

POINT OF VIEW

Our View

Groundbreaking election routine biz

The Roman Catholic Church made history two days ago, as leaders in the United States elected an African-American to be president of the most powerful congregation in the U.S. church.

In what the church and the Associated Press seem to think is a big deal, 249 members of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops gave the Most Reverend Wilton Gregory, Bishop of the Diocese of Belleville, Illinois, 75 percent of their vote. One of only 13 blacks among hundreds of American bishops, he becomes the first ever to hold the office.

Big deal.

The U.S. church is predominately white, and blacks have, for years, been practically falling over one another as they abandon it. It's ponderous, bureaucratic clergy is overwhelmingly white, with the few black priests dwindling and attrition's handwriting on the wall, soon to spell "zero." The hierarchy is whiter still- as the 13 black bishops will attest- and its elite is whiter than that. That's right, in the oligarchy of cardinals, who outrank bishops and elect popes, there are no African-Americans.

In the U.S. church, where racism is stifling, black advocacy is a bad career move in the laity, much less in the clergy where it's usually fatal. That explains why neither Rev. George Clements- the Malcolm X of the Archdiocese of Chicago- nor Rev. Lawrence Lucas of the Archdiocese of New York, author of "Black Priest, White Church," were ever so much as promoted to monsignor. Both are magnificent African-American priests of the Catholic Church and black leaders of the highest order.

Ironically, Catholic disdain for afrocentrism explains why, three years ago, the conference elected Gregory vice-president, a post that traditionally makes the presidency a gimme.

Like Father Clements, an icon of the activist black priesthood, Gregory is a product of the Archdiocese of Chicago, but there ends the similarity. As a student at Quigley Preparatory Seminary on the South Side, Gregory played it safe, the only way an ambitious black aspirant to the priesthood could.

During those years, the black liberation struggle was at its zenith, Medgar Evers and Malcolm were assassinated. Before Gregory graduated from the major seminary, Dr. King was assassinated as well, and brilliant young Illinois Black Panther leader Fred Hampton was murdered by stormtroopers of racist mayor Richard Daley.

In their own ways, many catholic bishops contributed to the racism of those times, while others were silent. A black exodus from the U.S. church was their bitter harvest, yet even now they do nothing to repair the damage.

Out of that milieu, one can be forgiven for assuming most black bishops are Uncle Toms, and that white bishops, loathe to submit to their authority, would put only a malleable, ultraconservative token on a fast track to the presidency.

From a black activist perspective, as bishops go, Gregory is pretty much standard issue, so progressive black catholics shouldn't expect much. For his part, Gregory says he feels "no great amazement" that a black was elected, and in his case, neither do we. The election of a black activist, now that would have been amazing.

On the other hand, Gregory might address the hemorrhage of black catholics from the church, help bring Offices for Black Catholics to dioceses- like Las Vegas- that desperately need them, reach out to an activist but disillusioned black laity, improve the ludicrous "religious education" of black children, and stimulate black vocations before the extinction of African-American priests, nuns and religious brothers. — Nah.

BREAKFAST AT THE GORES



Two months after the tragedy: Considerations of Thanksgiving

Special to Sentinel-Voice

Two months ago America's, and the world's, future was unalterably changed by an attack, an atrocity, against America of hitherto unimaginable dimensions.

Since that day, the newspapers in the metropolitan areas of New York and Washington have been filled with brief, wrenching profiles of the nearly 6,000 people who perished in the conflagrations at the World Trade Center in New York and at the Pentagon outside Washington. Reading these memorials, it strikes me that all of those lost seemed to be people worth knowing. Our world seems emptier without them.


Officially, there are still more than 3,900 people "missing" in the tangle of concrete and metal and glass that once was the World Trade Center — which is just a mile or so almost due west of the National Urban League's headquarters in Lower Manhattan. Those of us at the office that morning not only watched the calamity unfold on the television airwaves, we saw it from our very doorstep.

Now, as this column is being written on November 12, New York City has suffered another stunning blow — the crash of another jetliner in a neighborhood in the borough of Queens. That officials say this was from all indications thus far an accident is a relief. But the tremendous loss of life involved robs us of any real comfort.

Nonetheless, we Americans can take refuge, and find inspiration, in this month's

To Be Equal

By **Hugh B. Price**
President
National Urban League



two holidays, two of the most significant holidays America celebrates. For both Veterans Day and Thanksgiving underscore qualities that we'll need to draw on in great quantities if we're to get through the crisis that now confronts us with our "Americanness" not only intact but strengthened.

One of those qualities is patriotism — by which I mean not merely love of country, but the commitment to America's values of tolerance and freedom and justice for all. That these are values worth fighting for and worth dying for is why we celebrate Veterans Day.

Some Americans have long realized that a love of one's country and an allegiance to the highest principles of humanity which can inspire great sacrifices can be expressed outside the military as well: the Peace Corps, and the 20th century Civil Rights Movement are only two examples.

Thanksgiving underscores the commitment to compassion, to our brothers' keepers and our sisters' keepers without which humanity would indeed be bereft.

The bundles of qualities, and the actions that express them, symbolized by these

two holidays have been, thankfully, much in evidence since we sustained the awful blow. The extraordinary outpouring of money from ordinary citizens, nonprofit agencies and private businesses, and the giving of other kinds of services bespeak a profound sense of community and a determination to preserve our society.

Those qualities have a power that by comparison obliterates the twisted hatred of those who attacked us.

And the quick response of President Bush, New York Mayor Rudolph W. Giuliani and other government, religious and other civic leaders refuting suggestions that the nation ought to pursue a policy of racial profiling against those who "look"

Arabic was leadership at its finest.

They rightly understand that not only would such a course have destroyed the "national unity" they sought, it is un-American.

So, the crisis that America now faces on two fronts has not swamped and undermined America's commitment to its values; it has strengthened them.

That's the point we must keep in mind especially as we face the domestic "theater" of our two-front war. The economic recession the attacks of September 11 has intensified demands that in working to get the economy moving again, we be inspired by the same sense of community that's been so evident and effective in our other actions.

Congress must do its part by repairing the now-tattered social safety net to help Americans survive when jobs — particularly low-wage service jobs at the bottom of the occupational ladder — are disappearing. Doing so isn't only compassionate; it's also a practical band-aid for an economy struggling to over-

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<p>Contributing Writers: Tammy McMahan Nyla Pickett Dianna Saffold John T. Stephens III Nancy Watson</p> <p>Photographers: John Broussard Jonathan Olsen</p>	<p>Ramon Savoy, Publisher, Editor-in-Chief</p> <p>Al Triche, Copy Editor</p> <p>Don Snook, Graphics</p> <p>Ed & Betty Brown, Founders</p>
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