

## Black Catholic Revivalism: The Emergence of A New Form of Worship

### *Introduction*

The religious phenomenon known as "revivalism" has been a "way of life" in America from its earliest beginnings. It is a phenomenon rooted in the European awakenings which led to religious and political upheavals, and resulted in the flight or forced emigration of many who observed the "wrong" religious practices.

Those who fled eventually to the New World brought with them a religion rigidly strict in its beliefs and observances. The Puritans prayed to an omnipotent God who predestined those elected to be saved and damned all others, regardless of the quality of their lives.

In the untamed regions of America, however, this sovereign, austere form of worship soon led to problems. The vastness of this country, with its wealth of land and other resources, invited anyone to become independent and wealthy if he or she had a strong back and was hardworking. The novelty of working and thinking for oneself in secular affairs inevitably led to thinking for oneself on religious matters. The new struggling middle-class soon saw the irrelevance of a religion that shut them out and placed all privileges in the hands of a few. The seeds for the First Great Awakening were planted.

This paper relates how a new form of worship is evolving from the different forms, both Protestant and Catholic, which have made up the American religious scene. The term, "Black Catholic Revivalism," will be used to define this new form which has commingled the egalitarian Arminianism of Evangelical Protestantism with the institutionalized ritual of Roman Catholicism, and then filtered them through the unique black experience of slavery and continuing oppression in the United States. The result is the emergence of a worship form which recognizes and proclaims that the unique contributions of the African past, the ongoing black life experience and Catholic ritual and sacramentality are

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compatible and belong together. Out of this rich synthesis has come a form of worship which celebrates being black and Catholic in a way which is not only self-affirming but also community-building and nurturing.

There are four parts to the study:

Part One: The history of Protestant revivalism and the emergence of Evangelical Protestantism;

Part Two: The development of Black Protestant Revivalism—the result of a synthesis of African roots, black slave experience, continuing oppression, and the Evangelical Protestant tradition;

Part Three: Catholic revivalism, as it emerged from its origins in the simple “parish mission”;

Part Four: The emergence and continuing growth of Black Catholic Revivalism as a response to a continuing search for meaning and affirmation in the lives of black Catholics.

### *Protestant Revivalism*

There have been at least two Great Awakenings or “revivals of religion” in American history. (Both names will be used interchangeably hereafter.)

The first occurred between 1730-1760 and caused the first signs of strain to appear in the seamless fabric which was the Puritan church. The second took place between 1800 and 1830, and witnessed the final schism in the Puritan church and the birth or strengthening of the separated Methodists, Baptists, and other denominations. This period also saw the beginnings of the black church, first in the South, and, after its suppression there, in the North. A Third Awakening is acknowledged, but its exact dates and boundaries are in dispute.

Why do “revivals of religion” occur? It is hypothesized that they are not due simply to dissatisfaction with any particular church’s teachings. They are not merely religious upheavals, but encompass political and social problems as well. Unlimited to culture, race, religion, or class, they spread throughout a nation, overturning everything in their tracks:

They are essentially folk movements, the means by which a people or nation reshapes its identity, transforms its patterns of thought and action, and sustains a healthy relationship with environmental and social change.<sup>1</sup>

Revivals are only one manifestation of many which occur in the phenomena of a Great Awakening:

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<sup>1</sup> William G. McLoughlin, *Revivals, Awakenings and Reform: An Essay on Religion and Social Change in America, 1607-1977* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), p. 2.

Great Awakenings [and the revivals that are part of them] are the result, not of depressions, wars, or epidemics, but of ontical disjunctions in our self-understanding. They are not brief outbursts of mass emotionalism by one group or another but profound cultural transformations affecting all Americans and extending over a generation or more. Awakenings begin in periods of cultural distortion and grave personal stress, when we lose faith in the legitimacy of our norms, the viability of our institutions and the authority of our leaders in church and state. They eventuate in basic restructurings of our institutions and redefinitions of our social goals.<sup>2</sup>

What were the causes of the first Great Awakening, and what changes resulted from it? To answer these questions, we must return to England and the Puritan Awakening of 1610-1640. This Awakening, it is generally agreed, was a reaction against the established order which had evolved from the English Reformation. It was a "revitalizing" movement in English society which offered a new code of beliefs and values more in harmony with the needs and experiences of the rising middle class. The "Protestant ethic," in revolt against the medieval practices still employed by the Anglican church with its condemnation of usury, "filthy lucre" and individualism, established a new set of virtues more in keeping with capitalistic practices.

It was a political and religious movement based on the Bible as sole authority for all human and social action. Seeking to be more restrictive than their Calvinistic forebears, the Puritans stressed predestination, hard work and sober observance of the law for the benefit of the entire community.

This was the religious mindset brought to America by its first colonists. The stress was on self-sacrifice for the common good and the subjection of individual freedom to the will of the community. Free will did not exist and only a few "elect" were assured of the joys of heaven. All others were hopelessly predestined for the fires of hell.

The first strains in this theology, and the people's adherence to it, began with the opening of the frontier territories. As families moved into these new lands, they found that with diligence and patience they could make better lives for themselves. The church's influence and power which was supported by universal taxation, was weakened by distance. Class barriers began to bend and then break as the new landowners began to recognize their own equality and status. Estrangement between the common people and their church and state leaders grew as the non-elect began to question a worldview which condemned the majority to hell and maintained the reins of power and authority in the hands of a few.

The First Great Awakening started in New England, with a series of small, scattered revivals in the 1720s and 30s. People, in their search for

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

meaning and reassurance in their lives, called upon God as never before and felt answered and reaffirmed by His love for them and their new ways. In their joy, they wanted to share these new feelings. They sought communion with others who were also experiencing this new "reviving" presence of the Lord. Rather than waiting on the Lord in total passivity, they began to realize that God would respond to their prayers and actions. This sense of participation in one's own salvation led to the creation of "new churches and sects, new forms of Christian fellowship."<sup>3</sup>

By 1740, revivals had spread across the colonies. Itinerant preachers, especially those from England, came with a new style of rhetorical preaching which appealed directly to the audience's emotions. They called each person individually back to God, thereby redefining God's relationship to each sinner. This led to a new concept of the government and the public good in which the individual was not subjected to the government, but rather, shared responsibility with it. As more laypersons without formal theological education entered the pulpits, religion was democratized. Colony and class lines were shattered. The authority of the ordained over the lives of the people was broken.

The Methodist sect, which was originally a part of the Anglicanism in England, was strengthened by this "revival of religion." With their stress on Arminianism, which taught that Christ died for the salvation of all, not just a predestined few, and their emphasis on itinerant evangelists and lay preachers, Methodism was the answer for those dissatisfied with the restrictions of the colonial governments. The world view of the Calvinists, with its stress on human depravity and one's inability to improve one's lot, came increasingly in conflict with the world view of Enlightenment rationalism, which saw mankind as innately good and able to better its situation through individual actions. This latter view was to emerge victorious from the struggle.

The American Revolution brought this religious and social ferment to a temporary halt. However, with its end, the Second Great Awakening (1800-1830) was the outgrowth of continuing anxiety over the future and conflict with the past. Fear arose in the minds of the American ministry of all denominations that the country was falling away from religion. The rise of disestablishmentarianism, the deistic and rationalistic views of those in office, especially President Jefferson, and the growing expansion of an apparently "irreligious" western frontier, increased these fears.

They hoped for a second "revival of religion," a renewal of that first great outpouring of the Spirit which had occurred in the First Awakening. This time the clergy were promoters, rather than bystanders. They

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<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 59.

were yet hampered, however, by their pantheistic belief, that a revival was a "miracle" of God and could not be brought about by human effort. Thus, they felt their only recourse was to await God's will patiently and hope.

In the West, however, the children of the First Awakening had abandoned such a restrictive outlook. Between 1798 and 1810, there took place on the western frontier, especially in Kentucky, a passionate outburst of the Spirit known as the Western or Kentucky Revival. Although revivals were still considered to be miracles and individual conversion, "a work of God outside the sequence of natural events,"<sup>4</sup> it was acknowledged that human instigation could be the yeast which began the fermentation.

The Western revival brought about a further revolution in religious thought. Conversion was considered to be an individual act available to all. It was "a personal change of heart which came about suddenly and publicly and under excruciating emotional pressure."<sup>5</sup> Thus, individual conversion became the culmination of the Christian experience for each person. "Only those who were born again and went through a conversion experience were saved; all others, regardless of their virtue or piety, were sinners."<sup>6</sup> On the surface, this was a new version of the elect/non-elect teachings of the Puritans, but with one major difference. Conversion was available to all. Anyone could hope to be saved. Yet another blow was struck against the crumbling edifice of Puritan election and predestination.

Conversion was *the* important thing. It was an emotional overhauling of the sinner, usually manifested by dancing in the aisles, experiencing the "jerks" and "shudders," or falling away in a prolonged faint lasting hours or even days. Many felt the need to exhort their fellow sinners to confess their sins and to follow the straight and narrow path of God.

The preacher's role became more active. In the 18th century, his discourse had been intellectual and didactic. By the early 19th century, it had changed to a fiery exhortation meant "to convulse the conscience" of the repentant convert. The preacher

sharpened the message of man's guilt to a point, by repetition, and drove it into the sinner's heart. . . . The sinner had to *feel* in his very bones the smoldering of guilt, abasement, hope, and assurance.<sup>7</sup>

In the West, the Methodists were the denomination which gained the

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<sup>4</sup> Bernard A. Weisberger, *They Gathered at the River: The Story of the Great Revivalists and Their Impact upon Religion in America* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1966) p. 28.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 39.

most converts. In its opposition to Calvinistic predestination and in its enthusiastic "camp-meetings," the "semi-wild" peoples of the violent frontier felt welcomed and at home.

The movement was also slowly taking over the East in a more subdued manner. Here, conversion was still considered an exercise of the mind rather than of the heart. Attempts were made to redefine Calvinist theology to provide more room for personal activity. The portrayal of an arbitrary and sovereign God slowly gave way to one of a God who governed through moral principles to which all people, with His help, might be able to conform. A major result of these changes was a growing recognition of the responsibility to participate in social and community activities.

At this crucial point, Charles Grandison Finney came upon the scene (1820-1830) and brought the "lusty breath of the Western revival into the East."<sup>8</sup> Finney changed the face of the newly emerging evangelicalism with his views on social reform and conversion. He had no interest in waiting upon the Lord to get things started. For him, "a revival of religion is not a miracle"<sup>9</sup> nor was it dependent upon any miracle. It was, rather, the result of the "right use of the appropriate means,"<sup>10</sup> always with the blessing of God. It was Finney's contention that

almost all the religion in the world has been produced by revivals. God has found it necessary to take advantage of the excitability there is in mankind, to produce powerful excitements among them, before he can lead them to obey.<sup>11</sup>

Finney and his successors claimed immediate conversion in front of the altar. People were accepted or converted completely and immediately without having to wait "in hope" for confirmation on the final day of judgment. Revivals became events not "rained down" by the grace of God, but planned and run by professional evangelists who preached and planned them with a flair for detail down to the number and color of altar flowers. Accompanying these changes came an increased use of music, especially participatory congregational hymns, which became the backbone of all revivals.

It was at this point that the churches and evangelists began to look beyond the internal problems of their churches to the sinful state of the world around them. Evangelization became the purpose of the church as it sought to save mankind by "giving universal and saving empire to the

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 86.

<sup>9</sup> Charles G. Finney, *Lectures on Revivals of Religion* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1960), p. 12. Here, Finney deals with the theme, "What a Revival of Religion Is."

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

Kingdom of Christ."<sup>12</sup> As the revival fervor began to fade, its energy was transferred to the growing antislavery, temperance, and other social movements.

By the 1890s, the foundations of Evangelical Protestantism were in place. It was a religion, especially exemplified by the Methodist and Baptist denominations, which upheld the verbal inspiration, inerrancy, and sole authority of the Scriptures. It also emphasized the supreme importance of proclaiming the Word of God in preaching while reducing liturgical worship to the barest minimum.

Evangelical Protestantism was not merely a backwoods illiterate religion which appealed solely to the emotions. The circuit-riders were well-versed in their creed which was founded on the belief that all could be saved and reconciled to God through Christ. However, it was not an intellectual religion, either. It spoke to the heart of the individual sinner in terms which could be easily understood. Its theology was based on a realism which provided a clear distinction between right and wrong, good and evil. It was imbued with the popular romanticism of the day and with Jacksonian democracy. It stressed the value of the individual and the significance of the emotions in mankind. The evangelicals modified the doctrine of original sin to allow for progressive reform which gave rise to the political benevolence movement (social reform). Above all, it stressed the immanence of God as Spirit.

### *Black Protestant Revivalism*

The new sense of social reform which developed among Protestants soon began to focus on the conditions of Negro slaves.

The revivalism of the Great Awakening, spread over time and space by evangelical preachers, created the conditions for large-scale conversion of the slaves. By revitalizing the religious piety of the South, the Awakening[s] stirred an interest in conversion which was turned toward the slaves. By heavily emphasizing the inward conversion experience, the Awakening tended to de-emphasize the outward status of men, and to cause black and white alike to *feel* personally that Christ had died for them as individuals. Evangelical religion had a universalistic dimension which encouraged preaching to all men, embracing rich and poor, free and slave. The emotionalism and plain doctrine of revivalist preaching appealed to the masses, including the slaves.<sup>13</sup>

After the American Revolution, Anglicanism was uprooted in the South and replaced by Evangelicalism. With its stress on the "primacy of religious experience, the conviction of sin, the need for repentance and the importance of close fellowship and discipline,"<sup>14</sup> it soon swept the

<sup>12</sup> Weisberger, *They Gathered at the River*, p. 144.

<sup>13</sup> Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The "Invisible" Institution in the Antebellum South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), p. 148.

<sup>14</sup> Milton C. Sernett, *Black Religion and American Evangelicalism: White Protestants,*

area. The problem that evolved was "how to preach a Gospel premised on individual autonomy within the framework of slavery."<sup>15</sup> No real attempts at conversion were made until the problem of the effect of Baptism was settled to the satisfaction of slaveholders. Only when the established churches decreed that conversion resulted in a spiritual, rather than physical freedom, did evangelization really begin.

Attempts were made to grant at least a "spiritual personhood" to the slave despite his "inferiority." In the long run, however, black evangelization was seen merely as a "balm for Southern conscience" and a means of keeping the slaves in line.<sup>16</sup>

This justification was explicitly expressed by Charles C. Pinckney in an address to southern planters in 1829:

Were true religion propagated among this numerous and important class, a sense of duty would counteract their reluctance to labour, and, diminishing the cases of feigned sickness so harassing to the Planter, would augment their numerical force and consequent production. The social relations of life being better observed, a greater proportion of domestic happiness would prevail and render them more contented with their situation, and more anxious to promote their owner's welfare. The absence, or diminution of theft, falsehood, and many other vices, would render the home of the Agriculturalist far more agreeable than it can be, where guilt, which escapes human detection, knows not, and fears not, another tribunal.<sup>17</sup>

The Christianity which developed as an outcome of such thinking was one which confused the temporal sphere with the spiritual, which sought to make good saints out of good servants and which expressed itself in a hope for a better future in which the "troubles of this world" would "soon be over." The present-day situation and injustices were glossed over. Certain scriptural texts were emphasized and other ignored. The slaves were exhorted with the Epistle to Philemon and similar readings which stressed the duties of servant to his master, the God-given mandate of obedience to one's superiors, and the necessity that one rest in the state in which one found oneself without agitating for a change in one's situation. (Cf. I Cor 7:31, 24; Eph 6:7 *et al.*)

However, it was recognized that the slaves did not accept this indoctrination unquestioningly, especially when they were taught to read for themselves and were provided with Bibles. They were critical of the hypocrisy underlying Christianity as it was taught to them. They did not trust, initially, a religion which held them to virtues blatantly ignored by their own masters. Eventually, however, as they learned of other sections

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*Plantation Missions and the Flowering of Negro Christianity 1787-1865*, ATLA Monograph Series, No. 7 (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press and the American Theological Library Association, 1975), p. 25.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 59.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 54.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 62.



of the Bible, a change took place. They were able to differentiate between the piety of those around them and what they saw as the true virtues of the Christian religion. Out of this deeper understanding, they created their own piety, one which allowed them to survive, without adding to their oppression.

Timothy Smith suggests that

the Christian beliefs they adopted enabled the African exiles to endure slavery precisely because these beliefs supported their moral revulsion toward it and promised eventual deliverance from it without demanding that they risk their lives in immediate resistance.<sup>18</sup>

Initially, Southern religious life was integrated with both blacks and whites gathering for the same camp-meetings and experiencing the "convulsions" of the Spirit together. Black preachers were encouraged and were ordained by both Baptists and Methodists, and black exhorters, deacons or watchmen were set up on each plantation to "conduct evening prayers . . . assist church members by warnings, reproofs, and exhortations, heal breaches, report cases of delinquency, see that children be taught their prayers, and that everybody attended worship."<sup>19</sup> The black ministers not only preached to black or mixed congregations, but some were allowed, because of their knowledge and fervent preaching style, to "exhort" totally white congregations.

However, even during this period many slaves still preferred to conduct their own "hush-arbor" gatherings. These usually took place late at night and were events characterized by singing, handclapping, oral prayer, and fervent preaching, all culminating in communal ecstasy. In these sessions, Blacks felt they could more freely be themselves. It is from these clandestine gatherings that the first meshings of African and Protestant traditions occurred.

When the African peoples, uprooted from their ancestral homes in Africa, were brought to the United States in chains, they did not lose all that they had known and loved of their ancient culture. Africans were a religious people long before they had any contact with "civilization."

The African beliefs in one Supreme Being, in a realistic distinction between good and evil, in lesser spiritual powers, and in creation paralleled much in the Hebraic background of Christianity.<sup>20</sup>

This religious background helped ameliorate the cultural shock of their first exposure to the tenets of white evangelicalism. It is important to

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<sup>18</sup> "Slavery and Theology: The Emergence of Black Christian Consciousness in Nineteenth Century America," *Church History* 41 (1972): 497-498.

<sup>19</sup> Luther P. Jackson, "Religious Instruction of Negroes, 1830 to 1860, With Special Reference to South Carolina," *Journal of Negro History* 15 (January 1930): 72.

<sup>20</sup> Sernett, *Black Religion and American Evangelicalism*, p. 83.

stress that these African roots were not erased or eliminated by that exposure. Rather, after a period of time, they "incorporated into their Christianity certain beliefs and practices which paralleled those of the traditional tribal cults."<sup>21</sup>

With the violent rebellion of Nat Turner, a black slave minister, and the growing Northern agitation against slavery, much of the slaves' freedom to worship was abruptly ended. In a matter of weeks, harsh and oppressive "Black Codes" were passed in the Southern states which forbade the teaching of reading and writing and which stripped black ministers of their right to preach and gather a church. These restrictions severely crippled religious freedom and activity for blacks in the South until after the Civil War. Once-thriving churches were closed, often violently and religion in the South became white-dominated and white-oriented. The observance of black religious services took place out of sight of the masters, at night, in the fields or not at all.

What type of religious beliefs were the outgrowth of this admixture of freedom and oppression? They were beliefs expressed in terms of the paradox and mystery of God's dealings with mankind. There was an intertwining of emotion with perception which led to a unique theology of hope. It was not a religion of complacency or compensation. Nor was it a religion which looked only to "pie in the sky when I die." Rather, it was a faith rooted in an encounter with injustice from which sprang a theology of God's mysterious exercise of sovereignty over human history expressed in judgment for forgiveness, but most of all, in love.

Blacks took the stories of the Fall of Adam and Eve, of Moses, of Mary, and of the Cross and interpreted them in the light of their own encounters with despair and hope:

Moses became the deliverer of an enslaved people as well as the bearer of the Ten Commandments. Jonah's trembling denunciation of the sin of the Ninevites affirmed their suspicion that the rich and powerful were not necessarily God's chosen. Biblical accounts of the conduct of believing Jews during the Babylonian exile—of Daniel, of the three who would not bow down, and of Esther the Queen—seemed to Christian Blacks, as to generations of Jews, to be allegories of promise to the oppressed. The baby Jesus, needing tenderness and care, revealed a God whose love made him somehow vulnerable and dependent, and weakness of human faith joined him forever with the meek who would inherit the earth.<sup>22</sup>

Blacks transformed the Protestant religion. The emphasis was still on the individual and his or her own singular conversion. However, the Old Testament doctrine of a chosen people was adapted "in such a way as to affirm a common humanity rather than their people's separateness."<sup>23</sup>

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 84.

<sup>22</sup> Smith, "Slavery and Theology," p. 502.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

For them, Christianity was a reaching out to affirm themselves and others, as they traveled hand-in-hand with the Lord Jesus on his pain-strewn path to glory. From these roots came an outpouring of self-respect and spiritual authority which sustained many black Christians in their struggle not to succumb to the temptation to accept the white man's estimate of their worth.

Christianity, as they adapted it, enabled them to withstand the constant blows struck against them, both before and after emancipation. As an unknown freed woman put it: "My soul was set free long before the fetters fell from my body. God gave me *his* freedom, but the little children of this earth would not give me theirs."<sup>24</sup>

As a result of their unwilling arrival upon American soil, blacks had to look beyond their masters to those who shared their burden and oppression. Fellow blacks who would never have been called brother or sister in Africa were bound together in the common goal of saving their lives and preserving their humanity. From this unity, came a religious conversion which stressed human solidarity, not individual freedom. This solidarity laid the foundation for the triumphs of the black church in the twentieth century.

The form of worship which emerged from this transformation of Protestant piety into a uniquely black piety was also unique in other ways. It was characterized, especially in the South after the Civil War, by the "Old-Time Revival": an outdoor experience of communality and spiritualization similar in its fervor to the earlier camp meetings from which it grew. Black worship meant "getting religion," having a special kind of experience during which one was touched by the hand of God and permanently changed.

The "Old-Time Revival" was characterized by individual denunciation of sin in a public confession, an experience which could sometimes take several days. The minister and the "saints" of the church needed that time to decide whether the person had truly experienced God's healing grace. Those seeking that grace sat on the Mourner's Bench at the front of the Church and were exhorted, preached at, sung to, and prayed over with unceasing fervor until the Spirit hit them.

The most important aspects of these events were the emphasis on singing, the preaching which dragged the sinner from the fiery furnaces of hell to the pearly gates of glory, and the community itself. Everyone was involved in some way, either as preacher, witnesser, usher, choir members, food preparer, repentant sinner, or pray-er. It was a family affair which provided nurturing for the extended family and strength for black people through hard times.

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid, p. 504.

In short, it was a doxology of song, prayer and preaching. It was a soul-stimulating, soul-satisfying experience which made the spirit of the transcendent God present within their midst. It laid the "foundation for the development of a God-fearing and humane black religious community."<sup>25</sup>

What was happening in the Roman Catholic world during this period? It, too, was undergoing a period of revivalism similar to that of the Protestants, resulting in a "sacramental evangelicalism."<sup>26</sup>

### *Roman Catholic Revivalism*

Contrary to the view given by many American religious historians, the Roman Catholic Church and its people also experienced a revival movement during the second half of the 19th century. Most revival historians speak only of Protestant Awakenings, with minimal reference to the Roman Catholic Church. However, the Catholic parish mission can also be considered a revival with many of the same characteristics of a Protestant evangelical revival. The similarities include stress on individual conversion, a theology of individualism rooted in repentance, and fervent, emotional preaching. There were differences, of course, namely in the Catholic emphasis on inclusion of the sacrament of penance in the personal experience of conversion and in the pre-eminence of the celebration of the Eucharist. In its own way, Catholic revivalism gave birth to a form of evangelicalism, a "sacramental evangelicalism," which "shaped the piety of the people and strengthened the universal church."<sup>27</sup>

The Catholic revival was conceived in the parish mission, a form of evangelism dating back to the 16th and 17th centuries in Europe. As the Great Awakenings were the result of a growing disjunction between church, state, and people, the Catholic missions were a result of an increasing "religious malaise" among both clergy and congregations as well as the tensions and upheavals in thought and practice which resulted from the Protestant reform. In both cases, the need for a spiritual overhaul was evident.

The parish mission was also the result of a new preaching style developed by religious orders founded during the Catholic Counter-Reformation. The Jesuits were the initiators who brought structure and form to the mission concept, which preached the burning fires of hell and the need for individual repentance and conversion.

Missions appeared on the American continent with representatives of

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, p. 506.

<sup>26</sup> Olin P. Moyd, "The Old-Time Revival," *Freeing the Spirit*, II (Summer 1973): p. 23.

<sup>27</sup> Jay P. Dolan, *Catholic Revivalism: The American Experience, 1830-1900* (Notre Dame, Ill.: Notre Dame Press, 1978), p. xv.

the different orders of priests, especially the Jesuits, Redemptorists, and Passionists, who were sent to minister to the needs of the fledgling American church. The first probably took place in Maryland near the end of the 18th century.

Catholicism, as with Protestantism, was in a very derelict condition in the early 1800s:

Too few parishes, not enough priests and a population either scattered across the frontier or densely concentrated in the city were not conditions favorable to consolidation of a missionary church. Coupled with this was the obvious pattern of religious neglect among Catholic Americans.<sup>28</sup>

Far away from their former parish church, with the possibility of seeing a priest, if fortunate, perhaps once a year, there was a gradual but definite falling away from religious observance of the tenets of faith by Catholic immigrants.

Catholics looked down upon the Protestant form of revivalism, especially the Methodist camp meetings, as "heathenish" assemblies. The clergy was opposed to religious enthusiasm as an end in itself. It was felt that, "in Protestant revivals, excitement is carried to excess, and made the end aimed at. In Catholic retreats and missions, it is wisely managed and made simply a means."<sup>29</sup> In actuality, they were not that different.

As with the camp meetings, often the parish mission was held wherever a large group of people could be congregated. On the frontier, this meant huge tents, open fields, or barns. Both aimed for conversion, the reclaiming of sinners for Jesus Christ, and were "specially calculated to excite the piety of the faithful."<sup>30</sup> Stress was on the spoken word, often accompanied by a "variety of theatrical techniques." The mission was preached with "powerful emotion" and often the audiences responded with spontaneous outbursts of weeping, shuddering and moaning. Catholic revival preachers were also itinerant circuit riders. Initially, emphasis was on the already baptized but fallen away Catholics. The revival was an occasion for conversion of the indifferent, the new immigrants who had recently come from Europe and who were failing rapidly in their faith.

The Paulists, the first indigenous religious order in the United States, who were established specifically to run parish missions, emphasized that

A mission . . . is something which gathers into one powerful showing all the warnings of Divine Justice fully explaining the enormous folly and ingratitude of sin; it leads the sinner back to his very childhood and traces his downward track through youth and manhood towards his last death; which stands with him at his open grave; which calls in the ear the summons to the judgement seat of an offended God; which

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 9.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 86.

scorches his face with the fires of hell and all in an atmosphere of fervor, aided by the entreaties of the sinner's friends, their prayers to God, their tears, the example of the repentance of other sinners.<sup>31</sup>

This was evangelicalism in exemplary form. A Redemptorist Father likened the mission "to a thunder and lightening storm" which "bursts upon the scene with powerful sermons to arouse man from the lethargy of sin to a life of fervor."<sup>32</sup> With its emphasis on sin, its stress on fear of the Lord and its aim of arousing fear, reverence, awe, hatred of sin, and the love of God, one can say, quite truthfully, that the parish mission was, indeed, a revival in all but name.

However, Catholic revivalism was different in its emphasis on turning away from the world and towards more celestial goals. Unlike Evangelical Protestantism which led to the evolution of the Protestant social gospel, with its emphasis on making the world into the Kingdom of God, Catholic evangelicalism removed the Catholic from the world and left him or her concerned only with achieving the after-life rather than attempting to improve the situation of his or her neighbor.

Another striking difference of Catholic evangelicalism was its emphasis on the sacraments and sacramentals. By itself, a personal decision for Christ was considered incomplete. It had to be verified by a "sacramental confession of one's sins and the eventual reception of the Eucharist. . . ."<sup>33</sup>

For Catholics salvation was achieved through the instrumentality of the visible Church and its sacraments. The spirit of orthodoxy allowed for no other alternative. Catholic revivalism encouraged a sacramental evangelicalism which not only urged the sinner to repent but also provided the means necessary for such a conversion. For Catholics personal conviction of sin was only the first step toward salvation and without the church the pursuit of holiness could not be realized.<sup>34</sup>

Even with the importance of the sacraments as the bestowal of acceptance on the newly-confessed former sinner, revivalism did give a special coloring to the prevalent Tridentine Catholicism of the day. It was a religion of the heart not of the head, which spoke to the sinner's own personal life, and which invited him or her to a personal experience of sin and conversion.

The parish mission or revival soon became a commonplace event in the lives of Catholics and a major means of evangelization. Great stress was placed on the importance of Church structures and institutions. The parish, the key institution, was highlighted, the pastor was supreme, and the

<sup>31</sup> Jay P. Dolan, "American Catholics and Revival Religion, 1850-1900," *Horizons* 3 (Spring 1976): 44.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 46.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 45.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 54.

congregations, "docile and obedient." Any growth of social involvement was impeded by a "ghetto-mentality," i.e., Catholics against the world. The pervasive presence of a very strong anti-Catholic sentiment during the latter half of the 19th century was an important factor in this isolationism.

As parishes began to grow, both in size and number, the decision as to when a mission should occur became one for the pastor to make. Usually, they took place every four or five years, since it was found that more frequent occurrences led to a too-routinized event with little novelty or success at engendering enthusiasm.

As with the Protestants, revivals soon became structured affairs, managed period of grace called down by priests specifically trained and laden with sermon notebooks suitable for a parish of any size, class or racial makeup.

Blacks were a part of the revival spirit in the Catholic Church from its very beginnings. They have been present in the American Catholic church from its birth, especially in the French and Spanish-settled areas of the country. The majority of Black Catholics in the 17th and 18th centuries were found in what came to be known as the state of Maryland. They were the slaves of Catholics, including Catholic clergy and religious.

Little overt evangelization, beyond perfunctory instruction prior to baptism, was given to most of them. Yet, Roman Catholicism was attractive to many blacks, especially those newly arrived from Africa. It was more amenable to the survival of African religion than Protestantism.

In African religion there is a high God comparable to the Christian concept of a one God. But just as there are many spirits in Christianity, angels and saints, each especially empowered [St. Michael for strength, St. Raphael for healing], so, too, in the African religion there are spirits for particular aspects of creation.<sup>35</sup>

Devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary and the saints offered a rich context for syncretism with the African gods:

The use of sacramentals [blessed objects], such as statutes, pictures, candles, incense, holy water, rosaries, vestments, and relics, in Catholic ritual was more akin to the spirit of African piety than the sparseness of Puritan America, which held such objects to be idolatrous. Holy days, processions, Saint's feasts, days of fast and abstinence were all recognizable to the African who had observed the sacred days, festivals, and food taboos of his gods.<sup>36</sup>

On the other hand, many blacks who were Catholic through no desire

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Clarence Joseph Rivers, *The Spirit in Worship* (Cincinnati, Ohio: Stimuli, Inc. 1978), p. 4.

of their own, did not care for it because of its inhibitions towards an emotional experience of "church." "Prayer meetings, shouting and spirituals—the staples of Black Protestantism—were often foreign to the experience of Black Catholics."<sup>37</sup> While the Protestant religion denied the ritual use of sacred objects and devotion to the saints which were readily adaptable to African religion and theology, the formal structure of the Mass did not permit bodily participation and ecstatic behavior reminiscent of African patterns of dance and possession. Nor was the Bible or sermon as important in Catholic piety, an aspect of great importance to orally affective Africans.<sup>38</sup>

Indigenous black ministry could not evolve as rapidly because of the Catholic emphasis on years of training as a requirement for the priesthood. A major factor was the lack of acceptance of blacks in Catholic seminaries. Only a very few blacks were able to enter foreign seminaries. Thus, the status, authority, and influence of the black Protestant minister was not duplicated among black Catholics.

However, for the many blacks who were Catholic, the Catholic parish mission became a source of renewal and revival. These missions were at first integrated, but the blacks usually sat in the galleries of the churches. Soon, segregated black parishes began to emerge and with them evolved an apostolate for the evangelization of black America. Coupled with this was the trend towards a revival being held for one particular parish. As a result, revivals ceased to be interracial gatherings and revivalist simply included the black parish in their itinerary.

Although the Church still made no special effort to evangelize Blacks who were not Catholic, it did encourage the use of a revival as "a particularly effective way of evangelizing the black population" because it provided "a more vigorous stimulus,"<sup>39</sup> thus unknowingly recognizing the African desire for a more emotive religious experience.

The black Catholic was exposed to the fervent exhortation and the spirit-filled conversion experience of revivals in two ways. He or she either attended a mission within the parish, or stole away to the meetings of the black Protestant church. Regardless of the source, however, even after revivalism began to wane, the seed had been sown from which would emerge the black Catholic revival worship of the twentieth century.

### *Black Catholic Revivalism*

Revivalism, as already mentioned, has always been a means of effect-

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<sup>37</sup> Raboteau, *Slave Religion*, p. 87.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 272.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*



ing evangelization in both the black and white communities, and in both Protestant and Catholic churches. However, a new age of evangelization is dawning in the Roman Catholic Church. This is an age in which the Church still sees its predominant role as the proclamation of the Good News to the World, but its view of that world has changed.

During most of its history in the United States, the Catholic Church offered the experience of community, identity and a sense of belonging to many Roman Catholics, caught in a nation predominantly Protestant. It was an insular world-view which struck out against anything which threatened to break into its structured, institutional, hierarchical style. Although good for a struggling missionary church, this was not beneficial to the church of the 1960s.

As in the Great Awakenings of previous centuries, a dichotomy has now appeared between the views of many Catholics and the views of the institutional hierarchical church. A formalistic, static, objectivistic faith is seen as being basically out of touch with the needs and desires of real people living out real life situations.

In addition, the social and political atmosphere of the United States has changed. There is a greater emphasis on personal experience and fulfillment of needs. There is a greater desire for personal independence. Catholics have become more educated and politically astute. They feel the need to expand their horizons. The 1960s put an emphasis on change: the possibility of changing one's life, one's surroundings, one's beliefs. For the black population, the decades of the 1960s and 1970s were a period of great turmoil and upheaval. Blacks have seen long-sought and fought-for changes in their social, political and economic situation cut short. By the 1980s, white backlash seems determined to wipe out all progress.

Black Catholics are looking at the Roman Catholic Church in which they have lived for over two hundred years with new eyes. They see a structure which has tolerated their presence but not encouraged it. They see a structure which has required that they give up much of what was naturally and validly theirs in order to become a part of a sterile, oppressive system in which many have never felt fully at home.

The United States bishops have recognized this deformation of the Gospel's mandate to love one another in their statement that "Racism is an evil which endures in our society and in our church."<sup>40</sup> Much of what the Pastoral on Racism said in 1979 still holds true in 1984:

Today the sense of urgency has yielded to an apparent acceptance of the status quo. The climate of crisis engendered by demonstrations, protests, and confrontation has given way to a mood of indifference; and other issues occupy our attention.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>40</sup> Dolan, *Catholic Revivalism*, p. 115.

<sup>41</sup> *Brothers and Sisters To Us: U.S. Bishops' Pastoral Letter on Racism in Our Day*

In many ways, the situation for blacks in the Catholic Church in the United States has not changed. Despite papal statements which have apparently opened doors to new forms of expression in the church, we find that the unique contribution of a people, forged in slavery and oppression, yet full of hope and love, is still being ignored or condemned as inappropriate. Paul VI stated in his epistle, "To the Heart of Africa":

The language and mode of manifesting the one faith may be manifold. Hence, it may be original, suited to the tongue, the style, the characteristics, the genius and the culture of one who professes this one faith. From this point of view, a certain pluralism is not only legitimate, but desirable.

An adaptation of the Christian life and the fields of pastoral, ritual, didactic and spiritual activities is not only possible, it is favored by the church. The liturgical renewal is a living example of this. And, in this sense, you may and you must have an African Christianity. Indeed, you possess human values and forms of culture which can rise up to perfection, such as to find in Christianity a true, superior fullness and prove to be capable of a richness of expression all of its own and genuinely African.<sup>42</sup>

This is true also for Afro-American Christianity, a Christianity not only filtered through the roots of an African heritage, but also synthesized with the richness of a Christianity created out of pain and suffering of survival to bring forth a new and unique creation worthy of a full and celebratory expression. This heritage and this culture has to be recognized and accepted.

The Catholic church will remain religiously ineffective in the black community unless it can effectively syncretize African culture with Catholic worship, just as the black Protestant church two centuries ago syncretized African culture and Biblical religion.<sup>43</sup>

Black people have remained in the Catholic church against all odds. That they have done so is due to their perseverance and their faith in the truth of the Gospel more than the encouragement of the Church itself:

Black presence in the predominantly White Christian church is also an affirmation that Christian faith, rooted firmly in an uncompromised Gospel, speaks with clarity and directness to the heart of the black experience—namely the individual as well as collective quest for recognition of human dignity and personal worth. It is further a challenge.<sup>44</sup>

It is a challenge to the Roman Catholic Church to accept and implement its own teachings and to allow the expression of a people to come forth. For too long American Catholics of African descent have had to sit quietly and endure rituals that do not truly "speak" to them. Many came to love and revere the music of European composition which was

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(Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, 1979), p. 1.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p. 1.

<sup>43</sup> Pope Paul VI, St. Peter's, Rome October 29, 1967.

<sup>44</sup> Rivers, *Spirit in Worship*, p. 8.

all that was allowed to them. But that is not enough.

As blacks have come to appreciate, through the challenging years of the '60s and '70s and into the 1980s, the richness of their black heritage, they have begun to develop a sense of themselves as a people with something valid and valuable to offer to the Catholic church. There is an ineffable richness and beauty revealed in the services of worship of blacks which speaks of the "uniqueness of the black religious tradition" and which appeals to many, both white and black.

The form of worship of the black Catholic stems from a long-life experience of oppression in the Church and in the world. At the same time, it is expressive of a deep and abiding faith in Jesus Christ:

Worship in the Black tradition is celebration of the power to survive and to affirm life with all of its complex and contradictory realities. So the secular and the sacred, on Saturday night and Sunday morning, come together to affirm God's holiness, the unity of life, and God's lordship over all of life. In such a tradition, spontaneous responses and encouragement of improvisation are present. The worshipper is encouraged to turn himself loose into the hands of the essential here and now, where joy and travail mingle together as part of the reality of God's tradition.<sup>46</sup>

Black Catholics are beginning to merge their own rich tradition with the Roman Catholic tradition and its colorful ritual and sacramentality. They are creating a new form of worship—one which honors and upholds the values of both traditions. They are doing this, not only against opposition from their pastors and church, but from other black Catholics who have been, for too long, molded by values other than their own.

This new form of worship is one which enhances rather than detracts from the expression of love and faith in God. It is a form of worship which makes a statement to the world: to be both black and Catholic is not only possible, but authentic.

It is a form of worship which is slowly reaching out to those among the black population who have been alienated by the racist mindset of the Catholic church. It is a form of worship which attracts those who, for many years, have gone to Mass on Sunday morning and to "church" on Sunday afternoon. It is a form of worship which opens the doors to a true sharing of Jesus Christ with his brothers and sisters, who are members of the universal church, in an exuberant liturgical celebration of song and word.

Black Catholic Revivalism presents a challenge to the Catholic church which cannot be ignored. Black Catholics can no longer be required to "sing the Lord's song in a foreign land" (Ps. 137). Black Catholics have decided to take down their harps from the willows where they have hung for so long and to make that foreign land their own. Black Catholic Re-

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<sup>46</sup> *Black Perspectives on "Evangelization of the Modern World"* (Washington, D.C.: National Office for Black Catholics, 1974), p. 5.

vivalism uses those harps with their old and familiar melodies to reach out to the brothers and sisters with whom they have shared captivity. Its ritual speaks "to the needs of Black folk" and "reflects their problems, affirms their worth in the sight of God, and inspires them to militantly seek solutions to their problems."<sup>46</sup>

Rites and ceremonies and liturgies, like theology, cannot be developed in isolation from the crucial problems of a peoples' survival. Ritual must affirm the liberating presence of God in human experience.<sup>47</sup>

The ritual drama of Black Catholic Revivalism as expressed in fervent preaching and lively congregational singing, the reaching out and sharing of one another's pain and joy in the "kiss of peace," the vocal "amen" and "yes, Lord," exclamations, and the adoration of the Body of Christ on the altar, are all integral parts of that worship. At the core of Black Catholic Revivalism is the structure of the Mass into which it fits, not as a thrown-together mismatching of incompatible parts, but as the natural coming together of integral pieces into an incomparable wholeness to which they all belong. In its liturgical celebration of community, Black Catholic Revivalism results in a purgation of human emotion through spiritual involvement. It is a worship which appeals not simply to the heart or to the mind but which reaches out to both, to the whole person as a child of God.

The challenge is there and it must be accepted. Paul VI stated in his letter on leadership in the liturgical renewal:

To the Pastors and Lenten Preachers of Rome:

This is not an easy thing to do; it is a delicate thing. It demands direct and systematic interest. It calls for your personal, patient, loving and truly pastoral care. It means changing many, many habits that are, from many points of view, respectable and dear. It means upsetting good and devout faithful, to offer them few forms of prayer that they won't understand right away. It means winning over many, many people who pray and don't pray in churches (as they please) to a personal and collective expression of prayer.

It means fostering a more active school of prayer and worship in every assembly of the faithful, introducing into its aspects, gestures, usages, formulas, sentiments that are new—what we might call a religious activism that many people are not used to. In short, it means assisting the people of God with a priestly, liturgical activism. To repeat, this is sometimes difficult and delicate, but it is also necessary, obligatory, providential, revivifying and we hope consoling.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>46</sup> William B. McClain, "The Black Religious Experience in the United States," in *This Far By Faith: American Black Worship and its African Roots* (Washington, D.C.: National Office for Black Catholics, 1977), p. 31.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33.

<sup>48</sup> See various passages in Pope Paul VI, "On Evangelization in the Modern World" (Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, 1976).

It is time for the Church to listen to its own teachings. Black Catholics need no longer be apologetic for allowing their black heritage finally to emerge within the confines of the Roman Catholic Church. It has been too long denied its rightful position alongside the equally valid traditions of the Italians, Polish, Hispanics and others.

Blacks are Catholic, but they are also of African descent. The former cannot be allowed to negate the latter. In Black Catholic revivalism, that duality is not only expressed, it is celebrated with joy.

Black Catholic revivalism celebrates being black and Catholic in a way which is not only self-affirming but also community-building and nurturing. It is a celebration of the Spirit and of thanksgiving, one which remembers the sufferings of the past while rejoicing over the freedoms of the present. It is an expression of the solidarity of blacks with blacks, but one which also reaches out a welcoming hand to all—black and white alike—in a joyous recognition and acceptance of God's love.

It is true that the Church is not a mere human organization, but a society of men and women, with its own laws and customs, and its own history. It is a society which has existed for centuries, and which has been able to survive and flourish in the face of the most difficult and adverse conditions. This is due to the fact that the Church is a society which is united by a common faith, and which is governed by a common authority. It is a society which is able to adapt itself to the changing needs of the world, and which is able to remain true to its own principles and traditions.

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