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THE MISSIONARY APPROACH OF THE ROMAN
CATHOLIC CHURCH TO THE AMERICAN NEGRO

A Thesis Presented to the Faculty
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,
Department of Philosophy
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Bachelor of Divinity

by

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June 1954

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
I. INTRODUCTION	1
II. MISSIONARY BEGINNINGS.	4
The Society of St. Joseph	4
Other Male Orders	5
Sisterhoods	5
Efforts Before the Civil War	6
Efforts Since the Civil War	7
III. OBSTACLES IN THE NEGRO	9
Natural Indifference to Spiritual Matters	9
Suspicion of and Prejudice Against Roman Catholic Church	10
Loose Moral Standards	11
Desire for Emotional Release.	12
Migratory Disposition.	13
Fear of Losing Business or Practice.	14
Secret Societies	14
IV. OBSTACLES WITHIN THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH	16
Prejudice of Laymen	16
Prejudice or Indifference of Clergy and Religious	22
Lack of Colored Priests	24
Intellectual Type of Church Service.	27
Non-ownership of Church Property.	27
Lack of Social Life in the Church.	28
V. MEASURES TO BREAK DOWN NEGRO HOSTILITY.	29
Interracial Councils	29
Social Welfare Work	31
Liberal Integration Policy.	34
Liberal Admission Policies in Higher Educational Institutions.	37
Outdoor Apostolate	39
Scholarships.	40
VI. MEANS OF WINNING CONVERTS	41
Parochial Schools	41
Converts.	44
Hard Work and Personality of Priests	45
Influence of Pageantry Negligible.	45
VII. PROSPECTS FOR THE FUTURE	47
BIBLIOGRAPHY	49

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

"If you find a Negro who isn't either a Baptist or a Methodist someone has been tampering with his religion." Those words, credited to Booker T. Washington, describe quite well what the Roman Catholic Church has been doing in recent years in its mission outreach to the American Negro. With 420,590 Negro Roman Catholics reported in the latest statistics out of a total Negro population in the United States of approximately 15,000,000, one can see that the Roman Catholic Church has been doing considerable "tampering" to win that many adherents.¹ In fact, the Negro Roman Catholic population in our country has doubled in the last twenty-five years, over 75,000 souls being gathered in the last decade alone.² Every day, according to one Roman Catholic writer,³ twenty-one Negroes are added to the church.

To minister to this large number of Negro converts, the church maintains 461 churches and chapels for the special benefit of Negroes. Fifteen new missions and chapels were erected in 1952 alone, the latest year for which statistics are available.⁴

Serving these parishes and missions were 633 priests. About three-fourths of these parishes (325) have elementary schools operated in conjunction with

¹"Catholic Negro Missions in the United States," The 1954 National Catholic Almanac, edited by Felician A. Foy (Paterson, New Jersey: St. Anthony's Guild, c. 1954), p. 348.

²Ibid., p. 349.

³Casimir Marcevicus, "Prudence and Our Negro Catholics," Interracial Review, XXIV (January, 1951), 8.

⁴Foy, op. cit., p. 348.

them, with a reported enrollment of 71,811 and a total staff of some 1,900 sisters and 250 lay teachers. One Seminary, one college, twelve boarding academies, twenty-two institutions for industrial training, care of orphans, and delinquent children, ten hospitals, twenty medical clinics, twenty-two social welfare centers, two homes for the aged, one home for incurables, and about thirty high schools are also maintained exclusively for Negroes and run under Catholic auspices.⁵

The Roman Catholic Church could not always boast such impressive figures. Fifty years ago the sum total of Roman Catholic Negroes in the country was roughly 145,000 souls. A mere forty-eight priests were assigned to this ministry and only forty-one chapels were provided for the special benefit of Negroes. Enrollment in the ninety-four schools then existing, including ten small orphanages and two industrial schools, was 8,722.⁶

From such inauspicious beginnings little more than half a century ago the Roman Catholic Negro outreach today has reached such proportions that it now ranks third in number of Negro members among all religious bodies in the United States.⁷ As will be seen on the subsequent pages such growth from insignificant beginnings in the face of seemingly insurmountable obstacles is nothing short of phenomenal.

Study of the mission strategy employed in achieving such a sizeable number of converts and the obstacles overcome in doing so constitutes the purpose of

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 348. Cf. also Negro Yearbook, 1952, edited by Jessie Parkhurst Guzman (New York: Wm. H. Wise & Co., c. 1952), p. 262.

⁶ "Negro Mission Report, 1950," Interracial Review, XXIII (March, 1950), 35.

⁷ Ervin E. Krebs, The Lutheran Church and the American Negro (Columbus, Ohio: Wartburg Press, c. 1950), p. 19.

this paper. It is hoped that this study will aid in some small degree to implement our own missionary outreach to the Negro by pointing up missionary techniques and methods which can be profitably adopted or adapted to our own program, since many of the problems encountered by Roman Catholic missionaries must be faced by Lutheran missionaries, too.

CHAPTER II

MISSIONARY BEGINNINGS

The Society of St. Joseph

The first organized Roman Catholic missionary efforts to reach the colored people in our country were begun in 1871 by four priests of the Society of St. Joseph, or Josephite Fathers, as they are commonly called. Father Herbert Vaughan is credited with founding the order at Mill Hill, near London in 1866. Shortly afterward he offered his tiny band to Pope Pius IX to be used in whatever mission field His Holiness might choose. The Holy Father selected the recently emancipated Negroes in America to be their first target. Landing in Baltimore in 1871, the group began work there by taking over St. Francis Xavier Church.¹

This group, with the subsequent additions to its ranks, was destined to care for the largest number of Negro Roman Catholic mission units in the country. In the first fifty years of their work the Josephites were responsible for 73,992 Negro baptisms and 32,703 conversions.²

In 1893 the headquarters of the community were transferred from England to America. During the short span of time since then, the Josephite Fathers have seen their parishioners grow from an estimated 1,630 in 1893 to more than 135,000 in 1953.³ Today numbering 205 priests, they now have charge of

¹John Thomas Gillard, Colored Catholics in the United States (Baltimore: The Josephite Press, 1941), p. 123.

²Thomas F. Doyle, "Negroes in the Church," Homiletic and Pastoral Review, XLVIII (May, 1948), 590-595.

³"Negro Convert's Quandry," Interracial Review, XXV (March, 1953), 40.

ninety-nine parishes and operate thirty-five missions, a major seminary, a novitiate, a high school for boys, and an industrial school. A monthly magazine, The Colored Harvest, is published to promote their cause.⁴

Other Male Orders

Following close on the heels of the Josephites were the Fathers of the Holy Ghost who in 1872 sent several members from Europe to open an industrial school in Covington, Kentucky. The venture proved unsuccessful and had to be abandoned. Not discouraged by this first attempt, the Fathers took up Negro work again a few years later and this time were successful and gradually expanded their efforts. This group, together with the Josephites, was the backbone of colored missions till joined in 1906 by the Fathers of the Divine Word and the African Mission Fathers in 1907. These four groups, though aided by others in recent years, still have done the bulk of the Roman Catholic Negro work and carried the brunt of their missionary attack.⁵

Sisterhoods

First among the colored sisterhoods was the Oblate Sisters of Providence, founded in 1829 with motherhouse at Baltimore.⁶ The Sisters of the Holy Family with motherhouse at New Orleans became the second colored community. It was founded in 1840.⁷ The first community of white nuns engaged in colored work was the Franciscan Sisters. Founded in Mill Hill, England, in 1869, the

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Gillard, op. cit., p. 124.

⁶ Ibid., p. 190.

⁷ Ibid.

group came to this country in 1881 to take over a colored orphanage and has been working faithfully ever since.⁸

The sisterhood which today comprises the largest contingent of nuns in the field and also carries the largest load of responsibility is the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament, devoted exclusively to Negro and Indian missions. It was founded in 1892 in Philadelphia and in 1940 numbered 293 sisters.⁹

Other communities of nuns playing rather important roles in Negro work are the Sister-Servants of the Holy Ghost and Mary Immaculate with mother-house at San Antonio, and the Missionary Sisters, Servants of the Holy Ghost, their mother house located in Techy, Illinois.¹⁰ Of late, many other groups of religious communities have volunteered their services but the major portion of the work still is being done by the above mentioned groups.

Efforts Before the Civil War

Although most of the religious orders just mentioned had their beginnings after the Civil War, that does not mean there were no Negro converts to the Roman Catholic faith prior to that time or that no Roman Catholic work was done among the colored. In fact, there were Negro converts to Roman Catholicism already in colonial times in Maryland and Louisiana.¹¹

The historical situation in colonial America, however, was such that the country was predominantly Protestant. Consequently, the Roman Catholic

⁸ Ibid., p. 191.

⁹ Ibid., p. 192.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ 1952 Negro Yearbook, edited by Jessie Parkhurst Guzman (New York: Wm. H. Wise & Co., Inc., c. 1952), p. 262.

Church was in no position to exert much influence even if she had had much contact with Negroes. Thus, most of the church-going Negroes were gained by Protestantism because the slaves took the religion of their masters if they "got religion" at all.¹²

Only in Maryland and Louisiana was the situation different. Gillard estimates that, largely due to French and Spanish influence, at the time of the Emancipation there were about 16,000 colored Roman Catholics in Maryland and 62,500 in Louisiana, and about 21,500 in the rest of the country.¹³ Thus, the number of Negro Roman Catholics at that time was right around 100,000.

Such a number sounds impressive but thousands of these were Catholics in name only, being baptized into the faith by their masters and receiving little, if any, instruction.¹⁴ Possibly twenty per cent of that number drifted away from the church after the Civil War, Gillard estimates, but he attributes their defection more to neglect than apostasy.¹⁵

Efforts Since the Civil War

With such a large nucleus with which to work, it may appear at first glance that Roman Catholic gains among Negroes immediately following the Civil War were rather small. Gillard explains that the Church had its hands so full trying to care for the millions of immigrants from Roman Catholic sections of Europe settling in northern industrial centers that it had neither

¹² Gillard, op. cit., p. 38.

¹³ Ibid., pp. 94-95.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 106.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 103.

the time nor the resources nor the man power to throw into Negro work on any large scale.¹⁶ Another reason for relatively small gains following the Civil War was that the Church was then predominantly urban while the Negro then was largely living in rural areas. Even fifty years ago, 80.2 per cent of the Negroes were still living in rural areas. Under such circumstances, it was extremely difficult and unlikely that many Negroes would come under Catholic influence.¹⁷

In spite of such adverse conditions, in 1888, the first year when national statistics on colored Catholics are available, the total colored Catholic population in the United States had risen to 133,213.¹⁸ Reports from several dioceses are not included in this report so the number very likely is somewhat larger.

Missionary efforts continued at a slow but steady pace for many years. By 1928, Roman Catholic Negroes had grown to 203,986. By 1940, there were 296,998, a gain of 93,012 in twelve years.¹⁹ The 1947 report of the Catholic Missions among the Colored People and Indians listed 321,995.²⁰ Thus, on the basis of these figures, concededly incomplete but representing a close enough estimate, the gain in Roman Catholic Negroes in the fifty-eight years from 1888-1947 has been 183,782, or 3,100 a year.²¹ But note the growth in the past twelve years: over 143,000 from 1940-1952, an increase of 48.8 per cent.

Such gains have not been won without much hard work and in the face of tremendous obstacles, and it is to these that we next turn our attention.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 95.

²⁰ Doyle, *op. cit.*, p. 590.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

²¹ *Ibid.*

CHAPTER III

OBSTACLES IN THE NEGRO

Natural Indifference to Spiritual Matters

One often hears the claim that the Negro is "naturally religious" and consequently an easy target for the missionary. Statistics of all bodies working among the Negro, however, fail to bear this out. The carnal mind is still enmity against God whether encased in a white or black skin. In religion the Negro follows much the same pattern as his white brother. Of approximately 15,000,000 Negroes in the country, slightly less than 8,000,000 claim church affiliation or about 53 per cent. The percentage of church goers among the colored thus is quite similar to that of their white neighbors, which today number about 59 per cent. In New York City alone, 60 per cent or 360,000 of the total Negro population is unchurched.¹

One Negro priest writes that for every ten converts baptized in a Negro parish, the priests have contacted about forty persons as prospects.² What is often considered the innate religiosity of the Negro, he says, is nothing more than his keenly developed gregariousness.³ A worker among the colored in St. Louis sums up the whole matter quite well by saying:

In spite of the zeal of the missionary priests and sisters working in St. Louis, the great majority of the Negroes were indifferent,

¹ Emanuel A. Romero, "The Negro in the New York Archdiocese," The Catholic World, CLXXII (October, 1950), 7.

² Herman A. Porter, "Negro Priest Looks at the Negro Apostolate," The Priest, LX (August, 1953), 582.

³ Ibid., p. 581.

skeptical or antagonistic. . . . The Negro Apostolate in St. Louis [was] a hard rocky corner of the Lord's vineyard.⁴

Suspicion of and Prejudice against Roman Catholic Church

Closely associated with the Negro's natural indifference toward his evangelization is his suspicion of and prejudice against the Roman Catholic Church in particular. For some reason he feels the Roman Catholic Church is "the white man's church" and thus does not want any part of it. The National Catholic Almanac for 1954 lists this very attitude of many Negroes toward the Roman Catholic Church as the initial difficulty which the church must face in the Negro apostolate.

It is an attitude of unfriendliness, if not of violent antipathy, due both to ignorance of the Church and to deep prejudices, bred by the hostile public opinion of the communities in which they live.⁵

Gillard comes up with the same conclusion that Negro bigotry and prejudice comprise the greatest barrier to further Roman Catholic missionary success and blames it on reflections of Baptist and Methodist thought.⁶

This distrust of the Roman Catholic Church is perhaps due in large part to fear of the unknown. It is human to fear that with which we are unfamiliar and with 95 per cent of the Negroes in our country of the Protestant persuasion and having few points of contact with Roman Catholicism, it is reasonable to conclude that they naturally would be filled with suspicion of that with which

⁴Ella Madden Lancaster, "The Negro Looks at Catholicism," Interracial Review, XX (May, 1947), 76.

⁵"Catholic Negro Missions in the United States," The 1954 National Catholic Almanac, edited by Felician A. Foy (Paterson, New Jersey: St. Anthony's Guild, c. 1954), p. 349.

⁶John T. Gillard, The Catholic Church and the American Negro (Baltimore: St. Joseph's Society Press, 1929), p. 213.

they know so little. And often what little they know is distorted, such as ridiculous or frightening stories about confession, the Pope, and practices within convent walls.⁷

Loose Moral Standards

Not to be overlooked among the difficulties facing the Roman Catholic Church in its mission outreach to the Negro is his often prevalent loose moral behavior. Father Joseph Eckert, well-known priest working among Negroes in Chicago writes that

one of the greatest obstacles in the way of Negro conversion is the prevalent evil of divorce and subsequent remarriage. . . . Time and again I have come across people who would be willing to become converts but are prevented from doing so because of some hopeless marriage entanglement or other.⁸

Many Negroes given to lack of respect for the marriage bond thus resent the church's restraining criticism and do not take kindly to an institution censuring or reproving their irregular marital conduct. This lack of moral perspective thus stands as another hindrance to the more rapid conversion of the Negro to Roman Catholicism.⁹ Perhaps some mitigating or extenuating testimony could be cited in defense of the Negro's moral lapses such as poor and over-crowded housing conditions, low income, etc., but that would carry us far beyond the scope of this paper.

Even where moral barriers were not a factor, in mixed marriages, for

⁷ Ellen Tarry, "Why is not the Negro Catholic?" The Catholic World, CL (February, 1940), 546.

⁸ Joseph F. Eckert, "Methods of Convert Making Among the Negroes of Chicago," The White Harvest, edited by John Anthony O'Brien (New York, London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1927), p. 97.

⁹ Gillard, op. cit., p. 237.

example, the Roman Catholic Church often came out second best. Apparently the non-Catholic member of the union had more influence on the Roman Catholic partner than vice versa. And so the number of converts made from mixed marriage is negligible.¹⁰ In a census of one Negro parish in New York City it was found that mixed marriages proved to be the most consistent occasion for defection and complete apostasy.¹¹

Desire for Emotional Release

Perhaps the one feature of the Negro's religious fervor best known to most of us is his emotionalism. He loves to sing and shout and pour out the religious feelings of his soul. The restraint so characteristic of the worship in the Roman Catholic Church denies him this completely.¹² He becomes a mere passive spectator of the drama of the Mass and is given no opportunity for spontaneity of expression at all. Consequently, this restriction on emotionalism also becomes an obstacle to his conversion to Roman Catholicism. Gillard feels that especially after the Civil War the success of the Roman Catholic Church among Negroes was meager because its appeal was too intellectual and not emotional enough for the Negro who, on the other hand, preferred the Baptist and Methodist churches largely for that reason.¹³

Recognizing that the mere passive part which the Negro has in the Roman

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 266.

¹¹ Joseph G. McGroarty, "Census Findings in a Negro Parish," The Catholic World, CLVI (December, 1942), 328.

¹² E. Franklin Frazier, The Negro in the United States (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1949), p. 362.

¹³ Gillard, op. cit., p. 222.

Catholic worship is not satisfactory to the Negro temperament, Gillard suggests the use of more wide-spread use of congregational singing in an attempt to overcome this deficiency.¹⁴ Maynard goes so far as to suggest that the Negroes be provided with "bright colors and hearty hymns, and even, if necessary, with dances."¹⁵

Migratory Disposition

The migratory disposition of the Negro is also a source of constant difficulty to the Roman Catholic missionary. Gillard makes the astounding admission that

nearly fifty per cent of the gains made through baptisms and converts on the Colored missions in the South are drained off somewhere.¹⁶

Chief cause for this leakage according to him is the migration of the Negro from the South to the North. One priest serving northern Negroes writes: "It seems to be a mark of distinction to change their religion when leaving the South."¹⁷ Gillard sadly concludes:

in the face of the leakage occasioned by the migratory disposition of so many Negroes there can be little sense in statistically measuring our relative gain while rowing against a current of loss.¹⁸

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 289. At least one colored Catholic church in Chicago was discovered to be doing just that.

¹⁵ Theodore Maynard, The Story of American Catholicism (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1941), p. 389.

¹⁶ John T. Gillard, Colored Catholics in the United States (Baltimore: The Josephite Press, 1949), p. 153.

¹⁷ Quoted by Gillard, *Ibid.*, p. 173.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 179.

Fear of Losing Business or Practice

With strong Negro anti-Catholic feeling in many places, particularly in the South, joining the Roman Catholic church entails in many instances considerable hardship. Hostility and bitterness from non-Catholic relatives and friends often put the convert to a severe test.¹⁹

In small towns in the South especially, where a man's social standing makes or breaks him, social ostracism often results when a professional man, lawyer, doctor, or business man, joins the Roman Catholic Church. Consequently, converts among this class in many southern communities are slim. Rather than lose clients or harm their business or practice, many professional people simply do not have the courage to join the church and brave such persecution.²⁰

In the North such treatment is less likely to occur because usually the cities are large enough to permit moving to another section if it does materialize. "There is usually a sufficiently large Catholic Negro population to offer a substitute field for social and professional contacts."²¹

Secret Societies

As a final deterrent to the Roman Catholic faith a word must be also said about Negro secret societies. When a member of a secret society wishes to join the Roman Catholic Church, the lodge often exerts considerable pressure

¹⁹Thomas F. Doyle, "Negroes in the Church," Homiletic and Pastoral Review, XLVIII (May, 1943), 594.

²⁰John T. Gillard, "Catholicism and the Negro," Interracial Review, XII (June, 1939), 89.

²¹Gillard, op. cit., p. 177.

to prevent him from doing so. Even if Negroes are not concerned about the business or social advantages to be lost should they give up the lodge,

there is the possible pecuniary loss entailed by giving up membership in such societies, the majority of which are primarily fraternal or insurance organizations carrying sick and death benefits. . . . To the average Negro, never very well off financially, the monetary sacrifice of relinquishing membership in secret beneficial societies becomes a tremendous and frequently insuperable obstacle in the way of conversion.²²

Thus, it can be seen that the priest desiring to convert the Negro faces no easy task. As if these obstacles in the Negro himself are not bad enough, the Roman Catholic missionary also faces severe hindrances in his own church body. It is these that will be considered next.

²² Ibid., pp. 177-178.

CHAPTER IV

OBSTACLES WITHIN THE ROMAN-CATHOLIC CHURCH

Prejudice of Laymen

In spite of all statements and denials to the contrary, the greatest difficulty to the conversion of the American Negro lies in the prejudice of many white Roman Catholic laymen.¹ No less an authority than John LaFarge is forced to conclude:

The Catholic missionary to the Negro in the United States must fight on two fronts: to bring the Gospel to the Negro, but also to bring the same Gospel to the prejudiced minds and hearts of some of their own Catholic white brethren in this country.²

The well-known Roman Catholic historian, Theodore Maynard, feels that part of this deep-rooted feeling against the Negro may be due to early Irish antagonism towards the Negro.³ The large influx of Irishmen coming to this country in the early part of the Nineteenth Century and bringing with them little else but their muscles, often found themselves in competition with free black labor in the North. Contractors seeking laborers for the many railroad and canal projects then a-building cared little about the color of man's skin so long as he would work long and hard for as little as possible.

Actual labor riots broke out in many cities between white and colored

¹"Invitation and a Challenge: Conversion of the American Negro," Inter-racial Review, XXVI (April, 1953), 59.

²John LaFarge, "Josephite Jubilee of Work for Negro," America, LXIX (June 5, 1943), 237.

³Theodore Maynard, The Story of American Catholicism (New York: The MacMillan Company, c. 1941), p. 387.

laborers seeking these jobs.⁴ Since many of the rioters were nominally Roman Catholic, it is little wonder that the Negro was not attracted to a church so many of whose members showed such open hostility. Gillard concludes:

What started out as competition between two labor groups soon developed into antagonism of the Negro for the Catholic Church because so many of the white labor groups were Catholic.⁵

One wonders whether this race prejudice rooted in economic rivalry is altogether a thing of the past. Early in 1943, for example, a housing project known as the Sojourner Truth was assigned to Negroes in Detroit for occupancy. Serious race riots immediately occurred.

Opposition came mainly from the solidly Polish population of the neighborhood, and rightly or wrongly the Negroes felt that the opposition was being lead by the nearby pastors. As a consequence, NAACP literature in Detroit, even after almost two years, continues to identify the "Polish Catholics" as one of their principal sources of opposition.⁶

The notorious Cicero riots of recent years are another case in point.

Father Hugh Callias, well-known Chicago priest, was quoted as saying:

Last month's riot proved just how bigoted many Catholics are.... The (Cicero) neighborhood and the mobs were filled with Catholics. Priests were strangely silent and lay people cooperated in evil or stayed far away.... Only God knows the sins of hate and injustice committed and the grave injuries done Christ's Church among possible Negro converts.

In the Trumbull Park public housing riots in the grimy steel district on Chicago's south side race rioters have also been active. Time Magazine stated recently:

⁴ John T. Gillard, Colored Catholics in the United States (Baltimore: The Josephite Press, 1941), p. 41.

⁵ Ibid., p. 40.

⁶ Leo J. Trese, "Saint Philip, Pray for Us Catholic Negroes!" Commonweal, LII, (February 2, 1945), 405.

⁷ "Cicero Riot," Commonweal LIV (August 24, 1951), 482.

Last month, as Betty Howard, 22, left the 11:30 Mass at St. Kevin's Church, some 40 people congregated outside, most of them also coming from the services. The group shouted insults and threats, and six shrieking women followed Mrs. Howard all the way home, throwing small stones at her.⁸

Mrs. Howard is the light-skinned Negro wife of Don Howard whose move into the housing project in the summer of 1953 touched off the race riots which at times have necessitated as many as 1,000 policemen on around-the-clock duty in the Trumbull Park area ever since.

Roman Catholic animosity to the Negro is not limited to the laboring class, however. Recently the Most Rev. Floyd L. Begin, auxiliary bishop of Cleveland asserted, according to America, the "the treatment of Negroes in Cleveland by Knights of Columbus has reached the proportions of a scandal among Negro Catholics."⁹ Deeply shocked that three prominent Roman Catholic Negroes had been refused admission by the Cleveland Knights of Columbus, the bishop asserted: "Either I have to say that the Negroes are second-rate Catholics or I must say the Knights are not acting as Catholics." The article in America goes on to say that the Cleveland pattern, happily, is not universal but that nevertheless

the racist pattern is sufficiently widespread among the Knights to cause anxious questioning among Negro Catholics, and among prospective Negro converts to the Catholic faith about the real attitude of the Church itself.¹⁰

All the examples cited above are not just isolated cases of racial hatred. Repeatedly while preparing this thesis I ran across many instances of lay animosity and prejudice. A Jesuit priest writing in Integrity mentions cases like these which he has personally investigated:

⁸"Seven Month's War," Time, LXIII (March 1, 1954), 19.

⁹"Knights and Negroes," America, XCI (March 13, 1954), 618.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 618.

A Negro Catholic with a compound fracture of the leg refused even emergency service at a Catholic hospital because its pediatrics care was for white children only; Negro patients assigned to make-shift, hole-in-the-basement wards; pastors of colored churches who were desperately trying to keep colored Catholic unmarried mothers from going to abortionists because the Catholic home for unwed mothers was for white only; Catholic colored orphans placed in public institutions and lost to the faith because the authorities feared a loss of revenue at the orphanage if it were interracial. ¹¹

In one city where a quiet, well-educated Negro Roman Catholic moved into a neighborhood that was more than 90 per cent Roman Catholic, their white neighbors, instead of welcoming them, destroyed their furniture as it was being unloaded from the van, stoned their windows, and threatened their safety. In desperation the middle-aged couple had to call a police guard that was on duty twenty-four hours a day at their home. On Sunday, the police escorted them to the neighborhood church where they attended Mass with neighbors who would not let them live in peace. The bishop of the city said the interracial apostolate there was set back fifteen years as a result. ¹²

Perhaps the most shocking instance of Roman Catholic lay prejudice discovered while preparing this thesis was that of a white man who, when he discovered a Negro at the communion rail beside him turned and snarled: "Get out of here, you d___ nigger!" He knocked him away from the rail, down the chancel steps, and onto the floor. An usher hurried over and hustled the Negro out of the church for disturbing the peace! The white man remained and received communion! ¹³

Other sad examples of lay prejudice could also be cited, practically all of them taken from Roman Catholic sources, by the way, but these will suffice.

¹¹ Albert S. Foley, "Glimpses of the Interracial Apostolate," Integrity, V (November, 1950), 6.

¹² Ibid., p. 5.

¹³ Ibid., p. 4.

Even where racial discrimination is not practiced so openly, it may assume more subtle forms. One Negro convert to Roman Catholicism thinks that behind the generosity of some rich Roman Catholic parishes in supporting Negro churches in the slums is the fear that unless they do, the Negroes might move into their parish. She calls it "a shrewd investment in race discrimination --a cheap way to keep the Negro happy 'in his place', viz., in the slums."¹⁴

That the Roman Catholic Church is not unaware of the wide disparity between its doctrine and practice is shown by the extensive survey on Roman Catholic attitudes toward the Negro conducted by the Committee on Catholic Opinion Study in the Department of Sociology at the Catholic University of America in 1949.

The poll was administered to Roman Catholics in most major areas of the United States and 2,186 usable returns were obtained. The following six opinions were investigated:

1. This country has already done too much for the Negro.
2. We should be willing to let Negroes share our churches the same as anybody else.
3. We should be willing to let Negroes share our schools the same as anybody else.
4. Negroes should be allowed to compete fairly for the same job with white people.
5. Negroes should be allowed to buy or rent homes any place they want to.
6. We should do all we can to help the Negro but he should keep his place.¹⁵

The vast majority of the respondents approved of helping the Negro, only 4.8 per cent answering question one in the affirmative. The second statement received a favorable response in 86.5 per cent of all replies; the third item a

¹⁴ Alice Renard, "A Negro Looks at the Church," Commonweal, XLVI (June 13, 1947), 212.

¹⁵ Thomas J. Harte, "Scalogram Analysis of Catholic Attitudes toward the Negro," American Catholic Sociological Review, XII (June, 1951), 69.

favorable response from 77.4 per cent. But on the fourth question, dealing with jobs, one-third expressed an unfavorable attitude (35.6 per cent), which shows the importance of economic aspects to the race question. Only 38 per cent approved item five and 62 per cent disapproved. The writer of the report states: "This item [no. 5] was obviously beyond the racial tolerance of many." The last item received a favorable response from only 17.1 per cent. This may be significant although the author tried to explain it by saying:

this unfavorable reaction may be explained partially, perhaps, by its close proximity to the question on freedom of residence for the Negro... or perhaps some unthinkingly used the same symbol as in previous items... It is not unlikely, however, that the net result of such special investigations would be that approximately 83 per cent of the Catholics in this universe believe that the Negro should keep his place.¹⁶

Concededly, care must be taken not to draw too general conclusions from a poll of this kind but certainly its findings are interesting and revealing and furnish further insight into the formidable barriers which must be overcome before the Negro may be won in large numbers to the Roman Catholic Church.

A reprint of an editorial from The Record, a Roman Catholic paper in Louisville, Kentucky, analyzes the present problem as follows:

There isn't the slightest doubt that one of the principal obstacles blocking the progress of the Negro Apostolate in this country is the racial prejudice betrayed by so many white Catholics who pay mere lip service to the teachings of the Church on the dignity and equality of all men in Christ.

How can we expect our non-Catholic Negroes to be impressed by, or attracted to the teachings of the Church when people who are practicing Catholics are evidently unimpressed and uninfluenced by those teachings? ... In brief, the Catholic Church's conspicuous race prejudice is helping to keep away from Christ souls for whom he died.¹⁷

¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 66-74.

¹⁷ "Negro and the Church," Interracial Review, XXI (April, 1948), 58.

Prejudice or Indifference of Clergy and Religious

Almost incredible, were it not also for the evidence to the contrary, is the widespread indifference and aloofness if not downright prejudice against the Negro shown or expressed by many Roman Catholic clergymen. That strong racial feelings might be held by laymen is understandable but that such attitudes are manifested on the level of the priesthood seems doubly tragic and inexcusable. At least one Roman cleric voices the charge that the attitudes and words and acts of priests and religious are the greatest obstacles in converting the Negro.¹⁸

A young Negro Roman Catholic attending Mass in Cleveland one Easter found a pew close to the front only to have the three white people in it get up and move elsewhere when he entered. Not wishing to create a scene, he moved to the rear of the church, seeing room in a pew reserved for some religious brothers. Thinking they would understand, he went and sat there. But rather than let him share their pew, they got up and stood in the aisle. Such final humiliation on the part of the religious because of his race was too much for the patience of the Negro and he left in the middle of the Mass.¹⁹

Jesuit Albert Foley writes in Integrity:

I have personally investigated numerous cases where Catholic Negroes had been driven from the confessional by priests who refused to hear them in a "white" church; where Catholic Negroes had been ejected forcibly from church by ushers, and in one instance by two policemen called by the pastor; where bitterly anti-Negro pastors refused to go across the street to administer the last Sacraments to a dying Negro Catholic woman, or to answer a sick call from a Negro patient in the hospital near the rectory; where Negroes sitting in church have been

¹⁸ D. J. Corrigan, "Plight of Catholics," Homiletic and Pastoral Review, XLVIII (October, 1947), 45.

¹⁹ George Williams, "The Awful Truth," Catholic Digest, III (March, 1939), 81.

challenged from the pulpit to leave and go to "their own" church; and where others have been given printed cards telling them the address of the Negro Catholic church where they would be served.²⁰

A nun was heard to remark after colored students of a Roman Catholic high school presented a religious drama that "she was shocked that a Negro girl would dare to act the part of the Blessed Virgin."²¹

In one Roman Catholic church in Chicago a priest urged his people from the pulpit to keep Negroes from moving into the parish because the property values of church and school might thereby be lowered.²² It is readily understandable that not a few Negro Roman Catholics in the city were upset over such advice.

It might be argued that the above instances represent isolated cases and in no wise indicate a widespread antipathy toward or prejudice against the Negro on the part of the Roman Catholic priesthood. Admittedly, it would be most rash and unwise to base one's judgment on the few examples cited. More significant for our purposes, perhaps, are the comparatively few religious orders or communities admitting Negro members. In 1950, seventeen diocesan seminaries, fifty-two religious seminaries, and twenty-five congregations of nuns accepted Negro candidates. But according to totals in The Official Catholic Directory, that meant that forty-seven diocesan seminaries, 285 religious communities, and 209 congregations of nuns did not.²³ The Rev. Claude Heithaus, S. J., concludes: "Add it all up, and it looks like what? White supremacy

²⁰ Foley, op. cit., pp. 4-5.

²¹ Corrigan, op. cit., p. 45.

²² Casimir Marcevicus, "Prudence and Our Negro Catholics," Inter-racial Review, XXIV (January, 1951), 9.

²³ Claude M. Heithaus, "Does Christ Want this Barrier?" America, LXXXVII (February 11, 1950), 546.

masquerading as Christianity. And don't imagine that Negroes haven't noticed it."²⁴

Gillard complains bitterly about the lack of interest in colored missions by many religious communities of priests and nuns and for confining their efforts largely to more favored classes of men. He asserts:

converting the converted, while millions of souls are hungering for the crumbs of the Bread of Life... they are not accepting wholly the command of Christ to 'teach all nations."²⁵

The fault for this lies "in the cold fact [that] many... are not alive to the challenge or the duty."²⁶

As a result of this attitude, it still remains true that scarcely half a dozen communities of priests and about a dozen communities of nuns are carrying the larger burden of the Roman Catholic colored missions in this country.²⁷

Lack of Colored Priests

Closely linked with the prejudice of the Roman Catholic clergy is the lack of colored priests to minister to those of their own race. Theodore Maynard points out in his book bearing the imprimatur of Cardinal Spellman himself:

few colored men have sought admission to the priesthood, for no encouragement has been given them to do so. Unquestionably more would have come forward were they not afraid of being snubbed for their presumption.²⁸

²⁴ Ibid., p. 547.

²⁵ Gillard, op. cit., p. 256.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 256.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 257.

²⁸ Maynard, op. cit., pp. 333-339.

This absence of a native clergy is another hindrance to conversions among colored people for, as one Roman Catholic author points out, it creates the impression that the Roman Catholic Church thinks that Negroes are not qualified to enter the ranks of the clergy.²⁹

Though an impartial survey has revealed that educationally colored priests compare favorably with any similar clerical group selected at random from almost any diocese or religious order,³⁰ during the entire period from 1854 to 1953 only sixty-eight colored priests were ordained into the Roman Catholic Church. Included in that group are seven who came from outside the territorial United States, such as, for example, the West Indies.³¹ Thus, only sixty-one native American Negroes have ever entered the ranks of the Roman Catholic clergy. Of these, thirty-one have come from below the Mason-Dixon line, twenty-one from the Northeast, seven from the Midwest, and two from the Far West. Louisiana has furnished the largest number, seventeen.³² During the eighty year period from 1854 to 1934 only fourteen Negro priests were ordained.³³

In answer to the objection that the colored do not necessarily prefer priests from their own race, most evidence seems to point to the contrary, provided they are as well-educated as a white priest.³⁴ "For things of the spirit," LaFarge writes, "they feel that only a black minister who has the same

²⁹ Casimir Marcevicus, "Negro Priests and Seminarians," Interracial Review, XXIV (September, 1951), 138.

³⁰ Albert S. Foley, "God's Men of Color," Interracial Review, XXVI (July, 1953), 119.

³¹ Ibid., p. 114.

³² Ibid., p. 119.

³³ Marcevicus, op. cit., p. 138.

³⁴ Foley, op. cit., p. 121.

peculiar relation to God as they have themselves can give help and comfort."³⁵
 When Father Burgess, a colored priest, first came to Washington, D. C., his parish told him: "You are as welcome as the flowers of May."³⁶

It was not until 1920 that anything was done to increase the number of colored Roman Catholic priests. In that year, the Society of the Divine Word founded a seminary exclusively for Negro priests. A Father Christman was instrumental in starting the institution. Nine students enrolled the first year. However, local opposition was so strong in Greenville, Mississippi, where the seminary was started, that three years later it had to be moved to its present location, Bay St. Louis, Mississippi, a town almost wholly Roman Catholic and about fifty miles from New Orleans.³⁷ But the first class did not finish until 1934 when four priests were ordained.³⁸

The late Pope Pius XI, on the occasion of the founding of St. Augustine's Seminary in Bay St. Louis, laid great stress on the absolute necessity of a colored clergy if the American Negro is ever to be won to the Roman Catholic Church.³⁹ His dream is still far from reality and it may be many years yet before colored priests in any appreciable numbers enter the ranks of the Roman Catholic clergy since there are today only thirty-five Divine Word seminarians and clerical novices and eighty-four Negro preparatory students for the priesthood.⁴⁰

³⁵ E. Franklin Frazier, "Human, All Too Human," Survey Graphic (January, 1947), p. 74.

³⁶ Foley, op. cit., p. 121.

³⁷ Harry Sylvester, "Negro Seminary: Techy Fathers Persevere at Their Task of Preparing Colored Priests," Commonweal, XXXIII (April 11, 1941), 615.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 616.

³⁹ Joseph Eckert, "Negroes and the Catholic Church," Catholic Mind, XXXVIII (May 22, 1940), 186.

⁴⁰ The Official Catholic Directory 1953, edited by Louis Kenedy (New York: P. J. Kenedy & Sons, c. 1953), p. 688.

Other obstacles to the conversion of the Negro to Roman Catholicism, though undoubtedly minor in comparison to those previously mentioned, nevertheless must be listed to complete the picture. These include the intellectual type of service characteristic of the Roman Catholic Church, non-ownership of church property on the part of the members, and the lack of social life in the church.

Intellectual Type of Church Service

To what extent the Roman Catholic order of service is a hindrance is a moot question. There are those who think it makes little difference, others who feel that it actually attracts, and still others who are of the opinion that it is a block to winning greater numbers. No less an authority than Gillard concludes: "It is difficult for a more dignified and doctrinal religion like that of the Catholic Church to have appeal for the masses [of Negroes]." ⁴¹

Non-ownership of Church Property

Having been propertyless during most of his life in America, it is understandable how the Negro would take special pride in owning his own church buildings. It is Roman Catholic policy, however, to vest the title to property in the total church instead of the local congregation. And so the Negro is deprived "of one of the deepest sources of satisfaction in his corporate religious life." ⁴²

⁴¹ John T. Gillard, The Catholic Church and the American Negro (Baltimore: St. Joseph's Society Press, 1929), p. 235.

⁴² Willard L. Sperry, Religion in America (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1946), p. 187.

Lack of Social Life in the Church

Another peculiarity of the church among colored people is its wide social function. For many Negroes, their whole social life centers in the church because they have few other places to go and meet their friends.⁴³ In the past, the Roman Catholic Church has not given the Negro as much of a social outlet as he found in many Protestant churches and consequently another obstacle was placed in the way of winning the Negro.

⁴³ Gunnar Myrdal, An American Dilemma, The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy (New York: Harper & Brothers, c. 1944), II, 867.

CHAPTER V

MEASURES TO BREAK DOWN NEGRO HOSTILITY

Thus far we have considered the many obstacles which confront the Roman Catholic Church in its mission efforts to win the Negro. It was shown that the situation is far from auspicious and that difficulties are most formidable. The Roman Catholic Church is well aware of this, however, and straining its collective ecclesiastical muscles to alleviate or remove many of these difficulties.

Interracial Councils

One of the agencies which the Church is using to dispel Negro anti-Catholic bias as well as to combat anti-Negro prejudice among Roman Catholics and the American public generally is the interracial movement which was set up in 1934. It consists of councils of Negro and white Roman Catholics in key cities throughout the United States and has been growing steadily in prestige and influence ever since the parent council was begun in New York thirty years ago. Today, there are Interracial Councils in Baltimore, Brooklyn, Chicago, Columbus, Ohio, Detroit, Greensboro, North Carolina, Hartford, Indianapolis, Los Angeles, New Haven, New Orleans, Philadelphia, Providence, Rock Hill, South Carolina, Saginaw, St. Louis, San Antonio, Syracuse, Washington, D. C., Wilmington, and Springfield, Massachusetts.¹

¹"Catholic Negro Missions in the United States," The 1954 National Catholic Almanac, edited by Felician A. Foy (Paterson, New Jersey: St. Anthony's Guild, c. 1954), pp. 447-448.

Besides the purposes mentioned above, some of the aims of the councils are to help the Negro better understand the Roman Catholic Church, support programs for the improvement of the Negro's political, social, and economic conditions, and in general foster better race relations between Negroes and whites.² The program of the councils is primarily one of education and aided by the monthly publication of the Interracial Review, a magazine put out by the New York council. It highlights the progress being made in remedying the Negro's plight and exposes and condemns the many social injustices inflicted upon him.³

To help carry out these aims the New York council maintains a speakers' bureau to provide white and Negro speakers for other Roman Catholic organizations, sponsors bi-monthly interracial masses and communion breakfasts, conducts weekly forums attended by both white and colored who discuss various aspects of the race problem, maintains a library and reading room dealing especially with interracial topics, and cooperates with other associations in promoting legislation bettering the condition of the colored, for example, a permanent FEPC bill.⁴

One of the results of the formation of the Interracial Council in New York was a great change in the attitude of the Negro press toward the Roman Catholic Church. It had formerly been very critical of the Roman Catholic Church and its work but now has adopted a much more favorable tone.⁵ And without a doubt,

²Thomas F. Doyle, "Negroes in the Church," Homiletic and Pastoral Review, XLVIII (May, 1948), 593.

³Foy, op. cit., p. 447.

⁴Patricia McGerr, "Signposts for the Future," Interracial Review, XXI (March, 1948), 43.

⁵Ibid., p. 41.

thoughtful Negroes are being attracted to the church and giving it at least a hearing, feeling that a group which is devoting its time and effort to improve the temporal welfare of the Negro deserves or merits their attention in spiritual things as well.⁶

One disadvantage, nevertheless, must be mentioned. Though undeniably creating interracial understanding and contact on the local level, the councils appeal chiefly to middle-class and better-educated colored and white Roman Catholics and thus fail to reach the masses.⁷ Their effectiveness, consequently, is limited.

Similar to the interracial council movement is the Catholic Committee of the South which includes in its program social reforms, improvements in agriculture and industry, leadership training, programs for youth, and intensification of Roman Catholic activity in the South.⁸

Social Welfare Work

Perhaps more effective in reaching the masses of Negroes with the church's program and message has been its social welfare program, a notable example of which are the Friendship Houses organized by Baroness Catherine de Hueck in Harlem and Chicago in 1938 and 1942, respectively.⁹ Fides House in Washington, D. C., established in 1940, is a similar institution.¹⁰

⁶"More Negroes Turn to the Church," Interracial Review, XXV (February, 1953), 21.

⁷Thomas J. Harte, Catholic Organizations Promoting Negro-White Relations in the United States (Washington, D. C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1947), p. 155.

⁸Foy, op. cit., p. 445.

⁹Harte, op. cit., p. 62.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 65.

These houses operate basically on the settlement house plan in Negro slum areas and have as their purposes

to work for and with the poor, to alleviate their sufferings, and disabilities by material assistance and personal services, thus making it possible for them to know and love Christ better. The salvation of individual souls is the ultimate goal toward which all else is directed.¹¹

Staff workers are mainly white and female with some volunteer and part-time workers. The staff workers of Friendship House work without pay, practice poverty to an extreme degree, and live in the area in which they serve. They distribute second-hand clothing to the poor, give food or food tickets to needy families, engage in vocational placement and health care on a limited scale, hold regular instruction classes in Christian doctrine each week, conduct Monday night forums dealing with racial questions to which the public, both white and colored, is invited, and make regular home visits to the needy and to hospitals. They even help with housework, care for children, and do the marketing.¹²

Much emphasis is placed on youth work, it being felt that most positive results can be achieved by rehabilitation of the young.¹³

The interest and sincerity of the Friendship Houses has done much to break down Negro prejudice towards the Roman Catholic Church and build up good will towards it. In the race riot in Harlem in the summer of 1943, for example, the property of Friendship House suffered no damage while most of the stores in the same block were looted or broken into. Asked about her view of Friendship House, a colored girl said:

¹¹ Ibid., p. 67.

¹² Ibid., pp. 73-101.

¹³ Ibid., p. 85.

Seeing these whites here (staff and volunteer workers) has a good effect--people can see that there are sincere whites. It helps break down opposition to the church too. It is good for the Church because a lot of people just see the priests riding around in big cars, and nuns having three full meals a day, and they think the Church isn't interested in them because they have nothing. But here they see the Church can be poor too and be interested in the poor.¹⁵

Roman Catholic charitable endeavors in behalf of the Negro, however, are far from limited to those merely of the Friendship House variety. Numerous hospitals, medical and maternity clinics, orphanages, homes for delinquent girls, and day nurseries have been established exclusively for Negroes and serve as further points of contact between the colored and the Roman Catholic Church and via Negro good will and confidence.¹⁶

Especially noteworthy is the famous City of St. Jude, founded to St. Jude, the Saint of the Impossible, and built by Father Harold Purcell in Montgomery, Alabama. He began his work in Montgomery by opening a small clinic in a slum area. Gradually a school was added and later a hospital built with a federal grant-in-aid of \$1,500,000. When Father Purcell died in October, 1952, he had completed nearly twenty years in the Negro Apostolate and left a \$5,000,000 monument, the City of St. Jude, as a memorial to his concern for the Negro.¹⁷

Behind the establishment of all these many charitable institutions lies the Roman Catholic strategy of implementing its mission program with concrete evidences of concern and sympathy for the Negro. Indeed, many are of the opinion that the mission to the Negro can no longer be carried out along purely spiritual lines alone but that it must be augmented by a social welfare

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 107.

¹⁶ Supra, p. 2.

¹⁷ "The Beggar of St. Jude," Interracial Review, XXV (November, 1952), 187.

program.¹⁸ Proponents of this policy argue that social work is necessitated by the fact that the Negro judges the church by the work it performs. Although Gillard cautions not to lose sight of the primary function of the church and become too optimistic about the spiritual returns on welfare investment,¹⁹ it must be acknowledged that the investment has borne considerable fruit. Frazier, well-known authority on the Negro, goes so far as to say that many urban Negroes in the North were attracted to the Roman Catholic Church in the early thirties because of the aid given to them in their economic distress.²⁰

That it "pays" as far as breaking down Negro anti-Catholic bias is undeniable, that it is helping to win converts is also undisputable, but that the social welfare program bears returns commensurate with the huge outlay of funds involved is a moot question.

Liberal Integration Policy

Another effective means of allaying Negro animosity toward the Roman Catholic Church has been the introduction in recent years of a more liberal integration policy in both churches and schools. In this respect the Roman Catholic Church is far ahead of the rest of the church bodies in the country. Such action on the part of the Roman Catholic Church has met with some opposition, it is true, but in the end church authorities feel confident that it gains for them more friends than enemies. Especially interesting in this connection are the well-known St. Louis and Newton Grove cases. Because they illustrate so well Roman Catholic policy and procedure, they will be considered in greater detail.

¹⁸"Negro Mission Report, 1950," Interracial Review, XXIII (March, 1950), 36.

¹⁹John Thomas Gillard, Colored Catholics in the United States (Baltimore: The Josephite Press, 1941), p. 223.

²⁰E. Franklin Frazier, The Negro in the United States (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1949), p. 363.

In the summer of 1948, Most Rev. Rev. Joseph L. Ritter, Archbishop of St. Louis, discovered that a number of parochial schools in the Archdiocese had been affected by the migration of both white and Negro Roman Catholics. Some schools were overcrowded and it was necessary to consider the establishment of two sessions to provide for all who had applied for admission. Other parish schools, however, in less crowded areas of the city had many half empty classrooms.

After studying the matter, the Archbishop realized that adequate provision for all pupils could be had if Negro children were permitted to attend parochial schools in parishes in which they lived instead of attending segregated schools as formerly. He announced to all pastors that the change would take place at the opening of the school year in September.

His decision met with violent opposition on the part of many white Roman Catholic parents. They even went so far as to raise several hundred dollars and engaged an attorney to appeal to the courts for an injunction restraining their Archbishop from proceeding with his plans.

But the Archbishop did not flinch or falter. He warned his opponents that their opposition would expose them to penalty of excommunication. In the face of that drastic threat, the committee disbanded and turned over their remaining funds to charity. For the first time that fall (1948) Negro pupils entered parochial schools previously accommodating only white children and nothing unusual happened.²⁷

Whereas the St. Louis case involved integration in parochial schools, the Newton Grove, North Carolina, affair had to do with integration in the church.

²⁷ George K. Hunton, "Integration into Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools in the United States," Interracial Review, XXVI (October, 1953), 174-175.

Early in the summer of 1953, Bishop Vincent S. Waters, of Raleigh, North Carolina, decided to merge two parishes in Newton Grove -- one colored, and the other white. The approximately 300 whites of Holy Redeemer parish were told to absorb into their congregation the eighty Negroes of adjacent St. Benedict's Church less than 100 yards distant. In informing his diocese of the projected move, Bishop Waters issued a pastoral letter to be read from every pulpit in his diocese. It read in part:

So that in the future there can be no misunderstanding on the part of anyone, let me state here as emphatically as I can: There is no segregation of races to be tolerated in any Catholic Church in the Diocese of Raleigh. The pastors are charged with the carrying out of this teaching and shall tolerate nothing to the contrary. Otherwise, all special churches for Negroes will be abolished immediately as lending weight to the false notion that the Catholic Church, the Mystical Body of Christ, is divided. Equal rights are accorded, therefore to every race and every nationality as is proper in any Catholic Church and within the church building itself everyone is given the privilege to sit or kneel wherever he desires and to approach the Sacraments without any regard to race and nationality. This doctrine is to be fully explained to each convert who enters the Church from henceforth in the Diocese of Raleigh.²⁸

He, too, met with a group of dissatisfied parishioners, some of whom tried to force their way into his rectory after Mass one Sunday.²⁹ But he declined to see them collectively, saying he would abide by his decision and having made it, would keep it.³⁰

Ralph McGill, editor of the Atlanta Constitution, in a private spot-check

²⁸ "Bishop Waters' Pastoral," Interracial Review, XXVI (July, 1953), 111-112.

²⁹ For all three Masses on the first Sunday of enforced integration, only fifty-eight people came. "Light in Newton Grove," Time, LXI (June 8, 1953), 104. And on none of the first four Sundays since Bishop Waters' order did more than eighty-four of the combined congregation of 380 show up for Mass. "Cure for the Virus," Time, LXI (June 29, 1953), 43.

³⁰ "Test Case for a Catholic Policy at Newton Grove, N. C.," America, LXXXIX (June 13, 1953), 290.

survey found major approval for the bishop's action with some sharp dissent among the more narrow-minded.³¹

The influence of the Roman Catholic prelate's forthright attitude extended far beyond the confines of North Carolina and helped to give tangible proof to Negroes that the Roman Catholic Church intended to put teeth into its claim of equality and justice for the colored. Such courageous action undoubtedly led Negroes to feel that the Roman Catholic Church was for them and their cause and made them more receptive to the mission appeal of the church.

Liberal Admission Policies in Higher Education Institutions

In addition to fostering a more liberal integration policy in its churches and parochial schools in recent years, the Roman Catholic Church has also adopted such a program for many of its secondary schools, colleges, universities, and nurses training institutions.

A survey by Father Donald Campion, S. J., published in Jesuit Ecclesiastical Quarterly in March, 1951, revealed a substantial number of Negro students in large Roman Catholic universities. Loyola University in Chicago had 214, St. Louis University had 162, and the University of Detroit, 121.³² Surprisingly enough, at St. Louis University where Negroes were admitted for the first time in 1944, enrollment increased 17 per cent instead of dropping as some pessimists had predicted.³³

³¹ Ralph McGill, "North Carolinians Worship Together," Catholic Digest (September, 1953), p. 24.

³² Hunton, op. cit., p. 174.

³³ "Father Roche's Thesis: Catholic Colleges and the Negro Student," Interracial Review, XXI (October, 1948), 156.

Latest statistics available show that of 164 Roman Catholic colleges in the United States, 111 have a real operating policy of unrestricted acceptance of Negro students and seven admit them on restricted basis.³⁴ Since that was over six years ago, no doubt more schools have since opened their doors to colored students.

Of the many Roman Catholic orders, the Jesuits seem to be farthest ahead in encouraging such a liberal admission policy. In the schoolyear of 1948-1949, thirty out of thirty-eight Jesuit high schools and twenty-four out of twenty-eight Jesuit colleges indicated it was their fixed policy to admit Negro students. The number of Negro students in the thirty high schools admitting them was not very large, only thirty-three, but there were 837 Negroes enrolled in the twenty-four Jesuit colleges during that school year.³⁵

This trend toward wider admission of Negro students in Roman Catholic schools is further illustrated in their schools of nursing in recent years. The following chart showing schools reporting Negro nursing students enrolled from 1948-1952 bears this out:³⁶

Year	No. of Schools	Per cent of all Roman Catholic Schools	Total Negro Enrollment
1948	45	12.7%	91
1949	72	30.2%	103
1950	86	24.7%	257
1951	105	30.1%	323
1952	115	34.5%	369

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 155.

³⁵ Martin J. Neylon, "Negro Students in Jesuit Schools and Colleges, a Statistical Interpretation," *Interracial Review*, XXII (February, 1949), 24-25.

³⁶ Margaret Foley, "Negro Students: A Comparative Study of Enrollments in Catholic Schools of Nursing," *Hospital Progress*, XXXIV (November, 1953), 67.

Note especially the figures in the bottom line. While little more than 10 per cent of all Roman Catholic nursing schools admitted Negroes in 1948, by 1952, only four years later, fully one-third were doing so. Note also the large increase in total Negro enrollment by the year 1952, rising to 369.

It is not necessarily the fault of the church or its policy that two-thirds of the Roman Catholic nursing schools in the country do not admit Negroes. Some hospitals, especially in the South, are forbidden by state law to admit Negro nursing students, and in some instances city ordinances make it impossible.³⁷ Altogether, 152 Negro girls were graduated from Roman Catholic nursing schools in the period from 1948-1952.³⁸

Again we can see that such a trend on the part of the nursing schools cannot help but make a profound impression on Negroes. And, of course, being brought into close contact with Roman Catholic teachings in the process, there can be no doubt that adherents are being won through such a policy.

Outdoor Apostolate

Efforts to reach those Negroes less well educated have not been neglected either. To spread Roman Catholic teachings in areas where the majority of the people have had no contact with the Roman Catholic Church, particularly in the rural sections of the South, the Outdoor Apostolate was organized. Trailer chapels are generally used together with portable movie and public address equipment. This trailer mission activity is carried on from mid-May to mid-September. The missionaries are diocesan or religious priests and at times

³⁷ ibid., p. 66.

³⁸ ibid., p. 68.

laymen. Before invading a town, advance publicity is sent out via the mails throughout the area and posters are placed in vantage points around the town. The site chosen for the nightly services is usually a large field or park, such a spot having proved best adapted to attract a non-Catholic audience. A "stand" may last from four days to two weeks. To attract a crowd, recordings ranging from classical selections to Protestant hymns are played before the evening program.

The pattern followed for the service is generally like this: a talk on some religious topic, religious movies, often with commentary by the priests (a favorite is the old silent picture, King of Kings), a question box period giving the priest opportunity to remove any doubts in the minds of the audience, a closing prayer and hymn. Often after closing the people are invited to inspect the trailer chapel and speak with the priests. Tracts are generously distributed.³⁹

Aim of the trailer missions is not so much the establishment of new missions (though several have been started in that way) as to erase prejudice and misconceptions and resentment in non-Catholic minds concerning the Roman Catholic Church.

Scholarships

As a further means of enlisting Negro good will, the scholarships given Negroes ought not be overlooked. Started in March, 1947, the Catholic Scholarships for Negroes was incorporated in Massachusetts to help Roman Catholic Negroes in furthering their education. Instigators of the plan were a Mr. and Mrs. Putnam. As of September, 1948, twenty-eight young men and women were in denominational colleges through this arrangement.⁴⁰

³⁹ Foy, op. cit., p. 348.

⁴⁰ Caroline J. Putnam, "Catholic Scholarships for Negroes," Interracial Review, XXI (September, 1948), 138.

CHAPTER VI

MEANS OF WINNING CONVERTS

Parochial Schools

Of all the avenues of approach to the Negro thus far discussed, it is readily admitted by nearly all Roman Catholic authorities that the parochial school is the best.¹ Exactly what per centage of converts is gained in this way is hard to determine since statistics are not available but the converts are considerable if the example of Rosary Chapel School in Paducah, Kentucky, is any indication.

In 1947, when the school first started in a modest private residence, there were no more than ten Negro Roman Catholics in the entire city of 32,828. Five years later there were about eighty-five. In the first group of thirty pupils not one was Roman Catholic; of today's enrollment of 150, around forty are Roman Catholic. Most of them became converts at Rosary school. Today the school is housed in a new \$87,000 three-story brick building containing six classrooms and eight grades, living quarters for four Ursuline teacher-nuns, a cafeteria, and a basement auditorium seating about 200. The school is located in the heart of the Negro district and draws pupils from the entire Negro community. Daily Mass and doctrinal instruction are compulsory. One of the reasons pupils come (paying a tuition of \$1.00 a month per student) is that the emphasis is on running a better school than the segregated public schools.²

¹ Priests engaged in the work in Chicago, "Winning Negro Converts," Winning Converts, edited by John Anthony O'Brien (New York: P. J. Kenedy & Sons, c. 1948), pp. 101-102.

² "School for Negroes," Time, LX (September 15, 1952), 79.

Importance of the parochial school can also be seen in the case of St. Charles Borromeo parish in Harlem. There about 350 colored children are taught by Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament. Of the first graders in the school only about 50 per cent are Roman Catholic but the graduating class is generally 100 per cent Roman Catholic. Since the children are not baptized, no matter what their insistence, unless at least one parent is Roman Catholic, one can see the pressure put upon the parents by the children in order to bring the parents into the church.³

That pressure is put upon parents before their children will be accepted into the parochial school is further illustrated in the following promise which must be signed by parents of St. James School in Chicago at the time they enroll their children:⁴

- I promise:
- 1) to attend the 9 o'clock Mass every Sunday with my children;
 - 2) to attend the instruction class every Monday and Friday,

fully realizing that my children will be expelled from St. James School if I do not fulfill these promises.

Father _____

Mother _____

Date: Priest _____

Growth of parochial schools can be seen from the following figures: in 1940 there were 41,056 pupils enrolled in 237 schools of colored missions (roughly one-third of the pupils were non-Catholic).⁵ In 1953 there were 325 elementary

³ H. B. Furay, "Harvest in Harlem," Catholic Digest, XIII (February, 1949) 81.

⁴ O'Brien, op. cit., p. 101.

⁵ John Thomas Gillard, Colored Catholics in the United States, (Baltimore: The Josephite Press, 1941), p. 219.

schools with a reported enrollment of 71,811. So important do Roman Catholic authorities feel the parochial schools are in their mission program that of the nearly \$1,000,000 collected in 1951 for Catholic Missions Among the Colored People and Indians most of the amount was funneled into new school construction.⁶ Gillard declares:

The backbone of the Catholic Mission program for Negro education is the teaching nun. . . . The Catholic mission program of education rests firmly upon her humble shoulders.⁷

Why the school is so important in the church's mission campaign is obvious. Through the school the church makes contact with numerous parents and relatives of the pupils, many of whom are non-Catholics. Prejudices and fears of the church are thus broken down and the way is paved for early entrance of the parents or relatives into the church. When it is realized that of the 900 colored children attending Roman Catholic parochial schools in Chicago several years ago nearly half were non-Catholic but nevertheless required to take religious instructions, the tremendous potential of converts from such endeavors can be easily seen. Whether such converts remain with the church is another question but it would be safe to conclude that many do. And even if the children do not join the church after leaving school they still retain a kindly feeling towards it and later, when of age, usually come back to it.⁸ It will be seen that the Roman Catholic strategy here is "through the children win the parents."

⁶"School for Negroes," Time, LX (September, 15, 1952), 79.

⁷Gillard, op. cit., p. 189.

⁸Joseph F. Eckert, "Methods of Convert-making Among the Negroes of Chicago," The White Harvest, edited by John Anthony O'Brien (New York, London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1927), p. 103.

Converts

Second in the means of winning converts are the converts themselves.

Surely the well-known mission axiom, "converts beget converts," holds true here in a very special sense. Usually more enthusiastic about their new found faith, they create somewhat of a stir in their circle of relatives and friends, occasion the asking of many questions and often invite their non-Catholic friends to come and see what they found in the Roman Catholic Church. This enthusiasm of converts is a tremendous factor in winning adherents to the Roman Catholic faith and simply cannot be overlooked or ignored.

One priest in Chicago makes it a practice to tell the members of his catechumen class that one of the best ways of showing their gratitude to God for their new-found faith is to send at least a hundred others to the instructions. One lady in her late fifties did just that, bringing at least a hundred prospects to the catechumen class. Because of her weak heart, her doctor and priest finally had to tell her to stop her zealous missionary activity.⁹ Another man in Chicago won at least forty converts through his own efforts.¹⁰

Instruction classes are generally quite long and thorough. In St. Charles Borromeo parish in Harlem, for example, where the membership rose from 318 in 1933 to over 6,500 in 1947, instruction classes are held twice a week for three months. Classes are ninety minutes long and must be made up if missed. At the end of the instruction period, the catechumen is examined to test his

⁹ Priests engaged in the work in Chicago, "Winning Negro Converts," Winning Converts, edited by John Anthony O'Brien (New York: P. J. Kenedy & Sons, c. 1948), p. 102.

¹⁰ Eckert, op. cit., p. 101.

knowledge and sincerity. Converts at St. Charles, by the way, average 500 yearly.¹¹

Hard Work and Personality of Priests

In addition to the convert winning influences of the schools and the lay apostolate, a word must also be said about the hard work and personality of the priest working in the colored field. Here especially success or failure depends to a great extent on the winsome and magnetic personality or lack of these qualities in the priest himself.¹² Where the Negro senses a genuine interest and concern for his spiritual and temporal welfare, to such a one he is likely to turn.

Influence of Pageantry Negligible

The question is often raised to what extent the Roman Catholic liturgy and ritual influence the Negro. Though the Negro has a propensity for much color and sound, any widespread use of this form of appeal, Gillard feels, would produce questionable if not harmful results.¹³ The Negro must be won as all other people, by hard work on the part of the missionary. Any hope that the appeal of sound and color alone furnishes the answer to the conversion of the Negro would be gross delusion.

But that in individual cases the effect has been pronounced can be deduced from some of these examples:

¹¹ Milton Lomask, "Pact of Love, the Struggle for Souls in New York's Harlem," The Sign, XXIX (July, 1950), 49-50.

¹² Gillard, op. cit., p. 3.

¹³ John Thomas Gillard, The Catholic Church and the American Negro (Baltimore: St. Joseph's Society Press, 1929), p. 247.

A priest in Chicago writes:

The beauty of our liturgy is so pronounced that it is bound to make an impression upon the Negro mind, which is especially receptive to all such things. . . . The services themselves are carried out with as much solemnity and formality as is possible under given circumstances. The altar boys. . . are trained to perform with military exactitude and uniformity, and with great devotion. ¹⁴

Another author feels that Negroes are fascinated by the statues of the Lord and the saints and that the pageantry enchants them. ¹⁵

Monsignor Drew of St. Charles Borromeo parish in Harlem says that "many young people admit they are captivated by the drama of the statues and the liturgy." ¹⁶

A Negro mother seeking a church home for herself and her children in Chicago was so impressed by the mysterious atmosphere, the soft melodious strains of the organ, and the dignified manner of the priest at the altar in St. Anselm's Church that she soon joined. ¹⁷

These were the only instances discovered regarding the effect of the liturgy on the audience and so, in summing up, it can be concluded that while the liturgy and pageantry may to a degree make an impression upon the listener, their importance as far as conversion is concerned is minor.

¹⁴ Joseph F. Eckert, op. cit., pp. 105-106.

¹⁵ Ellen Tarry, "Why is not the Negro Catholic?" The Catholic World, CL (February, 1940), 544.

¹⁶ Lomask, op. cit., p. 50.

¹⁷ Joseph Eckert, "Negroes and the Catholic Church," Catholic Mind, XXXVIII (May 22, 1940), 182.

CHAPTER VII

PROSPECTS FOR THE FUTURE

In view of the many obstacles confronting the Roman Catholic Church in its mission outreach to the Negro, just what are its chances of success in the future?

That gains are being and will be made is obvious, but that Negroes in any considerable numbers will flock to the Roman banner in the near future seems unlikely.

This view is corroborated by Jesuit Louis Twomey, when he states:

any thought of wide, general conversion of the Negroes to the Catholic Church is an illusion until and unless the attitude of American Catholics -- clergy and laity -- is completely purified of approval of the segregation policy.¹

An indication of the way the younger generation of white Roman Catholics feel toward the Negro is shown in a Master's Thesis written by a St. Louis University student in sociology. He found that the overwhelming majority of the 667 white high school pupils surveyed in St. Louis showed a liberal attitude toward the Negro.² If the collective Roman Catholic heart can be touched with concern and sympathy for the Negro, as the younger generation seems to show, then chances of success for the Roman Catholic missionary cause augurs well. For, make no mistake about it -- prejudices are being overcome, colored priests and nuns are being trained, integration is becoming more widespread, and Negro

¹Louis J. Twomey, S. J., How to Think about Race (St. Louis: The Queen's Work, c. 1951), p. 37.

²Nicholas G. Kaschak, "The Attitude Toward the Negro of 667 St. Louis Catholic High School Seniors," Unpublished Master's Thesis, Department of Sociology, St. Louis University, 1952.

suspicious are being removed. But that the entire Negro population will ever be won to Roman Catholicism is purely visionary in view of the overwhelming majority of Protestant Negroes. The day is not too far distant, however, when the Roman Catholic Church will be much more of a force among the Negro than it is even today. Given the men, the money, and the resources, it could do mighty things.

The last decade especially has demonstrated conclusively that the Roman Catholic Church is on the move in Negro mission work. It remains to be seen whether Protestant church bodies will rise up to meet the challenge.

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