

# The Black Church: A Force For Change?

By Darrell Turner

As the problems of black Americans appear to have slid from sight in a conservative political atmosphere, new attention is being paid to black churches as a source of community, a repository of hope and a force for social change.

The black church is perceived as an institution that fosters social progress while adhering to traditional values. Black clergy are found on both sides of questions involving civil rights and political action. Christianity is praised as a liberating force and denounced as a repressive influence in the black community, depending on who is making the evaluation.

Throughout its history, the black church "has been called a crucible for leadership and an opiate of the people, an agent for social change and a conservative force," notes Dr. Alton Hornsby Jr., chairman of the history department at Morehouse College in Atlanta and editor of the Journal of Negro History.

In his view, "the education, aculturation and socialization performed by the black

church stands out as perhaps the greatest contribution to black history in the United States."

But Dr. Hornsby also worries that the role once played by the church in influencing the morals of the black community has been replaced by television and the schools.

"As black literacy rates soar to nearly 90 percent and each black household has at least one and in many cases two television sets, the black church's influence in socialization has been dramatically diminished," he says.

Not everyone agrees. "Blacks support the church more than any other institution," said the Rev. C. Anderson Davis of Houston, director of the National Emancipation Association, a group dedicated to promoting black family life.

Mr. Davis asserts that "even though they may not go to church, blacks identify with some church. It's not hard to get the attention of blacks when dealing with religious concepts."

Change in the black community cannot come about apart from the church is his view. "The church in the black community plays a similar role as the church in the white community, with a plus: It is an integral part of life and death and is inseparable from the black family. Therefore, it must be brought into the making of any plans for change or advancement."

Rep. Louis Stokes of Ohio says he and his brother, Carl Stokes, the former mayor of Cleveland, could not have won office without the help of black clergy.

According to Louis Stokes, "the black church network in America is a sleeping giant" and has the potential for mobilizing black and white leadership for social change.

Dr. Kelly Miller Smith, president of the National Conference of Black Churchmen and assistant dean of the Vanderbilt University Divinity School, said that it is "unfortunate that Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. is increasingly remembered only as a slain civil rights leader." The scholar feels that "this tends to divorce the political from the spiritual or moral and that is diametrically opposed to the black church's self-understanding."

According to Dr. Smith, "King, in a sense, was the black church... He was not simply working for human rights and against the efforts of oppressors; the struggle was against evil. It was against sin."

The Rev. William A. Jones Jr. of Brooklyn, president of the Progressive National Baptist Convention, says, "Just imagine 12,000 black churchmen saying, 'Go out and vote.' We could change the nation and change the world."

Some supporters of racial integration worry that the continued presence of black churches retards racial progress. But black clergy are uniform in their support for the existence of separate ethnic churches as a force for promoting and conserving black pride.

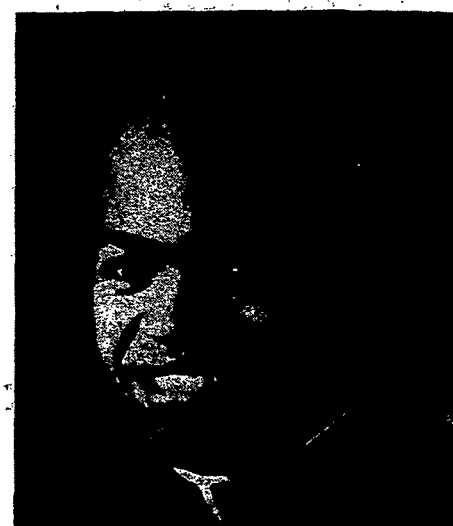
Father Thomas P. Hadden, rector of Sacred Heart Cathedral in Raleigh, feels that "the Catholic Church made a mistake in North Carolina by closing the black churches" (as a step toward integration). The black priest, who serves a predominantly white parish, says experience has shown that "a goodly number of black Catholics in integrated churches simply left the churches, remaining unaffiliated or going back to other black churches."

## Our One Black Priest

The Rochester diocese has produced only one black priest and even he was not a native of this area.

Father Charles Hall was born in Maryland in 1931 and lived in Washington, D.C., until he was five. He moved with his family to Rochester and attended Immaculate Conception School and Aquinas Institute, from where he was graduated in 1950.

He was ordained a Josephite Father in 1960 in Washington and said his first Mass in Immaculate Conception Church. He was stationed at St. Augustine's High School in New Orleans where he was a science teacher and counselor.



FATHER HALL

Father Hall died of cancer in 1967 and his funeral took place at Immaculate Conception Church.

## CCGEB Registration Up; Budget Gets Approval

Elmira — For the first time in years, an increased number of students are registered to attend Elmira Catholic schools in the fall.

After at least 15 years of declining enrollments, the Chemung County Education Board is preparing to educate 40 more children in September than are currently in class.

Registrations now total 846 students for September. Historically, the system's enrollment increases slightly over the summer.

In comparison, last September 837 students began the school year in the four schools the system operates. That was

a decline of 51 from the previous year.

Gail Callaghan, CCGEB business manager, said about half the increase is in the junior high. Much of the rest is at St. Casimir's School. Some of the new students are transfers from a public school being closed at the end of this year, she said.

At its April 22 meeting, the board approved a budget for the coming year.

The \$816,500 budget is up \$61,000. Funding will come from parish assessments, \$537,893, an increase of \$8,000; from tuition, \$137,000; and from other

sources, including fund-raising by the system.

Mrs. Callaghan said the budget also takes \$17,000 from the mandated services payment the system received from the state. That money had been held in reserve.

The increase in anticipated tuition income follows a 30 percent increase in tuition charges. Mrs. Callaghan said tuition next year will be \$210 for one student, \$310 for two, and \$335 for more than two. Kindergarten tuition will be \$105.

Mrs. Callaghan said no changes in the number of teachers in the system have been made. Money has been placed in a contingency fund to hire another teacher for the junior high if the increased enrollment there warrants it, she said. That decision won't be made until later.

The budget was approved with six voting in favor, one opposed and two abstentions.

Voting against it was Father Daniel Holland, St. Patrick's pastor, and pastor representative on the board. Mrs. Callaghan said he wanted the parish assessment system to be scrapped in favor of a per-pupil cost being charged to each parish.

St. Patrick's and St. Cecilia's representatives abstained.

Fr. Louis J. Hohman



The Open Window

### Accepting The Will Of God

Dear Father Hohman,

I'm confused about two apparently contradictory themes that appear in Catholic teaching. One is resignation to God's will and the other is the desirability of trying to improve bad conditions whenever we can.

Last Sunday our pastor in his homily spoke about resignation to God's will. As an example he used an (unnamed) woman in our parish who is dying of cancer. "She's not trying to hold onto anything in this world," he told us, "not even her family. She feels it is God's will for her to die like this and knows He must have His reasons. What a beautiful example for us all." Well, I've seen medical studies claiming that those who have a strong will to live and who don't give up have a higher rate of survival from cancer than those who are resigned and wait to die. How should someone react?

Another example: I know a healthy 65-year-old woman who lives with a mentally ill

(highly depressed) husband, her divorced daughter, and three teenaged grandchildren. Somehow my friend has gotten stuck with doing all the housework, laundry and cooking for the household because everyone else is "too busy" with school, jobs, activities. She feels tired and depressed herself, but just says, "I guess this is what the Good Lord has intended for me. This is the Cross I have to bear. He has His reasons." Well! Does God really want this woman to be a slave in her own home? I doubt it.

Could you offer some guidelines? When is it appropriate to say, "No, I won't accept this condition," and go out to fight against injustice, disease, poverty, ignorance, etc.? And when is it appropriate to say, "Lord, I submit to your will"? How can we tell if something is God's will and when something can and should be improved?

I'd appreciate any comments you could make.

(Signed) J.M.

Dear J.M.,

Perhaps the answer to your question is summed up

in the prayer of Reinhold Niebuhr: O God, give us the courage to accept with serenity the things we cannot change. Give us the courage to change the things that should be changed. And give us the wisdom to distinguish the one from the other.

I think what is meant in the second paragraph is that the woman wants to be accepting if her death really is God's will. It does not sound to me as if she is anxious to get going. She might very well have a strong will to live but also be willing to accept the inevitable.

The third paragraph does not indicate one way or another whether this woman can actually do anything about her situation. Looking at it from the outside it seems as though there are ways and means of handling it especially through counseling, recruiting help, or hiring it.

The bottom line is that the acceptance of God's will as you expressed it. "Lord, I submit to your will," comes only after every reasonable means has been used to overcome the evil. Certainly injustice, disease, poverty and ignorance are not God's will and therefore we need to engage ourselves against them whether or not we are immediately successful in that struggle.

In the long run I think the Serenity Prayer is the best answer we have in how to deal with a variety of situations.

## Right to Life March Scheduled

Corning — The Corning Area Right To Life Action Committee has announced that a "Life March" and "Life Rally" is scheduled for 1 p.m. on Saturday, May 22.

The march is to begin at the corner of State and Market streets, proceeding east on Market Street with a Corning Police Department escort. The group will enter the Nasser Civic Center Ice Rink for the rally.

Group spokesman John H.

Brennan states that the purpose of the Life Rally is educational, "to point out the legal, moral and medical aspects of abortion."

Among speakers at the rally will be Thomas J. Dillon of Manhasset. Dillon is a member of the Legal Advisory Committee of the New York Right To Life. He also served as New York's representative to the National Right To Life Board of Directors in 1974 and 1975.

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