

Race Relations

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A. History: The bringing of Negro slaves to America is truly a sad chapter in American history. Man's inhumanity to man manifested itself from the tribal greed which led to the selling of one another to the slave traders on the African coasts, through the cramped, unsanitary chain-horror of the "middle passage," to the family-dividing auction blocks of Charleston, Savannah, and New Orleans. Once the Negro was on the plantation, the final erasure of his past was enforced by the ban on his tribal dress, language, and custom. He was completely molded into an instrument of American life. He was forced to adjust to new realities. From that point on he was American.

The transition from slavery to freedom made little difference in the life of the Negro. Although the slave quarters were gone, the majority of people stayed with their former masters, either being paid wages, given a section of the plantation as a tenant, or having a share-crop arrangement. The ignorant Negro's life moved in an

orbit formed by great Cotton Kingdom economic forces, beyond his control or understanding.¹

For the more stable, progressive families, the authority of the father was firmly established. But to others the loose ties which held slaves together in marriage were quickly broken. Having grown up as a neglected child only to face the harsh rigors of white dominance, the Negro male had it hammered into him daily that he was a lazy and simple child of nature, expected to steal, having inferior blood. When the majority of people were saying the same thing, it became forced upon him. His skin was "different" and it could not be changed. The two were irrevocably bound. Like a dwarf among giants he could not fight on equal terms; therefore, he developed "ego defenses."² Because of the tendency toward masculine irresponsibility, the home became matriarchal in character. The virtues of humility and obedience flourished, fostering a lack of self-respect, shiftlessness, compli-

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ance, and sexual looseness. In a sense, there was no illegitimacy in the Negro community. This world had a standard all its own. A woman might have had several beaux, having been intimate with only one at a time. This was "approximate" virtue.

There was little time for individual attention or recognition of separate personalities among the children, who came with regularity "by the will of the Lord." With the frequency of hard times, children were sometimes passed among relatives for adoption as a simple and natural procedure. There often was confusion in the names and ages and parentage of children. Such emotional distance which characterized this society left a legacy in youth that was to last for several generations.

White supremacy was reestablished after Reconstruction in 1876. The entire nation, even the most liberal-minded, came to accept the South's theory that "the South will solve its own problem." At first through terror, and later through a pretense of legality, the Negro was robbed of his Constitutional rights in a systematic and thoroughgoing fashion through the enactment of "Jim Crow" laws, poll taxes, literacy tests, and "grandfather clauses." The record of lynchings and injustices against the Negro insured a silent and sullen enemy. White domination, paternalistic benevolence, and charity with condescension were leading to a smoldering enmity which would seek an opportunity to display itself. Booker T. Washington tried to develop self-help programs for the Negroes and was applauded enthusiastically by white and Negro Southerners. He was opposed by W. E. B. DuBois, who urged that the Negro not apologize for injustices North or South.

When the Negro was freed in 1865, there were 1,700,000 Negro children of school age in the nation, illiterate adults, no schools, with over nine-tenths of all Negroes living in the Southern states.³ Within one generation, the Negro population progressed to being less than 50 per cent illiterate. J. W. Cash points out that the South felt it did

owe the Negro an education, so as to teach him not to rape, and to be skilled in mechanics, but never to gain an academic training.⁴ That kind of education would give the Negro dangerous notions. The idea of the South was to control his education and thereby to keep him in his place.⁵

In the late 19th century, as racial distinctions in secular spheres were being drawn more sharply, Southern Protestant churches busily regrouped into all-white and all-Negro churches, less the result of design than of unplanned evolution.⁶ The church was the one institution over which the Negroes themselves exercised control. It became uniquely esteemed among them. A nation within a nation.⁷ Every Negro was a member of some church. It stood alone in administering to their needs. Its functions, therefore, were varied. It provided a large measure of recreation, relaxation from the physical stresses of life; it was looked to when misfortune struck; it was a medium for community expressions of fellowship. Above this, the church held out a world of escape from the hard experiences of life common to all. It exercised some control over the social relations, setting up standards for morals, passing judgment which represented community opinion, censuring and penalizing improper conduct by expulsion.⁸

Its ministers were ignorant, but articulate; often morally loose but valued by how well they could release tensions caused by social and personal maladjustments.⁹ The sins of dancing, card-playing, and baseball were often more condemned than immorality of sex.

Negro young people as they became more educated have required less of this kind of religion than their parents. They have become more mobile and less docile. Increased literacy has meant increased distance between older and younger generations.¹⁰

Segregation and education, in spite of the white man's wishes, led to a new consciousness within the Negro. The Negro learned to live a double life—as an American and as a Negro. From this rose a painful self-

consciousness, an almost morbid sense of personality, and a moral hesitancy which was fatal to self-confidence. Conscious of his impotence in a white-dominated society growing out of this double life, and pessimistic, he often became bitter and vindictive; his religion, instead of worship, was a complaint and a curse, a wail rather than a hope, a sneer rather than a faith.¹¹ The Negro quickly identified religious themes of the Bible with his struggle for complete freedom. Hymns and spirituals, therefore, came to have a double meaning.

B. Now and the Future: Today we are seeing the full flowering of the New Negro. No longer will he be content to make an occasional appearance at our lectureships as the "good," i.e., harmless, obedient Negro. We have practiced a kind of hypocrisy which says "I will accept you as a rare example of the other kind upon my platform—on my terms. I will not accept the rest of your kind as fellow human beings." But "Unce Tomism" is dead.

The civil rights movement, up until 1963, manifested the growing consciousness on the part of the Negro that the injustices against the Negro should be stopped by a peaceful, non-violent appeal to the American conscience as shaped by the Constitution. The demonstrations and marches had a dramatic effect upon the Negroes and white alike. The changes, especially in the South, have been remarkable and, of course, long overdue.

Since 1963, however, there has been a decided change in attitude. The civil rights movement is dead in the North and to a great extent weakened in the South.¹² The legal and political promises have made practically no noticeable change in the hard-core ghettos of American cities. Having remained peaceful in America for 450 years—arriving just after the Pilgrims, the Negro is coming into his own in a manner which can no longer be ignored. Black Bower is his motto and generations of abuse is his motive. The Negro revolution is perhaps the key issue of this century for America. The militancy of

Stokely Carmichael is being listened to and seems to be meeting vast and deep needs that a protest march from Selma to Montgomery or Hernando to Jackson could not satisfy.

Whereas the civil rights movement had an appeal to the middle and upper-class of Negroes, the Black Power movement is finding support in the lower classes. The riots of Watts, Chicago, Detroit, Newark, and a thousand other towns are attempts on the part of the Negroes to get a message across to white America. Often we do not want to listen. White people far prefer to maintain the present or even go back to the past when things were always comfortable. But the hard truth is that white America has had the advantages at the great economic, psychological, and political disadvantage of Negroes, and this they will tolerate no longer. Their panting charge is: NOW! And they will not rest until there is a new world for them—a world that grants "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness" to all Americans.

In the recent *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders*,¹³ we read: "What white Americans have never fully understood—but what the Negro can never forget—is that white society is deeply implicated in the ghetto. White institutions created it, white institutions maintain it, and white society condones it."

The best information I can gather indicates that the Black Power leadership is divided and cannot unify their objectives. Some want complete separation—as in a separate state; others want integration—meaning a complete assimilation of Negroes into American political, economic, and social life. As yet they are unorganized. This gives us an indeterminate amount of time to work on the problem.

As Christians, how are we to view the issue of Race? The Bible makes this abundantly clear. Acts 17 declares through Paul that God has indeed "made from one every nation of men to live on the face of the earth." Biologically, we are one, and the high rate of miscegenation in the past is

ample evidence of this unity. There is no such thing as a pure African in America.

But the fact that we are one, biologically, is only the minimum of what should serve as a guideline to ethnic relationships. Further, man is made in the "image of God" (Genesis 1:26), and Paul exhorts that we are to "do good to all men" (Galatians 6:10). There is something of God in every man which requires that I cannot, as a Christian, write him off as being unworthy of my attention, my concern. He is not an "it" but a "you." God is no respecter of persons (Acts 10:34) and neither must I be. His "Good News" of Jesus is intended to be heralded to the ends of the earth so that "every creature" will have the opportunity of being in His family (Mark 16:15).

Finally (and this is the most urgent upon Christians who worship in segregated churches), listen to Paul writing to the Ephesians. "Through the blood of Christ, you who were once outside the pale are with us inside the circle of God's love in Christ Jesus. For Christ is our living peace. He has made a unity of the conflicting elements of (white) and (Negro) by breaking down the barrier which lay between us. By his sacrifice he removed the hostility . . . and made in himself out of the two, (white) and (Negro), one new man, thus producing peace. For he reconciled both to God by the sacrifice of one body on the cross, and by this act made utterly irrelevant the antagonism between them. Then he came and told both you who were far from God and us who were near that the war was over (Ephesians 2:12ff-Phillips).

It is a shame that we in the church live in such close proximity with our Christian brothers and sisters and yet do not know one another or have any real communication with one another. Do we believe there will be a segregated heaven? The war is over! The unity that has been spiritually established when we all drank of the same Spirit and were all baptized into the one body transcends all distinctions previously considered important. "Neither bond nor free,

neither Jew nor Greek, neither male nor female, but we are one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28, I Corinthians 12:4-27, Colossians 3:11). In Colossians, Paul adds that even the Sythian—"the barbarian's barbarian" loses all disgracing marks of class within the "household of faith." As long as we commune at segregated communion tables, we have "failed to discern the Lord's body. For this cause many of you are weak, and sick and some have died" (I Corinthians 11).

We must face honestly the full implication of such a concept if we would be truly Christian. I mean now what is usually the white man's hang-up: racial intermarriage. I say it is the white man's problem, for the Negro has been seeing things from an entirely different viewpoint. In spite of some progress, when it comes to our social life, we are "afraid of what the neighbors will say" or what will develop among our uninhibited young people at church socials. White people are hung-up on racial intermarriage, but the Bible is not. I want to take the attitude of the Scriptures, which is completely neutral on this point. I intend neither to encourage nor discourage such a union, other than advising, due to the strong feelings usually manifest, that marriage is a difficult enough adjustment at best without adding this additional factor to yourself and to your children. But the New Testament is concerned with the spiritual unity of married people rather than racial distinctions.

One might ask: What can I do to improve race relations, or change my attitude, or show my Christian witness in a more meaningful way? First, realize that you are likely prejudiced, even though you may strongly protest to the contrary; that you are caught up in a dominant white society which unconsciously practices discrimination and segregation in a multitude of ways to which white people are oblivious but of which the Negro is painfully aware. Also, accept the fact that the future will have to be different from the past if we are to have equality in practice the way we have spoken the Con-

stitutional theory. Try to reexamine your own life and make the necessary adjustments in speech, thought, and actions. Give the Negro his inalienable right to have—even the house next door; the right to belong—in a society in which he is equal; and the right to be—an individual with needs, hopes,

and feelings like every other human.¹⁴ If no Negro can now call you his friend, make an effort to make a friend. Visit Negro churches and become acquainted with their world. In summary: "Do unto others as you would have others do unto you."

FOOTNOTES

- ¹ Frazier, E. Franklin, *The Negro Family in the U. S.* (Dryden Press, New York, 1948), p. 91.
² Allport, Gordon, *The Nature of Prejudice* (Beacon Press, Boston, 1954), p. 142.
³ Moon, Bucklin, *Primer for White Folks* (Doubleday, Doran and Co., Garden City, New York), p. 141.
⁴ Department of Commerce and Labor, Bureau of Census, *Negroes in the U. S., 1904*.
⁵ Cash, J. W., *The Mind of the South* (Vintage Books, New York, 1941), p. 179.
⁶ Bailey, Kenneth, *Southern White Protestantism in the 20th Century* (Harper & Row, 1964), p. 4.
⁷ Frazier, Franklin, *The Negro Church in America* (Schoken Books, New York, 1966), p. 44.
⁸ Johnson, Charles S., *The Shadow of the Plantation* (U. of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1934), p. 150.
⁹ Atwood, J. Howell, et. al., *This Be Their Destiny* (American Council on Education, Washington, D.C., 1941), pp. 18-19.
¹⁰ Johnson, Charles S., *Growing Up in the Black Belt* (American Council on Education, Washington, D.C., 1941), p. 169.
¹¹ DuBois, W. E. B., *The Souls of Black Folks*, pp. 202-3.
¹² Lasch, Christopher, *Black Power Movement Supplement* (*New York Review*, February 29, 1968).
¹³ Introduction by Tom Wicker of *New York Times* (Bantam Books, 1968), p. vii.
¹⁴ Haselden, Kyle, *The Racial Problem in Christian Perspective* (Harper Torchbooks, 1959), chapters 5, 6, & 7.

Meditations on the Lord's Supper—X

Luke tells the story of Jesus' appearance after his resurrection to two disciples on the way to Emmaus. It is instructive to note the three stages of their understanding and recognition of Jesus, which culminated when he "took the bread and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to them. And their eyes were opened and they recognized him" (Luke 24:30, 31). When Jesus first began to walk with them, they related to him the events of the past few days, but without understanding. They had seen that Jesus was a great prophet and potential redeemer of Israel, but they were puzzled by his seemingly ignoble death and even by the news of his resurrection. So Jesus "interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself" (v. 27). Even then, how-

ever, they did not recognize the risen Jesus before them, for mere intellectual comprehension of the Scriptures does not guarantee that one is acquainted with Jesus personally. It was the burning of their hearts within them (v. 32) as they listened to the Scriptures which moved them to invite Jesus into their home to sup with them. These two disciples would never have recognized Jesus had he not come into their house and revealed himself through the breaking of the bread. The principle of knowing and appreciating Jesus is clear: it does not come through seeing him as an unusual man or through mastery of the Scriptures only (although that is a necessary step), but through the intimacy of communion with him, the breaking of bread with an invited guest.

—Elton D. Higgs