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BLACKS and the Watchtower

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Few religious organizations have escaped being tainted by racial prejudice at one time or another. While the Watchtower has not been alone in its preferential treatment of the Caucasian, its history is perhaps a little more interesting and at times amusing in regards to the black man. It is all the more fascinating when you discover how few people really know what the Watchtower has taught regarding racial inferiority.

Taking a glimpse back in time to the beginnings of the Watchtower organization, we find more than just silent prejudice at work. Several statements were put in print regarding the alleged inferiority of the black man! Let's examine a few of these statements from the past, and then we'll examine their present view of blacks and even Hispanics in the Governing Body.

From the beginning, President C. T. Russell believed that the millennial kingdom was about to break upon mankind, accompanied by life in paradise and a restoration of the earth to the condition as found in the garden of Eden. Though in this present life the black man was found to be inferior, Russell argues, this will work to his advantage during the millennium. Humility, promoted by a position of inferiority, would breed strength of character to the "colored" if *they are so rightly exercised by it* (in other words, if they remain humble and not challenge the status quo). Note the following from the April 1, 1914 *Watchtower*:

If nature favors the colored brethren and sisters in the exercise of humility it is that much to their advantage, if they are rightly exercised by it. A little while, and our humility will work out for our good. A little while, and those who have been faithful to their Covenant of Sacrifice will be granted new bodies, spiritual, beyond the veil, where color and sex distinctions will be no more. A little while, and the Millennial kingdom will be inaugurated, which will bring restitution to all mankind - restitution to the perfection of mind and body, feature and color, to the grand original standard, which God declared "very good," and which was lost for a time through sin, but which is soon to be restored by the powerful kingdom of Messiah. (p. 105-106)

All men privileged to live in that "new world" would return to man's original state, including man's original color and language. And what was that color and language? White and Hebrew, according to the Watchtower. Under the subheading, "CAN THE ETHIOPIAN CHANGE HIS SKIN?", the Feb. 15, 1904 *Watch Tower* responds,

We answer, No. But all will admit that what the Ethiopian cannot do for himself God could readily do for him. The difference between the races of men and the differences between their languages have long been arguments against the solidarity of the human family. The doctrine of restitution has also raised the

question. How could all men be brought to perfection and which color of skin was the original? The answer is now provided. God can change the Ethiopian's skin in his own due time.

Prof. H. A. Edwards, Supt. of Schools in Slater, Mo., has written for the public press an elaborate description of how Julius Jackson, of New Frankfurt, Mo., a negro boy of nine years, began to grow white in September, 1901, and is now fully nine-tenths white. He assures us that this is no whitish skin disease; but that the new white skin is as healthy as that of any white boy, and that the changed boy has never been sick and never has taken medicines. (p.52-53)

The reason for printing such a story, of course, is to demonstrate that God *can and will* change the "Ethiopian" (black man) into a white man in the New World.

The obvious question to ask at this point is, *Why does the black man need to change?* The reason they gave revealed their true feelings, as we see from the following excerpts:

...The negro race is supposed to be descended from Ham, whose special degradation is mentioned in Gen. 9:22, 25. (*Zion's Watch Tower*, August 1, 1898, p. 230)

Noah declared, prophetically, that Ham's characteristics which had led him to unseemly conduct disrespectful to his father, would be found cropping out later, inherited by his son, and prophetically he foretold that this degeneracy would mark the posterity of Canaan, degrading him, making him servile. We are not able to determine to a certainty that the sons of Ham and Canaan are the negroes; but we consider that general view as probable as any other. (*Zion's Watch Tower*, July 15, 1902, p. 216)

The change was needed as a sign of removal of the curse; black skin was a blemish, so to speak. Yet the skin color of the black man was not the only thing about him that was apparently cursed. In an article attempting to prove the bigots of the day to be in error, an article was written entitled, "The Negro Not A Beast." The Negro was declared to be indeed *human*, yet with the following qualification:

While it is true that the white race exhibits some qualities of superiority over any other, we are to remember that there are wide differences in the same Caucasian (Semitic and Aryan) family; and also we should remember that some of the qualities which have given this branch of the human family its preeminence in the world are not such as can be pointed to as in all respects admirable....The secret of the greater intelligence and aptitude of the Caucasian undoubtedly in great measure is to be attributed to the commingling of blood amongst its various branches; and this was evidently forced in large measure by circumstances under divine control. (*Zion's Watch Tower*, July 15, 1902, p.215-216)

In an effort to provide hope for the Negro, the following story was related in the *Zion's Watch Tower* of October 1, 1900, p. 296-297:

CAN RESTITUTION CHANGE

THE ETHIOPIAN'S SKIN?

The following, from the *New York World*, is the third we have seen reported. These suggest and illustrate the process of restitution soon due. The item reads:

"From Black to White He Slowly Turned"

Parkersburg, W. Va., Sept. 8. It has fallen to the lot of the Rev. William H. Draper, pastor of the Logan Memorial church, of Washington Conference, A.M.E. church, of this town, to give a living affirmative answer to the famous Biblical question, "Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots?" Though once as black as charcoal, the Rev. Mr. Draper is now white. His people say that his color was changed in answer to prayer. Many years ago Draper was employed by a fair-skinned man, and he was often heard to remark that if he could only be white like his employer, he would be happy. While in the

white man's service Draper 'experienced' religion.

From that day forward he prayed constantly and fervently that he might become white. Thirty years ago his prayer began to be answered. He first experienced a prickling sensation on his face, and upon close investigation found a number of small white spots scarcely larger than the point of a pin. He became alarmed, thinking he had some peculiar disease but he did not suffer and aside from the prickling sensation felt nothing unusual. Gradually the white spots became larger and extended themselves, until now, after the change has been in progress for over thirty years, Draper has not a single dark spot on his body.

The advantage of being viewed as inferior supposedly made one a good servant, and *The Golden Age* magazine (now *Awake!*), comments:

It is generally believed that the curse which Noah pronounced upon Canaan was the origin of the black race. Certain it is that when Noah said, "Cursed be Canaan, a servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren," he pictured the future of the Colored race. They have been and are a race of servants, but now in the dawn of the twentieth century, we are all coming to see this matter of service in its true light and to find that the only real joy in life is in serving others; not bossing them. There is no servant in the world as good as a good Colored servant, and the joy that he gets from rendering faithful service is one of the purest joys there is in the world. (*The Golden Age*, July 24, 1929, p. 702)

Even as recent as 1952, the Watchtower extols the "teachableness" of the Negro:

Really, our colored brothers have a great cause for rejoicing. Their race is meek and teachable, and from it comes a high percentage of the theocratic increase. (*The Watchtower*, Feb. 1, 1952, p. 95)

Segregation was practiced during the days of C. T. Russell and even into Rutherford's term as president of the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society. This excerpt is taken from *The Watch Tower* of April 1, 1914, p. 105:

Recognizing that it meant either the success or the failure of the enterprise of the [Photo] Drama as respects the whites, we have been compelled to assign the colored friends to the gallery, which, however, is just as good for seeing and hearing as any other part of The Temple. Some were offended at this arrangement.

We have received numerous letters from the colored friends, some claiming that it is not right to make a difference, others indignantly and bitterly denouncing us as enemies of the colored people. Some, confident that Brother Russell had never sanctioned such a discrimination, told that they believe it would be duty to stand up for equal rights and always to help the oppressed, etc. We were obliged to explain the facts, assuring all of our loving interest in the colored people, and of our desire to do them good, and not injury. We again suggested that if a suitable place could be found in which the Drama could be presented for the benefit of the colored people alone, we would be glad to make such arrangements, or to cooperate with any others in doing so.

Intellectual Ability

Even more fascinating is the Watchtower's early view of the lesser interest and intelligence of the Black and Hispanic races concerning the deeper things of the Bible. *The Watchtower* of April 15, 1900 said the following regarding blacks not participating in the "pioneer" work:

There are probably as many as a hundred colored brethren on the Watch Tower lists, some of them very clear in the truth, and very earnest in its service, financially and otherwise. We have received letters from several of these, who had intended engaging in the volunteer work, expressing surprise that in the call for volunteers in the March 1st issue we restricted the inquiry to white Protestant churches. They rightly realized that we have not the slightest of race prejudice, and that we love the colored brethren with just the same warmth of heart that we love the white, and they queried therefore why such a distinction should be

made in the call. The reason is that so far as we are able to judge, colored people have less education than whites - many of them quite insufficient to permit them to profit by such reading as we have to give forth. Our conclusion therefore is based upon the supposition that reading matter distributed to a colored congregation would more than half of it be utterly wasted, and a very small percentage indeed likely to yield good results. (p. 122)

The average Jehovah's Witness today that is confronted with this information would probably excuse the organization of being in error because "the light was dim" back then but that now the "light has gotten brighter and brighter," and those days are long gone. It is true that times and attitudes have changed. Yet we should not be too hasty in concluding that the Watchtower has fully abandoned their old mentality. It was made known to me in 1977 while I was in charge of the printing of the Watchtower's large Bible encyclopedia, the *Aid to Bible Understanding*, that it was not translated and printed in Spanish partly due to the lack of interest of the Spanish brothers in the deeper things of the Word! The feeling was that all that work would only go to waste among Hispanics.

Typical of the "Watchtower amnesia" regarding their own past history, they act today *as if they never taught any prejudicial views*, and that only the churches of Christendom are guilty of such things. Yet even the Catholic Church surpasses them in this regard! *The Watchtower* of Oct. 8, 1977 states:

Even up to a hundred years ago the Catholic Church held the view that blacks were cursed by God. Maxwell explains that this view "apparently survived until 1873 when Pope Pius IX attached an indulgence to a prayer for the `wretched Ethiopians in Central Africa that almighty God may at length remove the curse of Cham [Ham] from their hearts." (p. 29. See also the 2/8/82 WT, p.14-15.)

According to what the Watchtower is saying, the Catholic Church dropped their official prejudice against the black man at least 40 years before they did! Of course, they are banking on the fact that few Witnesses really know the history of the Watchtower organization. As has been demonstrated earlier, they viewed the curse of Ham as applying to the Negro as late as 1929!

Have Old Things Really Passed Away?

The Watchtower of modern times prides itself on its supposed freedom from racial prejudice *as an organization* (it does acknowledge individuals who have problems from time to time). It takes great delight in quoting the news media as they observe and comment on the massive assemblies across the world each year, with peoples from all races attending in harmony. One observer they repeatedly quoted was G. Norman Eddy, who comments on Jehovah's Witnesses:

I am struck with their genuine high regard for the people of all races. Unlike some who pay lip service to the doctrine of racial brotherhood, the Witnesses welcome all to their society - even to places of outstanding leadership - without reference to color or feature. (*Journal of Bible and Religion*, as quoted in the Jan. 15, 1973 WT, p. 37)

It is true that the assemblies of Jehovah's Witnesses are remarkable in this regard, but so are many modern church groups across the country, especially among the charismatic persuasions. Yet unlike the churches, *the Governing Body of Jehovah's Witnesses has never had a non-Caucasian in its membership*, Negro, Hispanic or otherwise.

Further, there are likely more subtle reasons behind the reluctance of the Governing Body to take in minorities. The unspoken requirements of serving as a member of the Governing Body apparently include having the same eccentricities and Victorian attitudes as the men already serving in such capacities, which are somewhat peculiar to certain older Caucasians of English-American descent. Any aspiring *soul brother* must put on the same attitudes in order to be trusted. While the Watchtower does have a few blacks in high position, including Circuit Overseers and members of the Service Department at Bethel, such ones have been promoted no higher, in spite of their adopting "white" attitudes. Perhaps with increased public pressure and the passing away of the older diehards, a black may be appointed to the Governing Body - time will tell. One thing for sure, they will have to lose their "soul" in order to do so!



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