

RELIGION

Blacks must regain their biblical territory

BY PROF. MCKINLEY BURT

Most of this nation was startled last week by a report that an African American actor was threatened with death for having the "audacity" to take the role of "Jesus Christ" in a religious play. However, nothing was said concerning his role as the "Devil" in another play in the same city.

New York City's Park Performing Arts Center was caught off guard by a number of loud and strident protests over the selection of a black actor for the role of the Savior. That is quite understandable, given that New York considers itself to be the very epitome of cultural sophistication. Readers may remember that several years ago I did a series on major urban parks in America and that New York and St. Louis were cited for having achieved the most viable interface with their citizens.

Reasonably priced entertainment and recreation is the hall mark of these metropolitan islands of culture. And certainly, during the course of a year, nothing more controversial is expected than an occasional flap over some nouveau art or the

amount of flesh exposed by a sexy costume. The best way for a Portlander to project this scene is to imagine dozens of neighborhood parks, each with its own "Firehouse Theatre", and many with an open-air theatre as well.

The logistics of this operation are formidable enough without any introduction of racism or cultural on-upmanship. And one might say that the real dramatist for this multicultural stage, spilling over islands, rivers and boroughs, was the famed Robert Moses, Park Commissioner extraordinaire, and the driving force behind the development of New York City's infrastructure. Not since the 18th Dynasty reign of African Queen Hatshepsot of Egypt (1503-1482 B.C.) has one inspired leader developed so much of the modern concepts of urban infrastructure.

But this very thought immediately directs us to the historical concepts of the black involvement in the major religions of the world from their very beginnings. In fact, it is quite well documented that most of the fundamental constructs of the world's religions appeared first in

African cosmology: The Egyptian Trinity of Osiris, Isis and Horus; The groundbreaking idea of 'One God' (Akhenaten); The Egyptian concept that in the beginning there was only chaos, uncreated matter and that, then, the Spirit of God moved over the "Primitive Nun" to create the world.

An excellent discussion of these matters is to be found in "The African Origin of Civilization", Anta Diop. And certainly, when we consider that Egyptian Trinity referred to earlier, we see that Isis, wife of Osiris and mother of Horus in exercising heroic efforts to save her son, creates the foundation for the Hebrew legends of Moses hidden in the bulrushes or an infant Abraham rescued from Nimrod (P. 134, Asimov's Guide To The Bible).

Of course we have not even touched here so far, the many references to "hair like lambs wool" and similar African characteristics ascribed to Biblical characters; Jesus, Moses, et al. Then, too, we recognize the fact that a major American population center like the City of New York has

million of descendants of Middle European immigrants whose religions feature many African icons such as Black Madonnas and infant Jesuses. These are still to be found in the churches and cathedrals of a dozen countries.

Many of us, of course, are familiar with the important works of that erudite black historian, J.A. Rogers: "Sex and Race, World's Great Men of Color, etc. You will find comprehensive illustration and documentation of the early and seminal black involvement in the religions of the world. Visit your African American bookstore for these and other gems of the black heritage. Be sure to check out a copy of the best selling, "What Color Was Jesus" by William Mosly.

We must indeed "regain our Biblical territory" or else see it snatched away from us as has happened in many other areas; history is real and dynamic and must be nurtured and cared for. I also would have you read, "A History of Christianity In Africa; From Antiquity to the Present", Elizabeth Assoc, William Erdmans Pub. 1995.

to the Synod of the Americas by the Bishops of the United States. He is Episcopal Moderator and member of the Board, National Catholic Office for Person with Disabilities and a member of the Board of Trustees for The Catholic University of America.

Future presentations in The Jesus Series will be:

"Whatever you did for them: Jesus and Justice" bishop William Murphy April 18, University of Portland April 19, Franciscan Renewal Center

"Christ Centered Spirituality" Bishop Edwin O'Brien May 23, Mt. Angel Seminary May 24, Franciscan Renewal Center

All presentations begin at 7:30 p.m., and are open to the public. There is no charge for the lectures.

The Jesus Series: Christ and his church

Archbishop Francis E. George, O.M.I., will discuss "Christ and His church," as part of The Jesus Series. The Jesus Series presents Catholic teaching regarding the person of Jesus Christ for the Catholic and ecumenical community, the presentations focus on the resurrected Lord proclaimed by tradition and Scripture. Archbishop George's presentation will be given on Friday, March 21 at Marylhurst College in Lake Oswego, and on Saturday, March 22 at the Franciscan Renewal Center (0858 SW Palatine Hill Road) Portland. The lecture begins at 7:30 on both evenings.

Archbishop George entered the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate on August 14, 1857. He was ordained a priest on December 21, 1963. He was appointed Bishop of Yakima by Pope John Paul II and

was ordained, and installed as Bishop on September 21, 1990. In April, 1996, Pope John Paul II appointed him Archbishop of Portland. He was installed as Archbishop on May 17, 1996.

Archbishop George received a Bachelor in Theology degree from the University of Ottawa, Canada, in 1964, a Master of Arts in Philosophy from The Catholic University of America, Washington, D.C., in 1965, a Masters of Arts in Theology from the University of Ottawa, in 1971, a Ph.D. in American Philosophy from Tulane University, New Orleans, LA., and a Sacred Theology Doctorate in Ecclesiology from the Pontifical University Urbaniana, Rome, in 1988. He holds memberships in the American Catholic Philosophical Association, American Society of Missiologists and the

Catholic commission on Intellectual and Cultural Affairs. Archbishop George has published extensively including chapters in several books, twenty articles in professional journals and many book reviews.

Archbishop George is a member of the national Conference of Catholic bishops, and serves on the ad hoc Bishops' Committee to Oversee the use of the Catechism, the American board of Missions, Committee on the Church in Latin America, the Committee on religious Life and Ministry, the Committee on Doctrine, Committee on Missions, and ad hoc Committee on shrines. He serves as a consultant to the National Conference of Catholic Bishops committee on Science and Human Values and as a consultant to the committee on Hispanic Affairs. He was recently elected a Delegate

Civil Rights Journal: A Song For Valerie

BY BERNICE POWELL JACKSON

It's getting harder and harder to hear that a friend and warrior in the battle for justice has died. And it's felling more and more lonely every year. This time it was my friend and colleague Valerie Russell, a lifelong and passionate advocate for people of color, for women and the poor.

Valerie served most recently as the Executive Director of the Office for Church in Society of the United Church of Christ, where she was often on the cutting edge on issues such as welfare reform and affirmative action. Ever the optimist, she pushed and prodded, argued and fought for our church, our communities and our nation to do justice

and love kindness and walk humbly with God. Ever the realist, she knew how to use her wit, her sense of humor and her political acumen to force changes in social policy and legislation.

Even after suffering a stroke three years ago, Valerie never stopped working for justice. Justice was the center of her life and she cared passionately about people and believed that each one of us has the responsibility to work for change. It was a responsibility which weighed heavily on her and she took it so seriously that it probably killed her.

Valerie's spiritual guides were Sojourner Truth and Martin Luther King, Jr. and she felt herself called

to speak truth to power and to work for a non-violent world of justice and peace. She felt herself called to make a world where no children are left behind and where women and people of color are free from oppression and where all have a place to live and food to eat.

When she headed the City Mission Society in Boston, she was a fearless advocate for the city's poor, especially the children. Through her work in the church and the national YWCA, she was a tireless advocate for the rights of women, particularly women of color.

Valerie was the type of person you could always count on to raise the hard question, to face into the

winds of injustice. Just knowing that she was present allowed me and many others to breathe a little easier, to worry a little less. Her voice will be missed by many. Her accompaniment in the struggle will be missed by me.

Her death once again reminds me of how fragile life really is, an how precious and how short. She was only 55, but she had packed 100 years of experiences in some-how.

It's getting harder and harder to hear about the deaths. We must raise up a new generation of warriors for justice so that the sacrifices and the work of Valerie Russell will not have been in vain.

Court weighs suite against priest

The New Jersey Supreme Court is pondering whether a congregant who had an affair with her priest can sue him for malpractice, a notion that has been rejected by about 30 other states.

The priest and the Episcopal Diocese of Newark turned to the state's high court this week to appeal a lower court's decision in the case of a woman identified as "F.G."

F.G. said that a year after she went to the Rev. Alex MacDonell for counseling, she ended up in a romantic relationship with him.

An attorney for the woman told the New Jersey Supreme Court justices that priests have the same responsibility to their congregants as psychiatrists do when they undertake counseling, and that having sex with a patient is wrong.

But the attorney for MacDonell said creating such a standard for priests would force courts to get involved in issues involving the First Amendment and religious rights.

MacDonell, a married priest, admitted he had an affair with F.G.

when he was at All Saints Episcopal Church in Bergenfield. He was suspended for one year.

Nondenominational cathedral agrees to allow witchcraft rites

For 50 years, the Cathedral of the Pines war memorial and chapel has been used as a place of worship by members of all religions. Soon that will include witches and pagans, too.

After a two-year fight, trustees of the nondenominational cathedral have agreed to allow a witches' coven to hold services at the hilltop shrine.

The high priestess of the AppleMoon Coven, Diane Des Rochers of Groton, Mass., called the trustees' decision "extremely appropriate."

The controversy began when Des Rochers sought to use the open-air site in 1995 to perform a pagan wedding, and was turned down. She filed a complaint with the state Human Rights Commission.

The case was set for a full hearing this week, but the Cathedral decided to settle instead.

The cathedral and gardens in this

southwestern New Hampshire feature the Altar of the Nation, which is built with stones from every state and soil from each country where Americans fought.

Religious leaders get involved in ending strike by steel workers

Religious leaders have stepped in to try to end a steel workers strike that has idled about 4,500 workers in Ohio, West Virginia and Pennsylvania for five months.

At a reconciliation rally, labor-management consultant Wayne Alderson said, "There's man's way of confrontation. And there's God's way of reconciliation. After five months in our dispute, it's time for God to intervene."

The rally was conducted by the Concerned Pastors of the Upper Ohio Valley.

"We're not here to say that we have a guaranteed solution to the strike," said Rev. Lawrence Roff of the Covenant Presbyterian Church. "We just want to bring the people together to talk about how to find a possible solution to this strike."

Preacher Recounts

Return to Jewish Roots

"We all are on a journey during our lives, but some unique individuals manage to jump the tracks, to change their destination 180 degrees," said Devora Wilhelm, emissary for Chabad-Lubavitch of Oregon with her husband, Rabbi Moshe Wilhelm. Chabad and the Mittleman Jewish Community Center will sponsor an extraordinary speaker on Sunday, March 16, at 7:30 p.m. at the MJCC, 6651 SW Capitol Hwy. The focus of the lecture will be one Jewish woman's remarkable odyssey from the Christian sect she grew up in, into the arms of Judaism and her own heritage.

At the age of sixteen, Tonica Marlow, daughter of a Protestant minister and an Egyptian Jewish mother, was accepted as the youngest student at a noted Christian theological college, within four years she had become an ordained minister. Yet with all of her successful activities within the church, she could not explain the deep void she felt inside. She asked questions, but the answers she received did not satisfy her. And so she began a remarkable quest for her true heritage. Tonica Marlow is

now Tova Mordechai. She resides in Tsfat, Israel with her husband the three sons. Mordechai has authored an autobiography titled "Playing with Fire." Her fascinating story will touch your heart and continue to inspire you for years to come.

In her autobiography, Playing with fire, Mordechai describes her childhood; her flight from the religious compound where she had been ordained a minister and prophetess; her hiding out with a Jewish family in London; her leap-of-faith trip to America to study Judaism; marriage, children and her final trip "home" to join family in Israel.

Rabbi Moshe Wilhelm, director of Chabad-Lubavitch of Oregon says, "Tova Mordechai lectures throughout the world on the significance of being Jewish in this day and age. Her fascinating story will touch your heart and inspire you for years to come." Admission to the program is \$5 if pre-registered by March 12, \$7 at the door. Call the MJCC, 244-0111 to register.

For more information, call Rabbi Wilhelm at Chabad Center, 977-9947.

New Hope Community Church

The Performing Arts Department of New Hope Community Church is pleased to announce the dramatization of the Easter Story to be presented at New Hope Community Church on March 21, 22, 23, and the Easter weekend, March 27, 28 and 29, 1997.

Our Performing Arts Department has been performing since 1985. More than 300 volunteer singers, musicians and actors will again be participating in this year's Easter production.

Admission is free of charge. We are presenting the Easter Story as a gift to the community during this very special time of the year.



Celebrate Black History Month at the

Interstate Firehouse Cultural Center

IFCC Gallery presents:
Voices in Stone: Art of Zimbabwe
Stunning Shona stone sculpture and textiles.
Monday-Friday noon-5:30 pm through February 28. Free.

IFCC Theatre presents:
Driving Miss Daisy
Fridays & Saturdays at 8 pm through March 15,
Tickets \$10-15. Call 287-5929 for reservations.

IFCC Student Matinee Series presents:
Driving Miss Daisy
For grades 6-12. Thursdays at 9:30 am through March 6.
Tickets \$4. Call 823-2071 for reservations.
and
John Ole Tome, Maasai Tribe Cultural Lecturer
For pre-K through grade 8. February 26 & 28 at 10 am & 1 pm.
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