

"Is it going to get worse before it gets better?"

## "THE CHRISTIAN WAY IN RACE RELATIONS"

### INTRODUCTION

Events in Alabama, in Mississippi, and in other important sectors of the South and the North are pointing to a showdown this summer on the issue of racial segregation. Tensions, which have been growing steadily and startlingly in recent days, have reached a breaking point. A little over a week ago a Southern Negro leader was shot to death. A week ago last Tuesday, the President of our country called for action to meet the growing "moral crisis". ~~On almost the same day a Southern Governor backed off from a crucial confrontation.~~ In a single recent week sixty or more separate demonstrations by negroes were counted in various cities across our land. None but the most unrealistic dreamers believe that segregation has a ghost of a chance of surviving the present revolution. The question on everyone's mind is, "Just how will it be destroyed?" "Can a racial explosion be avoided?"

### DEVELOPMENT

With race relations the ~~deepening~~ <sup>moral</sup> crucial issue of these days, the Christian pulpit must spell out time and time again the Christian principle. The principle, as it was once magnificently stated, is that all men are created equal. We seem to forget all too easily that down below race, class and color there is a fundamental fact which is universal and everywhere the same. God is the Creator of all men. All men are equal in his sight. He cares for all men equally and intends that men should live in community with one another and love their neighbor as themselves.

Think for a moment of the Parable of the Good Samaritan, and the point that Jesus was trying to make. Think of his attitude toward the Samaritans, the Greeks and the Romans who crossed his path. Before his searching and penetrating gaze, racial discrimination cannot go by unchallenged. It is an insult to God. It is an affront to the native dignity of man. The Church will forfeit any moral right to leadership unless it stands by its God-given Gospel and declares that all men are made "in the image and likeness of God", and that in consequence each person is of infinite and eternal value. No human being is given the right by God to treat any other human being as less than human; no human being has the right to treat another human as an animal, with no soul or imagination, no unalienable right to life, liberty and the pursuit of his own happiness.

### PREACHING IS NOT ENOUGH

Time and time again the Christian pulpit must spell out this principle before its people. But preaching is not enough. The proclamation is important, but it is not enough. Practically all of the major denominations of the country have passed resolutions in support of integration. The resolutions are important; they help in creating a climate of opinion and a conscience, but resolutions in themselves do not change race relations. There is ample evidence that they have little effect on local congregation. I think the rank and file of church people today in our country have yet to discover the real outreach of their responsibility to minority groups.

Brotherhood begins on a person to person basis at home. It begins with the people right around you. It begins in our daily lives.

I sometimes have the feeling that the best that most American Christians can do is to be tolerant. However, something much more positive and dynamic than tolerance is needed. Tolerance may not lead to action. It may not take one step toward an improvement of race relations. Christian relationships with people whose color and class are not our own have to be cultivated - in this state, in this city, in this neighborhood, in its housing, its schools, its clubs, its churches, its shops. What is required in our pluralistic society is acceptance, association, cooperation, joint-undertakings.

In line with this, I was interested to read recently in the weekly church bulletin put out by the Memorial Methodist Church in White Plains, where an organized racial visitation project was being conducted in White Plains. One Sunday afternoon about three weeks ago, from three to six o'clock, there was an organized visitation which found white people going to homes of colored people. This sort of thing has been done in a number of communities. This organized visitation is a frank admission of the fact that visiting will not take place until it is organized for at least the first steps of getting acquainted. We do not truly know people until we have some understanding of their living way. It has been organized by people who believe that brotherhood has to be organized in its first stages.

As Christian people, our task is to put Christian principles to work. The Churches would greatly assist the present crisis in our national life if more of their members were willing to act like Christians towards their brothers and sisters of another color. I think the number of Christians who reject the myth of racial superiority is growing, but far too many still find some reason why in their particular situation it is not possible or expedient to work or to associate with minority groups. One of the encouraging features of race relations is that it is an issue about which every Christian can do something, beginning where he lives, works and worships. He can commit himself to belief in an unsegregated, inclusive society. He can conform his personal, family, business and religious life to this belief. This is one thing all of us can do. The Christian can cultivate contacts and friendships with members of other races. He can invite them to his home and visit theirs. He can press for the right to invite them to his club, his golf course, his church. Christian race relations begins in these immediate person to person contacts.

#### THE CHALLENGE OF THE COMMUNITY

Beyond such personal contacts there is the challenge of the community. The evils of discrimination and segregation are alleviated through neighborhood self-surveys, inter-racial conferences, social action undertaken jointly by citizens - Protestants, Jews and Roman Catholics - and by churches, synagogues, by colleges and hospitals. Association and cooperation break down the emotional barriers among races from which discrimination springs. Work can than be done for the enactment and enforcement of fair employment

James Reston writing in his column in today's New York Times has this to say:

"It is a problem of right and wrong. It is present in almost every community in the nation. And everybody can do something about it.

In fact, it is widely accepted in Washington that unless private citizens raise the moral question in their communities, churches, business associations, labor unions, school meetings, service organizations, newspapers, etc., Government alone cannot pass effective civil legislation and may not even be able to assure public safety...

This is why the President has not only been drafting legislation recently and conferring with political leaders of both parties, but also meeting with groups of businessmen, labor union leaders, editors, preachers and lawyers...

What has been happening here in these meetings at the White House can easily be repeated in every city, town and village in the nation, if even a remnant of the fair-minded people will insist on raising the issues in all their organizations.

Private citizens can help. The task is immense, but anybody who can write a letter or go to a union meeting or even walk in a parade can do something about these inequalities.

practices, of the right of every person to acquire housing on the basis of personal preference and financial capacity without regard to race, religion or national origin. Churches and individuals square their practice with their profession when they recognize their responsibility for creating and maintaining the racially inclusive nature of their communities and churches. A Christian Church should strive to make its fellowship inclusive of all types of people, for every church of Christ is intended to be a House of Prayer for all of God's children.

THE MOTIVE           What motive is strong enough to bring all of this about, to spur us to live up to what we profess? H. W. Brailsford, pleading that the Negro be given the opportunities and the rights which are his due, asks:

"Why should we do that? Because we believe that sound economics points that way? Because we think that in the long run our own interest will be served? Never. Men who have no hotter fire than that will stammer and wilt and yield, as soon as the battle looks doubtful. We shall do it for backwards people and do it at some cost to ourselves, only if our motive is brotherly love. Whether we think of them as our fellow workers, or as our fellow man, it must be a warm impulse of fraternity that drives us to defend them and to aid them. If we have in us the love that this great adventure demands, we shall succeed. If we lack this principle of action, then our plans are a dreary intellectual exercise and nothing more"

And this is precisely where the Bible puts the emphasis. "You shall love your neighbor as yourself. If anyone has this world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him. Let us put our love not into words, or into talk, but into deeds and make it real"

CLOSING           I read somewhere recently that when Rip Van Winkle went to sleep the sign over his favorite inn was "George III". When we awoke the sign was "George Washington". He had slept through a momentous revolution.

One of the most significant revolutions of our day is taking place within the borders of our land. I hope and pray that none of you will close your eyes and sleep through this revolution. The most critical field for the extension of the Kingdom of God in America today is the inter-racial community. I would challenge you to play a part on that field, large or small, against the little-mindedness, the prejudice, the injustices, the hatreds that are dividing individuals and neighbors, races and peoples.

We are facing a great national test. It must be met in the spirit of a nation proud of its traditions and prouder still of its respect for the dignity and the freedom of every human being.

The text for the sermon today is the entire New Testament.

LET US PRAY: "Guide us, Our Father, in the right way as we think about this great issue, and help us to see in Jesus and his life the clue to our behavior, to our attitudes and our thinking in the future. Help us, in so far as it is humanly possible, to apply to all men everywhere the principle that they are human, like ourselves, "made in the image and likeness of God".....We ask this in the spirit of Jesus Christ. Amen.