

## THE CHRISTIAN IN THE MODERN WORLD

Fellow laymen and friends of Washington Chapel Church, many years ago a President of Lincoln University, Jefferson City, Missouri, asked Dr. George Washington Carver a question. It was, "When is a man ready to give out?" Dr. Carver replied, "When he is full enough." Now I cannot say, I was full enough when I prepared these few remarks, but I do hope from my small cup of experience just one drop has overflowed. My subject, as you can readily see, is so broad that it may very well cover the universe. And so it does.

As laymen of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, we have a wonderful Christian heritage. Our history began in protest--the protest of Christians of African-European extraction against their treatment by other Christians of European extraction. This protest, as you may recall, was not against the principles of Christianity but against the practices of some Christians.

Today, fundamentally, this protest of colored Christians against their treatment by white Christians has not changed. While we no longer live under the system in which the A.M.E. Church was conceived or in a world in which it developed, we still live in a world where the mis-treatment of one group of Christians by another group is still most evident. Like democracy, Christianity is being severely tested both from within and

This is a matter about which all Christians should be deeply concerned. As members of the larger Christian community, we cannot escape involvement. Certainly as Negroes we cannot escape even if we wished.

Internationally, Christianity is being bombarded by those who have repudiated God and religious expression. Communism is perhaps the outstanding example. There is no place in its plans of world domination for the moral and ethical principles evolved by the lowly Nazarene.

What must eight to ten million native Africans think of the minority of approximately two million Europeans, white Christians, if you please, who cut them down with machine guns because they belong to a different race and culture, as happened at Sharpville in the Union of South Africa! Can these people, most of whom still practice their native religion, be expected to relinquish it become Christians after experiencing such treatment?

In our own country, particularly in our own region, Christianity is being severely tested. White and black Christians may not freely sit together, eat together, travel together, worship together. White Christians arrest black Christians; sentence them to jail; guard them while in prison; not because of illegal acts but because of the pigmentation in their skins. Such behavior subjects Christianity to ridicule and scorn.

In this country, the Black Muslims, 100,000 strong, a religious sect which originated some twenty-five years ago, reject

Christianity because white men practice it--"blue-eyed-devils," the Muslims call them. They despise everything white or Christian. Not only do they advocate a black country for blacks only, but they predict in a relatively short time white control will be a thing of the past. Whether their prediction has merit or not, one thing is evident, they want nothing to do with Christianity or with the white man, socially, economically or politically.

Has it ever occurred to you that the efforts of the "Freedom Riders" to break down segregation in this country are among the most thrilling adventures in the promotion of Christianity the world has ever known? Have you thought much about these martyrs in any way except to applaud their bravery, their fortitude, their forbearance and their true Christian spirit? Have you not also sensed that they too are exposing the practice of Christianity in America as it has never been exposed before? Each time a "Freedom Rider" or a "Sit-inner," white or colored, is molested--when anyone of them is beaten, insulted, or mis-treated, Christ too is being beaten, insulted, mis-treated. Whenever one of them is jailed, Christ goes to jail with him.

The denial of voting privileges or of public accommodations to qualified citizens because of their race, turning one's fellow man away from a Christian church because of his color mean that Christ is being denied. Unconsciously, all Christians who are working to advance freedom are both exposing the weakness of the practice of Christianity in America as it has never been exposed

before; and, at the same time, are demonstrating the strength of Christianity at its very best.

In our cities, white Christians are moving out of communities when colored Christians move in, so they will not have to live next door to or near them. White Christian ministers do not care to serve Negro Christian communicants. White Christians have bombed the homes, churches and synagogues of Christians and of Jews because they do not like their race or religion. In all areas of life, Christians are excluding others on the basis of race or culture or creed.

This is a dark picture, but the picture has two sides. There are many white Christians who are, and have always practiced the principles of their faith. Here again the "Freedom Riders" and those who "sit-in" are good illustrations. Were it not for them and a long line of persons like them, Negro people in the United States and in Africa could not have obtained the place in the world they now occupy. History is full of the names and deeds of whites who devoted their worldly goods, their freedom of movement and even their lives for the things in which they believed.

While we as Christians in a minority group are not such flagrant disowners of the Christ as are some members of the majority group, I am afraid that many of us are making things secular more and more important in our lives than are things spiritual. We work hard at accumulating the material traits of

our culture, but are we working just as hard to obtain things spiritual? If we could evaluate our spiritual life in terms of our material possessions, how would it stack up? What spiritual possession do we have that can compare with the ownership of a house, with the possession of an automobile, a TV set, radios, refrigerators, washing machines, jewelry, land and similar goods that we feel are a necessity in our lives? Do we obtain as much pleasure and a sense of security from our spiritual life as we do from our secular life? When we built or purchased our homes did we even symbolically bring God into our house when we entered it? Did we assemble our minister and our friends for a Christian dedication? We may have had an "at home" to which we invited our friends, but I am afraid most of us did not think to dedicate it "to the glory of God; to deep affection of the family circle and to all friendly hospitalities; to courage, patience, and self-control; to all beautiful things of heart and mind that lead the soul to wider vision and higher aims; to happiness, to hopefulness, to health; as a haven of peace and joy." We, too, are Christians in the modern world.

There are many ways in which we as Christian laymen in our own local church could increase our spiritual life that would assist in fulfilling our need for deeper religious experiences if we would but exert ourselves to discover them. Do we read Christian literature, including that of our denomination? Do we purchase religious books and enjoy them with as much pleasure as we do a novel or a scientific work in our special fields, or a

daily newspaper?

Many of us would not think of missing the last newscast before going to sleep, but do we also have as much concern for reading a chapter or even one verse in our Bibles before retiring? Would we really enjoy reading a book which told of the beginning of Christianity or of the life of John Wesley or of Richard Allen or of that greatest of all Protestants, Martin Luther?

Sometime ago, while traveling in the Mid-West, I visited the home of a family whom I had not known before. While I certainly was no stranger to family prayer, I was a complete stranger to a real Upper Room, a place on the top floor of that home dedicated and equipped for prayer and meditation, and which was used as regularly as were the other rooms in the home. Since then, the Upper Room has meant more to me than Christian literature. It means a quiet place to which one can retire to think, to meditate and pray. Is there just one Upper Room in our whole community?

We, as Negroes, as Christians, have left the infancy of our history in this country. More and more we must positively assert the initiative in order to take our places besides persons of good-will, Christians of good-will, everywhere to further the influence of the larger Church if the spirit of Christianity is to continue to have real meaning and influence.

This challenge has already been accepted by some whom we all know in our own community, in our region, and in the country at large. We read of Christians even paying for the privilege of serving others in foreign lands. The Christian project Operations

Crossroads Africa, was launched long before the Government's Peace Corps was thought of. Young American and Canadian students today are paying for the privilege of working side by side in a dozen African countries on a variety of construction and service tasks to demonstrate tangibly "we are able and willing to work along side our African friends."

There is no church or community in the world which cannot be benefitted by the constructive thinking and work of sincere Christians--those working not for self or fame or notoriety, but to promote the spirit of Christ, which includes the well-being of their fellow man. Tuskegee is not without such persons. Washington Chapel Church is not without such persons. But we need many more of them. We owe it to our community to think positively and constructively to determine what each of us can do to improve our personal and community life, so that both may be an influence in the promotion of those things in which we deeply believe.