

of races, which our visitor declared were created by God to be "different but not unequal." We tried to prove to him that if he and his fellow countrymen really believed that the difference did not spell inequality and if they did not regard "creation" as fixed, but as part of the historic development to which every race and person was subject, they could not maintain the rigor of their policy. We argued further that the sin of South Africa was in closing the doors of hope. This would create increasing hardness of heart among the dominant group who had an uneasy conscience, and would leave the minority group resentful and outraged. We told him that our society undoubtedly had an unsolved race issue. But we had many citizens in the white group who had dedicated themselves to the cause of justice and many Negroes who hoped for the future, and allowed their hopes to console them about present bitter realities. We did not pretend that our community was free of race prejudice, but we asserted that the difference was in the way a society was closed or kept open for future possibilities. The Supreme Court decision has justified every argument used in that encounter. We hope our South African will hear of this decision and learn from it.

### 31. WHAT RESOURCES CAN THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH OFFER TO MEET CRISIS IN RACE RELATIONS?

Evidence multiplies that our nation is facing the most serious crisis in race relations since the Civil War. Ironically, the crisis has been brought about by a Supreme Court decision, which even those who think more time should have been allowed for the gradual processes of history to take their hitherto hopeful course do not criticize because it simply affirms a Constitutional guarantee of equality before the law that if realized would solve the age-old "American dilemma."

Both Hodding Carter, a Southern editor with a long record of fairness on the race issue, and the distinguished novelist William Faulkner insist that, whatever may be the ultimate issues of justice in this problem, it is now unwise to push the cause of desegregation

*The Messenger*, April 3, 1956.

too consistently, lest the Southern white people are pushed, in Faulkner's phrase, "off balance" and are not allowed time to get their balance.

The question is what resources the Christian church can offer for the solution of these grave issues. It would be wrong to assume that there are automatic resources of grace and wisdom even in the church. The fact is — and it is a disturbing one — that the church is not now, and has not been, very creative on this issue. Perhaps it lacks resources for discriminate judgment — and that is the kind of judgment that the problem demands.

If we turn to the gospel, we shall come first of all upon the rigor of its moral demands. It challenges all partial loyalties in the name of an absolute loyalty. "For if you love those who love you, what reward have you?" asks Christ. "Do not even the tax collectors do the same?"

But the gospel is not simply a system of rigorous idealism; it knows that all men fall short of this universal love. Perhaps the first thing we must learn from the gospel is the sense of our common involvement in the sins of racial loyalty and prejudice. It is not a Southern sin, but a general human shortcoming. Such humility will prevent Northern liberals from self-righteous judgments, which, in the present instance, will aggravate the crisis.

Nevertheless, the realization of our general involvement in the evils of racial prejudice must not prompt us to inaction when particularly flagrant forms of the sins we all commit challenge our conscience. The fact that we all violate the law of love in some way or other ought not to obscure to our conscience the force of that law. Every Christian, for instance, should have some sympathy for a group of Negroes, who have long smarted under the contempt of their fellow men and who now see a chance, under the changing environment, to challenge age-old customs of segregation on public buses. Their boycott must appeal to sensitive men everywhere as another assertion of the dignity of man.

But this does not mean that we can have no sympathy for anxious parents who are opposed to unsegregated schools. The cultural differences between the two races are still great enough to warrant a certain amount of disquiet on the part of the parents. One may hope that ultimately the Negro people will have the same advantages that all our children have. But there must be a measure of sympathy for those who are afraid of the immediate effects of present educational

plans. It might help if we all realized that, in all our judgments about each other across racial lines, we do not judge with pure hearts and reason. Our judgments, however honest, are corrupted by the most perennial sin of group pride.

There seems nothing in the Christian ethic about prudence, and prudence is what is demanded in such critical situations as this one. But a genuine charity is the father of prudence. For genuine love does not propose abstract schemes of justice that leave the human factor out of account.

Perhaps there ought also to be a Christian witness of integrity and courage whenever fears prompt cruelty and oppression as they do today in some communities.

### 32. PROPOSAL TO BILLY GRAHAM

I have no business making any proposals to Billy Graham. We are not acquainted. But I share a general approval of his modesty and sincerity in the Christian community and also a certain uneasiness that his type of evangelism may seem to be irrelevant to the great moral issues of our day.

My proposal is prompted by the fact that in the revival that swept the nation a century ago, under the inspiration of the great Finney, the abolition of slavery was made central to the religious experience of repentance and conversion. As a result the revival led to the manumission of slaves in some instances and to various abolition movements in others. Warner, in his book *The Anti-Slavery Impulse*, gives us a good account of the reality of this type of evangelism. It sharpened the religious awareness of the central moral problem facing the nation a hundred years ago.

#### CHURCH LAGS IN JUSTICE

A hundred years later we still confront the same moral issue, though in a different historical context. The slaves have long since become emancipated. But the Negroes have not been freed from the contempt that the white majority visits upon the ex-slaves, partly

*The Christian Century*, August 8, 1956.

because of their color and partly because of their "previous condition of servitude." Men are very slow in their collective life in meeting the elementary norms of the Christian life. They violate the simple commandment, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." So here we are a hundred years after the emancipation of the slave in a new crisis because our Government, based upon a conception of law that makes "equal protection under the law" the cardinal principle of justice, is challenging the mores of the community that incorporated a remnant of the pattern of slavery into its customs.

The Christian church did not seriously challenge these customs. The political community proved itself more rigorous than the Christian community in guarding the dignity of man. The church, as our Negro friends constantly remind us, was the most rigorously segregated institution in the nation. That segregation wittingly or unwittingly gave a religious aura to racial prejudice. Even now, while many a heroic Southern minister has defied the congregation and the community in upholding the standards of both the gospel and the law, the church as an institution has lagged behind the trade-union movement in supporting the Supreme Court decision.

It would be idle to mention all this were Billy Graham totally unconscious of the moral crisis in our nation on the age-old race issue. Though a Southerner, he is "enlightened" on the race issue. He does not condone racial prejudice. But neither does he incorporate the demand of love transcending racial boundaries into his evangelistic appeal. He does not suggest that the soul, confronted with the judgment and the forgiveness of Christ, should regard racial prejudice as an element in the "life of sin" from which the conversion experience redeems. And he does not suggest that among the "fruits meet for repentance" there must be a whole-souled effort to give the Negro neighbor his full due as a man and brother.

A Jewish friend, after witnessing one of Billy Graham's revivals in the city of Richmond, Virginia, made some pertinent remarks about the nature of the revival. "We Jews," he wrote, "are naturally critical, not only because such a revival, with its emphasis upon a commitment in religious terms to which Jews cannot subscribe, tends to widen the chasm between Jews and Christians, which common devotion to civic decencies has tended to bridge, but also because the commitment does not include a new attitude on the race issue, which is so desperately needed today." In other words, the revival does not revitalize the Christian faith on the one point where Jews and secu-

lar idealists who do not share our faith would find a Christian witness most relevant and impressive.

This Jewish comment is much more searching than the innumerable Christian comments that find Billy Graham's interpretation of the Christian life too simple and perfectionist but counsel the rest of us to be sympathetic rather than critical because, they argue, Billy will bring people into the Christian church, and then the rest of us will have the opportunity to reveal all the duties and possibilities that a Christian commitment implies. These proposals might be relevant to the problem of the relation of a perfectionist version of the Christian faith to all the ambiguities that any man, including the Christian, must face in the realm of international politics. Even in this realm it is clear that Graham's insights, gained as a world traveler, are in conflict with his perfectionist solutions of the problem of the hydrogen bomb, for instance.

#### MINDS DULL TO RACIAL SIN

But these counsels do not apply to the race issue. There the moral dimension of the issue is fairly simple. It is whether the Christian recognizes the validity of the Biblical observation, "If a man sayeth that he loves God and hateth his brother, he is a liar." If the issue is as simple as that, the question arises why an obviously honest man, such as Graham, cannot embody the disavowal of race prejudice into his call to repentance. Perhaps the answer to that question takes one into the very heart of the weaknesses of "evangelical" Christianity, particularly evangelical Christianity in its pietistic versions. This form of the Christian faith relies on an oversimplification of the issues in order to create the "crisis" that prompts conversion and the acceptance of the Christian faith. The best way of inducing this crisis is to call attention to some moral dereliction of the person, in which some accepted moral norm has been transgressed and the conscience is consequently uneasy.

The moral transgressions that are embedded in the customs of the community, the sins that we do, not "one by one," but with the approval of our community, are not such effective means of creating the sense of crisis upon which the revivalist depends. If the "sinner" is to be convicted of involvement in some collective sin, it is necessary to appeal not only to the emotions but to the mind; that is, it is necessary rationally to analyze the social situation, conformity to

which means the violation of the love commandment. This is true even in such an uncomplicated problem as the issue of desegregation.

#### CALCULATIONS IN JUSTICE

Perhaps this is the reason why revivalistic Christianity has not been particularly effective in challenging collective evil. It grew to power on the frontier, where its moral appeals were limited to the condemnation of drunkenness, adultery, and Sabbath violations. It may not be entirely unfair to observe that the section of the country in which the present crisis in race relations is most acute is precisely that section which has experienced annual "revivals," all calculated to "redeem" the sinner and guarantee the perfection of a truly "committed" soul.

I well remember a rather pathetic experience more than a quarter century ago in Harlan county, Kentucky, at the time when industrial violence engulfed the county because of a strike by its miners. Their wages were very low because that was the only way the Kentucky mine owners were able to meet the competition of the Pennsylvania coal fields. The middle-class community was solidly arrayed behind the mine owners. We, who were members of a church delegation, met with the ministers of the county in order to convince them that it was dubious for the middle-class community to be so indifferent to the plight of the miners, simply because they felt that the community itself was endangered by a higher wage scale.

These calculations in justice, which touched the collective interests and challenged the moral complacency of the middle-class churches, were quite beyond the moral comprehension of the Harlan county ministers. We were assured that they had just had a collective revival in the town and would have another one, and that these revivals were bound to generate the kind of Christian perfection that would make the collective sins we spoke of quite impossible. The ministers were naïvely good men who did not think in terms that were even remotely relevant to the moral issues their community faced.

#### LOST WITH THE SOCIAL GOSPEL

The only difference between the situation a quarter century ago and now is that Protestantism as a whole was then informed by the

social gospel and regarded the viewpoint of the Harlan county ministers as a quaint vestige of an outmoded form of piety. But now, whether because of the many personal excellences of Billy Graham or because of a widespread naïve enthusiasm for any kind of religious revival, we have official church federations committing themselves to this kind of revivalistic Christianity, assuring us that if only Billy can bring the people into the Christian fold, the ordinary pastors can then proceed to instruct the new recruits in the full implications of the Christian life.

There is more hope that Graham himself will see the weaknesses of a traditional evangelical perfectionism in an atomic age than that his clerical and lay sponsors, with their enthusiasm for any kind of revival, will see it. For Graham is a world traveler and a very perceptive observer of the world scene with its many collective problems. His instincts are genuine and his sense of justice well developed. He could embody the cause of justice — particularly where it is so closely and obviously related to the love commandment as on the race issue — into his revival message. The only thing that could prevent such a development is that it is contrary to the well established “ technique ” of revivalism. That technique requires the oversimplification of moral issues and their individualization for the sake of inducing an emotional crisis. Collective sins are therefore not within the range of a revival. It may be that Graham is good enough to break with this traditional and obvious technique. In that case he would cease to be merely the last exponent of a frontier religious tradition and become a vital force in the nation's moral and spiritual life.

## P A R T

## III

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*Love and Justice**in International Relations*