express exactly the need to re-adjust the Christian message to communities or groups seen not simply as different, but also as inferior. While this specific standpoint does not feature in passages on Ethiopian communities, it does in the case of other forms of difference. For instance, according to Maiolo, a mentally deficient priest would be considered appropriate for people living in the woods or mountains, whom the author deemed to be intellectually inferior.[23] By contrast, he claimed the Church should not accept such a cleric to serve among better-educated urban believers.

Furthermore, perspectivism should by no means be confused with complete relativism since it remained exceedingly one-sided, according a privileged position to perceived European normality. European travelogues, for instance, spoke about the wonder Europeans induced in indigenous groups outside of Europe and missionaries were called upon to avoid any form of behaviour that might cause negative reactions, and found multiple ways to adapt to given contexts in practice.[24] However, unlike the presumed European reaction to physical otherness in the case of Ethiopians or people of a different stature, these forms of wonder did not result in any form of questioning as to whether white European priests could suitably serve local communities.

The very idea that bodily norms radically vary depending on the community in question was, however, by no means a novel one during the early modern period. Caroline Walker Bynum in particular drew attention to a view of wonder as a reaction of a particular "us" to an "other." Bynum exemplified her interpretation with Mandeville's Travels and Jacques de Vitry's work, who, for instance, wrote that "the Cyclopses, who all have one eye,

19. For this analogy in Sandoval see Harpster, 106.

20. "*Magnitudo quoque nimia sicut etiam parvitas irregularem quem reddunt, modo scandalum praebeat, vel risum moveat; alias autem non, quod contingere potest, ubi inter suos pares sunt. Pigmei ergo inter pigmeos irregulares non erunt, nec gigantes inter alios gigantes*." Ugolini, 192. The term "pigmy/pygmy" is problematic not least because of its usage in later European colonialism. In the treatises at hand, it evidently also draws heavily on ancient mythology. On the entanglements between old and new elements, see Young, 16–18 and—recapitulating premodern debates over the humanness of "pigmies" —Lynn T. Ramey, *Black Legacies: Race and the European Middle Ages* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2014), 94–110.

21. *"Non esse per se irregulares in sua natione; & ideo posse initiari, etiam Sacerdotio […] Apud nos irregulares ob deformitatem corporis & quia intuentes in Altari facile moverent ad despectum & risum"*; Leander, 29.

22. See, for instance, Surekha Davies, *Renaissance Ethnography and the Invention of the Human: New Worlds, Maps and Monsters* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2016).

23. Maiolo, 49.

24. See Röder, *Der Körper des Priesters*, 160–1.

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marvel as much at those who have two eyes as we marvel at them."[25] Early modern authors widely referenced what one could call a more general aesthetic perspectivism. Oftentimes, such texts borrowed examples from ancient and medieval literature. Fundamentally the idea of standards of beauty and how reactions could vary was applied directly to people of different skin colour in early works on the "New World." In his *De rebus Oceanis & Orbe nouo decades*, Peter Martyr d'Anghiera (1457–1526) states: "Ethiopians consider the colour black more beautiful than the [colour] white, while the white man thinks otherwise."[26]

Overall, the principle of perspectivism, according to which authors treated height and leprosy was structurally akin to that applied to skin colour. What all these examples have in common is that there was an implicit norm—or unproblematised bodily trait—involved, even if this assumed different forms. In the case of height, for instance, "too tall" or "too short" existed only in relation to the perceived average height ranges across Europe. In the case of leprosy, the non-leprous body was the norm that was sanctioned in every context. When it came to skin colour, as the next section will show in more detail, authors increasingly conceptualised black and white as polar opposites, assuming that having fair skin was the norm which, inherently, could never be problematic or give cause for outrage, whereas having black skin or not being fair-skinned was considered problematic.

Colour's Shifting Place: Blackness, Ethnicity, and Sacramental Matter

The tradition of medieval perspectivism and analogies with other forms of bodily differences explain how skin colour could be viewed as an obstacle to clerical status that depended on context. However, early modern canon law discussions also coexisted and interacted with other strains of thought on the question of skin colour—such as theological and more natural-philosophical/medical ideas. In fact, even the "universalist" Maiolo, in another work, had no problem repeating the dictum that "the physiognomists describe those who are too dark as stupid and obstinate, inasmuch as the Ethiopians are like this."[27] In this example, drawing on physiognomy, a way of evaluating external appearances and linking them to psychological attributes discussed by contemporaries such as Giambattista della Porta (1535–1615), could bring to the fore a more essentialist anti-Black rhetoric which was not explicit within the debate on ordination.

Even though all the authors considered skin colour as embedded within the broader topic of a cleric's acceptable or unacceptable bodily characteristics, striking differences are to be noted between proponents of universalism and perspectivism in how they approached the question of skin colour. Maiolo, for instance, as quoted above, viewed black as being equally ranked with white and red. The next paragraph of his text adds "saffron" to this list of unproblematic skin colours. In fact, according to him, some deeply religious people in the past had "yellow faces."[28] The Jesuit author Henriquez (1536–1608), professor of theology in Salamanca, who espouses Maiolo's standpoint when arguing in favour of "universal" admission to the clergy regardless of social context, wrote that "the colour of the Ethiopian or Moor & of jaundice (the Royal Disease), which turns the face and body saffron-yellow, do not render [a person] irregular."[29] In these passages no

25. Quoted in Bynum, 14.
26. "*Existimat Aethiops nigrum colorem esse candido pulchriorem, putat & candidus aliter.*" Pietro Martire d' Anghiera, *De Rebus Oceanis & Orbe Nouo Decades Tres* (Basileae: 1533), 73.
27. "*Definiunt nimium fuscos, stupidos ac pertinaces esse, quoniam Aethiopes sunt huiusmodi.*" Maiolo, *Dierum Canicularium* (Offenbach, 1691) 451.
28. Such as a certain bishop Donolus Caenomanorum as related by Gregory of Tour. Maiolo, 53.
29. "*Color Aethiopis aut Mauri & regius morbus ex quo facies & corpus induit croceum colorem, non facit irregularem.*" Enrique Henríquez, *Summae Theologiae Moralis* (Venice 1600), 861.

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trace of binary, colour-coded opposition between "us" and "them" is to be discerned, but instead a horizontal list encompassing a range of skin tones.

From a universalist standpoint, then, black and brown skin colours could serve as collective markers inter alia, for Ethiopians or Moors, but the correlation between colour and ethnic communities remained fragile. In the case of white and red, no ethnic term was named, so it remains elusive whether these colours point to specific collectives. In the case of "saffron," not only was it deemed at least sometimes unhealthy but also changeable and certainly not related to "yellow" as an ethnised term.[30] While no explicit mention is to be found of the theory that skin colours in general could change, depending, for instance, on where the individual in question lived, all these complexions were treated in a similar fashion.[31]

In contrast to this broad, more malleable colour spectrum from white to saffron and black, those authors adhering to the perspectivist standpoint exhibited a clear tendency to treat "black" as the only problematic skin colour, even if only within white communities. The perspectivists either did not name the colour white explicitly or, if it all, only to signify the community among which a Black person as a priest would cause an outrage. Crucially, other skin complexions such as red or saffron usually disappeared from the discussion altogether.

A noteworthy disparity between the two sides of the debate is to be discerned in how they correlate skin complexion and ethnic terms. According to Maiolo, skin colour came first whereas terms such as Ethiopian and Moor served only to designate certain individuals or groups with a dark complexion (as, for instance, black, such as in the case of an Ethiopian). This relationship was the opposite in texts penned by perspectivist authors. The Franciscan Leander, for instance, chose "the colour of Ethiopians and Moors" as the title of the section in his *Quaestiones morales* relating to this debate. It is only in the text that he uses the term "black" explicitly. Given that the book is structured into sections addressing separate questions, this issue is more clearly distinct from other kinds of phenomena. Technically, no section is devoted to skin colour in general presenting a potential problem. Black was therefore the only colour problematised and it referred exclusively to Ethiopians and Moors.

This divide in how authors presented and contextualised skin colour in their texts can be linked to what Valentin Groebner has described as a shift from an older variety of instable bodily attributes to a fixed, essentialised skin colour.[32] The use of terms such as black and white alongside red and saffron clearly relates to the older paradigm. Signifying the shift to a different paradigm, perspectivists discursively turned black into the opposite of white, thus creating a divide between the two—a "them" and an "us."[33]

30. This would concur with the argument that people from East Asia were not considered as "yellow"-skinned during most of the early modern age. See Michael Keevak, *Becoming Yellow: A Short History of Racial Thinking* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011).
31. On the changeability of skin colour, see Groebner and, also on "mutable bodies" more generally, Rebecca Earle, *The Body of the Conquistador. Food, Race and the Colonial Experience in Spanish America, 1492–1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2012). While humoral ideas concerning the body and skin colour may have underpinned canon law authors' treatment of these issues, they did not explicitly mention medical works. Furthermore, canon law authors did not discuss the phenomena of "whitening" saintly Black bodies after death, perhaps understandably in this context that the priests were still alive, see Erin K. Rowe, "After Death, Her Face Turned White: Blackness, Whiteness, and Sanctity in the Early Modern Hispanic World," *The American Historical Review* 121, (2016): 727–54.
32. Groebner.
33. For the idea of black and white as opposite extremes of colour, see also Carmen Fracchia, "*Black but Human": Slavery and Visual Art in Hapsburg Spain, 1480–1700* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 11. Given that a person of colour was still admitted to the priesthood under certain conditions, this is clearly not the same as the polar opposites of black and white as metaphors for sinfulness and innocence, powerful as it may have been in certain cultural and religious spheres. See the discussions in Cord Whitaker, *Black Metaphors: How Modern Racism emerged from Medieval Race-Thinking* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019).

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However, not only were such opinions voiced almost simultaneously, evading a clear-cut periodisation, but it would also be simplistic to read the perspectivists as proponents of an essentialist, biologically driven category of race. While Ugolini, for instance, rejects the idea of an Ethiopian serving as a priest in a white community, he concedes that one could allow an Ethiopian priest to work anywhere if he was only "somewhat Black" (*paululum niger*). This statement openly denigrates Blackness, all while acknowledging that there were Ethiopians, who were not entirely Black and therefore allowed to become priests. Overall, the authors exhibited little sense of urgency to define colour more precisely and deal with borderline cases, an issue which, in practice, often vexed mixed-race societies across the Catholic world. Fundamentally, the search for any differences did not go beyond visual appearances and their effects on observers. While certainly a form of discrimination, this non-essentialist viewpoint distinguishes perspectivism from many other forms of racialised denigration and exclusion.[34]

Those positions within the Church which regarded skin colour difference as something not of paramount importance drew on Catholic ideas about the sacraments and the Eucharist in particular. In agreeing with Maiolo that a person with "a completely black face such as an Ethiopian or a Moor" could be a priest anywhere, the Spanish-born theologian Martín Alfonso Vivaldo (1545–1605) referred to the material dimension of other Catholic sacraments besides ordination. Skin complexion was to be counted among the accidental and not the essential attributes.[35] A priest of a different skin colour was therefore conceivable and allowed, just as the water required for Baptism could be either green, red, or even murky (*turbida*), as long as it was water.[36] Similarly, it was essential to use wine for the Eucharist, but it was of no consequence whether it was white or dark in colour (*album vel nigrum*).[37] Once this principal fact had been established, however, it could become a matter of expediency (whether the wine was available, its preservability, and local tastes)—something akin to the perspectivist treatment of skin colour.

From a modern perspective, it might sound unusual, to say the least, to justify how human beings ought to be treated using an analogy with different types of wine. On one level, these analogies presented skin colour to the European reader by referring to something with which perhaps they were more familiar. Interestingly, the same adjective (*niger*) was used to describe both dark red wine and black skin.[38] And yet, the wine used in the Eucharist in a religious context was obviously not a mere material object. Once the wine had been consecrated, it was believed to have been transformed into the blood of Christ. Referring to the body of the priest in this context seemed less farfetched.[39] The holy sacraments' material aspect offered an important way in which to distinguish between the essential and the accidental, and to chart how much difference could be

34. For the burgeoning late seventeenth century interest in the structure of the skin and dissections of Black individuals, see Craig Koslofsky, "Superficial Blackness? Johann Nicolas Pechlin's *De Habitu Et Colore Aethiopum Qui Vulgo Nigritae* (1677)," *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies* 18 (2018): 140–58 and Cristina Malcolmson, *Studies of Skin Color in the Early Royal Society: Boyle, Cavendish, Swift* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013). By contrast, perspectivism was primarily interested in skin colour's effect on viewers. On the question of how to distinguish races in the absence of clear visual markers, see Mark M. Smith, *How Race Is Made: Slavery, Segregation, and the Senses* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006).
35. "*Quia color non inter essentialia, sed inter accidentalia computantur.*" Vivaldo, 33.
36. Vivaldo does not elaborate on this issue but one can assume that murky water was, while not essentially preventing baptism, not the preferred option for the ritual.
37. For fascinating debates about what counted as wine in the context of the Ethiopian missions around 1700, see Cesare Santus, "Le vin de messe en question: controverses et expériences au Saint-Office," in *Matière à discorde: Les objets chrétiens dans les conflits modernes*, ed. Marie Lezowski and Yann Lignereux, 187–98 (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2021), 187–98. I would like to thank Cesare Santus for sharing his work with me.
38. On comparing skin colour with the colour of certain foods, see Harpster, 96.
39. On the materiality of the Eucharist from a theological perspective see David Grumett, *Material Eucharist* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

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integrated into a given normative and institutional framework, an issue crucial to early modern missionary efforts.[40]

Ordination of Indigenous Persons and Adapting Perspectivism in the "New World"

Having established perspectivism's core elements as a discursive pattern, this section turns to the more practical issues surrounding non-white individuals entering or serving in the clergy. The focus will be on traces of perspectivist ideas and how they functioned especially in non-European contexts.

The specific debate on skin colour as a canonical impediment was one familiar to scholars outside Europe, as exemplified by two prominent authors of canon law and moral theology in the Spanish Empire. An instructive view can be found in one of the most significant canonist handbooks of the eighteenth century for the Spanish Empire, the *Cursus Iuris Canonici, Hispani, et Indici* by the Spanish-born Jesuit author Pedro Murillo Velarde (1696–1753), who also served as a missionary in the Philippines.[41] Crucially, while by and large the chapter in the book focusing on bodily defects does not differ from many other European works, the segment devoted to skin colour does. Velarde subscribes to the universalist view that skin colour does not lead to irregularity and therefore "Ethiopians and Moors" could be ordained as priests. He then adds that "as we can see on a daily basis in these Kingdoms of the Indies, Indians, who are brown, & Malabarese & Canarines, who are Black, are being ordained as priests."[42] Velarde did not base his argument merely on principles, but rather referred to empirical perception from within mixed communities. How could people of a different skin colour be forbidden to become priests on the basis of social criteria, if this was such a regular local phenomenon? The author's own experience of colour diversity among the Catholic clergy is foundational to his normative view on skin colour and his proposed policy toward admission to the clergy.[43]

The question remained of how one might arrive at such a presence and acceptance of clerics of diverse complexion in the first instance, especially in localities where the enslavement of Black and other non-white individuals was widespread. One answer to this can be found in the writings of Alonso de la Peña Montenegro (1596–1687).[44] Born in Galicia, he studied theology in Santiago de Compostela and later became the bishop of Quito in the Viceroyalty of Peru. His *Itinerario para párrocos de indios* originally published in 1668 dealt with a wide range of pastoral and legal issues, in particular with the education of the local population. Aside from the better-known

40. Ines G. Županov and Pierre A. Fabre, *The Rites Controversies in the Early Modern World* (Leiden: Brill, 2018). Another requirement for priests that was often seen through the lens of essential and accidental features was masculinity, see Brendan Röder, "Essentialising Sex: Hermaphrodites and the Thresholds of Masculinity and Femininity in the Early Modern Catholic Church *c.*1700," *Gender & History* (2023), 1–16. It remains to be explored how these issues of gender intersected with ethnicity with regard to ordination but on analogies between *Indios* and women, see Laura A. Lewis, "Between Casta and Raza: The Example of Colonial Mexico," in *Race and Blood in the Iberian World*, ed. Max S. Hering Torres, María E. Martínez and David Nirenberg (Vienna: Lit Verlag, 2012), 99–123.

41. On skin and skin colour in the Philippine context, see Sebestian Kroupa, "Skin and Hierarchies in the Philippines", *Renaissance Skin*, 19 June 2020. https://renaissanceskin.ac.uk/themes/defining/#image_thumb167.

42. "Color non inducit irregularitatem ac proinde Mauri, & Aethiopes possunt ordinari […] & in his Indiarum Regnis, Indi, qui sunt fusci, & Malabares, & Canarines, qui sunt nigri in Sacerdotes promoventur, ut quotidie in his Insulis videmus." Velarde, *Cursus Iuris Canonici Hispani et Indici*, vol. 1 (Madrid, 1791), 103.

43. Whether Murillo Velarde described the situation on the ground accurately is a different question. On ordination and different ethnicities in the Philippines more generally, see Horacio d. La Costa, "The Development of the Native Clergy in the Philippines," *Studies in Philippine Church History*, ed. Gerald H. Anderson (Ithaca, 1969), 65–104.

44. On the importance of Montenegro, see, for instance, William Taylor, Magistrates of the Sacred: Priests and Parishioners in Eighteenth Century Mexico (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), esp. 152–61.

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discussion concerning the ordination of *Indios* in the text, one section was devoted to the question of whether "in those parts where many Blacks and enslaved people are to be found, these can be ordained."[45] While he was clear that slaves could not be ordained (regardless of their skin colour but he was presumably mostly thinking about slaves of African descent), the matter was different for individuals who had been freed by their masters. De la Peña acknowledges that the question of whether being dark skinned was an impediment was indeed contentious. Some authors, he wrote, thought that a Black priest celebrating Mass would cause horror among white communities, clearly referring to the perspectivist view. He put this down to the fact that the parishoners mostly encountered them as slaves. Conversely, according to De la Peña, in regions where many (free) Black people lived and where some served as captains (*capitanes*) and held other military offices, they would not arouse any feelings of horror were they to serve as priests, but instead inspire great devotion in the people (*causaron gran devoción al Pueblo*).[46] This was even more so if people had already seen other Black people serving as priests. Acceptance is therefore described as a piecemeal process. Rather than being entirely prohibited or allowed in an ethnically determined community, priesthood as seen from this perspective is interpreted as a social position, among others, which could be filled by freed Black slaves. Given that De la Peña underlined the potential of widespread devotion, this would eventually lead a situation in which a Black priest was not only legally possible, but even preferable. Surely, an anti-Black bias was often more entrenched in-situ than this perhaps overly idealistic view might suggest. Nevertheless, these views had the potential to take into account shifting social practices and, possibly, to be agents of change themselves.

If one turns from these printed works to ecclesiastical decision-making, it is noteworthy that not every case relating to the ordination of people of non-European descent revolves around the discussion over their skin colour, a fact that highlights how multi-layered the legal issues surrounding racialised difference were. An important case from the diocese of Caracas debated at the Congregation of the Council in 1683 shows how Roman authorities emphasised the lawfulness of ordaining *Indios* and *Nigros* (or those descending from them maternally or paternally).[47] The official case material sent to Rome, however, at least did not dwell further on the issue of skin colour of those candidates considered suspicious. This might be indicative of the fact that secular and religious officials continued to rely on older genealogical and reputational formulas when it came to evaluating the purity of blood. As María Elena Martínez has argued on the basis of trial records in *limpieza de sangre*-cases in eighteenth century Spanish America, this line of argument stood in a certain conflict with the growing weight attributed to skin colour and other external bodily markers in (lay) witness

45. De la Peña Montenegro, Alonso, *Itinerario Para Párrocos De Indios: Libros III-V*: Ed. Carlos Baciero Et. Al. (Madrid: 1995), 224. See also Boxer, *The Church Militant*, 20. For the Itinerario's and other authors' treatment of mixed-blood primarily regarding questions of marriage see Ruth Hill, "The New World and the Problem of Race," in *A Companion to the Spanish Scholastics*, ed. Harald E. Braun, Erik de Bom and Paolo Astorri, 585–614 (Leiden: Brill, 2022), 585–614.

46. "*En estas partes adonde ay tantos, y algunos con oficios de Capitanes, y otros militares*," 225. One should note the difference to processes of "whitening," which downplay Blackness while here it is in fact highlighted and interpreted as positive for such an important social status as the clerical one on "whitening," see Ann Twinam, *Purchasing Whiteness: Pardos, Mulattos, and the Quest for Social Mobility in the Spanish Indies* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015). The text does not explain to which regions this referred. On the colonial practice of temporarily arming slaves, see Stephanie Hassell, "Religious Identity and Imperial Security: Arming Catholic Slaves in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century Portuguese India," *Journal of Early Modern History* 26 (2022): 403–28.

47. For this case, see Boxer, *The Church Militant*, 20–21 and Guillermo Figuera, *La Formación del Clero Indígena en la Historia Eclesiástica de América, 1500–1810* (Caracas: Archivio General de la Nacion, 1965).

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statements.[48] This clearly demonstrates that even if the phenotype became more important when it came to establishing who was of pure blood, these ideas still coexisted with other elements.

Overall, adapting perspectivism into "New World" contexts also made its limitations visible. Texts originating in non-European regions called into question the idea that societies were homogenous units and took into account how more complex local circumstances went well beyond the schematic colour-coded "us" versus "them." This also meant that any discussion of skin colour converged more explicitly with issues of colonial power structures and modes of discrimination such as slavery than in works by Italian authors such as Maiolo. Oftentimes, arguments over the importance of skin colour were embedded in local conflicts of interest involving a variety of stakeholders within the Church such as religious orders, bishops or parish communities, a point which is expanded on in the next section.

Beyond Skin Colour? Non-white Priests and their Opponents

It should be reemphasised that the issue of clergy born outside of Europe intersects with the question of skin colour, albeit it is by no means limited to it.[49] While canon law treatises may have neatly divided these issues, arguments for and against non-Europeans entering the priesthood related to language skills, intellectual aptitude, social status, alleged vices and untrustworthiness, whilst physical attributes and skin colour were possible but not necessarily decisive issues. For instance, a Theatine missionary reported to Rome from India in 1663 that "whether white or black, every Indian is truly wicked."[50] While black and white were already deployed as the primary colour categories in this statement, ethnic stereotypes clearly transcended this framework. We therefore need to distinguish carefully between explicit references to skin colour and other categories of difference.

Charles Boxer's work and, more recently, that of other scholars such as Francisco Bethencourt have showed to just what degree attitudes to "indigenous ordination" were contingent upon regional contexts and various motivations.[51] Some members of the European Catholic Church took the view that in order to ensure the successful spiritual expansion, members of the indigenous population should be ordained. An example of this can be found in a text published in 1630 by the Roman Propaganda Fide on India, stating that "the Indigenous (*indigenae*) enjoy greater trust among their own [and] better know the languages, manners and inclinations of their compatriots."[52] One good Indian therefore could do more for the faith than one hundred Europeans. And

48. Martínez, 249.
49. The aim of this section is to discuss relevant references to skin colour and "perspectivism" rather than attempt a full treatment of "indigenous ordination" in the Iberian Empires. On Boxer's work on race-relations', see J. S Cummins and L. d. S. Rebelo, "The Controversy over Charles Boxer's "Race Relations in the Portuguese Colonial Empire" 1415–1825," *Portuguese Studies* 17 (2001): 233–46; concerning the issue of indigenous ordination see also Juan F. Cobo, *Mestizos heraldos de Dios: La ordenación de sacerdotes descendientes de españoles e indígenas en el Nuevo Reino de Granada y la racialización de la diferencia 1537–1590* (Bogota: Fondo Editorial ICANH, 2012); Thomas Duve, "Derecho Canónico Y La Alteridad Indígena: Los Indios Como Neófitos," in *Esplendores y miserias de la evangelización de América. Antecedentes europeos y alteridad indígena*, eds Wulf Oesterreicher and Roland Schmidt-Riese (Berlin: De Gruyter 2010); Sabine Patricia Hyland, "Illegitimacy and Racial Hierarchy in the Peruvian Priesthood: A Seventeenth-Century Dispute," *The Catholic Historical Review* 84 (1998): 431–54; J. Beckmann, *Der Einheimische Klerus in Geschichte und Gegenwart* (Schöneck-Beckenried: Administration der Neuen Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft, 1950). The brief chapter in Dauril Alden's, *The Making of an Enterprise: The Society of Jesus in Portugal, Its Empire, and Beyond: 1540–1750* (Stanford: Stanford University Press 1996), 255–66 is indicative in that it does not mention skin colour as a specific problem.
50. "*Tutti Indiani cosi bianchi, come neri siano vitiosissimi*," quot. in Melo, 245.
51. Charles R. Boxer, *Race Relations in the Portuguese Colonial Empire: 1415–1825* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1963).
52. "*Indigenae maiorem habent apud suos fidem; linguas civium suorum, eorumque mores et inclinationes magis norunt*," quoted in Melo, 223.

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yet, a perceived need for making distinctions equally led to strong resistance to non-Europeans being ordained, especially among some members of religious orders.

Statements regarding skin colour taken from discussions regarding whether an indigenous clergy was admissible equally reveals a wide variety of positions on the matter. Some Catholic actors equated "whiteness of skin with purity of soul" whilst others were highly favourable to the idea of non-white clergymen.[53] The Jesuit author António Vieira (1608–1697), for instance, wrote that on the Cape Verde Islands there were some "clergy and canons as black as jet, but so well-bred, so authoritative, so learned, such great musicians, so discreet and so accomplished that they might be envied by those [clergy] in our own cathedrals back home."[54] People differed from Europeans, he continued, merely by having accidentally been born with a different complexion.[55]

Crucially, the central issue of perspectivism was whether to allow non-European clerics to serve *outside* of Europe—even if some individuals had been ordained for this purpose *in* Europe.[56] This is exemplified by the 1518 papal brief *Exponi nobis* permitting the ordination of some "Ethiopians." This document has been quoted as being indicative of how Black people were treated throughout Europe, usually alongside the elevation of the Congolese prince Henrique to the rank of bishop in that same year.[57] However, it is worth taking a closer look at the brief's Latin text. Indeed, the pope did allow the bishop of Lamego, the Portuguese king's chaplain, to ordain specific groups of baptised "Ethiopians, Africans, and Indians" in Portugal.[58] However, the brief then explicitly sets out that after all of these individuals had been ordained, they were required to preach and celebrate Mass in their homelands.[59] The text does not explicitly address skin colour as a legal or social problem. In fact, it states that a special dispensation was needed because of the converted individuals' "defect of legitimate birth" (*defectus natalium*) that is, they could (understandably) not prove that they had been born from legally married Catholic parents. Additionally, they neither had benefices nor patrimonies, and they were to be ordained bypassing the legally prescribed waiting times for the different clerical ranks. This dispensation was then extended in an attempt to cover other converts to Christianity "from Islam or other sects."[60] While this is surely an example of how European Catholic institutions dealt with, inter alia, African converts, it does not offer any in-depth insight into how skin colour was perceived at that time. This is also true for a much earlier example of "Africans" (*Afros*) being excluded from clerical offices in late Antiquity, where *Afros* presumably refers to North Africans and, significantly, states as the reason for their exclusion that they were heretics.[61] Here, the issue was religious in nature and not one of physical differences.

Regarding the question of ordination in order to serve in their home country, the case of Cyprus-born Ethiopian Yoḥannəs serves as another example. He was ordained a Catholic

53. Boxer, *Race Relations*, 35 and Boxer, *The Church Militant*, 7.
54. Note the use of the conjunction "but" referring to the expectation for it to be otherwise. See Boxer, *Race Rerlations*, 33. The original is "*negros como azeviche*," see António Vieira, *Cartas Do Padre António Vieira* (Coimbra: Impr. da Universidade, 1925); I, 295.
55. Vieira, 295. On Cape Verde, see Toby Green, "The Emergence of a Mixed Society in Cape Verde in the Seventeenth Century," *Brokers of Change. Atlantic Commerce and Cultures in Precolonial Western Africa*, ed. Toby Green (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 217–36.
56. Melo, 227.
57. Earle, Lowe, 294. A rich scholarship is exploring Christianity in early modern Congo, see e.g. John K. Thornton, The *Kongolese Saint Anthony: Dona Beatriz Kimpa Vita and the Antonian Movement, 1684–1706* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2012) and Cécile Fromont, *The Art of Conversion: Christian Visual Culture in the Kingdom of Kongo* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014).
58. António Brásio, ed., *Monumenta Missionaria Africana: África Ocidental* 1 (Lisboa: Agéncia Geral do Ultramar, 1952), 421.
59. Brásio, 421–22. For an interpretation, see Saunders, 157.
60. Brásio, 422.
61. Pope Gelasius I. (492–496) advised that "*Afros passim ad ecclesiasticos ordines praetendentes nulla ratione suscipiat, quia aliqui eorum Manichaei, aliqui rebaptizati saepius sunt probati*." quot. in Celestino Trezzini, *La Legislazione Canonica Di Papa S. Gelasio I* (*492–496*) (Locarno: 1911), 54.

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priest (having previously been a Coptic priest) and became the first-ever Catholic prior to the Ethiopian congregation in Rome.[62] He seems to have moved at ease among the white church officials in Rome and was eventually named bishop of the Ethiopian community in Cyprus in 1564. Here again, one could argue, that he was nominated a bishop solely to serve among other Ethiopian faithful in a perspectivist fashion.

If the idea was to send a non-European priest back to his native land, legal obstacles would then arise, according to the perspectivist rationale, only in localities with European Catholic settlers. This was the case if one assumed that those (at the time mostly Iberian) colonisers in that priest's native land constituted a white community that might be scan-dalised by the presence of a Black priest. In India, for instance, missionaries discussing the obstacles surrounding the ordination of Indians to the holy orders referred to how the Portuguese held those Indians in low esteem. A Theatine missionary, Fr. Avitabile, wrote in 1640 that "because they are Black people, the Portuguese deem them as slaves."[63] This bias extended to church officials as well, for another missionary wrote: "Given that they are black in colour, the Portuguese bishops do not want to ordain them."[64] If the Portuguese settlers would not even offer any indigenous person a seat, this would mean that an indigenous priest would have to remain standing in front of a layperson. These statements show how the Catholic actors adapted perspectivism to specific colonial communities outside of Europe prone to prejudice.

Crucially, the argument that resemblance forged more respect—making, for instance, Black priests suitable to Black communities—could be turned around entirely, especially in a colonial context, as an example from the Spanish Empire illustrates. In the debate over indigenous clergy, one friar from the Philippines argued that even if all other things were equal, one should always opt for a Spanish priest over an Indian or Chinese one "because as a white man, the *Indios* will show him more respect and esteem."[65] According to this rationale, if the local population saw how someone of their own ethnicity could become a priest, they would not respect him, and, in turn the Church to a lesser degree, as well.[66] As Erin Rowe has argued for Black sainthood in early modernity, both concordance and contrast in skin colour were employed to explain the depth of devotion. A similar coexistence of contradictory arguments was often present regarding clerical status.[67]

A particularly well-documented voice in those debates over indigenous priesthood was Matteo de Castro (ca. 1594–1677) the first ever Indian Catholic Bishop. Born to Brahmin Christian parents on Divar Island, close to Goa, he had first-hand experience of how non-whites who wanted to be clerics were discriminated against in Portuguese India.[68] Eventually, he travelled to Rome, where he was ordained in 1630 and consecrated titular bishop

62. Matteo Salvadore, "African Cosmopolitanism in the Early Modern Mediterranean: The Diasporic Life of Yohannes, the Ethiopian Pilgrim Who Became a Counter-Reformation Bishop," *Journal of African History* 58 (2017): 61–83. For encounters with Ethiopians in Rome see also Sam Kennerley, "Ethiopian Christians in Rome, ca. 1400-C.1700," *A Companion to Religious Minorities in Early Modern Rome*, eds Matthew Coneys Wainwright and Emily Michelson (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2021): 142–68. Note that in what follows "Ethiopian" now (loosely) refers to the territory in East Africa.

63. "*Per essere gente negra, sono dai portoghesi tenuti per schiavi*," quoted in Melo, 248.

64. "*Et per esser loro di colour negro, gli Vescovi Portughesi non gli vogliono dar gli Ordini*" quoted in Melo, 249.

65. Sinibaldo de Mas, *Informe Secreto De Sinibaldo De Mas* (Manila: Historical Conservation Society, 1963), 145. For indigenous ordination in the Philippines, see La Costa.

66. A similar argument—shifting part of the blame for discrimination to the Black population itself—can be found in early 20th century authors deploring too little indigenous clergy such as the Jesuit Anton Huonder who claims that "even the Blacks, who look up to the whites as superior beings, do not see the Black cleric as a full priest." Anton Huonder, *Der Einheimische Klerus in den Heidenländern* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1909), 237.

67. Rowe, *Black Saints*, 6.

68. On de Castro, see Théodore Ghesquière, *Mathieu De Castro, premier vicaire apostolique aux Indes: Une création de la Propagande à ses débuts* (Louvain: Bureaux de la Revue, 1937); Giuseppe Sorge, *Matteo De Castro*: (*1594–1677*) (Bologna: CLUEB, 1986).

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of Chrysopolis in 1637. Through his connection to the recently established Propaganda Fide, the institution responsible for missionaries in Rome, he became one of the major advocates for Brahmins to be admitted to the priesthood. The Propaganda had recently established a college to train boys and young men from India, Ethiopia and other regions throughout the world.[69]

De Castro subsequently lived in the papal city for years, interacting with prominent Church officials as an ordained priest just as some non-white Catholics from Ethiopia had been doing. Before his ordination, he received a dispensation, but not on account of any physical obstacle but to ascend to priesthood without the proper testimonials from his Ordinary back in India and outside of the prescribed time.[70] It would be surprising if de Castro had been a proponent of perspectivist thinking and, for instance, believed that his skin colour would scandalise the Roman community around him. However, he voiced ideas akin to perspectivism with regard to his home country. In a letter to the Propaganda Fide in 1645 he furthered the idea that members of the indigenous population were particularly well-qualified to become clergymen due to their language skills, and moreover argued that local Christians by and large would more openly accept one of their own as a pastor. In order to underpin his argument, De Castro cited the dictum *simile appetit sibi simile* [roughly translatable as birds of a feather flock together].[71] While he was almost certainly only thinking about Brahmins as becoming priests, this idea potentially transcended social categories within India and appealed to an affective dimension of religious practice based on ethnic and colour-coded affinity between the clergy and their communities.[72] Rather than rejecting Catholic perspectivism entirely, he emphasised one specific aspect—the suitability of Indian clerics for Indian communities—without mentioning any potential negative reactions by Europeans which were so crucial to perspectivism as voiced by most Italian and Spanish authors.

Crucially, the Propaganda Fide concurred with de Castro's arguments based on concordance in appearance but extended it to a different region and population. In search of a way for Catholic missionaries to re-enter the Ethiopian Empire after the Portugese Jesuits had been expelled in the 1630s, these Roman officials considered sending de Castro as a vicar apostolic—a step vehemently opposed by the Jesuit Patriarch of Ethiopia Afonso Mendez. One argument advanced for sending de Castro was that he was "of the Brahmin nation of the East Indies and of a similar colour to the Ethiopians of the Court of the Kingdom of Barnagasso."[73] The rationale was that de Castro would therefore be accepted by the local population and could further the Catholic cause whereas Europeans were not in a position to do so at that juncture. This alleged concordance of skin colour between the Goan cleric and the Ethiopians was made plausible through the earlier case of another Brahmin and Indian Catholic, Melchior de Sylva. According to a report in the Propaganda Fide archives, he had managed to enter Ethiopia in 1598 "because of the similarity of colour" and remained there for five

69. On the connection between de Castro and the Propaganda Fide, see Ghesquière, 34–40. On the Collegio Urbano see Giovanni Pizzorusso, "I satelliti di Propaganda Fide: il Collegio Urbano e la Tipografia poliglotta. Note di ricerca su due istituzioni culturali romane nel XVII secolo," *Mélanges de l'école française de Rome* 116 (2004): 471–98 On the "Ethiopian" Church Santo Stefano degli Abissini in the Vatican, see also Mauro Da Leonessa, *Santo Stefano Maggiore degli Abissini e le Relazioni Romano-Etiopiche* (Città del Vaticano: Tipografia poliglotta vaticana, 1929).
70. Ghesquière, 38.
71. Quoted in Melo, 233. See also Sorge, 55.
72. On how de Castro himself used narratives of purity, see Ângela Barret Xavier, "Purity of Blood and Caste: Identity Narratives Among Early Modern Goan Elites," *Race and Blood in the Iberian World*, 125–49.
73. Quoted in Sorge, 62. For Barnagasso see Christopher Clapham, "The European Mapping of Ethiopia, 1460–1856," *Journal of Ethiopian Studies* 40 (2007): 293–307, here, 296.

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years, bringing great consolation to the local Catholics.[74] In the end, little was to become of de Castro's Ethiopian mission. While some opposition to him can be explained by the rivalry between certain individuals and a series of Catholic institutions, the criticism was often colour-coded as well.[75]

Despite this missionary enterprise's meagre result, it still raises interesting points concerning perspectivism which are not discussed in the more schematic normative treatments analysed above. It is noteworthy how that statements from within the Propaganda Fide defined the two Indian clerics', that is, de Castro's and de Sylva's skin colour not merely as differing from that of Europeans—so that they would not be immediately recognised as European—but rather as positively similar to that of other Ethiopians thereby forging some sense of familiarity.[76] Undoubtedly, the missionaries would still have been distinguished from the locals on account of the language they spoke, a factor which ensured that they could not blend in entirely. Could (purported) physical concordance trump other factors such as language, and would an Indian priest, therefore be more suitable for carrying out his religious duties in a Black African context than a European priest? Moreover, how would he compare with a Black African missionary (if available)? While the answers to these questions depended upon specific social circumstances, de Castro's case demonstrates how institutions and individual actors could creatively use skin colour as an argument. Keeping the definition of Black open enough as to include Indians, in this case served the specific objective of advancing de Castro's mission to Ethiopia. Within an increasing binarism between white and black these categories were still fluid enough to be adjusted to certain political interests.

Ideas about physical difference and social reactions to it were embedded in specific debates and vested interests regarding clerical as well as colonial hierarchies, just as in the internecine power struggles between a variety of Catholic actors (the Roman Curia, the Iberian powers or various religious orders). While specific patterns such as the Roman Curia's greater flexibility as opposed to the Portuguese Jesuits' stance regarding non-white missionaries in Ethiopia or India emerged at certain times, the dividing lines were complex and could shift. As we have seen, even when discussions concerned a particular locality with non-white elites and relatively little power held by European actors (such as Ethiopia), perspectivism favouring non-white priesthood could be rejected whenever it threatened the privileges of certain groups within society.

Conclusion

It is worth reflecting on the early modern debate regarding skin colour and the clergy in light of the fact of the large number of non-white faithful around the world as well as a growing number of non-white priests in Europe over recent decades.[77] Early modern Catholic authors in canon law and moral theology did not consider skin colour to be a physical defect or an obstacle to becoming a priest per se. However, according to a dominant

74. Archivio Storico di Propganda Fide [APF], Scritture Riferite nei Congressi [SCR], Etiopia Arabia Socotra 1, 27r.

75. See also Sabina Pavone, Practices of Conversion in South India in the 16th and 17th Centuries: Strategies and Narratives, in ed. Vincenzo Lavenia, Stefania Pastore, Sabina Pavone and Chiara Petrolini, *Compel People to Come In: Violence and Catholic Conversions in the non-European World* (Rome: Viella, 2018), 117–34.

76. European views on the skin colour of Christian Ethiopians are complex, see the cases of mixed-race in Andreu Martínez d'Alòs-Moner, *Envoys of a Human God: The Jesuit Mission to Christian Ethiopia, 1557–1632* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 219. On the project of Catholic Ethiopian bishops, see Alberto Elli, "Mons. Ṭobiyā Gabra Egzi'abeḤēr *primo vescovo* etiope cattolico" *Studia Orientalia Christiana Collectanea* 50–51 (2017–2018): 7–32.

77. On the historiographical reverberations of this trend, see Simon Ditchfield, "Decentering the Catholic Reformation Papacy and Peoples in the Early Modern World," *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 101 (2010): 186–208.

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perspectivist view, any difference in bodily complexion between a priest and his surrounding community could provoke negative emotions and therefore turn into an obstacle in the eyes of the Church. This pattern of thought was derived from ideas about other forms of physical difference, especially leprosy and bodily stature, and was applied to people of colour from the sixteenth century onwards.

Privileging social context proved so successful that even proponents of what I have termed universalist admission of Black individuals into the clergy began to focus on social reactions, even if they differed in how they evaluated such reactions. The Jesuit scholar Francesco Pellizzari (1596–1651), for instance, claimed that Blacks could become priests and moreover not only serve Black congregations, but also serve as priests in white communities "because they usually do not cause much dread."[78] While many authors firmly believed that they could predict the negative reactions white congregations would display toward a Black priest, this was clearly still a matter of debate.

The perspectivist interpretation persisted well past the early modern period. The passage that the "Ethiopian" would incite ridicule among "us," for instance, was reiterated in nineteenth century editions of the important theological text by Alphonsus Liguori (1696–1787).[79] One notable difference to early modern passages was the addition of yet another skin colour, "*subfuscus*" (light brown), which, unlike Blackness, did not hinder anyone from serving at the altar anywhere. The creation of clear-cut and reductionist categories such as black and white seems to have sometimes sparked the need for renewed forms of differentiation.

The debate in Europe on who could administer the sacraments was embedded in an emergent dichotomy between "us" and "them" and the connection of such categories to white and black skin colours. From the universalist standpoint, however, black was just one of many horizontally arranged colours, not essentially differing from white, red, and saffron, and only loosely linked to ethnic categories. From a perspectivist view, black appears as distinct from all other skin colours as the only one problematised (at least among white observers). One can argue that correlating skin colour and *the* Ethiopian in the first instance and contrasting one's self with the other contributed to an evolving racialisation of human differences.

While those statements discussed in this article could, to some degree, be considered as being inclusive with regard to non-white individuals serving as priests, it is equally apparent that skin colour was not used merely as a descriptive, unprejudiced category.[80] On the contrary, in addition to promoting discrimination the perspectivist standpoint in particular construed black skin colour as negative and inferior to whiteness. The notion of white superiority is perhaps most apparent in the fact that the perspectivist argument was not applied to white priests serving among non-white congregations, such as the European missionaries working in all corners of the world at that time. In other spheres, however, Catholic actors did speak out against discrimination and violence, for example, concerning the enslavement of the *Indios* or the treatment of African slaves in Cartagena de Indias. It is hardly surprising that such episodes are deployed as positive reference points in more recent Church documents about the history of racism in the Catholic Church, and not the

78. Francesco Pellizzari, *Manuale regularium*, vol. 2 (Venice, 1648), 121.
79. D. Neuraguet, *Compendium Thelogiae Moralis Sancti A.M. De Ligorio* (Lyon, 1841), 727 A. M. Liguori and M. Haringer, *Theologia Moralis* (Regensburg, 1847), 291.
80. Claiming this for antiquity, see Frank M. Snowden, *Before Color Prejudice: The Ancient View of Blacks* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 1983). Critical from a Medievalist perspective, see Thomas Hahn, "The Difference the Middle Ages Makes: Color and Race Before the Modern World," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 31, (2001): 1–38.

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legal and social obstacles to the ordination of Black priests discussed in the present article.[81]

The perspectivist standpoint fulfilled several functions in the early modern Church's encounters with human diversity beyond Europe. First, it offered a potential answer to specific problems, such as the ordination of an individual or a group within a given context. In addition, it could effectively demonstrate the self-declared and highly symbolic universal outreach as professed by the Catholic Church. As a global institution, the Church of Rome was meant to transcend specific communities with different appearances. By taking a perspectivist approach, the Catholic Church was highly flexible in its admission policy, but yet also almost entirely reactive. According to this rationale, should a given community be racist, its religious institutions would simply mirror these sentiments. As we have seen, conflating black skin colour with slave status could be incremental to this pattern of thought. This effectively shifted responsibility away from the Church, which was then able to take both an inclusive and a discriminatory stance simultaneously. Rather than actively promoting the irrelevance of skin colour when it came to deciding the criteria for becoming a priest (in principle), the Church therefore built upon, and itself reinforced, colour-coded forms of discrimination.

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81. See, for instance, the mention of Las Casas in Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *The Church and Racism: Toward a More Fraternal Society* (Vatican City, 2001 original 1988).

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