

## THE CHURCH AND THE COLOUR QUESTION

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THE Catholic attitude to the colour question is necessarily bound up with the doctrine of human origins. It is clear, from the recent Encyclical of Pope Pius XII, *Humani Generis*, that we cannot maintain that the names Adam and Eve in Genesis should be taken in a generic sense, and so must hold that all existing men are descended from only two first parents. It follows that such differences of race or colour as exist among men can only be regarded as partially fixed characteristics due to periods of different climatic, cultural and hereditary factors. These periods may have been very long, and the fixing of characteristics so deep rooted that it cannot quickly be changed. But all have developed from a common beginning and, if the differentiating factors were now neutralised, particularly if inter-marriage took place, colour distinctions and all other racial distinctions could disappear in a common future. Moreover it must always be remembered that these distinctions are, from the Catholic point of view, only in the less essential part of men. The 'living soul' that God breathed into Adam is similarly breathed into each individual by him, and is that which makes him to be a human person. Human persons who, in addition to this, have the bond of grace in the Mystical Body of Christ, have a greater unity, however far apart they may be in their physiological composition, than even blood-relations who have it not.

Recently U.N.O. gave a fresh impetus to colour argument by its announcement of the existence of three races of men: Nigroid, Caucasian, and Mongoloid. This division is only an approximation, having possible exceptions such as Australian and African Bushmen who do not clearly fit into it anywhere, and having no particular implication as to separate origins. But it has raised again such questions as this: 'Are not the coloured peoples so fundamentally and anciently different as to make almost a "natural law" against their mixing with white men?' Colour strikes the imagination so much that it leads to sudden doubts like this. Actually the most exclusive characteristics upon which the division is made are not those of colour, but of profile and types

of hair. Colour overlaps the divisions considerably, as for instance in dark American Indians and light Chinese of the Mongoloid family, or in half-castes who will have the features of one race with the colour of the other. Colour differences are apparently due to the predominance of one or other of two pigments which are actually present in everybody's skin, and are brought out differently by long periods of different climatic conditions. Moreover, the most significant factor of all, blood, in its different types is spread unselectively over the different races and colours.

There is nothing therefore known to science which militates against the Catholic doctrine of one stock of men, or against the Catholic practice of assuming that men of all colours are equally men. All over the world every creature having the appearance of man responds to training of will and understanding and to the spiritual life, with only such accidental differences as also occur between individuals of one race on account of cultural and moral background and of free will. And even in this cultural sphere mixing of the most diverse racial types has taken place, and characteristics which appear most fixed change and fuse steadily with the mixing of blood, or without it where environment and culture alter. Nor is there any real evidence that any one race is more capable of culture than another. Anything that can be proved of unsatisfactory behaviour of half-castes in many societies, or of the apparent inability of some peoples, such as the Bushmen or some of the American Indians, to adapt themselves to a new culture, is quite sufficiently explained by social factors, such as the general ostracism of the half-caste, or geographical and hereditary factors, such as those which have isolated different peoples in a certain way of life for many generations and made change abhorrent to them. Individual examples have proved that the Bushmen, for instance, could change and develop, but socially, as a group, they seem to prefer dying out. It is necessary to labour this matter somewhat, for the recent racial propaganda has affected a surprising number of people with the idea of some permanently superior and inferior races, and with hazy conceptions about races of men, like species of animals, not being able to mix their breed, or having unsatisfactory progeny if they do.

Supposing therefore that there is no natural or scientific reason known to the Church for considering the races of men separate by the law of their creation, is there any positive revealed law

establishing such a separation? Calvinism, in face of the racial problem, has raised this question on grounds which are in part worthy of serious discussion, in part remarkable chiefly for showing what astonishing uses have been made of Scripture for self-interest. To the latter category belongs attempts to justify the separation and subjection of coloured peoples by identifying them with the descendants of Ham, or, as has been heard in South Africa, of Cain, or even with the race of 'daughters of men', by relations with whom the 'sons of God' sinned. This latter I have heard put forward by a man of reasonably good education. To the more serious type belong arguments actually used by responsible Calvinist divines, that the separation of races at the time of the tower of Babel was a penance put upon the world by God from which we must not escape by fusion of races; or that the fourth commandment demands a close adhesion to the traditions of one's fathers as a condition of God's blessing, which would be prevented by racial mixing. As Fr Oswin Magrath, O.P. recently pointed out in a South African paper, the Calvinists are able to find a backing for this attitude in their idea of the Church on earth as being necessarily a number of imperfect societies, in which the work of grace is particularised by racial and social grouping into national vocations. Apart from the lack of historical backing for the convenient ethnological theories mentioned above, all these arguments fall into the same error: of applying directly an Old Testament ordinance not renewed in the New Testament. There is no more ground for applying Old Testament texts literally in connection with the question of the fourth commandment and racial mixing than in connection with marriage or circumcision. And the Church has never made, nor even suggested, such applications.

Maritain, in *Redeeming the Time*, has remarked that we can see racial distinctions, and the succession of different races to more complex culture and to the Church, as 'acts of God'. The varieties in the human race are part of the multiple manifestation of God in his creation, and we can learn from the 'twilight of the imagination' in primitive peoples as from the march of science in others. Nor should we too hurriedly destroy anything that may be good in human custom, since few people can keep their souls without the support of their home culture. It is this, together with an undoubted truth that racial antipathies are shown by the story

of the tower of Babel, and its proper interpretation, to be due to human sin and pride and not easily overcome, that is the half of truth that the Calvinist idea is built on. But racial divisions can only be treated under the Gospels as 'acts of God' in the sense of operations of secondary causalities for which he has provided, and to be changed if necessary by the same causalities, i.e. human free will and prudence acting for the good in given circumstances. The Church has never been racist or nationalist, but nor has she ever been hurriedly internationalist. If anyone now thinks that racial divisions should be neutralised he is entitled to think so, but must show a good reason for it. Catholic social lore builds upwards, as society develops; from the family, from the local kin and occupational grouping, to the larger units. The smothering of all diversities by state and international action is not a Catholic idea.

It seems at first sight that there is more than sufficient reason for forcing the fullest unity among men, even at the expense of any social crisis, in the Gospel doctrine of grace and of the Mystical Body of Christ. The new supernatural principle of life, 'the seed of God', is greater than any human heredity or tradition. If two people have it, however far apart they may be in kin or culture, they have a greater bond of unity than the closest blood relations who have it not. So much is this so that the Catholic theologians have had to put the question as to whether we should not absolutely love better those who are better, and to find a reason for maintaining the natural order, of loving those nearest in kin most intensely, in the fact that there is always a hope of becoming most near to them in grace also. But while this is wise, it is also clear that the union of Grace can allow no exclusions. While we love some more, we must love all with a substantially complete love. It is difficult to see how this can be compatible with such an institution as the colour-bar, excluding intimate relationships on grounds of racial differences. And as if to emphasise this it was ordained that the Incarnation itself should take place in that corner of the world where Europe, Asia and Africa meet, in the half-way colour area of the near East, and in such a way that the first communities of Christians contained men of various colours, Romans and inhabitants of Pontus, Parthians and Ethiopians. It is clear that the greatest social demonstration of the new unity in

Christ was made when there were 'no rich and no poor' among men, and when St Paul claimed that there was neither bond nor free, Jew nor Greek, but all were one in Christ.

This ideal is maintained by the Catholic Church. But—and it is here that liberal christianity and the left wing in general misunderstand us—it is understood in terms of the whole theology of the Gospels. Our Lord came on earth to save men, and in so far as it should follow from the moral regeneration of man, to perfect social institutions, but by means of an interior grace which must be accepted voluntarily, not by attempts socially to plan and organise the unconvinced. The special social influence of the Gospel can only be coterminous with the reign of this grace. In their social Encyclicals the Popes have repeatedly warned the world that their principles will not work without a full moral conversion accompanying the social means. Where not all accept this grace of the Gospel, then to make them keep all its social implications would only lead to bitter reaction, and this most particularly if any attempt were made to force upon people matters which are not precepts of Christ. Our Lord never insisted upon the abolition of national or class distinctions. Therefore the Church, in her attitude to such conventional divisions among men as colour-bars, has never condemned them provided they can be maintained with substantial justice and charity. As in the matter of class or national distinctions, where there is no clear precept of their abolition, nor evidence of the grace to live without them, she leaves the achieving of a more perfect unity in Christ to those who voluntarily seek it as a counsel of perfection, and in her general dealings with society accepts the system developed under the Natural Law by human law and custom.

Since there is no reason for assuming any absolute natural law against colour-bars any more than against class bars or national divisions, the question becomes one of the practical judgment as to whether, under given circumstances, their existence will lead to more peace, order and justice in society or not. The wisdom of intermarriage and bringing half-caste children into the world will depend upon whether there is sufficient proximity of culture to make the companionship of marriage a reality, upon the chance given by the society to the half-caste child, and upon the necessities of the society, as to whether it is feasible, in the light of the numerical and geographical groupings, to maintain separate

culture regions or not. Since extensive social intercourse will lead to intermarriage, and it is the most controversial point, the subsidiary questions of economic and social colour-bar must be judged in the same way. The Church has never instituted or even encouraged a colour-bar, and it is a fact that the more Catholic the colonising power the less colour-bar has there been; but she would not force any society beyond that which it could be brought to do with moral conviction. *Sub specie aeternitatis*, as she considers all things, where no clear command of God is involved, it is better to tolerate a situation of awkwardness and incidental injustices than to provoke the peculiarly bitter forms of hatred that usually accompany racial conflicts.

Colour-bars, where they are a problem, are nearly always one-sided, and so it is necessary to say something of the conditions of justice towards the segregated people under which they can be justified. The first of these is equality before the altar and in the liturgy; that, for instance, no person may ever be denied access to any church and the reception of the sacraments there on account of his colour. Secondly, while the Church can admit the social necessity of curtailing secondary economic and political rights, such as that of entry into special careers or to suffrage, on a racial basis, in situations where the majority of one group are not yet prepared for their use, or where their concession would lead to riot and violence; nevertheless the primary social rights, such as those to life, limb, wage, property, integrity of family life, equal appeal to courts, opportunity of self-improvement, can never even be temporarily refused. Furthermore, the administration of the segregated people must visualise and work for their admission in a reasonable time to all ordinary citizen rights, or the provision of a separate territory where they can have full political and economic responsibility. Thirdly, it becomes a duty on all to be more than ever socially watchful, since the incidental injustices of colour-bar societies are normally serious, and to see that in addition the works of mercy and charity are not forgotten but rather increased. For it is one of the most miserable effects of the colour-bar that it makes people live side by side as if in different worlds, and the better-off have no contact with the poor, and no knowledge of their misery. The final point upon which the Church must insist most strongly, because of the very moderation of her demands upon society as a whole, is that those who wish to ignore the

colour-bar in the pursuit of evangelical perfection and the most perfect union of charity should be free to do so.

The distinction between Counsel and Precept, between that which all can be obliged to do and that to which some may feel themselves called as a voluntary work of supererogation, is an essential one in the whole scheme of the Catholic Apostolate, social as well as moral. The observance or non-observance of a colour-bar is not strictly speaking a matter of Counsel. For if a society had no colour-bar individuals would act wrongly if they observed one. But it is one of those delicate matters, like the observance of class distinctions, where attempts at change by law are almost bound to fail, and either will be ineffective, or have to enforce the change on society by means of a slave state, as in Russia. It is a matter in which the Catholic idea of the influence of the Counsels, the infusion of human conduct with an ideal beyond obligations by the example of people living in a special state, is of singular importance. Actually in all colour-bars fear of miscegenation is the hardest element. Fr Vincent McNabb once wrote to a priest in South Africa: 'We Catholic priests are the only people who can solve colour problems, because we have no marriageable daughters'. The Counsel of celibacy provides the perfect opportunity for ignoring the colour-bar for the sake of the most perfect expression of the unity and brotherhood of grace. The fear of miscegenation is removed; the actions of the individual do not commit society as a whole but only those dedicated to special work of the spirit. It is remarkable what freedom is allowed to Catholic Religious in the most intransigent colour-bar societies for this reason. A further great opportunity in this line has been added by the recent development and recognition of Lay Institutes professing the counsels. These can have the protection from prejudice given by their celibacy, and yet be still more in touch with and working amongst the people. They can be more independent of that concern about property rights, and the need of conciliating government departments and municipalities and not offending their prejudices, which oblige Religious Orders with schools and other large institutions to be very circumspect. It is by the maximum use of this freedom of the followers of evangelical perfection that the higher ideal can be kept before society as a whole, and people educated to drop colour-bars where they are really unnecessary and unwise, or at least brought to a

greater humanity where the situation cannot be changed.

It seems to be for lack of this clear concept of the distinction between Precept and Counsel that liberal Protestants (as for instance the Methodist Congress which recently made pronouncements about South Africa from a safe distance in Yorkshire), are forever bringing forth statements that appear to commit society as a whole to the impossible, and which are ineffective because not one in ten thousand of their own Church members would live up to them. In Catholic spheres of colonial influence, South American and the French, Belgian and Portuguese possessions in Africa, although there is less protest and talk of 'democracy', colour-bars are not so formal, and are reduced to an irritant in society; grades of colour causing awkwardness like class distinctions in a period of social change, rather than threatening complete deadlock or disruption as in the U.S.A. or British South Africa. This is not only due to the Catholicity of the Church, the realisation that every man is a man, but also to the plan of sanctity in the Church, and the opportunity the Counsels give of the infusion of society with a higher ideal, without the sense of coercion.

The whole Catholic attitude is of course anathema to the Communists, because it is peaceful, because it leaves the real cure to voluntary action, because it patiently guards the good in all tradition and does not wish to wrench any man hurriedly from his home culture for the sake of catch-phrases. At present, with the crisis of reaching independence coming to them, and the reaction of hundreds of years of exploitation, the word that catches the more violent element in coloured peoples is 'equality'. Communism has a great advantage because it uses only this word; and in practice, whatever their motives may be, communists do actually disregard the colour-bar, and so appear to show a greater spirit of brotherhood than ours. Many hastily educated leaders of coloured peoples are easily duped by this. But there is also a solid body of these peoples becoming politically articulate who will be grateful to those who thought carefully, and did not destroy all their traditions for the sake of an abstract 'equality' with Europeans. They will realise as time goes on what it was because we never doubted equality that we talked of it less. In the meantime, in the present very serious crisis for the Church, the way to show that grace can do as much as communism in 'breaking down the



middle wall of partition' is for Catholics who have the freedom of the state of the Counsels to accept, and live and eat with persons of any colour or culture, as completely one with them in Christ.

It is not necessarily the vocation of all Religious to do this. The Holy See, while laying down that indigenous peoples should not be barred from the European Orders, also frequently encourages separate congregations, in which the non-Europeans can live more according to their own customs, and with rules based on their own psychology rather than on that European psychology which lies behind so much of the rules and customs and time-tables of European Orders. Also some European Orders, especially those with much active work and the nerve-strain that goes with it, are plainly incapable of shouldering the extra burden of adjustment necessary to a real community life with peoples of so different a culture.

The alternative, of insisting upon the 'indigeni' conforming with European custom, places an extra burden upon them in addition to the ordinary trials of the religious life, and reduces the potential number of vocations; or alternatively offers a motive of ambition in becoming 'Europeanised' which makes decision about the sincerity of a vocation much more difficult. Both policies are therefore being followed in the Church, that of accepting coloured peoples into the European Orders where possible, and that of forming separate Orders. The special work of charity which consists in living without colour-bar is not the only work of Religious Orders, nor is any order called to the whole sum of the Gospel counsels of perfection, so the institution of the separate Orders is justified. But lest it should lead to great misunderstanding and scandal, it is most necessary that the mixing policy should go as far as possible, both in Orders which find themselves capable of it, and also through the new gate that has been opened for extending the life of the counsels among the laypeople, either by the Lay Institutes or by even less formal works such as those of the American Houses of Hospitality and Friendship Houses. As in the matter of human economic relationships, so in the matter of colour relationships, the great need in the present age is to show a social unity and brotherhood corresponding to the spiritual brotherhood we profess. A few meetings together, and co-operation through alms between the separated groups is not

sufficient to achieve this. It must reach the stage of the most complete unity of brothers living together in the Lord somewhere in the Church.

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