

THE CATHOLIC HOUR

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THE CHURCH AND INTERRACIAL JUSTICE

BY

REV. JOHN LaFARGE, S. J.,

Executive Editor, *America*,

Chaplain, Catholic Interracial Council of New York City

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THE CHURCH AND INTERRACIAL JUSTICE

The present program of the Catholic Hour is devoted to practical topics. When we speak of the Church in Action we are telling a story, and a very great story. We are showing how the Church founded by Jesus Christ is healing the wounds of mankind, like the Good Samaritan of whom the Savior speaks: Counseling the doubtful, consoling the sorrowful, encouraging the hopeful, and strengthening the bonds of human society.

The Church tells man that he has here no abiding home. We are made for eternity, and all the genius and wisdom of all time can make nothing out of this life but a passing pilgrimage. It is a brief time in which to believe, to live, to suffer, and to die. Yet the Church is not indifferent to the conditions of that pilgrimage. Her Divine Founder wrought the miracle of changing water into wine so that the guests at the marriage feast should be merry, that the dignity of matrimony should be symbolized, and the bride and groom would be better prepared, better equipped, to carry out their life-task of building a noble and God-fearing home.

The Church gives answers to the deepest problems of eternity, but she gives practical answers also to those of time, to those problems which affect our spiritual life, af-

fect our love and service of God. One of these problems grows more difficult as the world grows older and more civilized: This is the problem of human unity, the question how the different groups and nations and races of men can learn to live together on the face of this much-troubled globe.

The Church is deeply interested in this question. Her Divine Founder, Jesus Christ, the night before His Crucifixion, prayed the Father in Heaven that all men might be one, as He and His Father are one. Saint Paul, the Apostle of the Gentiles, told the Athenians that God had made of one kind all the nations of the earth, and he reminded his Christian followers that we should all live and treat one another as members of one spiritual Body, whose head is Christ Himself.

So the Catholic Church today teaches that all mankind are one by their very nature. All are children of one Father, all are endowed with the same immortal soul, and are subject to the same rights and obligations. The social teaching of the Catholic Church recognizes no exceptions on the score of race or color when it comes to the question of fundamental human rights.

If we are going to live together

in unity upon the face of the globe we cannot, according to Catholic teaching, make or permit any such exceptions to be made. We say to an employer: Look, here is the father of a family. He has a wife to support, his children to educate, his obligations to perform as a citizen and as member of a Christian community. You must pay him wages sufficient to perform his duty. You, or the community of which you form a part, must see that he has proper conditions for the exercise of family life, proper recreational facilities, proper safeguards for health. But what if the employer replies: Yes, I agree to all that, because this man is of my own race. But when he is a man of another race, I cannot recognize these rights on his part, but must treat him as an inferior. The Church's answer will be: No such exceptions can be made, for they are contrary to human unity. They are a violation, says our present Pontiff, Pope Pius XII, of "the universal law of human solidarity and charity," which is the law of Christ's Kingdom.

The world today, unfortunately, presents a picture very different from that which Christian teaching would like to have realized. It is a world where race is being inflamed against race, where certain races arrogate to themselves the right to dominate over all others.

We have seen the terrible effect of such teaching as proclaimed by Hitler in Europe. The Nazi racism seems to us unbelievable, yet a younger generation is being trained to accept it without question. Witness to its ravages are the graves of Jews and Christians slain in the name of this teaching, in Eastern Europe.

We are not immune from such teaching, and some forms of it have struck deep roots into our national life. Its poison is still capable of rousing a mob to reckless fanaticism.

In view of such a picture, the Catholic Church, with her sublime teaching on human unity, cannot rest indifferent. Interracial justice is her answer, the doctrine which teaches that the relations between racial groups should be governed, not by false theories of essential racial superiorities, but by the Christian teaching as to the spiritual dignity of the individual human person, and the essential unity of mankind.

Within the sacred confines of her temples, the Catholic Church daily enacts a spectacle which is in itself the denial of all that race hatred would proclaim. Before her altars kneel, in complete equality, men of all nations and races. All receive together the sacred Body and Blood of the Lord, and all are united together by the common

sharing of the Savior's Person. To this most sacred and intimate bond of personal intimacy with the God-Man, no bars of race, color, or nationality are tolerated. Her priests are drawn from all races, and black priests offer the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass at Catholic altars here in the United States, equally honored by their own racial brethren and by white Catholics.

But her action is not confined to her church sanctuaries and altars. She goes out into the highways and byways to meet this evil on its own ground, and demands that interracial justice shall be put practically into effect.

No more practical field for such action can be found than that which concerns the situation of the Negroes in this country. A recent survey, made by Catholic students of the problem, showed that the Negro community is a glaring example of the results of neglect and artificially arrested progress. Among the conditions peculiar to the Negro community, reports this survey, are the following:

SEGREGATION: With a growing population, there exists a scarcity of living accommodations, and resultantly higher rents, overcrowding and unhealthy living conditions.

UNEMPLOYMENT. Is found to a far greater extent than found among any other group in Ameri-

can life, with the highest percentage on the relief rolls.

LOW WAGES: Where Negroes are employed, save under the abnormal conditions of war time, they receive, as a rule, a wage much lower than that paid to others for doing the same work. Because the fathers of families are denied a living wage, many mothers are obliged to go out to work to supplement the family income. With both father and mother away from home, the children, left without parental supervision, are the more subject to mischief, delinquency, and crime. Race prejudice denies the Negro employment in jobs for which he is amply qualified. Certain types of labor unions are grievous offenders in this regard.

As a result, the natural leaders of the race are obliged to devote all their efforts for its welfare, and all their energies, to the problem of securing the basic rights and privileges of citizenship. Until these fundamental, natural, and civic rights are granted, the Negro community will be denied the benefits of the leadership of those best qualified to direct the race's progress.

For this reason groups of Catholic men and women, of both races, are working in different parts of the country to remedy such disorders by whatever means are at hand—of public education and constant

representation of those who are in a position to apply the proper correctives. This is but a beginning, a small beginning, in view of the vast amount of work that needs to be done. But it is a vigorous beginning, and the Catholic program for interracial justice is making steady progress, winning wider and wider circles of support among the clergy and the laity of the United States.

You may ask: but is such action realistic? Or is it aiming at a Utopia which can never be attained? How can a change be made in the deep-seated prejudices of men? The answer is that this program is entirely realistic, and that for two good reasons.

The first is that a truly Catholic program must necessarily be realistic. The Church deals with people not as they are imagined to be, but as they are: she deals with living persons, not with masses and abstractions. For that reason interracial justice, as conceived in the Catholic sense, is not satisfied with generalities, but deals with specific problems and the specific prejudices which cause these problems. It believes that people can learn to overcome their prejudices, and that these will yield to education, to the persistent, quiet, but effective presentation of the facts.

On the otherhand, the program for interracial justice takes an im-

portant truth into account. No matter how successfully prejudice is dissipated, this will mean little or nothing unless there is a corresponding progress in the race against which the prejudice is directed. Our country cannot survive, and we can have no special peace, if the Negro and other minority groups are not fully integrated into the life of the country—into our religious life and our civic life. As long as they are burdened with the weight of race prejudice, this integration can never take place. But in order to be fully integrated, the race must be built up, spiritually and materially. It must be educated, and learn to educate itself. It must develop its leaders, strengthen its inner resources. Interracial Justice, therefore, battles on two fronts: a warfare against injustice and prejudice, a campaign for the spiritual and educational progress of the race.

One evening last August I was watching a sight which illustrated the simple truths that I have just spoken. It was the amazing work of salvaging the former ocean liner *Normandie*, now the *Lafayette*.

Out of the ship's hold were being pumped great cascades of water and, as the streams poured over her deck, the immense bulk of the hull was steadily righting itself. A giant measuring rod that hung from the boat's stern down into the water

was slowly, imperceptibly, being pulled higher and higher. Already, by that date, the deck, which had lain over at an angle of ninety degrees, half buried in the Hudson River mud, was now listing at an angle of but some thirty degrees, and soon would be practically horizontal. The wide, dirty, black band which had marked the ship's line of submersion, was now lifted far above the water level. That band was a grim reminder of the fate that had befallen the once mighty vessel; yet was now a pledge of the freedom she would experience again—freedom from that clinging mud, which seemed to mock and baffle all human ingenuity, all mechanical power.

The work of righting the *Normandie* was a triumph of engineering wisdom. Out of 5,000 plans, one was chosen, which was disheartening in its complexity and tediousness. Two great processes had to go hand in hand. The vast bulk of the ship had to be strengthened, girded from within, protected against cracking and breaking. Concrete was poured into her bulkheads, and armies of engineers and workmen planned and welded the bonds that would hold her form together. Yet all the time the work of righting and freeing the ship's hull was proceeding. Nothing was allowed to drift, nothing would have taken place without the steady

forces being applied that once more brought back the *Normandie*, as in former days, upon an even keel.

So with the great work of bringing back to a level the lives of those of our fellow citizens which are submerged in crime or poverty or ignorance because of racial antagonism, the work of freeing these lives from the clinging mud of racial prejudice. The level sought is the level of justice and charity, the freedom sought is that of equal opportunity, whereby a man and his family may sail safely to the port of eternal salvation. As the bonds are loosed, so the fabric of the family and the race must be built up, through the great mission apostolate of the Christian Church, through the work of devoted leaders of both races, through zeal and self-sacrifice and cooperation.

This is a mighty work and a difficult one; but so are all things which are worth while. Is it impossible? Are we to yield to those who clamor that nothing can be done, who cry defeat? I recall the motto of the engineering company which so notably effected the salvage of the *Normandie*. "The difficult things," says the motto, "we do now; the impossible takes a little longer." So, too, in the matter of interracial justice, that which is difficult we shall do at once. That which is impossible will take a little longer; but it will

still be done, for all things are possible to Him whose power knows no defeat, Whose Kingdom is the Kingdom of the ages.

THE CATHOLIC HOUR

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The nationwide Catholic Hour was inaugurated on March 2, 1930, by the National Council of Catholic Men in cooperation with the National Broadcasting Company and its associated stations. Radio facilities are provided gratuitously by NBC and the stations associated with it; the program is arranged and produced by NCCM.

The Catholic Hour was begun on a network of 22 stations, and now carries its message of Catholic truth on each Sunday of the year (and Good Friday) through a number of stations varying from 90 to 107, situated in 40 states, the District of Columbia, and Hawaii. Consisting of an address mainly expository, by one or another of America's leading Catholic preachers, and of sacred music provided usually by a unit of the Paulist Choir, the Catholic Hour has distinguished itself as one of the most popular and extensive religious broadcasts in the world. A current average of 41,000 audience letters a month, about twenty per cent of which come from listeners of other faiths, gives some indication of its popularity and influence.

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