

THE ONLY CATHOLIC BISHOP OF THE NEGRO RACE

(From the Boston Transcript)

The widespread and enthusiastic celebration the other day of the Garrison centennial makes more than ordinarily interesting any bit of news about the achievements of any member of that long-oppressed (and indeed still oppressed) race for which Garrison dared and did so much. Hence the interest which attaches to an account in a Spanish-American newspaper of Monsignor Gomez Pimenta, Bishop of Marianna, Brazil, who up to his recent death had the distinction of being the only Roman Catholic bishop of the negro race in the world. There are, of course, in that world-wide Church clergymen of the negro race (there are two or three in the United States), and over one of our North American dioceses there presided until recently a man who had a trace of negro blood in his veins. But Monsignor Gomez Pimenta, the Brazilian prelate was the only full blooded negro Bishop, and now that he has passed away there remains in the Catholic Church no Bishop of the African race.

The story of Monsignor Pimenta's life is an inspiring record, a proof of what ability and merit will do, and a further proof (if any were needed after beholding the rise of Pius X., the present occupant of Peter's chair) that in the Roman Catholic Church, apparently so autocratic and aristocratic, lowly origin is no bar to the attainment of the highest offices and honors. Still further than this, Monsignor Pimenta's life history is a most striking instance of negro progress and achievement.

Silveria Gomez Pimenta was the son of slave parents. Born in extreme poverty, he knew what it was to be destitute and hungry. When a child he attended school half naked and barefooted, but he was from the first remarkable for his application and his good conduct. He was, in fact, so excellent a schoolboy that his case came to the attention of the Archbishop of Balua, who took a liking to the exceptional young negro, and placed him, after some time, in the seminary of his see city. Here Pimenta, now a young man pursued his studies for the priesthood, winning admiration on all sides, not only for his intellectual powers, but for the kindness and nobility of his heart. Ordained a priest, he overcame the prejudices which exist against the negroes even in Catholic countries (though these are by no means so strong as the prejudice against negroes which prevails in the United States) and was given ecclesiastical charges and offices of much importance in which he bore himself so well and so creditably that when still quite young, he was raised to the episcopal dignity as Auxiliary Bishop to the diocese of Balua. In this office he still won favor, and when, in 1902, the late Pope Leo XIII. restored the Diocese of Marianna, Amazon, whose area was 300,000 square kilometres and whose population was two millions, he designated as its prelate the negro Bishop.

This new office was by no means a sinecure. For years the Bishop's territory had been more or less neglected, and the state of religion was far from ideal. He was almost alone and without resources in his vast diocese. Added to this it had been the scene of an anti-Catholic propaganda which rendered the new Bishop's task particularly difficult. But this son of slave parents, who had overcome so many obstacles in his life, was not discouraged by the situation, no matter how hopeless it seemed. He bent every effort to the work in hand—the building and maintaining of churches, schools, seminaries, houses of charity, etc. and gave so little thought to himself and his own dignity as a Bishop or even to his own comfort as a man that he often went almost as poorly clad, and certainly with his feet as destitute of covering, as when he attended school years before in Balua. But he succeeded before his death in rehabilitating the diocese which he had found in ruins, and in elevating the tone of its religious and social life.

The merits of this negro Bishop were not confined to his own diocese or to Brazil; nor did his life of labor prevent him from continuing those studies in which he showed himself so brilliant at school. He was a man of vast learning, and had a high reputation among Orientalists for his knowledge of the Semitic languages. He was besides held as authority of great weight in Biblical questions, and in Rome, that city of religious experts, his opinion was much esteemed. His death removes a man of whom the negro race of North as well as of South America may well be proud.

IS IT POSSIBLE FOR A CATHOLIC TO APOSTATIZE IN GOOD FAITH?

There is a canon of the Vatican Council (De Fide, Cap. III, 6) which seems to imply that it is not: "If any one should say that the faithful are in the same condition as those who have not yet come to the only true faith, so that Catholics may have just cause to suspend their assent and to doubt of the faith which they have already received under the teaching of the Church, until they have completed a scientific demonstration of the credibility and truth of their faith, let him be anathema."

In the body of the chapter, where the same subject is dealt with more fully, the reasons assigned for this doctrine are: the splendor of the evidence for the Church's claims, and God's promise not to desert any soul that shall not have first turned away from Him.

It would seem from this as if the Church were definitely committed to the view, that it is impossible for a Catholic, especially an adult, to apostatize without thereby committing a formal sin of infidelity.

But the annotations added to the preparatory scheme, which was submitted to the Fathers of the Council, make it plain that this conclusion is not necessarily implied by the decree above quoted. The decree, we are there told is directed against the teaching of Hermes, who had exhorted students of theology to prosecute their studies in a spirit of indifference to all, even the Catholic or Christian, forms of religion. The decree, it is expressly stated, "leaves untouched what some of the older theologians do not hesitate to admit, that *per accidens*, it may happen that in certain circumstances the conscience of some uneducated Catholic may be led astray so far as that he would join some heterodox sect, and this without committing any formal sin against faith; in which case he would not lose the faith nor become a formal but only a material heretic." (Coll. Lacensis VII., pp. 534-5).

Should this be true, it would explain what many persons regard as an indisputable fact, that when the Eastern and the Anglican Churches separated from the Holy See, many of those who apostatized did so in good faith. But, as the learned Dr. Walter McDonald of Maynooth puts it in a recent popular lecture ('Rationalism in Religion' in 'Proceedings of the Second Australasian Catholic Congress,' p. 97), "On the one hand, it is hard to doubt the fact; while it is still more difficult on the other hand to reconcile it with the doctrine propounded by the majority of theologians."—Catholic Fortnightly Review.

DID THE POPES PROMOTE WAR?

Dealing with the assertion that they did, made by a correspondent of the Springfield Republican, Dr. Starbuck says:

This gentleman tells us that his "few persons at Rome" have not scrupled from time to time "to promote war."

He might, to support this charge refer us to various early Popes who encouraged the Romans to stand out successfully against barbarian and Italian invaders. Benedict VIII. was one of these, and if I remember right, Leo II. (IX), and others. He might also cite Urban II., who set on foot that magnificent series of expeditions which, while failing of their immediate purpose, so essentially helped to preserve the independence of Europe against Moslem invasion.

He might mention Pius II., who would probably have reft Constantinople out of the hands of the Turks if Europe, and possibly had Venice alone observed his enthusiastic impulse.

He might cite Pius VI., who at least brought about the destruction of the Turkish fleet, which was thought so glorious a thing when it was repeated three centuries later at Navarino.

He might exultingly instance Innocent III., whom Paul Sabatier, so little a Catholic that he is an admirer of Combes, declares, by crushing the Albigenian heresy, to have saved European civilization from corrupting into sullen lunacy. He will surely not omit Alexander III., for he unquestionably promoted war, a war of twenty-three years. He encouraged the Italians at the cost of all these years of strife, to maintain their national distinctiveness against all the powers of the redoubted Barbarossa, and carried them through to a triumphant success, and to such a marvellous Christian modesty in the use of their triumph as has most seldom, if ever, been seen again in the world.

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Yet, although the Popes of the Middle Ages could, on occasion, encourage war—and I by no means say that all the wars which they encouraged were commendable—yet I notice that the attention of these two great Protestant scholars, Bishop Westcott and Bishop Stubbs, is chiefly drawn to the marvellous—to Westcott it appears hardly short of miraculous—justice and wisdom of the mediæval Popes of every level of personal worth, in staying the Catholic nations from war, or in bringing them about to a reasonable peace. We see, then, how strong a case our correspondent has.—Sacred Heart Review.

POLISH PAPER CRITICISED

To the Editor of the Free Press:

Sir,—On Jan. 13, 1905, a Slavic-Liberal Immigration club of Winnipeg was organized by the Poles and Ruthenians of this city. The two foremost aims of the club are: (1) to organize more closely the Slavic races of Canada; (2) spreading of education with a view to inculcating Canadian national ideas and patriotism.

That the aims of this club were gladly received by the peoples in question its membership of 300 is ample evidence. On Jan. 27, 1906, at a meeting of the club in Fairbairn's hall, the following resolutions were passed.

1. Because the Polish weekly, Echo Kanadyjskie, published by Dr. W. Harvey & Co.; and edited by Thomas Sniezek, is a purely business paper, and has for one of its principal aims the sale of farms and lots, as a commercial enterprise, therefore the said paper was not established for the education of the Poles and their development as Canadians citizens; and

2. Because the said paper, instead of organizing and educating, in our

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