

# THE NEGRO AMERICAN AND MRI

"Our unity in Christ, expressed in our full communion, is the most profound bond among us, in all our political and racial and cultural diversity. The time has fully come when this unity and interdependence must find a completely new level of expression and corporate obedience." *Mutual Responsibility and Interdependence in the Body of Christ*

**T**HE CONCEPT of Mutual Responsibility and Interdependence addresses itself to the revitalization of the Church, and more particularly, the Anglican Communion, far and near. On its more obvious level, it has been received as an effort to provide more equitable sharing of the financial, human, and other resources of prosperous nations and churches with those which are struggling and developing. It has produced linkages which transcend cultures and national boundaries.

The implications of the MRI document for life in our own church and nation have been given only limited expression. Within both church and nation, communities of

white privilege exist alongside communities of black poverty, second-class citizenship, and frustration. Surely, the need for this interdependence here at home is as real—and as pressing. If, as the MRI document asserts, the "keynotes of our time are equality, interdependence, and mutual responsibility," there is no more appropriate place to begin than within our own country, in our own church practices and structures.

The history of the Negro in America from 1619 until the present is the unholy record of a systematic exclusion of people—on the arbitrary basis of color—from the most elementary of human rights, the right to live in dignity as a man. For a majority of Negroes in this country, words such as "personal freedom," "liberty," "law and order," "justice," and "equality" have not had the bearing on reality that they have had for the majority of the white people in the community. Few Negroes have achieved positions where their rights have had to be respected by whites; many are powerless to do anything about their predicament.

It is against this background that

we must understand why the "black power" slogan has such appeal to the beaten and downtrodden masses of ghetto dwellers, and why the refrain is being picked up by numbers of middle-class Negroes as well. One of the reasons the slogan "black power" evokes so much emotion is that the term means many different things to different people. Following are a few interpretations of the phrase:

1. Black power may represent the nurturing of pride among Negroes in their cultural heritage, in their negritude—a drive for self-realization, self-identity, and dignity through consciousness<sup>19</sup> of group history—which seeks to elevate the black man to a position of dignity on a par with other men.
2. Black power may mean the effort within the black ghetto to build communal solidarity, to create a power force capable of changing the conditions of urban life.
3. Black power may mean repudiation of the theory of nonviolence and a call to all Negroes to defend themselves against their oppressors.
4. Black power may mean rejection

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of integration as a goal or a strategy, brought on by the realization among ghetto people that the methods of white-dominated civil rights organizations will not improve the conditions of their lives.

5. Black power may be seen as an attempt to show the black masses that they must express themselves militantly, aggressively, and in their own ways, realizing that community leadership will not respond to gentle, single voices.
6. Black power may mean racial supremacy, black nationalism, violent insurrection, and "Burn, baby, burn."

As the term has been used by its advocates, it may mean any one or a combination of the above. When one evaluates the conditions of the urban ghetto today, it is not difficult to understand why such a slogan would have emerged. While the exponents of black power, such as Stokely Carmichael, have not attracted large followings, recent events have reinforced the separation between whites and Negroes in American life in many areas.

If our society is to face realistically the problems of the Negro sector of the culture, it must recognize and encourage the legitimacy of Negroes' developing those modes of power expression—political, economic, and social—that are utilized by other groupings in the culture, and have been so used by other long since assimilated low-income ethnic groups. For most ghetto poor of this generation, and perhaps for many of the next, a strategy of individual mobility is irrelevant.

The emergence of the black power slogan is probably due as much to the ineffectiveness of civil rights organizations as it is to the general worsening of living conditions. The civil rights movement, in many areas of our nation, has failed to produce through its strategies a solution to the Negro's traditional powerless, subservient position in American culture. In fact, this failure often has

made it easier for injustices to be perpetuated among the black masses.

The fact is that for the Negroes who live in the ghetto, conditions are probably worse today than they were ten years ago. Recent statistics prepared by the United States Department of Labor show a larger proportion of Negroes unemployed now than in 1954; the gap between the average wage of the average white worker and those of the average Negro worker is widening. Slum housing is as bad, if not worse, because of crowding. And in many areas schooling is as segregated—and as inferior—as when the Supreme Court struck down the separate-but-equal doctrine.

The urgent cry to find a base of political and social power in the ghetto is symptomatic of the lack of faith in white people, and in the organization in which whites have played such a prominent role. Because the ghetto community has not had the opportunity to develop spokesmen who are heard, it is not difficult to understand why black power organizations have become a rallying point for the oppressed community, particularly among its young and militant fringe.

In the period between 1954 and 1965, there was an impressive record of change in the area of *civil* rights. *Legal* separation on the basis of race was stricken down in the fields of education, employment, voting rights, and access to community facilities—if not in the field of housing. Yet the actual living conditions of the majority of Negro Americans have not changed in any appreciable way commensurate with those of the white community.

Nowhere is this more apparent than in the churches. Interaction between the "Negro denominations" and those which are predominantly white is still limited. The status of most Negro clergy in our own Church remains one of unequal opportunity. In the development of urban strategies, the major denominations have failed to enlist the indigenous black

leadership which has been there all along. The denominations have continued to use their financial resources largely in support of white leadership in declining inner-city churches.

In view of the fact, as emphasized above, that the slogan "Black Power" means so many widely different things to different people, it is not for the Church to affirm or condemn this phrase. To act constructively, the Church should concentrate on removing the conditions, in church and society, which perpetuate any inferior status and which have given rise to black power as a slogan and a style of operation. The Church should encourage efforts by all excluded people, Negroes and others, to organize for development and participation in society. The Church should speak and act directly to curb any open animosity and violence which have greeted the efforts of Negroes, individually or in groups, to assume a full and free place in society. The Gospel, which affirms human unity in the Person of Christ, is the essential prerequisite for the achievement of a society of justice and equal opportunity and for a church life which gives equal place to all members apart from racial distinctions. Integration without equal opportunity is not enough.

The following resolutions are therefore recommended (and are adopted):

**Whereas**, The Executive Council of the Episcopal Church recognizes that the removal of social, economic, cultural, and political conditions which perpetuate second-class citizenship for any citizens requires a wide range of effort on the part of the entire community; that the Church has a substantial part to play in such an effort; that at the heart of the struggle is an effort to support Negroes to achieve self-identification, self-respect, and self-reliance; and that this is an essential element of Mutual Responsibility and Interdependence, at home or anywhere else, now therefore be it

**Resolved**, That the Executive



Council pledges itself to constructive efforts to assure that Negro churchmen attain positions of leadership within the life of our own Church, in accordance with the statement concerning the nondiscriminatory placement of clergy adopted by the House of Bishops at Glacier Park, Montana, in October, 1965; that to this end, the Presiding Bishop is requested, in the responsible selection of qualified personnel, to continue his efforts to appoint Negro clergymen and other professional persons to top executive positions on the staff of the Executive Council, in particular to the urban program of the Church, and to establish means whereby Negroes may advise in the selection of, as well as appointment to, advisory bodies and other positions of national scope; that the staff of the Joint Urban Program be directed to assist bishops in pilot dioceses to recruit and appoint Negroes wherever feasible as pilot diocese coordinators and to other positions of key responsibility in diocesan affairs; and that the officers of the Council are requested to offer cooperation to diocesan bishops in developing means of securing the placement of a significant number of Negro clergy in major parishes; and be it further

**Resolved,** That the Executive Council, having committed itself to the support of and collaboration with community organizations of the indigenous poor, declares this to be a matter of high priority and, having recommended to General Convention that it make substantial provisions in the next triennial budget for this ministry, urges the dioceses and parishes of the Church to include funds for this purpose in their budget as a matter of urgent priority; and be it further

**Resolved,** That, recognizing that inadequate schools have contributed materially to discrimination in employment for Negroes and especially among Negro adolescents and young adults, the Executive Council urges the Church to support and,

if necessary, initiate efforts which will lead to a substantial upgrading of all schools, particularly those largely attended by the Negro poor and other underprivileged groups, and requests the Department of Christian Education to devise programs by which parishes, dioceses, and individual churchmen can participate in such efforts; in view of the serious needs of public education throughout the nation, the Council recommends that a major goal of the Church should be to contribute through support of and leadership in public education to the creation of a society of equal opportunity free from discrimination, and be it further

**Resolved,** That, recognizing that the continuation of ghettos and the continued deterioration of our central cities as well as the expansion of all-white suburban developments calls for a national housing policy which will invest a larger share of available funds in housing for the poor than in housing for middle-or-upper-income groups, in all of which discrimination shall be prohibited, the Executive Council urges the Church to support such national housing policies; reminds parishes and church-related institutions that Federal law makes it possible for the churches to participate in the creation of not-for-profit housing for the poor, and that the technical services of Urban America, Inc., are available to this end; and hopes that the Church will seek such participation in the creation of new and rehabilitated housing, and be it further

**Resolved,** That the Executive Council calls for a national housing policy which will prohibit all forms of discrimination in the purchase, sale, and rental of residential property, and be it further

**Resolved,** That the Executive Council urges that the 90th Congress make available substantial appropriations to turn a skirmish into a full-scale war against poverty and advocates adequate appropriations to be spent particularly on com-

munity action programs now suffering serious cutbacks, and be it further

**Resolved,** That in recognition of the crucial role which the private sector of the economy must play in eliminating exploitation and discrimination in employment, the Executive Council calls upon all communicants of the Episcopal Church, especially leaders in finance, industry, education, and labor, to use their talents and best efforts to create employment opportunities for Negroes and special training programs to offset lack of skill resulting from past and present discrimination, and be it further

**Resolved,** That because economic growth in recent years has been accompanied by serious disparity between the incomes of rich and poor, the Executive Council records itself in favor of the study of possible social welfare legislation in the appropriate areas which will guarantee a decent standard of living for those who cannot be employed and provision of supplemental allowances for the underemployed who cannot attain an adequate standard of living; and church people are urged to consider the need for comprehensive social and economic policies and legislation to eliminate poverty and to communicate their points of view to members of Congress, realizing that the achievement of such goals may involve them in personal sacrifice, especially by their willingness to pay higher taxes, and be it further

**Resolved,** That in order that the members of the Episcopal Church may be assisted to give disciplined and informed consideration to and take appropriate action on the issues dealt with in these resolutions, the Executive Council instructs the Departments of Christian Education and Christian Social Relations to prepare study-action programs based on these resolutions for use in the parishes of the Church, and to offer consultative services on the use of these programs in dioceses and parishes. ◀