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Father Divine

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DIVINE'S PEACE IS SLOW COMING

Harlem Puts Off Victory Feast as Court Delays Quashing Suit

By TED POSTON

The adoring angels in Father Divine's No. 1 Heaven were forced to postpone a victory celebration on 126th Street today. The latest threat to the celestial kingdom didn't vanish according to schedule in Supreme Court.

The dapper, little cult leader had expected to be relieved of an equity action before Justice Dineen as the result of a \$12,500 settlement offered to former followers by Colonel Hubert Fauntleroy Julian, Harlem's erstwhile Black Eagle.

Julian had volunteered to pay \$8,500 to Verinda and Thomas Brown, two disgruntled ex-angels, and \$6,000 to their attorney, William W. Lowell—if they would agree to drop their receivership suit against Divine's Righteous Government movement.

Divine May Be Obstacle

But Justice Dineen delayed the proposed settlement after conferring with both sides in his chambers. "In the interests of justice," he adjourned the trial until noon Thursday.

Neither Lowell nor Kevie Frankel, Divine's attorney, would discuss the last minute hitch, but Julian—resplendent in blue suit, wing collar, Ascot tie and pearl-gray spats—intimated that Father Divine himself might be responsible.

"I was arguing with Father until 4 o'clock this morning in an effort to get permission to settle this suit with my own money," he said. "But he seems determined to go through with the trial and vindicate his movement."

Julian advanced a new reason for wanting to settle the suit of the two Long Island domestics who are attempting to recover \$4,476 in gold coins and additional moneys allegedly given to Divine when they worshiped as angels in his Sayville, L. I., Heaven.

"The Browns were once servants of my parents in Barbados, B. W. I.," the former commander of Haile Selassie's Ethiopian Air Force told reporters. "I have known them for twenty-five years and I want to see them taken care of."

"At the same time, I want to save my race the embarrassment of this trial and to defend Father Divine, who has done so much for my people."

• Wilbur Young
Negroes of New York
Sketch of Father Divine

"Peace"! "Its truly wonderful"! "Father Divine is God"; such are the appellations applied to the diminutive and slightly bald middle aged little man whose one redeeming feature are an extremely keen pair of eyes.

Father Divine nee George Baker was born somewhere between 60 and 70 years ago on a rice plantation on Hutchinson's Island in the Savannah River. He was the youngest child of Joseph and Mary Baker and as early as the age of 10 is said to have had Messianic hopes when an incident occurred in the locality of his birthplace around 1889..... The story goes that one summer night, there appeared at the home of one Negro family an unearthly figure of a man who seemed to be a mulatto or white. He said, "I am Jesus Christ in person!" As the news of this yarn spread up and the countryside, ~~it spread in proportion~~ ^{perhaps} and no doubt somewhere in the back of young Baker's mind there glowed a spark of inspiration. - 2

Baker, unlike the other boys of his ^{environment} environment, was not lazy. He was possessed with an undistinguishable zeal and energy and stubbornly refused to bow to the inferior customs of the average Negro. It was this fault which found him serving a 60 day jail term for refusing to ride in the Jim Crow section of a street car in Savannah.

A few month. after serving his jail sentence, Baker was married to one of the local belles and set sail with his bride

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to a small town in Alabama. After five years of stormy married life, Baker deserted his wife with four children and proceeded to wander around the southern part of the country.

In 1906, George Baker turned up in the city of Baltimore; a tiny, underfed, poverty stricken little colored man who maintained a measly existence mowing lawns, cutting hedges and other odd jobs. However the spark of ambition still burned in his chest and in a short time he was teaching Sunday School in Reverend Henderson's Baptist Church. He devoted much of his spare time to religious activities and before long was acquainted with every little church and mission in Baltimore.

It was in a little dingy mission on Druid Hill that George Baker saw the answer to his lifelong ambition. Here one Father Jehovia preached his doctrine that the body was the temple of the living God and that he himself and every one of his listeners had God within and could make their particular life either Heaven or Hell, according to how they allowed the spirit of God to manifest itself. 4

George Baker became a devout student of Jehovia for a number of years and absorbed his doctrine as well. It was during this period that he changed his name from Baker to the "Messenger" and acquired a following of six men and six women and like a Broadway show that tries out on the road, The Messenger took his entourage on a Southern itinerary and met with quite a bit of Evangelistic success. Satisfied with this, he and his little band set out for New York in 1915. 5

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The Messenger and his little group became located at Prince Street in Brooklyn. It was here that he installed the "Communal system". No doubt the idea was gotten from the fact that Christ and his Apostles had a community of ownership over all property and effects. However, the Messenger was his own treasurer, he needed no Judas. 6

Now that he was in New York, the Messenger took on a more dignified title and became known as Major Morgan J. Devine. The chances were that he meant the name to be Divine from the start but never learned the correct spelling until a few years later when he did change the spelling to Divine.

It was in October 1919 that Divine took his flock of a dozen souls and moved from Brooklyn to 72 Macon Street in Sayville, Long Island where he purchased an eight room house and thus his cult began in earnest. The word Cult is used here in its true sense for a definition of the word Cult is as follows;

A Cult is an autocracy with unlimited power and authority vested in its founder or if the founder is no longer living; then in its ruler. 7

At Sayville, Divine obtained a license to conduct an employment agency and secured many jobs for domestics in the nearby white homes; the tieup was that those who secured jobs were obligated to board at his place. This naturally led to their absorption into the cult.

Divine however did not remain isolated in his Sayville retreat but saw to it that word got abroad about his many mystic powers such as healing the sick, sumptuous banquets free of charge

and his mysterious and unlimited supply of money. This led to many newspaper articles and soon the outside world began to beat a path to his door in Sayville. Bus companies with an eye to business began running regular bus trips from Harlem to Sayville for \$1.50 a round trip advertising free meals at Father Divine's and the healing of the sick and lame. Divine however, put a stop to this racket by using his own buses free of charge.

Father Divine when questioned about his unlimited supply of money would merely state;

"The spirit of consciousness of the presence of God is the source of all supply and will satisfy every desire and it does." 1

* * *

At Sayville, L.I., Father Divine and his flock with all the publicity they have been receiving began to present a problem to the local townsfolk. They were alarmed in no small way by the prospect of their little hamlet being overrun by Divine's "Angels" and foresaw sharp declines in their real estate holdings. Accordingly, they decided to get rid of "The Father" by hook or crook. The first hostile move was the passing of a village ordinance limiting the parking time on the local streets. By this means the police were able to give out summonses by the wholesale to cars parked in front of the Divine place. Divine retaliated however by immediately purchasing several adjacent lots which were converted into parking space.

The next move to get something on the Father was by a plot engineered by the Riverhead District Attorney who hired one Rose Burrows, a sensual looking latin beauty who joined the "Kingdom" and attempted to exert all her charm and sex in order to place

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the good Father in a compromising situation so that the authorities would be able to nab him on a morals charge. She succeeded in getting into Divine's private study but she was quite unsuccessful from there on and was forced to report with her work unfinished.

On November 5th, 1931, the Sayville Police and Fire Department with the aid of a few State Police raided the Divine establishment and arranged Father Divine and 78 ##### Angels on a charge of maintaining and contributing to a public nuisance. They were brought before Justice of Peace Charles W. Duryea. Forty-six pleaded guilty and were fined \$3.00 each. In paying the fine, Divine produced a \$500 bill which nobody could change. He himself was held under a \$1500 bail for Grand Jury. A few days later the remaining 32 Angels were tried and found guilty and fined \$5.00 each.

Such goings on furnished excellent copy for the newspapers. many people declared that this was the beginning of the end of Father Divine's racket once the law got its clutches on him.

James C. Thomas, former Assistant United States Attorney graciously offered his services to Father Divine's cause. In doing so, Mr. Thomas denounced the prosecution and the Sayville group stating that the success of such action would mean the deprivation of constitutional rights to own property wherever one saw fit. His services were accepted.

The results of the Divine trial in Nassau County Supreme Court on May 24th, 1932 will always ^{be} an epic event in the history of court battles. Divine after a most thrilling court fight, lost and was convicted. He was sentence to one year in jail at Riverhead in spite of the Jury's plea for lenience. He was sentenced on June 4th by Judge Lewis J. Smith whose exact words were;

"I find the defendant is not an ordained minister and I

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am informed that his name is George Baker and not Divine, that he was not born in Providence, R.I. but in some Southern state or island off Georgia. I am informed as to his income that he obtains work for people who come to his place and uses their wages and that as to others who come under his spell, they are induced to transfer property to him. I am advised that Mother Divine is not his wife and I have information that this man is not a moral man but very immoral. I believe that this man is not a useful member of society but a menace to society"

On the heels of such a declaration, some of the Angels were heard to say, "Dont pity Father Divine, pity the judge who sentenced him." Other adherents were heard to remark, "The Jedge can't live long now. He's offended almighty God."

On June 7th, just three days after Divine was sentenced, Judge Lewis J. Smith died suddenly at his home in Hempstead, a victim of heart disease at the age of 55. At this psychological moment, Divine was heard to have said from his cell, "I hated to do it."

From this point on, The Father was God. At last he had proven his immortality. As an anti-climax to the case, On January 9th, 1933, the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court in Brooklyn reversed Divine's conviction and ordered a new trial. The case never came up again.

News leaked out that Divine's number one attorney had resigned. This was James C. Thomas and the tale is told that when Divine was sentenced to jail, he gave Thomas \$7,000 in large bills to keep for him. Mr. Thomas promptly deducted from this sum. a generous amount for his services. Divine was quite shocked at this and objected in no quiet terms. However, he could not keep the lawyer from his self determined reward but at least he could fire him.

When being questioned as to the difficulties that caused this break, Divine merely stated, "Peace, Brother Thomas freely volunteered his services in the first place and anyhow, why should a lawyer be paid for representing the Lord?"

Some months later in a letter to Mayor La Guardia, Divine suggested that he protect his courts by having Lawyer disbarred.

In order to demonstrate the growing popularity Divine enjoyed, on June 26th, 1932, the day after his release from jail, a celebration was held for him at Rockland Palace, a huge hall at 155th street and Eighth Avenue. Divine appeared there at 12 noon when the place was jammed with over 7,000 people shouting he is God; Peace Father, it's truly wonderful. Several meetings were held here and later they were transferred to Laural Gardens at 77 East 116th Street. It was here at the first meeting that Divine announced the purchase of two publications which would be devoted to the dissemination of his principles. (In regards to newspapers, Divine was also given credit for helping to put the sensational tabloid, The New York Evening Graphic out of business when they sold pictures of him.

In explaining his finances to his congregation he once stated;

"I have money without limit, because my money comes from God. When I spend a dime, I make a dollar, when I spend a dollar, I make a hundred dollars, and when I spend a hundred dollars, I make a thousand dollars, and when I spend a thousand dollars, I make a million."

Up until this time his banquets were all free of charge but in July 1932, at the Laural Gardens, the first Divine menu with a 35cent maximum was listed. Later, prices were cut much lower.

when persons became followers of Father Divine they became new persons hence they got new names, for example, Sunbeam, Serene, True Love, Bouquet, Beauty Smiles, Norah Endurance, Holy Shinelight, Rose Memory, Pearly Gates, and hundreds of others.

One hint as to the source of Divine's incomes when during the first week of August 1st, 1933, Katherine Edmunsen, a colored mother in her late thirties, called at a Harlem Post Office to withdraw her life savings, \$1800. When asked why, she merely stated that she needed no more earthly possessions since God was now on earth in the person on Father Divine. Another incident told was about the time at Rockland Palace, when the Father was having one of his meetings and banquets. La Guardia who was running for Mayor at the time made his appearance. It was one of the strangest political speeches yet made. La Guardia started out by saying, "Peace be unto all of you." The crowd answered "Peace" and cheered. The speaker then said, "I am going to clean up this city," but the congregation loudly disagreed and pointed to Father Divine. La Guardia, who obviously saw that he was on the wrong track made a quick switch. "I came here to-night to ask for Father Divine's advice and counsel. Peace be unto to you all." The crowd cheered and called for Father. Divine did a back and wing to the center of the platform.

On November 7, 1932, at a Divine meeting in Brooklyn, Surrogate John P. O'Brian democratic candidate for mayor spoke before a huge Divine group but failed to impress.

About the greatest task of Father Divine's was his ban on sex. There were many arguments pro and con on this subject. Apparently this ban on sex worked alright with both wife and husband when both were Divine's disciples but the trouble started when only one or the other belonged in these religious principles. Sex starved wives blamed husbands for not doing their marital duties and irate husbands accused Father Divine of alienating the affections of their wives. In many cases homes were broken up.

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Divine when asked that his disapproval of marriage and procreation just a temporary idea but that if it was upheld, wouldn't the race die out? He responded, "Hell, of course, when we learn to live, we unlearn to die. Men have been learning to die from their earliest existence, instead of learning to live. Why should we go on increasing and multiplying and replenishing the earth with more misery? For this cause I feel, if we will clean or cleanse those who are now living, and purify themI believe we are about a greater work than self-indulgence.".....

"Men become to be fathers as they are called, women become to be mothers, when their physical condition would not be justifiable; but because they are in a free country they are privileged to do so. Through self-indulgence they would multiply afflictions, sickness and diseases."..

Like a crafty general Father Divine uses the psychology of worrying the enemy by exaggerating the number of adherents in his multitudinous legions and by the asserted potency of his superior weapons. He reiterates his claim of more than twenty million followers and advertises the supernatural forces which are, according to Father Divine enrolled under his banner. Divine's number one Heaven for quite some time was located at 20 West 115 Street where nearly a whole block of private houses were leased or bought by him. In this block there was a regular Divine community. The followers engaged in every type of trade from laundry to book shops.

Another important chapter in the life of Father Divine is the story of Faithful Mary, his number one angel. She was formerly known as Viola Wilson, a drunkard, ragged, dried up Negress who lived in a tumbled down shack on Broome Street in Newark, New Jersey and who under the guidance of Father Divine became one of the most potent factors in the success of the Divine movement.

In 1936, Divine made his fling at politics with the following statement: "They have striven to keep the Christ completely out of politics,

telling you that God and religious people would not be in politics; in the corruptibility of the politicians and the wickedness of the wicked. He would not function in their expression but he came among them to convert them. For this cause, I am and have as much right in politics as I have in the church and really I have more right in politics than I have in the church."

On January 10, 11 and 12th, 1936, the "A.D.F.D.", Father Divine's Peace Mission Movement met in an International Righteousness Government Convention at St. Nicholas Palace in New York City and established a political platform with the slogan, "One for all and all for one but not for one who is not for all".

At this meeting, the first motion placed before the house was a move that Father Divine was God. A vote was called and the measure was passed unanimously.

In three days the platform was formed and adopted. It was divided into four sections, 1) Principles, 2) Economics, 3) Political, 4) Educational. Under each division the main plank was racial non-discrimination which led a wide variety of tenets on many diverse subjects.

Other demands for righteous Government was legislation providing for any labor unions limiting the hours per day and days per week must guarantee that much work for its members. If a strike should be called it must pay its members full time while out of work.

Divine's policy on labor unions is mentioned in the following statement,

"Practically all of the labor unions, they think they have domination over the people and they force them to work or force them not to work and yet give them nothing. I have risen to put it down. Every union in the United States must deal justly among the people or else I will strike on them. If you belong to a union, the union must have a

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law to see that you get so-much work, if you pay your union due.....
This country does not belong to the Unionists, it belongs to God. Now
tell them that I said to keep their hands off! Talking about man not
working unless he belongs to the Union, and then joining the Union and the
will not give him work to do.....If the labor Unions that limit workers
to five days work each week will guarantee the workers five days work each
week, and guarantee to pay them what they are demanding from the employers
and they call them out on a strike, we will endorse them. Otherwise, we
will not tolerate them."

Other points of the platform were legislation against lynching and
the outlawing of members of the lynch mob, legislation against employment
agencies collecting fees for jobs from employees, abandonment of the law
requiring individuals to be on Home Relief before getting on WPA., legis-
lation to limit the amount of profit to be made on any article but freedom
to sell as low as one desires. It also called for the abolishment of the
word, hello, and the substitution of the word, "Peace".

Although Divine supported La Guardia in 1933, they were of no
particular party, In fact, Divine is more in accord with the doctrines of
the Communist Party than with any other group.

In a statement about political parties, he said, "The party or parties
which desires my support, tell them I said, 'Give me something better than
the Communists offer' this is what I say but remember this is not confined
to the Communist Party, neither the Democrat, Republican, nor Socialists
for I have brought to the surface something better than the Communist offer
I have something- and I am something- better than the Communist offer.
and better than all the partisan parties.

Asked another time about his cooperation with the Communists, Divine
replied, "I stand for anyone who will deal justly between man and man.
The Communists stand for social equality, political, and economic equality
and for justice in every issue and this is the principle for which I stand."

Some of the more recent purchases of Father Divine's domains includes the Promised Lands, a track of land ~~about~~ in Wallkill valley, in Ulster county, less than one hundred miles north-west of New York City. Divine purchased more than one thousand acres of land and established a Promised Land for his followers.

Hasbrouck Manor, one of the oldest homes in the United States built by the original Dutch Huguenot has been purchased as one of the headquarters of the Divine Colony. The general headquarters of the Promised Land is former Senator Sweeney's mansion in Kingston.

Many residents refused to sell to the Divinites but there were many who bowed to the lure of hard cash. This section is near Kingston and Poughkeepsie and buses carry the Angles to and fro regularly.