

Harris Poll!

Blacks Feel the Church Discriminates

By Darrell Turner
Religious News Service

In Florida, frustrations in Miami's black ghetto erupt in rioting and looting. In Indiana, a sniper shoots a nationally known civil rights leader. In California, a Ku Klux Klan organizer and professed white racist wins a congressional primary election.

These recent events demonstrate dramatically that racism remains a major American problem. Some observers have had a sense of *deja vu*, as violent racial incidents have hearkened back to the turmoil of the 1960s. Others are perplexed, wondering why the major gains made in civil rights legislation 15 years ago have not solved the problem.

In 1968, the President's National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorder warned that the United States was "moving toward two societies, one black, one white — separate and unequal." Today, institutional racism continues to be a problem involving structures allegedly unresponsive to the needs and capabilities of minorities.

One crucial aspect of the problem is that whites and blacks have sharply differing perceptions of the nature and extent of racism today. This was documented in an extensive survey prepared by Louis Harris and Associates for the National Conference of Christians and Jews last year.

It found, among other things, that most blacks feel that most white-dominated institutions are either indifferent or hostile to the cause of full equality for blacks. The number of blacks who felt that the federal government helped them dropped from 58 percent under the Kennedy and Johnson administrations to only 13 percent under President Carter.

By contrast, whites in sizeable majorities thought that the federal government, the Army, higher education, courts, Congress, newspapers and state governments had a genuine interest in seeing blacks achieve full equality.

(But whites and blacks both agreed on the "indifference" of real estate firms, police and small and large companies to black aspirations.)

The survey also reported that only 12 percent of blacks believe that white Protestant churches are genuinely committed to full racial equality, while 18 percent have this view of Jewish groups and 28 percent feel this way about the Roman Catholic Church.

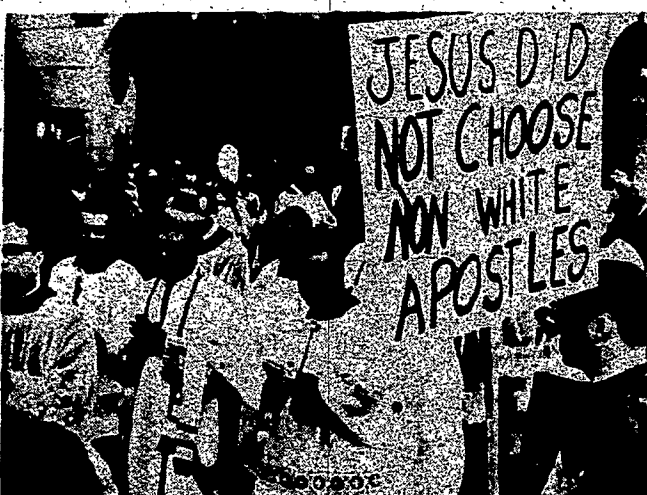
But the program is not going unrecognized in the churches.

A charter for racial justice policies adopted at the United Methodist Church's recent General Conference in Indianapolis asserted that "in principle, the United States has outlawed racial discrimination but, in practice, little has changed."

It maintained that "the institutional church, despite sporadic attempts to the contrary, still discriminates," and that "the racist system in the United States today perpetuates the power and control of those of European ancestry."



In the 1960's, top, an international group of civil rights demonstrators kneel in prayer outside a Protestant church in the south, after being denied entrance to morning services. Below, a picket sign questions the elevation of a black to be a Roman Catholic bishop.



An attempt to amend the wording to stress that "some progress has been made," in combatting racism failed. The Rev. Richard Parker of New York, speaking for the unamended statement, said that although "we can celebrate the changes in the laws," in reality little has changed in the way minorities are treated in the United States.

Last November, the U.S. Catholic Bishops adopted a pastoral letter on racism that urged dioceses and church institutions to take specific steps to counter racism's "dehumanizing impact."

They called for adoption of effective affirmative-action programs in every diocese and Catholic religious institution, examination of investment portfolios to determine if racist institutions and policies are inadvertently being supported,

and establishment of local leadership-training programs for minorities.

Black Auxiliary Bishop Joseph Francis of Newark, N.J., who drafted the pastoral letter issued by the bishops, recently charged that "very few institutions in our country have done less to combat racism than the church, given its mission to witness to Christ's presence among us."

He declared that "people can deal with the avowed racism of the Klan and the neo-Nazis, but they are unwilling to deal with the institutional racism of both the public and private sector."

During a recent consultation on racism held in Cleveland by the World Council of Churches (WCC), representatives of the black, Hispanic, Native American, and Asian American communities asserted that despite the civil rights movement, their conditions are worse today than they were ten years ago.

Discussions during the meeting indicated that future concerns of the churches over racism are likely to focus more on overthrowing institutionalized racism rather than working to improve the interpersonal relations between whites and minorities.

The gathering was one in a series of national consultations on racism held by the WCC in preparation for an international conference June 16-21 at the Leeuwenhorst Congress Center in the Netherlands to set guidelines for how churches can respond to racism in the 1980s.

At the recent Religious Communications Congress in Nashville, a group of blacks, complaining of a "sea of white faces," formed a caucus to challenge the churches to take affirmative action to open positions in communications to blacks. "No other group of persons is invested with so much power to change the world's attitudes, images and values as those persons at this congress," they said. "yet white religious communicators still assume that they alone have been ordained God's messengers and master editors."

The churches did get good marks recently from the Rev. Ben Chavis, paroled leader of the Wilmington 10, who offered his "thanksgiving" for their commitment to social justice and civil rights as demonstrated by their support of his protracted court battle to prove his innocence.

Speaking at the Governing Board meeting of the National Council of Churches in Indianapolis, Rev. Chavis said he emerged from 4½ years in prison without bitterness but "with thanksgiving" for the churches' proven commitment to the cause of social justice. A field worker for the United Church of Christ, Rev. Chavis had been part of a group that was convicted and imprisoned on charges of firebombing a white-owned grocery in Wilmington, N.C., during racial violence in 1971.

While some critics feel that the churches are not doing all they could do to combat racism, most observers agree that the religious community has been at the forefront of efforts to improve the lot of minorities. The very fact that they are still subjected to pressures and criticism indicates that minorities feel they can be effective in helping improve their status.

Fr. Paul J. Cuddy



On the Right Side

Retreats

My uncle is "on retreat." What is a retreat?

Simply, it is a withdrawal from ordinary activities to ponder, pray and to come to some firm resolution. The most famous retreat is the Thirty Day Exercises, fashioned by St. Ignatius of Loyola. It has been given to Jesuit novices from the time of Ignatius at the beginning of novitiate. The Jesuit House in Guelph, Ontario, still gives them to any priest. Father Paul McCabe made one before taking over Lourdes in Elmira.

But I can't be away for 30 days.

Cheer up! There are many retreats tailored to the time available and the needs of retreatants. For example, almost weekly, Notre Dame Retreats in Canandaigua begin Friday at 8 p.m. and end Sunday noon with a light snack. Retreatants are almost unanimous in their praise of the doctrine, the liturgy, the chapel with the Blessed Sacrament, the

devotion to Our Blessed Mother. They praise the spirit of the Redemptorist Fathers and the cherubic Brother Benjamin Beh. They are well impressed by an audiovisual conference by Father Powell, SJ, on Family Life. The beautiful grounds are conducive to prayer and exercise. Compared to 30 days, 54 hours isn't much, but most men can't leave their jobs for a longer time. It is long enough to get a spiritual tune-up; to ponder over God and the purpose of life and death.

How are the meals?

It troubles me that people make a fuss about food, but probably that's because I have a stomach like a camel's, taste buds of an ant-eater, and relish anything set before me. This is more a biological inheritance than an ascetical attainment, though the influence of the valued *Imitation of Christ* by A' Kempis has some bearing on it. However, the meals and housing at Notre

Dame are good. I just phoned Holiday Inn and asked: "What is the cost for two nights, double occupancy, at your motel?" "\$84, sir." "Any discount for senior citizens?" "No sir, \$42 a night." The Retreat House gives two nights, 5 meals, wonderful atmosphere and a solid series of spiritual conferences — all for \$45. It is not enough, but the Fathers have a holy dread lest anyone be discouraged by cost. I think each Father ought to spend a week tending bar in any city or village in the diocese and see how much money flows cheerfully from women and men, who do not complain that a highball is \$1-\$1.50, a bottle of beer is 45 cents, a pack of cigarettes is 60 cents. A cup of coffee anywhere costs from 25-60 cents. The Fathers are too timorous. Let's hope that some day some surprising retreatants will make some fat donations to remember the Retreat House in their will.

You don't mention women's retreats.

From lack of space, not from lack of love. What is said of Notre Dame applies to women's retreats. In Rochester we have the Cenacle run by the Cenacle Sisters. Skaneateles has Stella Maris run by an

energetic Hawaiian, Sister John, and her Franciscans. Our Lady of the Poconos, run by the Bernardine Sisters, is used by the Southern Tier women. Retreats for men are also available at the Trappists at Piffard; the Benedictines at Mt. Saviour, Elmira. Priests and laymen set a few days aside for a private retreat, using the Archbishop Sheen Retreat Conferences, or the equally good but different conferences of Father Basset, SJ.

Are there any weaknesses about retreats?

Yes. 1) Not taking the opportunity to go on retreat. Cursillo, Marriage Encounter, Teen Seminar, etc., are fine, but a one-time experience. A retreat can be annual. 2) Some men, despite the request of the Retreat Master, just won't shut up. They disturb others by their yacking. Women usually are better. 3) Trying too hard to be spiritual. Fr. Basset comments, "Even if a man does nothing but sleep and rest during the retreat he would return home in a charitable frame of mind, and that makes for a good retreat." We recommend sincere retreats for men, women and youngsters, measured to the time, capacity and opportunity of each.

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