

NON-VIOLENT PROCEDURES TO INTER-RACIAL HARMONY

It is impossible to look out into the wide arena of American life without noticing a real crisis in race relations. This crisis has been precipitated, on the one hand, by the determined resistance of reactionary elements in the South to the Supreme Court's momentous decision outlawing segregation in public schools. This resistance has often risen to ominous proportions. Many states have risen up in open defiance. Legislative halls of the South ring loud with such words as "interposition" and "nullification." In many states a modern version of the Ku Klux Klan has arisen in the form of so-called respectable White Citizens Councils. All of these forces have conjoined to make for massive resistance.

The crisis has been precipitated, on the other hand, by the radical change in the Negro's evaluation of his nature and destiny of himself. It is true to say that there would be no crisis in race relations if the Negro thought of himself in inferior terms and patiently accepted injustice and exploitation. It is at this very point that the change has come. The tension which we witness in race relations today must be explained in part by this revolutionary change in the Negro's evaluation of his nature and destiny. A brief survey of the history of the Negro in America reveals this change in terms that are crystal clear.

It was in the year of 1619 that the first Negro slaves landed on the shores of this nation. Unlike the Pilgrim Fathers, who landed at Plymouth a year later, they were brought here against their wills. Throughout slavery the Negro was treated in a very inhuman fashion. He was considered a thing to be used, not a person to be respected. He was merely a depersonalized cog, in a vast plantation machine. The famous Dred Scott decision of 1857 well illustrates the status of the Negro during slavery. In this decision the Supreme Court of the United States said, in substance, that the Negro is not a citizen of the United States; he is merely pieces of property subject to the dictates of his owner.

After his emancipation in 1863, the Negro still confronted oppression and inequality. It is true that for a time, while the Army of Occupation remained in the South and Reconstruction ruled, the Negro had a brief period of eminence and political power. But he was quickly overwhelmed by the white majority. So in 1896, through the Plessy v. Ferguson decision, a new kind of slavery came into being covered up with certain niceties of complexity. In this decision the Supreme Court of the nation established the doctrine of separate-but-equal as the law of the land. Following this decision there was a strict enforcement of the "separate" with not the slightest intention to abide by the equal. So the Plessy Doctrine ended up plunging the Negro across the abyss of exploitation where he experienced the bleakness of nagging injustice.

Living under these conditions, many Negroes came to the point of losing faith in themselves. They came to feel that perhaps they were less than human. The great tragedy of physical slavery was that it led to the paralysis of mental slavery. So long as the Negro maintained this subservient attitude and accepted this "place" assigned to him, a sort of racial peace existed. But it was an uneasy peace in which the Negro was forced patiently to accept insult, injustice and exploitation. It was a negative peace. True peace is not merely the absence of some negative force — tension, confusion, or war; it is the presence of some positive force — justice, goodwill, and

brotherhood. So the peace which presently existed between the races was a negative peace devoid of any positive and lasting quality.

Then something happened to the Negro. He began traveling more. His rural plantation background was being supplanted [*sic*] by migration to urban industrial communities. His economic life was gradually rising through the steady decline of crippling illiteracy. A myriad of factors and happenings came together to cause the Negro to take a new look at himself. Negro masses began to re-evaluate themselves. The Negro came to feel that he was somebody. His religion revealed to him that God loves all his children, and that the important thing about a man "is not his specificity but his fundamentum," not the texture of his hair or the color of his skin, but the texture and quality of his soul.

With this new self-respect and new sense of dignity on the part of the Negro, the South's negative peace was rapidly undermined. The tension which we are witnessing, in relations today can be explained, in part, by this revolutionary change in the Negro's evaluation of himself and his determination to struggle and sacrifice until the walls of segregation have been finally crushed by the battering rams of surging justice. This is the meaning of the whole crisis.

This determination of Negro Americans to win freedom from all forms of oppression springs from the same deep longing for freedom that motivates oppressed peoples all over the world. The rhythmic beat of the deep rumblings of discontent from Africa and Asia is at bottom a quest for freedom and human dignity on the part of people who have long been the victims of colonialism. The struggle for freedom on the part of oppressed people in general and the American Negro in particular is not suddenly going to disappear. It is sociologically true that privileged classes rarely ever give up their privileges without strong resistance. It is also sociologically true that once oppressed people rise up against their oppression there is no stopping point short of victory. So realism impels us to admit that the struggle will continue. Since the struggle will continue, the basic question which confronts the oppressed peoples of the world is this: How will the struggle against the forces of injustice be waged?

There are two possible answers to this question. One is to resort to the all too prevalent method of physical violence and corroding hatred. We all know the danger of this method. Violence solves no social problems. It merely creates new and more complicated ones. There is still a voice crying through the vista of time saying to every potential Peter, "Put up your sword." History is replete with the bleached bones of nations and communities that failed to follow this command. If the Negro succumbs to the temptation of using violence in the struggle for justice, unborn generations will be the recipients of a long and desolate night of bitterness. His chief legacy to the future would be an endless reign of meaningless chaos.

The alternative to violence is the method of non-violent resistance. This method was made famous in our generation by Mohandas [*sic*] K. Ghandi, who used it to free his country, from the domination of the British Empire. Several basic things can be said about non-violence as a method in bringing about better racial conditions. First, this is not a method of cowardice or stagnant passivity; it does resist. The non-violent resistor is just as opposed to the evil against which he is protesting as the person who uses violence. It is true that this method is passive or non-aggressive in the sense that the non-violent resistor is not aggressive physically toward his opponent, but his

mind and emotions are always active, constantly seeking to persuade the opponent that he is mistaken. This method is passive physically, but it is strongly active spiritually; it is non-aggressive physically, but dynamically aggressive spiritually.

A second basic fact about this method is that it does not seek to defeat or humiliate the opponent, but to win his friendship and understanding. The non-violent resistor must often voice his protest through non-cooperation or boycotts, but he realizes that non-cooperation and boycotts are not ends within themselves; they are merely means to awaken a sense of moral shame within the opponent. The end is redemption and reconciliation. The aftermath of non-violence is the creation of the beloved community, while the aftermath of violence is tragic bitterness.

A third fact that characterizes the method of non-violence is that the attack is directed to forces of evil, rather than persons caught in the forces. It is evil that we are seeking to defeat, not the persons victimized with evil. Those of us who struggle against racial injustice must come to see that the basic tension is not between races. As I like to say to the people in Montgomery, Alabama: "The tension in this city is not between white people and Negro people. The tension is at bottom between justice and injustice, between the forces of light and the forces of darkness. And if there is a victory it will be a victory, not merely for 50,000 Negroes, but a victory for justice and the forces of light. We are out to defeat injustice and not white persons who may happen to be unjust."

A fourth point that must be brought out concerning the method of non-violence is that this method not only avoids external physical violence, but also internal violence of spirit. At the center of non-violence stands the principle of love. In struggling for human dignity, the Negro must not succumb to the temptation of becoming bitter or indulging in hate campaigns. To retaliate with hate and bitterness would do nothing but intensify the existence of hate in the universe. Along the way of life, someone must have sense enough and morality enough to cut off the chain of hate. This can only be done by projecting the ethics of love to the center of our lives.

In speaking of love at this point, we are not referring to some sentimental and affectionate emotion. It would be nonsense to urge men to love their oppressors in an affectionate sense. When we refer to love at this point we mean understanding goodwill. There are three words in Greek for love. First there is **eros**. In Platonic philosophy **eros** meant the yearning of the soul for the realm of the gods. It has come now to mean a sort of aesthetic or romantic love. **Philia** is another Greek word for love. It meant intimate affectionateness between personal friends. **Philia** denotes a sort of reciprocal love; the person loves because he is loved. When we speak of loving those who oppose us we refer to neither **eros** nor **philia**. We speak of a love which is expressed in the Greek word **agape**. **Agape** means nothing sentimental or basically affectionate; it means understanding, redeeming goodwill for all men. It is an overflowing love which seeks nothing in return. It is the love of God working in the lives of men. When we rise to love on the **agape** level we love men not because we like them, not because their attitudes and ways appeal to us, but because God loves them. Here we rise to the position of loving the person who does the evil deed, while hating the deed that the person does.

Finally, the method of non-violence is based on the conviction that the universe is on the side of justice. It is this deep faith in the future that causes the non-violent re-

sistor to accept suffering; without retaliation. He knows that in his struggle for justice he has cosmic God in on the side of truth and justice comes down to us from the long tradition of our Christian faith. There is something at every center of our faith which reminds us that Good Friday may occupy the throne for a day, but ultimately it must give way to the triumphant beat of the drums of Easter. Evil may so shape events that Caesar will occupy a Palace and Christ a cross, but one day that same Christ will rise up and split history into A. D. and B. C., so that even the life of Caesar must be dated by his name. So in Montgomery, we can walk and never get weary, because we know that there will be a great camp meeting in the promised land of freedom and justice.

This, in brief, is the method of non-violent resistance. It is a method that challenges all people struggling for equality and freedom. *[Following 4 sentences are scrambled in the original.]* God grant that we will wage the Companionship. This belief that struggle for justice with dignity and discipline. May all those who are confronted with oppression in this non-violent resistance. It is a method of retaliatory violence and choose the method that seeks to redeem. **Through wisely and courageously using this method we will be able to emerge from the bleak and desolate midnight of man's inhumanity into the bright and glittering daybreak of freedom and justice.**

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