

THE NEGRO CHALLENGES CHRISTIANITY

THE NEGRO in the United States is not a problem so much as our attitude toward him is a puzzle. The puzzle is the problem. For twelve minutes each day Amos 'n Andy entertain a nation in the parlor at a fabulous salary, while for twelve hours daily Mammy and Sammy slave in the kitchen for a mere pittance. We pay handsomely for the Negro's music and laughter; we are bored with his tears and tragedy. But that is typical of our American way of doing little things in a big way and big things in a little way.

There was a day when the body of the Negro could be had for a price—America was interested. Now that his soul can be had for a kindness, no one seems to care. During the Civil War a mouse of hate labored and brought forth a mountain of prejudice. Since then the American spirit toward the Negro would seem to be that of the Donnybrook Fair: "Wherever you see a head hit it." As a consequence, we journey across oceans to Christianize heathen who often take our cash and curricula but not our Church; at the same time we do all in our power to heathenize the Christian porter who lugs our traps to the boat.

Cold statistics may not warm our heart with enthusiasm for the Negro, but they at least show that in the United States we have a mission field unparalleled in opportunity. Waiting for someone to sow the seed are 12,000,000 souls plowed by physical pain, harrowed by spiritual suffering, and furrowed by fear for

the future. Has the grain of the Gospel fallen on that ground? It has not. Even making due allowance for children not counted in Protestant church membership (estimated to be an average of 18.4 percent for all denominations), at no time since the government has been issuing figures on the religious condition of the Negroes in the United States has more than one-half of the total colored population claimed any church affiliation whatsoever, much less been deeply influenced by any religious teaching. In the United States today there are at least 6,000,000 Negroes untouched by any church.

Of the 6,000,000 Negroes who sought the Word of God as best they knew, some found consolation and spiritual exaltation in bootleg forms of religion. Yesteryears brought abundant harvests to the store-front churches which preached a gospel of shouting and hand-clapping. Between the Negro Baptist Church, claiming over 3,000,000 members (three-fifths of all Negro church-goers), and the various branches of the Methodist Church, claiming a total membership of over 1,500,000, seven-eighths, or 88 per cent, of the total Negro church-going population is accounted for.

Yet, of the Negro Church a prominent Negro leader who carries much weight wrote:

The Church is largely an institution exploited for the benefit of the individuals in charge.

More recently another Negro writer, but of less authority, concluded an article on Negro religion with these words:

It would seem that the Negro Church which began so auspiciously in America, and once contributed so much to the progress and development of the race, must descend in

the end to the level of a barbaric cult for the delectation of half-wits and the profit of cunning shamans.

While the services of the *allelujah* sects satisfied, after a fashion, the religiously inclined Negro of another generation, and even yet show remarkable power to move his heart and his feet, somehow or other one gets the impression that the "new" Negro refuses to choose his religion by means of the "blindfold test." He challenges Christianity to produce its credentials. In the summarizing words of the last-quoted writer :

On the horizon loom a growing number of iconoclasts and atheists, young black men and women who can read, think and ask questions, and who impertinently demand to know why. . . . There are hundreds of this sort in every community. Coupled with those who have left the Church completely and the vast number who are on the rolls but never attend, they make a formidable and increasing majority.

It will not at all do for us to meet this challenge of the new Negro by denying that he exists. During the past decade, for instance, Negro high-school enrolment increased 177.8 percent, while an advance of 10.8 percent in enrolment of Negro children between the ages of five and seventeen was made. The little red school-house, now grown to stately proportions through the generosity of a rich uncle in Washington, bulges with 2,500,000 Negro children. Three times as many Negroes now attend the first year of high school as attended a decade ago, and a corresponding increase of more than five times as many students in the fourth-year high-school classes is reported. Over 100,000 colored students are now enrolled in high schools throughout the United States.

There are at least 20,000 Negroes attending colleges. In 1930, according to the *Crisis*, a Negro magazine, 2,071 Negroes received the Bachelor's degree in arts and sciences. This puts the number of Negro college graduates well over the 18,000 mark, not to mention the growing number of Masters and Doctors.

Then there are the 57,000 Negro teachers in public schools and colleges, 4,000 Negro physicians and surgeons, 2,000 Negro dentists, 6,250 musicians and teachers of music, 1,150 lawyers, judges and justices, 375 authors, editors, reporters, 230 chemists, assayers and metallurgists. Add to these imposing figures the 20,000 clergymen (as a professional class the least well-educated, according to reports), and it at once becomes evident that the eighty-odd Negro universities and colleges (not to mention the numerous white universities and colleges which now enroll Negro students) verily have rejuvenated Uncle Tom and Topsy.

When President Lincoln struck the shackles of slavery from their hands, 90 per cent of the Negroes in this country could not even hold a book right side up. Today their grandchildren are writing books. Literature, the theatre, art, invention—in a word, every phase of America's cultural, scientific and professional life—has been the better for Negro contributions. Verily, we must face the fact that here in America a new Negro has grown up almost unbeknown to most of us.

Like men of old this new Negro asks for a sign. To the Christian Churches he says, "Art thou the Church of Christ or look we for another?" Christianity must give evidence of its mission, even as did Christ to the

disciples of Saint John the Baptist. Cap and bells no longer satisfy the brown-skinned boys and girls in cap and gown.

Now the norm of Christliness in which the Negro happens to be most interested is precisely the very mark of identification by which Christ said His Church could be recognized: "By this shall all men know that you are My disciples, if you have love one for another" (John, xiii, 35). Possessing a college degree and an alertness of mind frequently far beyond the brain power of some of our white graduates, the new Negro's difficulty as regards Christianity is much the same as that of the rest of the world, with, of course, the added and aggravating complications arising from a consciousness that while he may be good enough to make the squad and play football for dear old alma mater, his own dear old "alma mater nigra" is not good enough to sit in the same pew with a white woman.

Either an unwillingness or an inability on the part of most Christian churches with which he is at all familiar to produce evidence of belonging to Christ, has led our pragmatic Negro to the conclusion that (to quote by way of concrete example the words of a prominent Negro writer in the *Journal of Negro History*):

Among the Negroes the Christian Church has been discredited. There are a few slavish-minded Negroes who still persist in referring to this repressive order in the modern world as Christian, but very few enlightened black people think of it other than as a farce. The young Negroes of today, even when not given to infidelity, are very suspicious of persons who are known as Christians. They have a much better opinion of sports, gamblers and outlaws, for among them or between these classes and

Negroes is found more brotherly love than between white and black Christians. . . . Christian people have promoted serfdom, established slavery, devised segregation, and even the gradual extinction of races; and worst of all, they have done all these things in the name of God.

Even apart from its inspired character, and from a purely sociological point of view, the new Negro finds Christianity suspect:

How much good-will does it (Christianity) release for race adjustment? It is often assumed that it will release much, since so many people are enrolled in Christian communions in every section of the country. It does indeed reach a certain element, as witness the growth of Commissions on Inter-Racial Cooperation themselves, which, if I mistake not, are largely the result of the ethical impulse. But unfortunately there is not any ground for thinking that the Christian motive will prompt many Christians to cooperate across the color line. Only a small fraction is all that is ever under any circumstances stirred by the ethics of religion anyhow, and when it comes to race relations that fraction dwindles with astonishing rapidity. People are not accustomed to let ethics compromise religion. Christianity therefore is not going to lend any great aid to race adjustment.

Of course the reasons usually adduced in justification of this rejection of Christianity are all very shallow; nevertheless, to the Negro they are all very real since they cause him pain. It is difficult to be logical when suffering. It is understandable, therefore, that the educated Negro should be led into a questioning of Christianity. Those of us who have a correct philosophy of life have not yet opened very wide to him the doors of our classrooms. The young Negro who would get a higher education must drink from the secularist streams

of learning flowing from the less snobbish but more pagan rostrums of such institutions as Harvard, Yale, Cornell (to mention only a few of the white schools which admit Negroes). There he learns that society alone matters: that anything not contributing to what sociologists conceive to be social progress must be ruled out. Upon graduation he is devoid of a sense of real spiritual values in religion—all things must be subject to experimental tests. Religion in such a scheme of life is merely another social force, true in so far as it is useful. Regarding the Church as a social institution to save men's lives rather than as a divine institution to save men's souls, no wonder that to him "the main thing is not what you believe but what you do to help your fellow men. This is the only principle of religion which Jesus of Nazareth emphasized."

At a recent meeting of educated and prominent Negroes, the Church as a factor in the life of the Negro was given lengthy consideration. In the words of the press notice:

It will be subjected to the acid test and evaluated as students of social science would treat any other force in present-day life. . . . In other words, the Church, the most significant force in our life, will be analyzed just as a research man tests a mineral which he finds and does not quite understand. The so-called veil will be thrown aside and discarded. The institution must stand the test.

Possessing only a subjective, pragmatic rule of life, the Negro's acceptance or rejection of Christianity hinges upon its workability as a rule of life. Ultimately then, the new Negro does not challenge Christianity—he does challenge Christians. He hurls his defiance at those of us who stand beneath the Cross, not at Him

Who hangs upon the Cross. It is unthinkable that a Crucified Christ would crush a crown of thorns upon those for whose souls He shed His Blood, yet history runs red with many a lurid tale of Christian cruelty against the black. Since the day when the English Captain John Hawkins named his slave ship "Jesus" we have grown more refined perhaps, but that very refinement only serves to make our Christian cruelty more offensive.

It marks, for instance, a certain failure that in spite of the best efforts put forth by religious and inter-racial groups, the number of lynchings remains high. Already this year has its share of animality; last year thirteen was the number of lynchings, and the year before it reached the high mark of twenty-one, according to the most conservative records. One may not condone the loose reasoning which invariably leads Negro writers to see an essential connection between lynching and the failure of Christianity; nevertheless, one must recognize that such conclusions have a very deleterious effect upon the young Negroes who, like most college graduates of this age, have not been trained to think independently nor to check the logic of conclusions haphazardly drawn by popular writers.

As a point in instance: Recently Maryland had a very gruesome lynching. A Baltimore newspaper recounted the fact thus:

The lynching, only forty feet from the spot where a Negro was hanged by a mob in 1895, took place under a huge Community Fund banner, depicting Christ with arms outstretched and the plea: "He who gives all feeds three—himself, his poor neighbor, and Me."

Columns of space in the local Negro newspaper were

devoted to flaming diatribes against Christianity for permitting its supposed adherents to perpetrate such an atrocity. But what are the facts? The government report on religious bodies gives the following church membership for Wicomico County, the scene of the disorder: white Methodist bodies, 8,534; Protestant Episcopal, 641, Baptist bodies, 464; Presbyterian, 320; Roman Catholic, 195; and total for all denominations, 11,040. Considering that this church membership represents barely one-third of the total population of the county (31,229 in 1930), it can hardly be said that the community is Christian. And when one considers the brand of religion, as well as the fact that one-third only claimed church membership, much less practised their religion, it is at once evident that Christianity is supplied with an argument in its favor rather than against it.

As a matter of fact, an examination of the record shows that in nearly every instance states in which lynchings occur are states less than 50 per cent of whose citizens, on the average, claim church membership. Kansas, the latest state on the lynching list, is an example—only .397 of its total population even claims church membership.

The necessity we are under of maintaining separate churches for the exclusive use of Negroes is admission that the sun does not always shine in Dixie, nor for that matter north of Mason and Dixon's Line. Our inconsistencies stultify our Christian teaching; we disciples shame the Master. Almost like a sorrowing Christ brooding over the Jerusalem which stoned the prophets, is the lament of the white-haired Negro, Kelly Miller:

I believe profoundly in the saving power of religion. But the saddest experience which worries my soul is to see the educated young Negro of this day and generation repudiate religion because the un-Christianlike attitude of the white professing Christian causeth him to offend. I can only urge upon the intelligentsia of the race to adopt a deeper philosophy. Christianity does not belong to the white race. Because this race violates its spirit and essence is no valid reason for the Negro to repudiate it.

The bad example of many Christians has made it easy for the bad logic of the new Negro to lead him into apparent conflict with Christianity. "Woe to the world because of scandals! For it must needs be that scandals come; but nevertheless woe to that man by whom scandal cometh." When the all-pervading Sun of Justice shall rise to light the hidden places in men's hearts, then shall John Brown's spirit rise as John Brown's ghost to accuse us; then shall the dark-skinned children of light sit in judgment over the light-skinned children of darkness, for "He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in darkness even until now. He that loveth his brother abideth in light, and there is no scandal in him" (John, ii, 9, 10).

THE NEGRO CHALLENGES COMMUNISM

THE NEW Negro has nailed his challenge to the Christian church door. Christianity cannot be white and black at the same time; it must be the omni-color rainbow or nothing. But precisely because the new Negro is intelligent, he is not jumping overboard until he finds a good place to land.

Agnosticism in the person of its vociferous prophet, Mr. Clarence Darrow, beckons with alluring if empty hands. In season and out, this all-star American agnostic drives home to the Negro the same old message:

Prayers won't do you any good. Your race has accomplished a great deal by the methods of education and organization, but nothing by prayer, reliance on preachers, and naive trust in the Deity. If there is a Lord Who governs everything, be sure that He knows all about your troubles before you ever tell them to Him. And He has done nothing about them.

The Negro press heralded widely this statement at the time of its deliverance, although its subsequent answer by the French Abbé Dimnet from the same platform at Howard University, Washington, D. C., went unnoticed. Other speeches and magazine articles of Mr. Darrow's are much the same in content.

But this kind of religion is a pure negation. The Negro himself has been negated almost out of existence. He wants something positive. Protestant Christianity he finds to be not even good Protestantism—its first lusty yell was “faith without works,” while its dying gasp is “works without faith.” Humanitarian Christianity, as a substitute, the Negro finds earthbound

—while useful as a social force to help the race, it cannot give life to its spiritually unborn children.

Communism projects itself as a seeming combination of the negative pole of atheism and the positive pole of humanitarianism.

On the surface it would seem that Russian red and American black is a coming color scheme. Why not? The Negro has a grievance. Christians refuse to heed it. Communism listens sympathetically. And when men are hungry and their children are fainting for bread, a promise seems better than a threat. Most of us who are not ourselves nursing the ills of poverty have a feeling of aloofness from the misery of our colored brother. We may not, however, content ourselves with a sigh for his sorrows and the meringue of words for his wrongs. We are all members of the Mystical Body of Christ.

Neither may we logically claim the right of the white workingman to an opportunity to earn a decent living, unless at the same time our yardstick applies to the Negro worker. God created the earth for the sustenance of all His children. Therefore all persons are equal in their inherent claims upon the bounty of nature. If a person's worth be something intrinsic, it cannot be determined by the pigmentation of his skin. Since it is impossible of demonstration that any class of persons is less important in the eyes of God, it is logically impossible for anyone who believes in a Divine Providence to reject the right of the Negro worker to an opportunity to earn a decent living. It is equally impossible of demonstration, however, that we Americans are a logical people.

The Negro's inherent right of access to the earth

is conditioned upon and becomes actually valid through the expenditure of useful labor. Precisely what the Negro wants is an opportunity to work, not a basket of groceries. There must be some obligation upon those of us who control the opportunities of the earth to permit access to him on reasonable terms. While the present state of industry gives leeway for a very elastic interpretation of the reasonableness of terms, as a minimum it may be said categorically that when a Negro is denied an available job solely on account of his color an injustice is done him. The sacredness of his personality is violated quite as fundamentally as when his body is strung up on a rope by a mob.

Yet, it is a matter of facts and figures that not a few large concerns which formerly hired Negro labor have now adopted a lily-white policy, which under present circumstances means that the Negro is denied reasonable access to the goods of life. In its report, dated January 15, 1932, to the President's Organization on Unemployment Relief, the National Urban League noted that, not only was preference given to white over colored applicants for available jobs, but actually "there are employers who are discharging them in order to make room for white workers."

Marginal workers, Negroes are the first to be discharged in any curtailment of employment and last to be re-employed in the event of economic revival. The National Urban League, an organization equipped to study conditions throughout the country, estimated that at the close of last year the number of unemployed Negro workers exceeded 750,000. This is more than twice the number reported in March of 1930. Available studies show that in nearly every instance the per-

centage of Negroes among the unemployed is higher than the population percentage warrants, sometimes running as high as four times the proportionate amount, and being in a few instances as high as five and six times as great.

The picture is not complete unless we include the great army of those Negroes who while actually employed are receiving anything but living wages. Before the depression the average day's pay of a Negro worker was \$2.00. At the same period of study in New York City the average family wage per month was \$85.00, while the average monthly rental was \$40.00. Even in normal times the percentage is high of those Negro families which find it impossible to get along on the income of the male members alone. Of necessity, mothers of families and daughters who should be in school seek employment outside the family circle; often with disastrous results. The earnings of these women when compared with the earnings of white women in the same occupations are outrageously low, as government statistics prove.

The plight of the Negro worker is not made easier by the fact that our national prejudice and personal injustices conspire to keep him in an economic and social strata in which a mere hand-to-mouth existence is the best that can be hoped for. As a consequence, he is utterly unable to provide against the day of prolonged unemployment. Lack of technical skill, inability to secure recognition even when properly trained, seasonal unemployment, discrimination on the part of most labor unions, exorbitant rents and a host of other evils successfully conspire to prevent all but a relatively few Negroes from attaining economic stability.

In vain does the Negro worker look to the labor unions for redress of his wrongs. The "Handbook of the American Trade Unions" (Bulletin 506, United States Department of Labor) shows that the more important labor organizations emphasize the disability of color. By way of contrast the Industrial Workers of the World (I.W.W.) expressly forbids any color bar. Yet, if and when hungry and jobless colored workers turn I.W.W.'s and demonstrate too violently, we shall shoot them down and whitewash our consciences by blackening their criminal records.

A colored man, Mahatma Ghandi, recently succeeded in focusing the sympathetic attention of the world on the Indian 300,000,000 of Britain's 475,000,000. The American Negro has no heaven-sent messenger "to make" the front pages of our dailies. The only time he makes the front pages is when as a Vice-Presidential candidate on the Communistic ticket he is thrown out of a Congressional hearing on the bonus bill, when his skull is cracked for picketing in front of the Japanese Embassy in Washington, when Ford's plant is stormed, when a crime has been committed.

As a result of all this injustice, Communism has painted many a black man red. The annual May-day demonstrations in which plump Jewesses parade arm in arm with hollow-cheeked Negroes; the inter-racial balls during which high-heeled low-brows mix freely with low-heeled high-brows; the frequent riots during which policemen's clubs and Negroes' heads are broken; the Scottsboro (Alabama) riots in which black men grabbed all the glory of dying for a cause while their white leaders grabbed the first train out of town—these and many others are but occasional belch-

ings of a bilious racial stomach hungering for justice.

Some race leaders who should have known better lent their aid to the Communists—from a safe distance. Negro magazines and newspapers, orators and preachers, waved the magic wand of words from windy heights, and second-hand manna from printing-presses on New York's East Side fluttered down to the outstretched hands of a hungry but hopeful people. Russia made grandiose gestures of indicting and condemning workers found guilty of *chauvinism* (race discrimination), as college professors with cormorant appetites for publicity made after-dinner speeches on the generous treatment accorded the Negro in Russia—at so much per speech.

Then came the dawn—or, rather, the Scottsboro case of last year. The sordid details are better forgotten. Suffice it to mention that several Negro youths were on trial for their lives. For a while, hand in hand, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People worked with the International Labor Defense for what seemed to be a common cause. But no job can stand two bosses. The Communists gave the Negro leaders a metaphorical kick. Only the kick was metaphorical—the effect was real and immediate. Negro leaders had their eyes opened and at once began to warn the masses to beware of the wily reds. To quote one:

The Negro in America must not turn over his destiny to any other group of leadership, not even to the "white proletariat." They have axes of their own to grind. . . . Just as we were about to applaud their efforts, they began to attack the best interests of the Negro, and to try to destroy the most constructive institution for self-defense and advancement the Negro has ever builded for himself

in the history of the Western world. They launched this treacherous attack with such dirty and disreputable lying that even many of us who were disposed to fraternize with the "underdogs" of any race, had to repudiate them in this particular case at least.

A cow's kick is said to have started the great Chicago fire. Another generation may chronicle the more historically correct fact that a Communist's kick saved the American Negro from Communism.

In the *Crisis*, a Negro magazine, for April and May are listed the opinions on Communism of a score of Negro editors. They all agree that Communism is making inroads upon the masses of Negroes and that there is an appeal in their energetic defense of the Negro. Yet, with the exception of but a few, all feel that Communism will not solve the problems of the Negroes:

"Despite the theories behind Communism, we do not think it offers the way out for the Negro which shall be most beneficial and lasting in the long run."—P. B. Young, *Norfolk Journal and Guide*.

"The Negro can well afford to wait until he has more definite information as to how Communism in America would be practised by those poor whites upon whose shoulders would ultimately fall the responsibilities of government."—W. Kelley, *Amsterdam News*, New York.

"I believe that any people who put their trust in a name will be sooner or later disappointed. A mere shibboleth has never been adequate for the solution of personal or race problems. . . . In the life of the American Negro, Communism does not represent any plan for the solution of his problems: it is but a name."—J. A. Atkins, *Houston Informer and Texas Freeman*.

"While the end (of Communism) is certainly worthy of attainment, the means employed are destined to defeat

the Communistic program and objective."—C. F. Richardson, *Houston Defender*.

Rejecting the reds, rejected by the whites, no wonder the Negro sings the blues. Small wonder that a kiss from a Communist seems preferable to a kick from a capitalist. Deep down in his heart the Negro wants neither to be cuddled nor cudgelled; all he asks is to be treated like a human being. If he seems to prefer being bluffed by Communism rather than cuffed by capitalism, it is only his empty hand reaching out in hope, not his head or his heart assenting.

It is a good sign that Negro leaders have issued a challenge to Communism to produce its credentials before they give it further credence. They have begun at last to see that the Negro will get the worst of it, for generations at least.

Whenever they enrage the mind of the abused Negro and stir him into action and into trouble, it is the Negro who remains to do the dying and the languishing in jail, while his white Communist leaders escape from the scene.

The new Negro knows that Communism cannot do what it so readily promises. Nor will the mass of the Negroes be long deceived. By nature the Negro is too optimistic to listen to the pratings of enemies of organized society. Given half a square deal, he will ignore all blandishments. But unless we do something for the 12,000,000 colored citizens of this country and do it soon, we shall see the Communists swelling their ranks, Negro leaders nursing swelled heads, and the police getting "swell" exercise.

So far as the Catholic Church is concerned, every argument being used in behalf of the white victim of this crisis is equally valid for the colored victim, with the added validity which comes from his very helplessness.

ness. As Pope Leo, in his encyclical on the condition of labor, wrote: "When there is question of protecting the rights of individuals, the poor and helpless have claim to special consideration." Who is poorer, more helpless, and less master of his destiny than the American Negro?

Just as the spirit of fair play which engendered the War of the Revolution a century and a half ago begot a spirit of consideration for the rights of the Negro slaves, so may we hope that out of the world's present travail will be born a spirit of consideration and fair play toward the colored victim of our present system of economics. At any rate, those who describe, discuss and deal with the Negro as a being belonging to an order of nature and grace inferior to their own, must know that such an attitude is not only unworthy of the strong Caucasian and fatal to the poor Negro, but contrary to Christian teachings.

We Catholics must look into our consciences to see if we are among those who are misled by mistaken social philosophies, partial views of social relationships and values, and we should note well the words of Christ in Matthew, xxv, 42-45:

I was hungry and you gave me not to eat; I was thirsty and you gave me not to drink. I was a stranger and you took me not in; naked and you covered me not; sick and in prison and you did not visit me. Then they also shall answer Him, saying: Lord, when did we see Thee hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison and did not minister to Thee? Then He shall answer them, saying: Amen I say to you, as long as you did it not to one of these least, neither did you do it to Me.

Can we measure up to this standard by which Christ said we are to be judged?

THE NEGRO CHALLENGES CATHOLICISM

THE NEW Negro is rejecting Reformation Christianity. As a possible substitute Russian Communism is suspect. In his quest he challenges Catholicism. Can the old religion answer the new Negro who hears the voice of Jacob but feels the hands of Esau?

In the words of the Negro writer, Kelly Miller:

The Negro no longer respects the white man's pretensions to Christianity. A religion that cannot cross the color line will not meet the needs of the world. The despised man will not take a religion that must be handed to him with the left hand across the great divide. Christ said to His disciples: "Where I go, there ye may be also." The white Christian says to his black co-religionist: "So far and no farther. . . ." A religion which stultifies the soul cannot save it. For what is the value of a stultified soul even though it be saved?

Upon the occasion of the Holy Father's recent encyclical on Christian marriage a noted atheistic sociologist, H. E. Barnes, commented upon the Pope's letter to the effect that the day had come when those who wish to be Christians must be Catholics, for that is the only logical and intelligent religion in existence today. This being so, Catholic Christianity must bear the brunt of the Negro's challenge to Christianity. If the Catholic Church be the Church of Christ, then surely the Negro has a right that she be able to meet his challenge.

Long since dead is the Protestant Negro, Dr. E. W. Blyden, who wrote:

The thoughtful and cultivated Protestant Negro, though he may *ex animo* subscribe to the tenets of the particular denomination to which he belongs, as approaching nearest to the teaching of God's word, cannot read history without feeling a deep debt of gratitude to the Roman Catholic Church. The only Christian Negroes who have had the power successfully to throw off oppression and maintain their position as freedmen were Roman Catholic Negroes—the Haitians. And the greatest Negro the Christian world has yet produced was a Roman Catholic—Toussaint L'Ouverture. In the modern ecclesiastical system, as was the case in the military system of ancient Rome, there seems to be a place for all races and colors.

The nearest approach to ideal conditions under which the Catholic Church has ever worked for the Negroes were those which obtained in Brazil during the period of slavery. A comparison between the treatment of slaves in Catholic Brazil and Protestant America during that period gives an illuminating basis upon which to evaluate the relative claims of Catholic and Protestant Christianity. Mary W. Williams, Goucher College (Protestant), Baltimore, has made this comparison. In an article entitled, "The Treatment of Negro Slaves in the Brazilian Empire: a Comparison with the United States of America" (*Journal of Negro History*, July, 1930), she writes:

One of the factors (in securing good treatment for the slaves) was the unifying influence of the Catholic Church, with which the casual and diminishing part played by the Protestant group in the Southern United States offers no comparison.

She describes minutely the care which the Catholic Church took of the slaves, how they attended their religious duties, were properly instructed, and aided in gaining their freedom, etc. She continues:

Most important of all—and most difficult fully to evaluate because the influence was so subtle—membership in the Roman Church bound the slaves, with all the power represented by that organization, to white Brazilians, in a brotherhood based upon the recognition of God as a common Father. This tie was everywhere formally acknowledged by a little ceremony which preceded the retirement of the slaves for the night. . . . No racial barrier discouraged the development of their talents. To them all trades and professions were open, and the realms of art and scholarship, as well; political offices were held by ex-slaves; as priests they ministered to the whites as well as to the blacks, and were even raised to the bishopric in the Catholic Church.

Probably the most memorable document stating the position of the Popes and the Catholic Church on the question of slavery was the letter addressed to the bishops of Brazil by His Holiness, Pope Leo XIII (1888), in which he exhorted the Brazilian hierarchy to do all in its power to banish from the country all remnants of slavery. Without bloodshed or the nightmare of a "Negro problem," slavery was completely abolished from Catholic Brazil. So impressed was President Roosevelt when he traveled through South America that he wrote:

If I were asked to name the one point in which there is complete difference between the Brazilians and ourselves, I should say that it was in the attitude toward the black man. . . . The ideals of the United States and Brazil as regards the treatment of the Negroes are wholly

different. . . . (He quotes with approval:) "We treat the Negro with entire respect, and he responds to the treatment. If a Negro shows capacity and integrity, he receives the same reward that a white man would receive. He has therefore every incentive to rise."

In the United States the Catholic Church never was in a position to exert much influence upon the question of slavery. Beaten down by persecution from without and torn asunder by schism within, the wonder is that she survived those times at all. It is a matter of history, nevertheless, that where and when she was in a position to command attention she defended the rights of the Negroes and enforced her mandates in their regard. Carter G. Woodson, a non-Catholic Negro historian, writes:

The Spanish and French missionaries, the first to face this problem (education of the Negroes), set an example which influenced the education of the Negroes throughout America. . . . Put to shame by this noble example of the Catholics, the English colonists had to find a way to overcome the objections of those who, granting that the enlightenment of the slaves might not lead to servile insurrection, nevertheless feared that their conversion might work their manumission.

But not on history alone does the Negro live. Yesterday may have its glories; today must have its calories.

That the Catholic Church does not preach the Gospel to the Negroes with her tongue in her cheek is evident from the record of achievement which is hers. While the figures reported are not rotund, they are stalwart; and considering the resources at her command, as well as the almost insurmountable obstacles which confront her, one must marvel that so much has been produced

from so little. Twelve baskets full is good return from five loaves and seven fishes. When such *advocati diaboli* as Henry Mencken and Clarence Darrow speak in mellifluent terms of the Catholic Church's care for the colored, surely no one shall say nay.

Writing in a Negro journal, *Opportunity*, Henry Mencken roundly scores the Negro for his loyalty to "dunghill varieties of Christianity." He makes only two exceptions:

If their nature demands the consolations of religion, then there is plenty of room for them on more decorous levels. In Baltimore, my friend, Dr. George F. Bragg, jr., shepherds a flock of Episcopalians: they are an intelligent and civilized people, and he himself is respected as a scholar and a man. There are in the same town many Negro Catholics—quiet, devoted, self-respecting men and women, to whom a Methodist revival would be as horrifying as it would be to the president of Harvard.

Writing in another Negro magazine, *Crisis*, Clarence Darrow hits hard at Negro churches which take the Negro's money and give him nothing in return. He makes only one exception to his general condemnation. He writes:

Of course it is only fair to say that one great Church, the Catholic, does not discriminate against the Negro. This Church has earned the respect of the Negro and there is every reason for the tendency of the Negro religionist toward Catholicism.

Like her Divine Master the Catholic Church can stand before the world and say, "Which of you shall convince me of sin as regards the Negro?" But all Catholics cannot say that. Paradoxically we are not altogether catholic Catholics here in America. The

Negro may pray before the statue of a Negro saint on a Catholic altar, but often his prayers must be sent heavenward from the Jim Crow rear or gallery. He is damned if he does not go to Mass on Sunday, and he is not welcomed if he does go. By way of quieting our qualms at the perversion of the Negro in America we contribute an alms toward the conversion of the Negro in Africa. Verily the Negro blames us for being skin-shy religionists.

Probably the reason why he is so disappointed in us Catholics is that he recognizes the Catholic Church as the greatest moral force in the world and the only moral force which gives promise of ability to solve his problems. He finds the Church pregnant with promise but Catholics still-born with prejudice. The reason is not so much because we are Catholics as because we are Americans. As Catholics we are trained to think catholic; as Americans we act provincial. This is the only explanation for the vast difference between our preaching and our practising.

If the Catholic Church can claim as her own but one out of every sixty Negroes, the fault is not to be imputed to her shame. Unheralded and unsung, her missionaries have gone into a section of the country born in prejudice and reared in suspicion of all things Catholic. If the priests and Sisters who have so generously given their all have failed to achieve a phenomenal success, the shame is on those of us who have hardened our hearts and our arteries to their cries for help, and will not heed them.

The problem is not what to do with the black man so much as it is what to do with the white man. If we 21,000,000 Catholics in the United States would

go out of our way a little to convince the 12,000,000 Negroes in the United States that the Catholic Church really wants them in her communion, it would not be long before the Negro race would be a Catholic people. Our supine indifference makes the Church as much distraught in finding the Negro as it makes his despair in finding Christ. After fifty years of most discouraging missionary labor, today we are far from the goal for which so many had hoped and so few have striven. And the only reason is that the Catholic pew is still half Protestant.

It behooves us Catholics not only to spiritualize our consciences as regards the Negro, but to socialize them as well. Our practical views of the color question, of the rights and privileges of the Negro, and our corresponding duties toward him are matters which should receive our best thought, not only as Catholics performing a spiritual duty imposed by Christ, but as citizens keenly alive to the welfare of our country. The problems of the Negro are problems vitally connected with the general welfare of the country which, in the face of accusations to the contrary, we profess loudly and blatantly to love. Yet there are those of us who seem to think that the Negro is outside the pale of our obligation: that he has no moral, social, industrial, political or religious rights which we are bound to respect; in a word, that he is destined to be poor, ignorant and outcast, and that there is no way of preventing it.

It were vain to deny that there are certain practical difficulties in the way of achieving immediate success in our Catholic program. But no difficulties can alter the command of Christ that all nations and races must

be brought into the true fold. We Catholics, by a kind and persistent endeavor, can influence the attitude of America toward its colored citizens. Twenty-one million Catholics is not an inconsiderable leaven. First, however, we must ourselves suffer a conversion of heart, a correction of views, and an increase of that stern self-discipline which holds the strong true to personal ideals. Then, having converted ourselves, we shall be in a position to go forth and convert the Negro. Until we do that, we Catholics shall be unable to meet the challenge of the new Negro.

Could we but see the royal romance of the Church's work among the dark-skinned children of a universal Christ! By service to a sorrowing people, by kindness to a suffering people, can we make less shameful one of the darkest pages in the history of the United States and remove a fact which all missionaries to the Negroes must try in vain to explain to prospective converts—that the Catholic Church apparently is not all things to all men.

Christ calls from the hills of Rome; Caesar calls from the steppes of Russia. Which way for the American Negro? The answer lies in our own hearts. But one thing is certain: we shall never make many Negroes Catholic until we first make more Catholics Christian.

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