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Race Relations— The Christian Directive*

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DOES the Christian religion have something to say concerning race relations?

There are those who would limit the references of the Christian religion to race relations simply to those data of the Old and New Testaments of sacred Scripture which concern races. Thus they assemble material on the creation of man, the separation of races, the pattern of races in the pre-Christian era, the nature of races and the Biblical references to them in the Christian era, and the like.

However, we are concerned in this institute not simply with the question of race, but with the relations of races to each other. By these relations we do not mean simply that they live side by side or that their nature can more or less clearly be defined. But we speak of their relation, that is to say, the concern that one has for another, the forces which cause races to accept or to refuse this concern, the barriers between races which are not so much geographical or sociological as spiritual and personal, and the fashion in which these barriers are to be removed, if, indeed, they are to be removed.

So viewed, race relations, as far as the Christian religion and the revelation basic to it are concerned, are a phase of human relations. The Christian revelation is concerned not simply with historical or sociological data, but is concerned with the forces which cause men to be related toward one another. The Christian religion is not so much the bundle of practices and opinions concerning God and men, but it is in itself a relation of men to God which involves and produces a relation of men to men. The Christian religion searches the revelations of Scripture not merely for historical and sociological data, but for primary impulses within

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human nature itself. It finds God having mercy on needy and dead men, re-establishing Himself in one from whom He had been cast out, and there producing a life which is in the fullest sense the life of God. That life is the life of love—the life of love of one man to other men (John 3:1-16; 17; Eph. 2:1-10; 1 John 2:1-11; 3; 4:6-21).

Our questions of race relations should not, however, be so simply dismissed. In the problems of race relations we confront some unusually radical and difficult phenomena. The Jewish question in Europe and the colored question in America, to speak in the simplest of terms, revealed a design of group reaction, of total communities responding toward races and the race question by bequest, that is to say, by the handing on of ideas and reactions strenuously fostered through a variety of means. Just superficially we frequently say that children do not have the prejudice for races, nor do some entire peoples have them, but it is a product of training by elders. Nevertheless, in race relations we need to remind ourselves that we confront in the fullest sense of the term a relation. It involves a concern for other individuals and groups. The concern may be positive, a direct desire to help, aid, be with; or it may be negative, a hostility or desire to hinder or hurt; or it may be neutral, a desire to be unconcerned, which is still a conscious and determined effort and therefore a relation.

When, therefore, we inquire as to the Christian directive for race relations, we apply ourselves toward an area which is uniquely the business of the Christian religion. For it is the concern for the heart of man as it reacts toward other men. Any attempt to outlaw the values of the Christian faith and Gospel for this purpose is out of place. It should not be said that the Christian faith and Gospel make no contribution here because race relations are a political or a biological or an economic problem. For whatever goes on in human hearts, and particularly in human hearts concerned for other people, is the business of the Christian faith and Gospel.

A final word should be said by way of introduction as to what a Christian directive involves. Our investigation will distinguish two well-defined areas of thought. The one is a pattern of conduct which outlines the human activities and areas of human behavior in which the conduct takes place and the form that the behavior

and conduct assumes. The other is a motivation—mind you, not just a description of the motivation, but the motive itself—for the conduct and behavior. The Christian religion is never merely law, description, prescription, code; but it is always the life of God in Christ Jesus.

I

THE NEW TESTAMENT REFUSES TO GIVE
SPECIFIC DIRECTIVES

When the investigator approaches the New Testament for special suggestions and directives in the domains of specific human relations, he is apt to find himself disappointed especially in the domain of such current questions as capital and labor, democracy and totalitarianism. Investigators have complained concerning the meagerness of information. In explanation it has been suggested that the early Christian lived in a world apart and hence gave little thought thereto. This is obviously untrue, for the very first church in Jerusalem came to grips at once with the problem of wealth and poverty and even of racial prejudice. The "murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews" (Acts 6:1) began in Jerusalem and drew its trail across the experience of the whole Early Church. A whole sect arose which sought to undo the teachings of St. Paul, and he wrote paragraphs in most of his Epistles, and the entire *Epistle to the Galatians*, against them. Also *Ephesians* seems to have been written to heal the gap between Jew and Gentile. It is important to note, however, the procedure which the New Testament takes. It does not analyze the nature of races or recommend their several excellencies or even attack race prejudice as an entity. It simply denies that race has any significance in the mind that is truly led by the Spirit of God and in the person who is in the Church of Christ.

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female; for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. Gal. 3:28.

For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him. Rom. 10:12. Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds and have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created him, where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision,

Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free, but Christ is All and in all.
Col. 3:9-11.

This becomes clearer to us as we observe the fashion in which the New Testament treats similar cleavages between human beings. Common is the distinction between rich and poor. But the New Testament does not give one code of ethics for the rich and another for the poor. It simply directs Christians to have no "respect of persons" (James 2:1-9) and asserts that this fault, the regarding of one individual as lower than another for economic or other reasons, is one which vitiates the entire Law.

But if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin and are convinced of the Law as transgressors. James 2:9.

The distinction between employer and employee — in the New Testament even between owner and slave — is not denied, but the New Testament insists that this distinction is to have no influence on the heart, for the obedience of both is toward God.

Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ; not with eyeservice, as menpleasers, but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart; with good will doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men, knowing that whatsoever good thing any man doeth, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or free. And, ye masters, do the same things unto them, forbearing threatening; knowing that your Master also is in heaven; neither is there respect of persons with Him. Eph. 6:5-9.

To repeat: The New Testament recognizes that differences between people exist. But it does assert that the heart, the inner attitude of the Christian, is not to be swayed by these differences to regard one person as higher or lower, more or less deserving of respect and concern, than the other. The New Testament is not a handbook of sociology, but it is very much an attack upon the human heart. It classifies people and recognizes their distinctions, but only to help men be aware that these distinctions play no part in Christian relations or in the structure of the Christian Church.

This is not to imply that early Christians were unduly optimistic concerning problems of prejudice and racial cleavages. In fact they deliberately confronted them and demanded their hearers and readers to examine themselves concerning them. Our Lord went out

of His way to make the exemplar of the most perfect neighborliness and love to be a Samaritan (Luke 10:33). Interesting is a similar account in Luke 17:16 on the one leper who gave thanks to Christ for his healing, or the Savior's determination to evangelize the Samaritans in John 4, or the climax of reproach leveled at Jesus: "Say we not well that Thou art a Samaritan and hast a devil?" (John 8:48). The Samaritans were a mongrel race living in a highly restricted plot of soil and isolated from all normal contact with the Jews to the point that they, too, were hostile, and their readiness to faith and love was doubly noteworthy. The missionaries' progress of the Early Church was impeded at the outset by difficulties adhering to prejudice between Jew and Gentile, and this cleavage was remedied only through vigorous and sometimes heated discussion (Acts 15; Gal. 2:4-13).

Already our Savior had to remind the Jewish people of a principle which the prophets of the Old Testament had first initiated: No racial barriers obtain in the Kingdom of God.

And I say unto you that many shall come from the east and west and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. Matt. 8:11.

II

THE NEW TESTAMENT SPECIFIES CONCERN FOR ONE RELATION: STRONG AND WEAK

How can the New Testament allow Christians to be aware of differences between them and nevertheless urge them to have "no respect of persons"? The answer is that the New Testament does, indeed, recognize one relation between people to which it summons their best spiritual life and concern. That relation bids Christians to have a concern for men and women, rich and poor, bond or free, stranger and foreigner as well as friend and countryman. That is the relation of strong and weak.

We are here concerned not simply with a classifying of people into two divisions, but with the concern that each is to have for the other. There is to be a relation between strong and weak, a reaching out to the other that he be helped.

Without using the term "weak" our Lord describes the relation of strong to weak in its ideal expression in the parable — interesting for our purpose! — of the Good Samaritan. Our Lord told this

parable in answer to the question: What constitutes life? A religious teacher had asked the question, "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" The Savior said, "What is written in the Law?" The lawyer responded with the two summaries of the tables of the Law. The Savior answered: "Thou hast answered right; this do, and thou shalt live." That is a sudden turn to the phrase, for the Savior thus points out that the lawyer was discussing, not how to gain life, but how to live life. The lawyer recognized the turn to the conversation. Why should he be asking this question at all? And so "he, willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus, And who is my neighbor?" Within the space of a few words, the conversation had arrived at the core of Christian living, at the nature of the life of God in the soul of man. The lawyer indicated that the crux to the definition of that life lies in the concept of neighbor. The Savior tells the story of the three men that were confronted by a man in need. The first two were religious leaders bent on a sacred task, a priest and a Levite, and they passed by. The Samaritan peddler "had compassion on him," made personal sacrifices and went to the length of personal effort and concern to help. The Savior asks, "Which now of these three thinkest thou was neighbor unto him that fell among thieves?" The lawyer answered, "He that shewed mercy on him." "Then said Jesus unto him, "Go, and do thou likewise." (Luke 10:25-37.)

The Apostles develop this concept at great length. To the elders of Ephesus St. Paul says:

I have shewed you all things, how that so laboring ye ought to support the weak and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how He said, It is more blessed to give than to receive. Acts 20:35.

He writes similarly,

Now we exhort you, brethren, warn them that are unruly, comfort the feeble-minded, support the weak, be patient toward all men. 1 Thess. 5:14.

We, then, that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak and not to please ourselves. Let every one of us please his neighbor for his good to edification. For even Christ pleased not Himself; but, as it is written: The reproaches of them that reproached Thee fell on Me. . . . Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received us to the glory of God. Rom. 15:1-3, 7.

The last quotation had grown out of a specific situation, the thoughtfulness of Christians, without scruples of conscience about details of food and ritual, toward those who were troubled in their consciences. On that subject St. Paul writes elsewhere:

And through thy knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died? But when ye sin so against the brethren and wound their weak conscience, ye sin against Christ. 1 Cor. 8:11-12.

St. Paul describes a similar concern for spiritual upbuilding to the Galatians:

Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted. Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. . . . And let us not be weary in well-doing, for in due season we shall reap if we faint not. As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith. 6:1, 2, 9, 10.

The entire relation of Christian to Christian is drawn into the context of care and aid toward the weakness and shortcomings of the other. The Apostles use the term "submit" in order to indicate the readiness of the one who is competent to aid the one who is in need.

Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God. Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. . . . Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the Church and gave Himself for it. Eph. 5:21, 22, 25.

Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility; for God resisteth the proud and giveth grace to the humble. 1 Peter 5:5.

Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands. . . . Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honor unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel. . . . Be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous. 1 Peter 3:1, 7, 8.

It is important to realize that the Apostles do not distinguish between physical and spiritual objectives of this care. Wherever the Christian can support another person, particularly his brother Christian, he will self-evidently do so. This is the significance of the accent on Christian humility.

But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his

own house, he hath denied the faith and is worse than an infidel.
1 Tim. 5:8.

Our Lord Himself, though Son of God and before all worlds, humbled Himself in order to be at one and the same time an example of this care and a means of making our own concern for men possible.

Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God; but made Himself of no reputation and took upon Him the form of a servant and was made in the likeness of men. And being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross. Phil. 2:3-8.

Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me, for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light. Matt. 11:29-30.

The forces which destroy the Christian readiness to this concern are simply termed pride.

But he that hateth his brother is in darkness and walketh in darkness and knoweth not whither he goeth, because that darkness hath blinded his eyes. . . . Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. 1 John 2:11, 15, 16.

Well does the Church repeat Mary's song:

He hath shewed strength with His arm; He hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He hath put down the mighty from their seats and exalted them of low degree. He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich He hath sent empty away. Luke 1:51-53.

And our Lord links the conquest of pride with the service to men:

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. . . . Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. . . . Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy. . . . Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God. Matt. 5:3, 5, 7, 9.

In these materials we confront a consideration basic for any Christian discussion of race relations. For here we are taken into the genuine and ongoing life of Christians. We can discern an attack upon our problem which moves forward in two ways. The first is within the Christian Church itself, the building up of insights, attitudes, and readinesses for an immediate concern toward the brother. Here Christians are recognizing the difficulties and handicaps under which each labors and are seeking to build up and sustain one another against them. Thereby, however, a total program of action is developed which is a witness toward its world. Christians help one another to overcome the pride of life that they might become servants to their world. St. Paul describes the process at work in himself:

And unto the Jews I became a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the Law, as under the Law, that I might gain them that are under the Law; to them that are without Law, as without Law (being not without Law to God, but under the law to Christ), that I might gain them that are without Law; to the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak. I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. And this I do for the Gospel's sake, that I might be partaker thereof with you. 1 Cor. 9:20-23.

It remains for us to attempt to outline with specific reference to race relations the Christian's process suggested in these words of Scripture.

III

THE CHRISTIAN SEEKS TO RELATE WELL TO CHRISTIANS OF OTHER RACES

Within the Christian Church itself the Christian seeks to make the first attack upon the problem of race relations. He will do so as he seeks, in first place, to understand the problem.

In meeting a relation between strong and weak the Christian must at once understand that he is never exclusively either strong or weak. He must understand his own weaknesses and shortcomings. He must rise to the challenge of Christ and himself be meek, that is to say, aware of his place in life and the deficiencies with which he is still confronted. These deficiencies are classically listed as world, flesh, and devil. The world around him is not

driven by Christian concerns or filled with the Holy Spirit. Hence it constructs patterns of behavior which are driven exclusively by self and by self-interest. Its modes of thought and behavior find a reflection within the Christian himself, namely, in his flesh. The Christian flesh (cf. Rom. 7:15 ff.; Gal. 5:16 ff.) is the sum total of his desires, drives, and interests as they are not under the control of the Spirit. With his redemption by Jesus and renewal by the Spirit, the Christian has actually become a bundle of mutually contradictory drives, and those which are out of the control of the Holy Spirit at any moment are his flesh. And so all of the opponents of the Spirit; and as co-ordinator binding the forces of world and flesh into a conspiracy is the Adversary of God, a brooding Force and Intelligence which knits these powers into a unity and impedes progress toward human relations. It is with these forces at work upon himself that the Christian has to reckon in the business of race relations likewise. It is with these forces at work in any and every one of its members that the Christian Church has to reckon. These forces of self and world are weaknesses within its own midst which the Christian Church has to help its members overcome.

We can, first of all, briefly scan these forces as they invade Christians in a majority group. Here the outstanding characteristic is that of prejudice. A majority group seeks to maintain a status toward a minority. It seeks to preserve that status for the sake of personal advantage. Thus the colored group is kept in a state of peonage or economic inferiority under the assumption that a change will work disadvantage in the structure of white life—job and labor market, real estate values. This procedure involves manifest inequalities. To rationalize them and to remove the sting of injustice apparent in them, each generation constructs a fabric of assumptions and prejudices. To face these prejudices involves embarrassment or admission of injustice. Thus each adult generation carefully fosters a series of prejudices in each oncoming one, and each break in the existing pattern is the occasion for bitter antipathy.

Manifestly the social and economic patterns maintained under prejudice are on their surface non-Christian. Thus the effort must be made by the flesh of Christians to rationalize the injustice. Either Christian status to the colored is directly denied on the basis of

fictions such as the curse of Ham or the Tower of Babel, overlooking that this curse applied to a specific white tribe inhabiting Palestine before the Jews (Gen. 10:15-19), that the incident of Babel was a judgment upon the pride of the whole human race (Gen. 11:4, 6-9). God made all men of one blood (Acts 17:26). The man who bore Christ's cross and was well known in the Christian community (Mark 15:21) and one of the first notables baptized in Christian mission work (Acts 8:26-39) were men of color. Despite these truths the flesh of Christians may seek to rationalize the assumption that the colored are not welcome in the Church of God. Or they may be welcomed as long as they are at a distance and make no claim upon the immediate concern and sympathy of Christians. To that end the worldly solution of social segregation or political inferiority are drawn into the range of the Church.

Such rationalizations and prejudices involve a distortion of the Christian way. But this means that they are a burden for other Christians to bear. It can be argued that they are a burden which the strong among the colored are to bear, and that is true. But to "bear" these burdens does not mean simply to allow them or to yield to them. The Christian bears the spiritual burden of another Christian when he helps that Christian to overcome the fault and frailty which besets him. If a brother Christian is an alcoholic, we do not help him bear his burden by simply allowing him to drink. When a brother Christian is beset with prejudice, hatred, or neglect in any form, we help him to bear his burden, never by simply granting him the right to go his way, but we must seek to cure him of his malady.

In going about this task, we must, above all, "consider ourselves lest we also be tempted." Christians need to be aware of the trends and forces of the flesh which we have been describing. Hence they need, through confession to one another of their faults (James 5:16), through frank discussion of problems and difficulties, come to realization of the forces that beat in upon them. Christians confess faults not just to gain merit through the confession, or to have an imaginary account settled on an imaginary ledger, but to have the faults of self replaced with the life of love. To that end the members of the Church are to help each other to come to an

awareness of those faults and to turn to the program of remedy. It must likewise be remembered that the problem of overcoming prejudice and relating properly to other groups is not solved when a Christian succeeds toward one group and fails toward another or when he overcomes his faults of prejudice and succumbs to other weaknesses in other phases of Christian living. The attack upon prejudice and faulty relation toward other groups is to be part of a process of growth in "all things" (Eph. 4:11-16) — and when we say that, we remind ourselves that the whole Church and its ministry is to be working together toward that total growth of each individual.

And He gave some, Apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: till we all come in the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men and cunning craftiness whereby they lie in wait to deceive; but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up into Him in all things, which is the Head, even Christ, from whom the whole body, fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love. Eph. 4:11-16.

Before we turn to the mode in which this growth is to be accomplished, we may remind ourselves that also Christians in the minority group face special difficulties of the flesh within them. Also they are the focus of attack from the outside — suspicions, feelings of inferiority, compensations in violence or self-seeking. The fact that they have a legal right to those feelings does not alter the fact that world and flesh make capital out of them. It is at this point that the danger of race prejudice within the Church sets in most mischievously. For the ongoing and growing life of the Church involves togetherness, each helping the other. Yet, the mutual reactions and hostilities in the flesh between the two groups sever this togetherness. The fact that a meeting such as this is in response to an emergency is testimony to the collapse of these

mutual relations. At this point Christians on each side of the table need to move on in Galatians 6 and say to themselves:

For if a man think himself to be something when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself. But let every man prove his own work, and then shall he have rejoicing in himself alone and not in another. For every man shall bear his own burden. Gal. 6:3-5.

It is easy to trace the reactions of world and flesh in the other group. It is imperative that each Christian learn to diagnose the fault and difficulty in himself first.

That diagnosis is the first step in a program of action within the Church. In theological terms we call it the applying of the Law. It is, indeed, to be the subject of preaching and catechetical instruction. But, together with that, must come the patient sitting together of Christians conferring and discussing, seeking to find the scope and root of their several problems and frailties in this regard. The mechanisms of prejudice always involve stopping to think, finding a means of being satisfied with self. The application of the Law always involves good thinking, bringing the hidden motives and feelings to light, surveying them calmly and humbly and getting set to move them with dispatch.

Our quotation above, Eph. 4:11-16, indicates the next steps. They involve the "edifying" of the body of Christ, the increasing of "faith and knowledge of the Son of God." This increase is to be achieved through the work of the professional ministry within the Christian congregation and through every relation of Christians to one another in the fellowship of the Church. The Apostle is thinking of the fact that when a Christian has come to faith through the Gospel of Jesus Christ and has accepted the forgiveness of his sins because of the redemptive work of Jesus, he has at the same time received the Holy Spirit, the very life of God which now seeks to take hold of every one of his inner impulses and aims at the inclusion of his entire heart and life into the operations of love. Love means that an individual is not necessarily sentimentally attached to another, but that he has taken up the responsibility of love toward the other. Love in the Christian sense is best observable, the Savior would say, toward enemies and toward those who treat us poorly (Matt. 5:43-48). We must remember that this love, which is the mark of the presence in the heart of God Him-

self who is Love (1 John 3:14-19; 4:7-13), is the gift of God to us, and comes to us through the one operation of His Word of the Gospel (1 Peter 1:22—2:18). Hence the members of the Christian Church defeat the forces of the flesh and of the world, of prejudice and apathy and hostility, by bringing one another under the influence of the Word of the Gospel, by gathering themselves about Word and Sacrament, by discussing not merely the diagnoses of their faults and frailties in their conversations, but by also applying to one another the power of love through their mutual consideration of God's love in Christ Jesus.

When we say that the Gospel is to give the power for conquest of prejudice, we do not mean to say that the attack upon prejudice and the advance toward better relations between Christians in the Church is to be a mild, mental, mystical, and abstract process. Evangelical never means sluggish. We are talking about a process in which we take hold of the high voltage of God's own grace in Christ. In the recent flood disaster, Christians in a community and Christians throughout the nation were promptly related to one another's aid. It was self-evident that they should help one another, and their help was substantial in dollars which they had earned, in substance which they might have used otherwise. That disaster involved human lives. The disaster of interracial hostilities and apathies within the Church also involves lives. Human beings are drowning in their own flesh; they are ceasing to breathe the Spirit of God. Hence Christians need to act promptly. The Good Samaritan acted now. The chief difficulty in solving any problems of race relations is that it seems so hard to make a beginning. Every program simmers down to a delaying action. The New Testament does not allow sluggishness at any task of edifying Christians. Our Lord is about to return. We do not have too much time:

Now, we exhort you, brethren, warn them that are unruly, comfort the feeble-minded, support the weak, be patient toward all men. See that none render evil for evil unto any man; but ever follow that which is good, both among yourselves and to all men. . . . Quench not the Spirit. . . . Abstain from all appearance of evil. And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it. 1 Thess. 5:14, 15, 19, 22, 23, 24.

IV

THE CHRISTIAN IS CONCERNED FOR GOOD RACE RELATIONS
INVOLVING ALSO NON-CHRISTIANS

Up to this point we have discussed race relations inside the Christian Church. What of race relations in general? The Christian religion directs itself to Christians. It seeks to implant the life of God in people and thus to provide motivations for them which differ from those of the self-interest of the world. This is not to imply, however, that its significance ends when non-Christians enter the scheme of things. In first place, the Christian is to be concerned also for non-Christians. Hence his concern is to reach out beyond the confines of the Church, wherever he can help men in need (Gal. 6:10). In the United States, race prejudices have caused a series of injustices toward racial minorities which have caused deficiencies in housing, education, employment, and the like. The Christian, in the degree to which he is a Christian, is disturbed by those deficiencies. The Golden Rule for him implies that his standard for other people is the same that he would apply to himself. This does not imply that he would level everyone to the same standard of living automatically. For the Christian, in the degree to which he is a Christian, does not find the standard of living to be the chief element in life and happiness. But it does mean that he would deplore any means by which individuals are kept from having what he has. The Christian deplores injustice. Justice means, to quote familiar words, equal opportunity for "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."

Most Christians live in communities which contain also many non-Christians. Also the Christians in these communities are influenced by the ways of the world and the flesh. Just as the Christian is alert to the deficiencies of the flesh within the Christian community, so he will be aware of these deficiencies as they beset non-Christians likewise. He will seek to understand them and to appraise them at their true worth. It belongs to the mechanism of race prejudice to make disparities and injustices seem to be the natural and true order of things. The Christian will earnestly endeavor to understand and to deplore these disparities, whether they be between classes or races.

The Christian will understand that the motives which drive him

toward concern and love for men in need are not automatically at the disposal of the entire community. He knows that he cannot by-pass the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit. There is, however, a process among men which directs them to thoughtfulness toward others and which enforces justice also without the drive of the Holy Spirit. That process is government. Government seeks to reason out what is just and necessary for the relations of men. It puts these judgments into laws and enforces these laws with penalties and rewards. The Christian supports these activities of his government because God Himself is thereby maintaining an order among men which is very important for God's purposes and the purposes of the Christian's life. In a community in which injustices prevail, those who are hampered are going to be cut off from access to the Gospel and to the witness of the Christian's faith (1 Tim. 2:1-10). It is noteworthy that the membership of the Lutheran mission in Nigeria after less than fifteen years of labor is 23,237 souls. The total membership in the American activities in nearly a century is 16,579 (*Statistical Yearbook, Missouri Synod, 1950*, p. 242). The same Gospel was preached in both countries and by many more workers in America. But in America the barriers of community injustice help to impede that Gospel — along with other factors, of course.

At the present time considerable effort is being invested by government and private agencies to remedy injustices toward the colored. Unfortunately these measures are frequently the result of mixed motives. However, a Christian does not cease patronizing a grocery store when the proprietor is moved by selfish objectives. Nor should the Christian withdraw his support and concern from the democratic processes by which his community and government seeks to remedy injustices toward racial groups. Above all, he should be careful not to join in objections which stem evidently from selfish motives.

For those to whom an injustice is plainly evident and the proper course of conduct clear, delay seems frequently indefensible. It is important to understand, however, how the democratic process functions. The Christian is interested, since that is his government, to employ the democratic process wisely and well. That process works through community-wide conversation and discussion. People on both sides of an issue frequently prefer to by-pass this

process. Totalitarianism is always the result. It is uniquely Christian to want to sit down and counsel with the fellow citizen, to explore the nature of the just procedure and the mode of arriving at it. In the recent lamentable occurrence in Cicero, Ill., the democratic process had fallen down at a number of points, police protection notoriously one of them. However, the chief problem, for which the entire community is to blame, lay in this, that there had been no preparation of community information, discussion, and concern, and the entire issue, other than a trend to hoodlumism, boiled down to fear of declining property values. The democratic process, even short of Christian ideals, could arrive at the realization that a community in which justice was enforced could only prosper, even materially, by comparison with one which harbored an injustice for the sake of a monetary and imaginary gain. Hence the Christian will be tremendously anxious to improve education and the schools of his community, the organizations of welfare, politics, and community improvement by which citizens can counsel together and every other means for making his government function.

These lines have offered only initial reflections upon the contributions of the Christian religion to the race question: We have sought to stress its contributions to the heart of the individual Christian. Until that contribution is made, until the individual Christian is actually that in his thinking about race and in his actions within his community, any larger theory and plan of action seems futile. The Christian religion suggests a simple yet rich approach to the problem:

1. Let each Christian carefully diagnose what is fleshly and worldly in his thinking toward members of another race.

2. Let each Christian fully employ for himself and apply to his brother in his church the resources of the Christian Gospel for producing and maintaining sacrificial love toward those who are in need; let him assume responsibility for the burdens of the weak.

3. Let the Christian intelligently and patiently engage in the democratic process of his own community for preserving justice and creating a climate of mutual relations in which his own witness to the Gospel will be fruitful and the purpose of his life in the world be realized.

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