

## IS GOD WHITE OR BLACK?

(A sermon delivered on May 10th, 1963, by Rabbi Herbert M. Baumgard, D.H.L.  
Temple Beth Am, South Miami, Florida)

A THOUSAND NEGROES WERE HUDDLED IN A SMALL AUDITORIUM IN HARLEM TO HEAR THE HONORABLE ELIJAH MUHAMMAD, LEADER AND PROPHET OF THE BLACK MUSLIM GROUP. "GOD IS BLACK", SHOUTED ELIJAH MUHAMMAD, "ALL BLACK MEN BELONG TO ISLAM. THEY HAVE BEEN CHOSEN. AND ISLAM SHALL RULE THE WORLD!" THE NEGROES LISTENED WITH AUDIBLE ATTENTION. ELIJAH MUHAMMAD HAS CONVERTED TENS OF THOUSANDS OF NEGROES TO HIS GOSPEL. HE HAS BEEN ABLE TO DO "WHAT GENERATIONS OF WELFARE WORKERS AND COMMITTEES, RESOLUTIONS AND REPORTS, AND HOUSING PROJECTS AND PLAYGROUNDS HAVE FAILED TO DO, TO HEAL AND REDEEM DRUNKARDS, TO CONVERT EX-CONVICTS AND TO KEEP THEM OUT OF JAIL, TO MAKE MEN CHASTE AND WOMEN VIRTUOUS, AND TO INVEST BOTH THE MALE AND FEMALE WITH A PRIDE AND A SERENITY THAT HANG ABOUT THEM LIKE AN UNFAILING LIGHT."

THE WORDS I QUOTE TO YOU TONIGHT, ARE THE WORDS OF JAMES BALDWIN, (WRITING IN THE "NEW YORKER", NOVEMBER 17, 1962,) ELOQUENT SPOKESMAN FOR AN AROUSED AMERICAN NEGRO COMMUNITY WHICH IS FAST LOSING ITS OLD MOOD OF PASSIVITY. WHAT JAMES BALDWIN SAYS OF ELIJAH MUHAMMAD, IS TRUE. IT IS SAID THAT ELIJAH, WHO PRESENTS HIMSELF AS THE PROPHET OF A NEW ORDER, WAS SIX YEARS OLD WHEN HE SAW HIS FATHER LYNCHED BEFORE HIM. HE SPEAKS, WE ARE TOLD, FROM A DEEP SENSE OF PAIN AND INJUSTICE. HE DOES NOT HARANGUE WHEN HE PREACHES. HE SPEAKS SOFTLY AND GENTLY. HE IS CERTAIN OF WHAT HE HAS TO SAY. "THE WHITE MAN IS AN AGENT OF THE DEVIL. HIS DAY WILL SOON BE OVER. ALLAH WILL SEE THAT HIS CHOSEN ONE, THE BLACK MAN, BECOMES THE RULER OF THE WORLD. THE SINNER, THE WHITE MAN, WILL ROAST IN HELL."

IT IS POSSIBLE TO SMILE AT THE ABSURDITY OF THIS TEACHING, BUT THE TEACHING IS REAL FOR A GROWING LEGION OF NEGROES. ITS SUPPORTERS POINT OUT THAT THE DOCTRINE IS NO MORE EXTREME THAN THE TEACHING OF MILLIONS OF WHITE CHRISTIANS WHO HOLD THAT THE BLACK MAN IS AN AGENT OF THE DEVIL, AND THAT THE WHITE MAN IS CHOSEN TO RULE.

VERY FEW OF US KNOW OF THE BLACK MUSLIM GROUP. THIS REVEALS, ALL THE MORE CLEARLY, OUR LACK OF AWARENESS OF WHAT IS GOING ON IN THE AMERICAN NEGRO COMMUNITY. THERE WAS A TIME WHEN THE N.A.A.C.P. WAS CONSIDERED THE RADICAL NEGRO ORGANIZATION. IT WAS CONSIDERED RADICAL, BECAUSE IT DID NOT SPEAK FOR THE PASSIVE, ACCEPTING NEGRO. THE N.A.A.C.P. HAS LONG HELD THE POSITION THAT NEGROES, AS WELL AS WHITES, ARE ENTITLED TO THEIR CIVIL RIGHTS, AND THE N.A.A.C.P. HAS FOUGHT IN THE COURTS CONSTANTLY, TO HELP THE NEGRO WIN HIS FULL FREEDOM. THE ACTIVITIES OF THE N.A.A.C.P. HAVE BEEN DESCRIBED AS COMMUNISTIC BY THE CONSERVATIVE WHITES, BUT, TODAY, THE N.A.A.C.P. IS NOT THE VOICE OF THE NEGRO RADICALS. IT IS THE VOICE OF THE MODERATES. ELIJAH MUHAMMAD, AND MANY OTHER ADVOCATES OF A QUICK SOLUTION TO THE RACIAL PROBLEMS OF AMERICA, ARE FAR MORE VIOLENT IN THEIR PROGRAM. THE WHITE AMERICAN WHO THINKS THAT THE N.A.A.C.P. SPEAKS FOR THE REVOLUTIONARY NEGRO, IS BASKING IN IGNORANCE, AN IGNORANCE WHICH COULD BE HARMFUL TO HIM, AND TO THE UNITED STATES. BETWEEN THE N.A.A.C.P. AND THE BLACK MUSLIMS, ARE MANY GROUPS WHICH SPECIALIZE IN ACTIVITIES DESIGNED TO ADVERTIZE THE NEGRO'S PROBLEMS, AND TO MAKE THE WHITE COMMUNITY LESS INDIFFERENT TO THE DAILY SUFFERINGS OF THIS SUBSTANTIALLY IGNORED ELEMENT OF OUR SOCIETY. C.O.R.E., (THE CONGRESS OF RACIAL EQUALITY), IS SUCH AN ORGANIZATION.



WHITE AMERICANS OUGHT TO KNOW THE SCORE ABOUT THE NEGRO. FOR MOST OF US, THE NEGRO IS A SHADOW THAT FLITS IN AND OUT OF OUR LIVES IN THE FORM OF A MAID OR HANDYMAN. WE ARE GENERALLY OBLIVIOUS TO THE FACT THAT MANY NEGROES HAVE RISEN ABOVE THIS STATUS, AND ARE CAPABLE OF TOP-LEVEL ORGANIZATION AND PLANNING, AS MARTIN LUTHER KING DEMONSTRATES, OR AS OUR LOCAL LEADERS, REVEREND EDWARD GRAHAM AND FATHER THEODORE GIBSON DEMONSTRATE. WE ARE GENERALLY UNAWARE THAT, MORE AND MORE, THE NEGRO COMMUNITY IS SPRINKLED WITH BRIGHT INTELLIGENT YOUNG PEOPLE LIKE JAMES BALDWIN WHO WRITES, "I WAS ICILY DETERMINED ... NEVER TO MAKE MY PEACE WITH THE GHETTO, BUT TO DIE AND GO TO HELL BEFORE I WOULD LET ANY WHITE MAN SPIT ON ME, BEFORE I WOULD ACCEPT MY "PLACE" IN THIS REPUBLIC."

WE CAN UNDERSTAND THE ATTRACTION AN EXTREMIST LIKE ELIJAH MUHAMMAD HAS ON THE NEGRO, WHEN BALDWIN TELLS US, "NEGROES IN THIS COUNTRY ... ARE TAUGHT REALLY TO DESPISE THEMSELVES FROM THE MOMENT THEIR EYES ARE OPEN ON THE WORLD. THIS WORLD IS WHITE, AND THEY ARE BLACK ... EVERY EFFORT MADE BY THE CHILD'S ELDERS TO PREPARE HIM FOR A FATE FROM WHICH THEY CANNOT PROTECT HIM, CAUSES HIM SECRETLY, IN TERROR, TO BEGIN TO AWAIT, WITHOUT KNOWING THAT HE IS DOING SO, HIS MYSTERIOUS AND INEXORABLE PUNISHMENT. HE MUST BE "GOOD", NOT ONLY IN ORDER TO PLEASE HIS PARENTS, AND NOT ONLY TO AVOID BEING PUNISHED BY THEM; BEHIND THEIR AUTHORITY, STANDS ANOTHER, NAMELESS, AND IMPERSONAL, INFINITELY HARDER TO PLEASE, AND BOTTOMLESSLY CRUEL. AND THIS FILTERS INTO THE CHILD'S CONSCIOUSNESS, THROUGH HIS PARENTS' TONE OF VOICE AS HE IS BEING EXHORTED, PUNISHED, OR LOVED; IN THE SUDDEN, UNCONTROLLABLE NOTE OF FEAR HEARD IN HIS MOTHER'S OR FATHER'S VOICE WHEN HE HAS STRAYED BEYOND SOME PARTICULAR BOUNDARY. HE DOES NOT KNOW WHAT THE BOUNDARY IS, AND HE CAN GET NO EXPLANATION OF IT, WHICH IS FRIGHTENING ENOUGH, BUT THE FEAR HE HEARS IN THE VOICES OF HIS ELDERS, IS MORE FRIGHTENING STILL.

"THE WHITE MAN'S HEAVEN", SINGS A BLACK MUSLIM MINISTER, "IS THE BLACK MAN'S HELL." THE TEACHING IS FRIGHTENING, BECAUSE IT IS TRUE. IT IS WE, THE WHITE MEN, WHO HAVE BUILT OUR SOCIETY ON THE BASIS OF TWO EXTREMES. WE HAVE NOT MADE IT POSSIBLE FOR THERE TO BE AREAS OF GREY, OF MUTUAL RIGHTS, OF MUTUAL COMMUNICATION AND APPRECIATION.

SHORT MONTHS AGO, A GROUP OF NEGROES HELD UP A GROCERY STORE IN COCONUT GROVE. WHEN THE COPS ENTERED, ALL OF THE NEGROES MEEKLY SURRENDERED, EXCEPT ONE, WHO FOUGHT THROUGH ONE BULLET, THEN ANOTHER, AND THEN STILL ANOTHER, MURMURING ALL THE TIME, "KILL ME, WHITE MAN, LET ME DIE." HE DIDN'T SAY, "KILL ME COP." HE SAID, "KILL ME, WHITE MAN." IN THE DESPAIR OF THE NEGRO THIEF, IN HIS WILLINGNESS TO DIE, IS EXPRESSED THE DESPAIR OF MANY NEGROES WHO FEEL SO STRONGLY THE IMBALANCE OF THE WHITE AND BLACK WORLD, THAT THEY FEEL IMPELLED TO STEAL OR TO BE KILLED. FOR THE IMBALANCE IS NOT SOMETHING THEY CAN LONG ENDURE. "GOD IS BLACK", SAID ELIJAH MUHAMMAD, "AND ISLAM SHALL RULE THE WORLD." IN THIS UTTERANCE, TOO, IS THE DESPAIR OF MEN WHO, TOO LONG, HAVE BEEN DENIED THEIR FREEDOM. THEY NOT ONLY SEEK AN ALLEVIATION OF THEIR CONDITION, THEY SEEK ITS COMPLETE REVERSAL. HAPPILY, FOR AMERICA, AND FOR THE WHITE MAN, THE BLACK MUSLIMS DO NOT SPEAK FOR THE MAJORITY OF NEGROES, BUT THERE IS A GREAT STIRRING AMONGST AMERICAN NEGROES, MANIFESTED IN THE BIRMINGHAM MARCHES, IN THE N.A.A.C.P. COURT CASES, AND BY THE FREEDOM RIDERS. WHO WILL REPRESENT THE NEGROES TEN YEARS FROM NOW? IF THE MODERATES ARE REASONABLY SUCCESSFUL, THE EXTREMISTS WILL NOT DO SO WELL. IF THE WHITE MAN WANTS TO EAT HIS CAKE AND HAVE IT, TOO, WE MAY WELL ENCOURAGE THE DESPAIRING NEGROES TO TURN TO THEIR EXTREMISTS.



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IN THE SUMMER OF 1946, I CAME HOME FROM THE ARMY, BELIEVING THAT THE WAR HAD BEEN FOUGHT FOR A REASON. WHEN A NEGRO LAWYER IN MY HOME TOWN OF NORFOLK, RAN FOR THE CITY COUNCIL, I SUPPORTED HIM PUBLICLY. I WAS NOT SURPRISED WHEN THE POLITICAL MACHINE OF MY AREA CALLED ME A COMMUNIST. I WAS SURPRISED WHEN THE NEGRO SEAMSTRESS WHO WORKED FOR MY FATHER SAID, "YOU OUGHT NOT TO DO THAT, HERBERT. EACH OF US HAS HIS PLACE." THAT WAS 1946. MORE AND MORE NEGROES ARE NOT WILLING TO MAKE THAT KIND OF STATEMENT TODAY.

LAST WEEK, I WAS INVITED TO GIVE THE BENEDICTION AT A MEETING OF THE LOCAL N.A.A.C.P., ADDRESSED BY THE NATIONAL BOARD CHAIRMAN OF THAT ORGANIZATION. THE SPEECH WAS THE SPEECH OF AN EDUCATED AND RELIGIOUS MAN, A BISHOP OF THE AFRICAN EPISCOPAL CHURCH. HIS MESSAGE TO HIS LISTENERS WAS: 1) REGISTER TO VOTE; 2) GIVE MONEY TO OUR LEGAL FUND SO THAT WE CAN FIGHT FOR YOUR CIVIL RIGHTS IN THE COURTS; 3) ORGANIZE, SO THAT YOU CAN LIVE WITH DIGNITY. IT WAS THE SPEECH OF A SINCERE MODERATE, SAYING WHAT ANY SELF-RESPECTING MAN OUGHT TO SAY. EVERY PERSON PRESENT, CAME BY THE TABLE IN FRONT OF THE SPEAKER, AND PUT DOWN WHATEVER MONEY HE COULD AFFORD, \$5, \$2, A QUARTER, DIMES, AND PENNIES. THEY COLLECTED \$250 ON THAT RAINY NIGHT, AND THEY ARE COLLECTING MONEY BY QUARTERS AND DIMES IN EVERY NEGRO VILLAGE THROUGHOUT AMERICA. THEN, CAME THE SINGING. LIKE EVERY DRIVE FOR FREEDOM, THE CURRENT NEGRO DRIVE HAS ITS STIRRING SONGS, POINTING TO THE GOALS OF THE GROUP. IN CONTROLLED, BUT FIRM VOICES, ALL SANG A SONG, THE WORDS OF WHICH WERE, "IN THE SCHOOLS - FREEDOM; AT THE COUNTERS - FREEDOM; IN THE VOTING BOOTH - FREEDOM; ON THE JOB - FREEDOM, FREEDOM!" I TELL YOU THAT THIS SIMPLE SONG WAS SPINE-CHILLING, FOR IT WAS A SONG OF TRUTH.

IT WAS A SONG OF HOPE, LONG DORMANT; IT WAS A SONG OF A PEOPLE STRUGGLING FOR ITS SELF-RESPECT; IT WAS A SONG OF A RIGHTEOUS CAUSE THAT COULD NOT BE DENIED, FOR ITS TIME HAS COME. IN THIS SOLEMN MANNER, MUST THE JEWS OF EUROPE HAVE SUNG THE HA-TIKVAH, AS THEY DREAMED OF A DISTANT LAND OF SALVATION. IN THIS WAY, ALL IDEALISTICALLY ORIENTED GROUPS HAVE SUNG.

THE PERSON, WHETHER WHITE OR BLACK, WHO HEARD THAT SONG, AND REMAINED UNMOVED, HAD TO BE A LITTLE BIT DEAD. THE SONG FILTERS OUT OF THE OPEN DOOR OF THAT NEGRO CHURCH ON THIRD AVENUE IN MIAMI. IT IS SUNG IN BIRMINGHAM, WHERE NEGROES RESIST POLICE DOGS AND FIRE HOSES. IT IS SUNG IN RALEIGH, N.C., BY THE NEGRO GIRLS WHO YESTERDAY, STAGED A SIT-DOWN IN A RESTRICTED RESTAURANT. IT IS SUNG IN HARLEM, BY NEGROES WHO HAVE ALL THE SURFACE FREEDOMS, BUT WHO ARE DOWN-GRADED BY HYPOCRITICAL WHITES WHO THINK THEY HAVE DONE THEIR PIOUS DUTY.

THE IDEALISM OF A NATION, IS SOMETHING THAT HAS TO BE LINKED CONSTANTLY TO A LIVING RESERVOIR. THE NEGRO HAS BEEN OFFICIALLY FREE, AND PRACTICALLY A SLAVE SINCE THE CIVIL WAR. FOR A HUNDRED YEARS, WHITE AMERICANS HAVE LIED TO THEMSELVES, AND DRIED UP THEIR OWN SOULS WITH PLATITUDES ABOUT BROTHERHOOD. IN FIGHTING FOR HIS RIGHTS, THE NEGRO REMINDS US OF OUR OWN BETTER NATURE. IN OBTAINING EQUAL OPPORTUNITY, THE NEGRO TAKES FROM OUR BACKS, A STAGGERING BURDEN OF GUILT AND SIN. IN SHOUTING FROM THE HOUSETOPS, "I WILL BE A MAN ERECT - AND NOT BOWED", THE NEGRO REMINDS THE WHITE MAN TO STAND ERECT. AMERICAN IDEALISM IS IN NEED OF SOME RE-AWAKENING. CERTAINLY, THE WHITE MAN CAN USE AN INJECTION, THAT CARRIES WITH IT, THE SERUM OF HUMANITY.



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THE N.A.A.C.P., AND THE NEGRO INTELLECTUALS, WANT TO SAVE THEIR COMMUNITY FROM THE BLACK MUSLIMS AND THE EXTREMISTS WHO SEEK TO MATCH THE FANATICISM OF SOME WHITES WITH A FANATICISM OF THEIR OWN. WE CAN HELP THE NEGROES, AND SAVE SOMETHING OF OUR OWN SELF RESPECT BY JOINING, IN DEED AND HEART, WITH THOSE WHO SING . . .

IN THE SCHOOLS - FREEDOM

AT THE COUNTERS - FREEDOM

ON THE JOB - FREEDOM, FREEDOM!