



DAILY WORLD Correspondent R. J. Reed interviews the Rev. Jean Toussaint, Haiti priest, who moved to southwest Louisiana to work with Negroes. — (Photo by Donny Tate)

Negro Priest Finds Contentment While Ministering to Members of Own Race

By R. J. REED

MAMOU,---The Rev. Jean Toussaint, present assistant to Rev. Henry Van Boxel, pastor of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel Catholic church in Chataignier, and missionary father of all Negro Catholics extending from Chataignier to the outskirts of Oakdale, is truly a remarkable man to know.

His work among the French-Canadians of New Brunswick and Montreal, together with his social, economic and theological background, is well worthy of publication and commendation.

Born of a wealthy family of Negro-French near Port Au Prince, Haiti, 42 years ago, he was destined to become one of Canada's great preacher and writer for some 12 years, and then quietly and almost unwittingly to accept a clerical position in southwest Louisiana that will likely entail a life of sacrifice, poverty, and oblivion for the people of his color. He is currently in charge of the spiritual well-being of over 500 Negro families which covers a territory of about 22 miles, comprising Chataignier, Mamou, Reddell, Vidrine, Pain Clair, Beaver Creek and Jean Reed.

Father Toussaint first came to New Orleans at the demand of vacationing priests, and immediately fell in love with Louisiana, its less harsh climate, and especially its people. Despite the rehabilitation to an entirely different social set-up (he administered only to whites in Canada) the zealous Negro priest states that he has always been sincerely appreciated and respected by Louisiana whites and Negroes alike. He did Missionary work in Eunice, Breaux Bridge, and Arnaudville before making his home in Evangeline parish in the latter part of 1953.

Following 12 years of classical and theological studies, he was ordained in the Cathedral of Port Au Prince, Haiti, at 26. He was then sent into training for another ten years at New Brunswick and Montreal. During that time he served as professor and administrator. He pursued extensive courses in social relations, politics, and economics at the Universities of Quebec and Montreal. At the latter he fell under the direction of the famous Jesuit, Emile Bouvier of International fame, where he received his bachelor and Master's degrees in Economics and Social Relations with the added titles of "tres honorable".

"I was then ready for my work," he told this reporter, "and my functions were many for the next few years." During this time the brilliant young naturalized Canadian specialized in preaching, lecturing, writing, and missionary work.

His work was with the whites. "I preached as many as seven sermons a day, wrote hundreds of articles, conducted over 25 conferences and was singled out by the parishioners of St. Henri De Montreal to address the special annual sermon at the great procession of Notre Dame de Cape. I addressed 30,000 people that day; he'll tell

you with a simplicity and enthusiasm that radiates.

Checking further into his brilliant Canadian career, this reporter discovered that he was professor of sociology at the University of St. Louis of Edmundston, professor of philosophy at Miellet College, burser of the late Cardinal Villeneuve, special protegee of Archbishop Charbonneau, Third Degree Knight of Columbus, editor of two university journals, personal friend of two great state chiefs of Haiti and of numerous Canadian dignitaries.

Father Toussaint's latest pride and joy is the little mission church of Pain Clair. In one month's time the humble little temple has been completely transformed into a joyful little church. The labor involved was done solely by volunteer, workers, himself the main one. Other Negroes devoting their time and work are Ashton Decalus, and Simon Gullory. The Mamou pastor, Rev. J. A. LeBlanc, to whom Father Toussaint is greatly obliged, also helped.

He is also a great admirer of Bishop Jeanmarc of Lafayette "who has done so much for the colored in the diocese. He deserves a statue and someday he'll get one," he added.

Over 150 Negro families, mostly quadroons and octoroons flock at Pain Clair every Sunday from miles around to hear the eloquent young pastor of their color.

In Chataignier, he thanks men like Mr. Alida Rozas and Mr. Clanny Gullory especially who helped better his living conditions.

In a final burst of fervor, he added, "Tell your readers that money means absolutely nothing to me. It's the value of a man's character, the worth of honest work, the intrinsic value of creatures, the human comprehension of things that I look for and admire. I expect to make my home in Louisiana and do all I'm asked to do the best of my native, intellectual, and spiritual ability and with equal sentiment for whites as well as blacks."

A leather binding along the edges of sleeves or jackets that get hard wear will prevent fraying.

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