

THE CATHOLIC HOUR

CHRISTIANITY AND INTERRACIAL JUSTICE

AUG 27 1946

The seventh in a series of addresses by prominent Catholic laymen entitled "THE ROAD AHEAD," delivered in the Catholic Hour, broadcast by the National Broadcasting Company in cooperation with the National Council of Catholic Men on July 21, 1946, by G. Howland Shaw, former Assistant Secretary of State. After the series has been concluded on the radio, it will be made available in one pamphlet.

National Council of Catholic Men
Washington, D. C.

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CHRISTIANITY AND INTERRACIAL JUSTICE

In his first Encyclical after his election Pope Pius XII declared:

"Those who enter the Church, whatever be their origin or their speech, must know that they have equal rights as children in the House of the Lord, where the Law of Christ and the peace of Christ prevail."

And again in a magnificent passage of that most magnificent of recent Encyclicals, "The Mystical Body of Christ," the same Pope says:

"Men may be separated by nationality and race, but Our Savior poured out His blood to reconcile all men to God through the Cross and to bid them all unite in One Body. He has taught us not only to have love for those of a different nation and a different race, but to love even our enemies. We chant the length, the width, the height, the depth of the Charity of Christ which neither diversity of race or culture, neither the wasteless tracts of ocean, nor wars, be their cause just or unjust, can ever weaken or destroy."

We read or hear such words. We admire them. We say to ourselves: Yes, that is what I believe. And then we forget

them. Rather should these words make us hang our heads in shame so great is the distance between that in which we claim to believe and a state of things radically at variance with those beliefs for which we cannot escape responsibility. It is a convenient alibi to say that individuals guilty of acts contrary to interracial justice and charity have blundered or were tactless, but they would not have blundered or been tactless if you and I translated our Christian beliefs into practice. And it is easy too to say that these things are very unfortunate, but that there must be a long process of education before they can be changed. That puts our consciences effectively to rest and relieves us of any compulsion for immediate action.

What are we Christians to do?

There are three important things we must do as individuals. Let us at least know just what Christianity teaches with respect to race relations. That is basic. And then let us get some clear picture of what the interracial problem is in this country at the present time. There are countless excellent books, pamphlets and magazine

articles on the subject and they are readily available. They can be supplemented by first hand observation. But we should go further than study and observation. We should make every effort to get beyond such facts as high infant mortality, poor schooling and worse housing and discrimination of all sorts and in the measure that such is possible feel with the victim of discrimination as he or she faces the conditions of living. There must be at least some real emotional identification.

There is a final stage in this preparation of the individual Christian. The human mind is curiously liable to function in water tight compartments and there are undoubtedly many Christians who keep their theology in one compartment and such knowledge of the interracial problems as they possess in a quite different and very much separated compartment. Christian teaching and the realities of that problem must be consciously compared and the incompatibility between them vividly understood. That is the conclusion at which we must individually arrive before we can effectively participate in any useful program of action in the interracial field.

There are many such programs. There is The Interracial Council organized on a religious basis. Today there are Catholic Interracial Councils in New York, Detroit, Los Angeles, Washington, Brooklyn and Chicago. They bring together Negro and white Catholics to know each other, to pray and to work together and to study the implications of their faith with respect to race relations. The members of the Washington Council, for instance, pledge themselves:

“1. To act with equal justice, courtesy and consideration towards white and colored, Jew and Christian.

2. To condemn any discriminatory practice.

3. To fight any interior bitterness that may have resulted from past and present experiences or racial prejudices.

4. To do all in my power to obtain the acceptance of these principles by others.”

To implement this pledge the members of the Washington Council have prepared and use a very specific examination of conscience.

Young children are naturally tolerant and unaware of racial and national differences. Through adult influence the

grow into intolerance and become aware of these differences and they are led into the unchristian interpretation which many adults place upon them. The role of the school therefore in correcting racial and national tensions is of paramount importance and has received wide recognition. However, a greater stress must be placed on inter-cultural relations in our school systems, for American and Catholic principles demand a marked emphasis on interracial justice in the curricula of those schools such, for example, as is found in the Archdiocese of New York, where a very complete syllabus of inter-cultural education was prepared well over a year ago by the Office of the Superintendent of Schools and Fordham University. During the past scholastic year it has been in use in one third of the parish schools of the Archdiocese. The results have been highly satisfactory and at the opening of the school year next autumn the syllabus, revised and made more concrete as a result of teaching experience, will be in use in all of the parish elementary schools of the Archdiocese.

In the field of higher education there are also significant moves to record, Fordham Uni-

versity, for instance, at its School of Social Service has offered during the past year a course in "Community Organization and Cultural Relations" and St. John's University in Brooklyn has given its students the opportunity to enroll in a course in "Interracial Problems and the Principles of the Encyclicals." The School of Social Studies founded in Chicago by Bishop Sheil has likewise made a notable contribution along similar lines.

Two weeks ago, under the auspices of the Social Action Department of the National Catholic Welfare Conference, and with the ardent support and personal interest of the Apostolic Delegate, a Seminar on the Negro Problem was held in Washington. For four days a group of leaders, clerical and lay, Negro and white, discussed all aspects of the problem and arrived at a series of recommendations to stimulate as well as to guide Catholic action in this field.

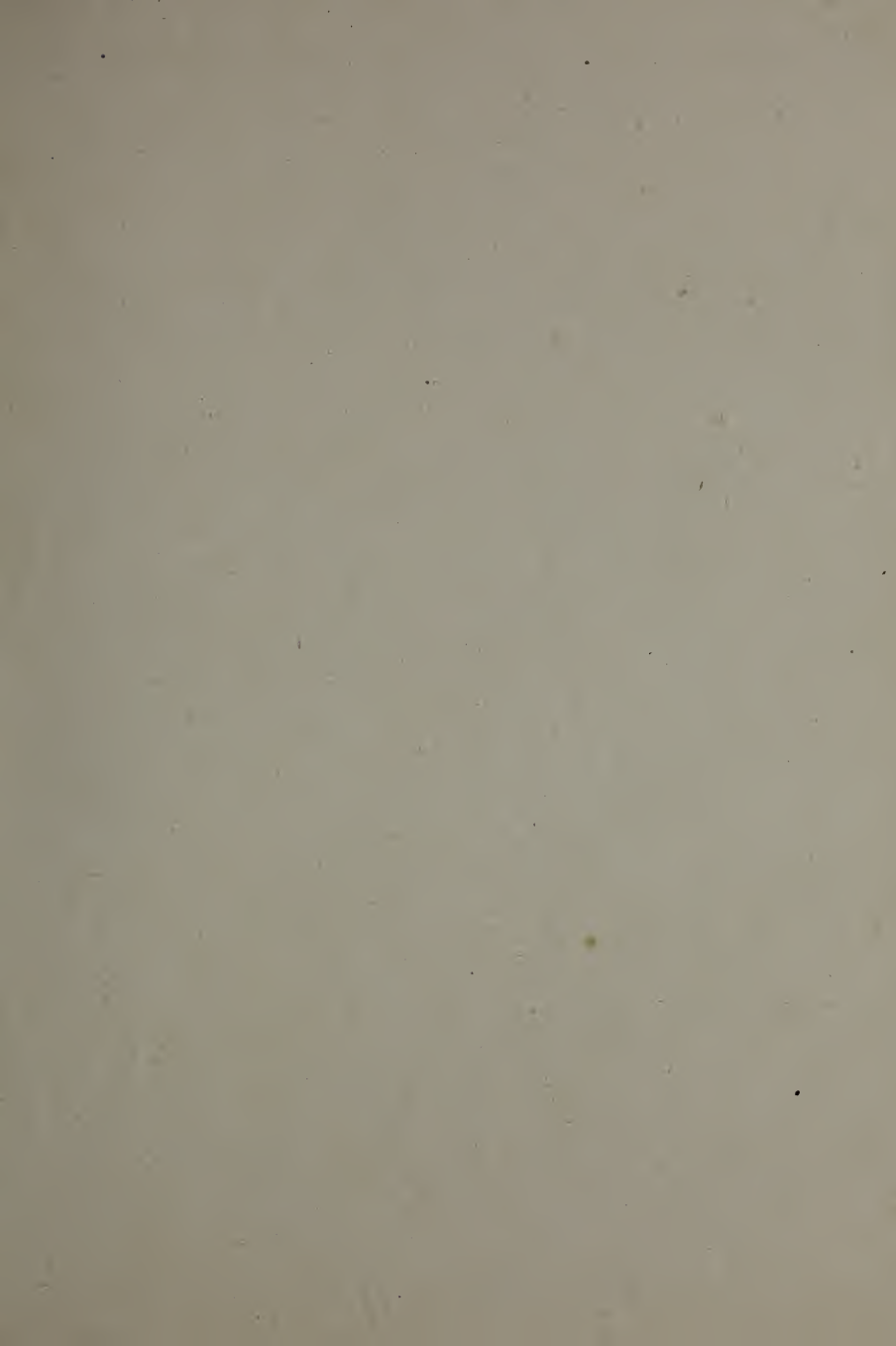
It is notorious that racial tension thrives upon rumors. Dealing with such rumors is, of course, a negative approach but it has its value and importance. As an example may be cited a practice followed by the Back of the Yards Neighborhood

Council in Chicago. The Council has taken a particularly serious view of the danger of irresponsible rumors. On one occasion not so long ago a rumor to the effect that Negroes were causing disturbances on street cars was gaining wide local credence. Three priests, after careful investigation, as a result of riding the street cars, discovered that the rumor was unfounded and so reported from the pulpits of their respective churches on the following Sunday.

These are samples of Christian programs in the interracial field, but there is one more aspect of the problem which must not be forgotten. Events of the past few years have shown that the time has passed when the world of color could be pushed aside and classified as inferior, colonial or uncivilized. That world is in process of taking its rightful place in contemporary life. The process may be long, but it is well advanced. From a Christian and a Catholic point of view it should present no difficulties, religious or intellectual. Catholics do not always realize how Catholic the Catholic Church really is. They are those who are astonished when

they are told that the Church, besides Latin, recognizes Greek, Armenian, Syriac, Slavonic and Coptic as liturgical languages and that the rites in these languages are protected to the point of decreeing excommunication for everybody who encourages a person of an Eastern rite to pass to the Latin rite. They have also perhaps failed to grasp fully the meaning of certain important acts of the present Pope: His consecration of twelve Bishops of different races and nationalities in St. Peter's as one of the first acts of his pontificate, the creation of thirty-two Cardinals representing nineteen different nationalities, including the Chinese, and most recently the change of status of the Catholic Church in China from the missionary category to one of equality with the Church in the United States and Europe.

When we are considering what we as Christians should do in efforts to solve the interracial problem, let us never forget that we shall not be judged by the prudence we display nor by the skill with which we compromise, but by that part of our convictions which we translate into action and with which we challenge the world.



THE CATHOLIC HOUR

1930—Seventeenth Year—1946

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 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 through a number of stations varying from 90 to 110, situated in 40 states, the District of Columbia, and Hawaii. Consisting usually of an address, mainly expository, by one or another of America's leading Catholic preachers—though sometimes of talks by laymen, sometimes of dramatizations—and of sacred music provided by a volunteer choir, the Catholic Hour has distinguished itself as one of the most popular and extensive religious broadcasts in the world. An average of 100,000 audience letters a year, about twenty per cent of which come from listeners of other faiths, gives some indication of its popularity and influence.

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