



Universal Negro Catechism
George Alexander McGuire (1921)

George Alexander McGuire was a black Antiguan who immigrated to the United States near the end of the 1800s. McGuire migrated religiously as well as geographically, joining first the black-run African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church, then becoming a priest in the white-dominated Episcopal Church, and eventually founding the African Orthodox Church. He belonged also, for a time, to the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), a US-based organization which aspired to unite black people worldwide in a common struggle for political independence and economic development. Although the UNIA was not a religious body, it published the catechism excerpted here, which McGuire wrote to teach black Christians to take pride in their racial identity.

[The equality of races]

- Q.** Did God make any group or race of men superior to another?
- A.** No; He created all races equal, and of one blood, to dwell on all the face of the earth.
- Q.** Is it true that the Ethiopian, or Black, group of the human family is the lowest group of all?
- A.** It is a base falsehood which is taught in books written by white men. All races were created equal.
- Q.** What, then, is the chief reason for the differences observed among the various groups of men?
- A.** Environment—that is, conditions connected with climate, opportunity, necessity, and association with others.

[The color of God]

- Q.** What is the color of God?
- A.** A spirit has neither color nor other natural parts or qualities.
- Q.** But do we not speak of His hands, His eyes, His arms, and other parts?
- A.** Yes; it is because we are able to think and speak of Him only in human and figurative terms.
- Q.** If, then, you had to think or speak of the color of God, how would you describe it?
- A.** As black, since we are created in His image and likeness.
- Q.** On what would you base your assumption that God is black?
- A.** On the same basis as that taken by white people when they assume that God is of their color. [...]

[Jesus and Africa]

Q. Where was Jesus born?

A. In Bethlehem, a town six miles from Jerusalem.

Q. Who came from far to worship the infant?

A. Wise men, called "Magi." [...] It is generally believed that there were three: Caspar, Melchior, and Balthazar, and that Balthazar was of the Negro race.

Q. Who sought to slay the infant child?

A. Herod, king of Jerusalem.

Q. Where did His parents take Him for refuge?

A. Into the land of Egypt, on the continent of Africa.

Q. How long did He live in Africa?

A. Until He was two years of age. [...]

Q. Upon whom did they lay His cross as He ascended Mount Calvary?

A. Simon the Cyrenian, a man of Africa.

Q. How many times, then, in His life do we find mention of Africa?

A. Three times: when the wise men visited Him at His birth, when He was taken to Egypt for safety, and when He was about to be crucified.

Q. Of what race was Jesus Christ?

A. The Hebrew race, through Abraham, Judah, David, and others.

Q. Of what larger group is the Hebrew race a part?

A. The Semitic.

Q. Was there any admixture of other blood than Semitic in the veins of Jesus?

A. Yes. [...] Pharez, the son of Judah and an ancestor of Jesus, was born of Tamar, a woman of Canaan and a descendant of Ham. [...] Rahab, the mother of Boaz, who was the great-grandfather of David, was also a Canaanite woman. [...]

[The essential principle of true religion]

Q. What did Jesus Christ teach as the essential principle of true religion?

A. The universal brotherhood of man, growing out of the universal Fatherhood of God.

Q. Did His Apostles preach the same truth?

A. Yes; especially St. Paul, who is known as the great Apostle to the Gentiles.

Q. Mention a verse in this connection from the writings of St. Paul.

A. Colossians 3:11 (R.V.): “There cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, bondman, freeman: but Christ is all, and in all.”

Q. Did St. Peter also proclaim the same doctrine?

A. Yes, for in Acts 10:35 (R.V.), he says: “Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation, he that feareth Him and worketh righteousness is acceptable to Him.” [...]

[The curse of Canaan]

Q. Is it true that Noah cursed his son Ham?

A. No; he cursed Canaan, the youngest son of Ham, saying, “Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren.”

Q. Who are the descendants of Canaan?

A. The Canaanites, who dwelt in Palestine before the Jews took possession of it.

Q. Are Negroes concerned in this curse of Noah?

A. Certainly not.

Q. How are the people of our race described in the Holy Scriptures?

A. As Cushites or Ethiopians.

Q. From whom did they descend?

A. From Cush, who was the first son of Ham and the grandson of Noah. [...]

[Moses, Miriam, and race prejudice]

Q. Who was the wife of Moses, the great leader of the Jews?

A. Zipporah, an Ethiopian woman. [...]

Q. Was Moses’s marriage pleasing to his relatives?

A. No; Miriam, his sister, who was a prophetess, and Aaron, his brother, who was a priest, both upbraided him for having married an Ethiopian woman. Read Numbers 12:1.

Q. What does this show?

A. That race prejudice is as old as the human family and that even religious teachers are not free from it.

- Q.** What punishment came to Miriam for speaking against the Ethiopian woman?
- A.** She became afflicted with leprosy and was placed in quarantine for seven days, until Moses prayed for her restoration.
- Q.** What appears, then, to be the most effective cure for race prejudice?
- A.** Leprosy. [...]

[“I am black but comely”]

- Q.** Mention a verse in the Bible in which a person of black color was proud of the fact.
- A.** “I am black but comely, O ye daughters of Jerusalem.” Song 1:5. [...] Shulamith, daughter of Pharaoh, king of Egypt, betrothed to King Solomon, thus describes herself to her Jewish rivals.
- Q.** How do the best Negro scholars translate the words mentioned above?
- A.** “I am dark and comely.” It seems that white translators use “but,” in preference to “and,” to create the impression that one who is *dark* is not expected to be *comely*. [...]

[Africa in prophecy]

- Q.** What prediction made in Psalm 68:31 is now being fulfilled?
- A.** “Princes shall come out of Egypt; Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God.”
- Q.** What does this verse prove?
- A.** That Negroes will set up their own government in Africa, with rulers of their own race.

Source: George Alexander McGuire, *Universal Negro Catechism: A Course of Instruction in Religious and Historical Knowledge Pertaining to the Race* ([New York]: Universal Negro Improvement Association, 1921), 2-11, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/emu.010000685445>. Public domain.

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