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### Preston Taylor, The Status and Outlook of the Colored Brotherhood

Preston Taylor

*National Christian Missionary Convention*

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**The Honorable Rev. Preston Taylor, President of the National Convention. Rev. Taylor is a man of recognized rare ability. He is both one of the leading business men of Nashville, Tenn., and at the same time one of the most successful pastors. He is planning great things for the future of the Church throughout the brotherhood.**

## **THE STATUS AND OUTLOOK OF THE COLORED BROTHERHOOD.**

The movement for New Testament Christianity among the colored people began with Barton W. Stone and his work at Cane Ridge, Ky. Growing out of that work and incidental to it, the colored people in that community yielded obedience to the fervid appeals of the Johnstons, Rogers, and Ganos; for our colored brother, true to his religious and plastic nature, under the example of his white brother, could not be disobedient to the heavenly vision more than other human beings.

To this day, the place set apart for colored Disciples in the old Cane Ridge Church may be pointed out by the aged few of the hundreds who frequented there. The names of some of the colored men appointed to baptize the colored converts and to further minister to their spiritual needs still survive in the many traditions of that day. Four strong colored Christian churches in Bourbon County, Ky., testify, today, to the thoroughness and value of this early work, as does also a number of other churches instituted almost everywhere these pioneers and their children have gone.

The experience of Cane Ridge and its colored people has been repeated many times as new centers of religious interest in our Zion have sprung up.

Although a hundred years are behind the beginning of the colored brotherhood, one of the striking facts about it, is its smallness. No figures are given in the Disciples' Year Book as to the number of colored churches and communicants. It is claimed by some, in authority, that there are six hundred churches. The average number of members in a congregation is small. We have listed more than four hundred ministers. Fifty per cent. of these are lay preachers without special charges or training. Our schools number six. One of these provides secondary education. The other

five are devoted to elementary training. There are no schools for higher education among the colored Disciples. A considerable number of colored men have found their way into several of our white Disciples' colleges and into other schools of similar and higher academic standing. We have no newspapers of national import; no general organizations or meetings. Our churches are free to have fellowship in giving to the national work of the church. But even here, there is maintained no propaganda of education and inspiration through special workers, with the exception of a Bible School secretary recently put out by the American Christian Missionary Society, and the work done under the auspices of the Christian Woman's Board of Missions.

For the past twenty-five years, this Board has been charged with practically all of the work done by the Disciples of Christ among the colored people. The responsibility was thrust upon the Christian Woman's Board, rather than having been chosen by it. Up to the time of acceptance of the colored work by the C. W. B. M., the church had maintained what was then known as the Board of Negro Education and Evangelization. For reasons which will shame some of our leaders at the judgment bar of God, this Board was dissolved and its black wards rendered homeless. The C. W. B. M. took them in and deserves to be credited with whatever gains they have made during these years.

The change so far as the church was concerned was a compromise between plain, hard duty involving large faith, patience, courage and service on the one hand; and easy surrender—out of doubt, fear impulsiveness and shiftlessness on the other. Almost instantly, the other general agencies of the church as well as thousands of congregations felt free from any further responsibility for the colored work. The C. W. B. M. was expected to do for this most needful field what the church had failed to do, and that too without the money with which to do, save as the colored work shared interests with the then already full and growing program of the C. W. B. M. Thus the colored brotherhood was cut off from direct appeal to the great, warm, but negligent heart of the church and made a sort of partaker on a proposition that commended itself to the church, mainly, on other grounds.

The program of the C. W. B. M. has ever been too full to meet adequately the needs of the colored work in America. That work needed and needs now not only an educational and missionary program appealing, in the main, to the women of the church but rather to the whole church in the interest of well-rounded culture and Christian fellowship. Many of our colored churches have memberships that are reasonably large and capable. There is every reason why they should be trained in the graces of the whole church.

The colored brotherhood has had a forlorn existence so far as our state missionary societies are concerned. Where there is a sufficient number of colored churches, they have, usually, their own organization, which in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred has no relation whatever with the white state society. The state of Missouri, so far as I have been able to learn, is that one hundredth case. There the state secretary cooperates with the colored brethren and is a responsible intermediary between them and their white brethren. The state secretary of one of our leading states in Disciple work, a year or so ago, acknowledged without seeming abashment that during his twenty-five years of incumbence he had never attended a single state meeting of the colored brethren, although these brethren had been trying to do organized work for forty years.

Justice must say, however, that all, if not quite all of the colored churches have had the help and co-operation of the white brethren in any given locality. The smaller towns and cities, especially, have been thoughtful of the colored Disciple. In the larger cities, usually, the local unions have found so much other work to do that the matter of colored evangelization has been neglected. Indianapolis is the most striking exception to this statement. The colored work there is almost wholly the fruit of local support and guidance. Similar interest is being shown in Cincinnati, O.; Baltimore, Md., and Kansas City, Mo. It is not too much to say that, almost without exception, wherever the work of education and evangelization of the colored people has been brought home to the rank and file of our white brotherhood, it has extended sympathy and generous help.

A study into the causes for the present status of our work must start with the colored people themselves. The first hundred years of our history found them, save in exceptional localities, almost hostile to the religious life offered by the Disciples of Christ. It is true today that nine colored persons out of ten belong in some sense either to the Baptist or to the Methodist churches. These institutions were early in the field of colored evangelization. Moreover the methods used were such as ap-

pealed strongly to the untrained, emotional nature of the black man. At all events, we are not far removed from the day when a colored Campbellite was considered the extreme of audacious perversity and blasphemy—a man with a head or book religion or no religion at all. Even now in winning enlightened colored persons to the cause of New Testament Christianity, one is called upon to break down family tradition and prejudice.

Again, the fewness of the colored Disciples, their poverty and remoteness from each other coupled with a lack of leadership have made impossible any great distinctive organization for the proposition of their cause. We have had, for the most of the time involved, no medium of exchange of opinion or way of comparing methods and results and thereby obtaining the possible encouragement from one another. We had no newspaper nor have we one now of national import. The Gospel Plea will always be a Southern Christian Institute paper, dominated by local interests.

The attitude of our white brotherhood on the race question accounts largely for our smallness. Without intentional wrong or neglect, the relation of the white to the colored brotherhood has been little more than trifling. It is only within comparative recent years that any conscious plan and purpose, however meagre, have actuated our white brotherhood with regard to their colored brethren. He was in most cases simply let alone, separated by an ever increasing and corroding class spirit which denied him the help, inspiration and encouragement so much needed. Indeed in some striking instances, the Disciples of Christ have set the pace in heartless, unnecessary and silly racial discrimination. They have not found it difficult to strain at the gnat of human brotherhood or sectarian irregularity while they swallowed the camel of racial bigotry or un-Christian policy. It would seem that there should be no good objection to Christian men of whatever nationality working—together in general Christian endeavor.

Now growing out of this accentuated class spirit as regards the colored man came the cheapened ideal for him. Too often our white brethren have reasoned that almost anything is good enough for the Negro. At all events he is different from anybody else, in that he is regarded as about the last of descending human ratios. Perhaps this fact is most clearly shown by the church's educational ideal for colored men. More than thirty years ago it was held that a knowledge of the English language and the English Bible was all that was necessary for the colored minister. We have not changed that standard. In the training of leaders generally the church has felt that the higher culture is not only unnecessary for the colored race, but detrimental. So we have among us the same spirit which threatened the great white brotherhood twenty years ago—the spirit of suspicion and doubt concerning the really educated man; the spirit that attempted to fix the Indian sign upon every man who had not been made in a given mold.

This policy has resulted in either sending the majority of our liberally trained men into other professions than Christian leadership or into other communions for service and in putting a premium on a type of leadership that is incompetent to meet the problems of our day.

The question of leadership among any people is always vital. Particularly is this true of the colored people. Increased difficulty here should be met with increased ability, not less ability. Moreover, the churches of large experience in this field, have all except our own recognized this fact. I think that many of our white friends would be surprised at the excellent caliber of the men pastoring the leading colored churches in one of our cities. Many of these men are well educated. They represent some of the best colleges in our country and constitute a type of leadership that does more than preach poorly a stereotyped set of first principles, falsely so-called.

Again, the Disciples of Christ have learned nothing from their religious neighbors in dealing with the colored people. The Methodist Episcopal Church maintains a number of colored conferences which during any ten years of their history more than match our entire record in points of church growth, church efficiency and church leadership. This church maintains, exclusive of the work done by the Woman's Home Missionary Society, twenty-two schools for colored people. Thirteen of these offer the higher training. The annual expenditure for educational purposes is \$350,000. All of the national boards maintain field secretaries, usually colored men, to inspire and educate the churches along the respective lines. The church also maintains and owns for the colored contingent a first class newspaper. These conferences have a pro rata representation in the General Conferences, thereby fostering a dynamic unity in service.

Lastly, the Disciples of Christ fail to recognize the changed and changing condi-

tion among colored people and insist in dealing with today as if it were yesterday. With the progress of the colored man has come and will come the sense of self-consciousness and personality. For one to ignore this fact is to shut the door of opportunity in one's own face.

Back of all I have said, running through all and overlooking all are two striking features. One of them is the almost pathetic loyalty of the embattled and straggling colored Disciple to the Christianity of the New Testament as presented by the Disciples of Christ and the other is the great, warm, sympathetic, but ignorant, busy and therefore indifferent heart of the Disciples of Christ toward the colored brotherhood.

There is no doubt that the ten million colored people in the United States need the Disciples of Christ and their message, perhaps as no other. There is a simplicity and rationality about it that fits in healthfully with the heartfelt make-up of the colored man, thus tempering him in the interest of normal, strong Christian manhood. The colored people after a half century of freedom are quite ready for this message. Granted that the majority of them are inclined by paternalism to some other direction, they are nevertheless looking for something better and gladly accept it when full proof is made of its excellency.

Then, the Disciples of Christ, strange as it may seem, need the colored people, if for no other reasons, as the acid test of Christian orthodoxy and willingness to follow the Christ all of the way in His program of human redemption. For if the white brother can include in his religious theory and practice the colored people as real brothers, he will have avoided the heresy of all heresies.

The outlook for the colored brotherhood is conditioned upon a more healthy faith and pride on the part of the white brotherhood in colored people. Much depends upon what we think of the material we use, if we are to give it our best workmanship. It is up to the colored people in this connection to prove to the world that they are worthy of its best investments.

The colored brotherhood must be organized for work. Organization is not everything, but there is no growing life in this universe without it. Life that is to protect itself and to propagate itself must have a healthy articulate body.

There are those who when confronted with this problem constantly cry out, "The colored people are not ready." I have heard that cry all of my life and know it to be a false cry. The personnel of the colored Disciples wherever found compares to advantage with the personal in other religious bodies. We have wasted at least a quarter of century listening to this foolish lament. May I ask if the colored people in the Methodist Episcopal Church, in the Presbyterian Church, in the Baptist Church and even in the distinctively Negro denominations, are ready? Perhaps our disposition to philosophize about the Negro problem rather than to work at it, accounts for much of our poor showing.

Finally, the colored brethren have no future without able leadership. The Disciples of Christ are not providing that sort of leadership. Some of us doubt if they seriously believe in it. It is to be remembered that it is extremely difficult, if not quite impossible, to make first class Leaders by third rate methods. We are in dire need of at least one school of standard college curriculum where our leaders, especially those entering the ministry, may be adequately equipped for their work; where the boys and girls of the church may have a liberal education in the church; where they may be won for Christian leadership. At present the pick and cream of our young people, are by force of conditions, in schools other than our own. Not as I care how much industrial training there is in such a school. There ought to be some. It is fundamental. The difficulty lies in feeling that it is sufficient.

I am ready to reaffirm my faith in the simple religion of Christ and in the Disciples of Christ as the most faithful exponents of Him. They represent the faith of my fathers for more than a hundred years. I believe the Disciples of Christ have the message of salvation for my people, as for all people, for all time, world without end. Amen. It is this conviction rather than any encouragement or achievement, that has held me fast when otherwise I might have faltered. It is the faith of Christ that challenges us today to make good with God who shall judge the living and the dead.