ABSTRACT
TOWARD A RENEWED THEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK OF
CATHOLIC RACIAL JUSTICE: A VISION INSPIRED BY THE LIFE AND
WRITINGS OF DR. ARTHUR GRAND PRÉ FALLS

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Catholic theological thought in the field of racial justice has evolved considerably during the 20th century—and even more so over the past twenty years. I analyze changes in Catholic racial justice concerning the use of black Catholic sources and the role for African American Catholics in working toward a more racially just society. In order to properly critique and augment more recent developments in the field of Catholic racial justice, this work retrieves the life and writings of Dr. Arthur Grand Pré Falls (1901-2000), a black Catholic medical doctor who worked ceaselessly for racial justice within the Catholic, political, educational, medical, and residential institutions of the Chicago area. The life and writings of Falls confirm that black historical retrieval and a role for African Americans in racial justice projects (or black agency) are prerequisites for the success of any Catholic racial justice project.

Chapter one delineates the use of African American sources and black agency within the work of American Catholic theologians, United States Bishops’ documents, and Vatican documents during the 20th and early 21st centuries. Chapter two outlines the life of Arthur Falls—his family and educational background, his work and positions within the Chicago Urban League, the Federated Colored Catholics, the Chicago Catholic Worker, as well as his focused assaults on segregation in the housing and medical fields in his later life. Chapter three examines the writings of Falls in the field of theology and race relations. His writings provide insight into the fluid relationship that he entertained between contemporary theological thought and the suffering caused by racism in Chicago. Chapter four integrates the life and writings of Falls with the insights of current Catholic theological reflection on the social sciences, racial justice, and modes of action for addressing racism. This final chapter exhibits the efficacy of Falls as a resource for Catholic racial justice projects and the necessity of organized and authentically interracial collaboration if one hopes to achieve lasting positive results.