

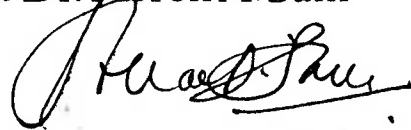
AF from Willis, 3Dec80.....#1500

Having a person like Heron in my doctoral seminar, and writing the foreword to his book on his experience of the black struggle, illustrates for me, as well as anything can, the privilege of teaching at NYTS. The book is now in the Library.

THE DISPOSABLE PEOPLE

by

The Reverend Dr. Heron A. Sam



VANTAGE PRESS
New York / Washington / Atlanta
Los Angeles / Chicago
1980

Foreword

This book was written by someone in three basic human categories—a sex (male), a race (black), and an age (middle-aged). So, of course, is this foreword: I am an old white man in whose doctoral seminar, not many years ago, this book's author proved himself a magnificent, full-passioned, brilliant, and devout human being. So I appeal to you, dear reader, to read book and foreword with your full humanity—including your bundle of powers and prejudices, of faith and fears, of anger and hopes, as Heron and I live with our bundles, and pray that we shall get through this world having done as little damage as possible in light of our call to do the good as God gives us to see the good.

Now, instead of commenting on particulars within the witness that lies before you in the pages of this worthy book, I shall limit myself to a few affirmations that rose in my heart as I read it. You would lose little if at this point you were to stop reading the foreword and go directly to the text! But if you continue reading my words, I plead with you not to assume from what I say anything about the book itself. Indeed, it might be wise of you to margin-mark the foreword at this point, then read the book, then—as a way of digesting and reflecting on the book—write your own foreword, and finally return to and finish my foreword!

First, this is a healthy and health-giving book. Instead of only preaching faith against fear, it evidences the redeeming power of God against "the survival syndrome." It is a tough book, intolerant of whining and blaming excuses for not stand-

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ing on one's own feet; it is a tender book, arms open to all who cry out "Lord, grant me the faith to face down my fears, the honesty to stop distorting reality to evade my responsibility, and the humility to ask my brothers and sisters for help!" Not just this book, but the huge Episcopal church of which its author is rector, has this tough-tender, healthy and health-giving quality. In this book, you will be reading reality, not just ideality; the Kingdom come, not just coming.

Second, why should I be asked to write this foreword? Surely not because in this past decade I have had hundreds of black ministers in my courses at all academic levels, and so can context Heron's witness within black religion and the American and world realities; not because, as a white, I can bring an inside-outsider's perspective; but because God gave me the privilege and joy of being, for the author, the right teacher at the right time, "my most ruthless critic"—in the author's words when he asked me to write the foreword: "You made a man of me because you wouldn't soften to my arguments, attacks, and tears." Not the words of a small soul, or a little man. We are all God's damaged children; and I, as one of us, am trying to make it through the world as a creature (not just an "individual" or even a "person") of God, a human being, a man, and a Christian. Within every soul, known or unknown to be standing in the presence of God, is a dialogue between genes and pains. Our differences in genes and pains are not as significant as our similarities; and since our sexual, racial, and cultural differences are trivial relative to our common call to be worthy creatures and truly human, I refuse to excuse myself or others from the fundamental obligations. Basically, I am called not to be a Protestant but a Christian, not to be a man but a human being, not to be a white man but a man. And I refuse, out of respect and love for my brothers and sisters, to respect special pleadings in light of particular pains and oppressions. Betimes, it amuses and distresses me that for this refusal of inauthentic respect I am sometimes called a racist and a sexist and a classist and even an anti-Semite!

Third, all these agenda for the shaping of soul and society

converge on and in the Christian congregation, the centripetal locus for angels and demons. The faithful pastor who wrote this book is well aware that the situation is not as neat as in the nave of a gothic church, the demons outside the roof and the angels inside both holding up the roof and preventing the demons' entry. How anguishing so often to find the demons in and the angels out, or nothing but demons anywhere in sight! But above the altar is a Sign reminding us that any demon-victories are only temporary in church, society, world, cosmos. That is our faith against all fears, our resurrection against all deaths, our serenity when the world does not yield to our goodwill, our courage to believe that changes needing to be made in us, in the church, and in the world can be made, and our wisdom to wait patiently for the Lord while working whatever good is given us to work.

Fourth, I give thanks to our common Lord for what my brother Heron has taught and is teaching me and us with his power to turn slavery's ploughshare into freedom's sword. Not just American black folks but our whole society and indeed the whole world now is in a dug-in, anxious, survival mood whose end, unless deliverance comes, is self-destruct. Of faithful Christians who refuse to lose heart in the struggle for justice and peace, the Bible says, "I give thanks for every remembrance of you." I hope this pastor, this church, this book does that for you, as it does for me.

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