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THE ROLE OF THE CHURCHES II

Joseph James Murray, D.D.*

"A House of Prayer for All Peoples."1

In The Kingdom Beyond Caste, Dean Liston Pope of Yale Divinity School has charged that of all the major institutions in our community life the church is the most segregated. However dangerous generalizations so broad may be, and however many qualifications may justly be made in this particular charge, there is too much truth in the indictment for ecclesiastical comfort. We of the church must be both humble and hesitant as we try to speak a word of counsel for the tensions of our time.

The executive board of the Greater Cincinnati Council of Churches recently felt it wise to issue a statement to its member churches.2 "While it is easy," they said, "to point an accusing finger at others, we are constrained to confess that we in the Christian church have been guilty of establishing and allowing to exist racial discrimination and segregation within the Body of Christ itself. While virtually all our denominations have made statements condemning these un-Christian practices within the churches, we are well aware that throughout the nation and here in Greater Cincinnati they continue to exist. Distinctions and separations of persons according to the color of their skin is contrary to the gospel of Jesus Christ. We call upon our constituent churches to prayerfully consider this tragic situation and together to seek ways of finding solutions."

The school situation, brought about at least in its present intensity by the decisions of the Supreme Court, is but one feature of the whole picture of racial relations in the United States today. Segregation in housing, in labor, in athletics, in industry, in the armed forces, in the churches, evidence the same problem. The basic principle underlying our whole discussion here is that no nation can continue to call itself a democracy and at the same time continue to raise barriers based on race, creed, or color. The principle applies whether the discriminations are legal, partially legal, or simply supported by social pressures. In education in the South there has been a gradual and very slow movement toward integration, beginning on the upper levels of graduate work. The new rulings of the Supreme Court simply bring legal force and acceleration to the movement and begin to make it effective at the lower levels. The same new forces are at work in other areas, such as housing, although here the pressure is by no means so clear-cut and inescapable.

* Since 1957 Dr. Murray has served as Visiting Professor of Homiletics at Louisville Presbyterian Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky. From 1924 to 1957, Dr. Murray was pastor of Lexington Presbyterian Church, Lexington, Virginia.

1 Isaiah 56:7.
The rate of desegregation has varied in different areas of life and in different parts of the country. In housing, for example, there is probably less segregation in most southern communities than in cities of the North, nor have the fights over the proximity of homes of white and negro people been as bitter there as in Detroit or Chicago or Des Moines. To be sure, this may be due to the fact that on the one hand the absence of housing segregation in places in the South has been more or less accidental, and that on the other hand there have been in the South few efforts to break down residential segregation where it occurs. But in 1958, in the announcement of plans for a huge two hundred million dollar Levittown at Burlington, New Jersey, it was stated by the builder that housing there would be on a segregated basis.  

In a few places church people have taken the lead in voluntary desegregation in housing, asking their members to agree not to move or to sell their property when negro families begin to move into a community. At its meeting in February 25, 1959, the General Board of the National Council of Churches of Christ called on all local churches to encourage their members “to sign and make public covenants which commit them to support open-occupancy housing in their neighborhoods.”

One of the strangest forms of segregation is that of segregated burial. In most southern communities that is accepted practice, but it is by no means unknown elsewhere. Recently there was an occasion in Minneapolis, where an American Indian wife of a Swedish-born husband was informed that when she died she could not be buried in the cemetery plot which she and her husband had purchased in 1955. In the legal action which she has taken to compel the trustees of the cemetery to permit such burial she is being supported by the Minnesota Council of Churches.

The process of voluntary desegregation has gone farther in athletics than in most social areas. In the armed forces, where it could be promulgated by executive order, integration is almost complete.

Racial prejudice is not a local matter in America, although its effects have been much more in evidence and much more complete in the South. Some of the worst race riots to disgrace the nation have been in cities of the North. Nor is such prejudice confined to the United States and to African areas. There is increasing evidence of it in Great Britain, where until lately there was almost no prejudice against black people. In London and in other cities, with the vast and rapidly increasing influx of Jamaican Negroes, racial feeling is rising, bringing its concomitant of race riots. In fact, there seems to be an almost chartable index to race troubles. Prejudice and violence seem to be almost mathematically related to the proportions between the races.

It would probably be fair, before proceeding any further with this paper, to make explicit the presuppositions which will be implicit throughout its development. These are three at least. First, the church is not alien to any aspect of public life. It has a duty to the whole of human life, and a message

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4 The Presbyterian Outlook, Sept. 1, 1958, p. 8.
to speak to all human relations. In particular, it must speak out whenever moral issues or human needs are involved. While it has no right to dictate legal measures for the enforcement of its principles, it clearly has the obligation to proclaim those principles and to put behind them the moral pressure of its influence.

Second, in advocating any principle, the church should seek, so far as is consistent with truth and right, to promote harmony among men of differing principles. The church's chief interest is not success in argument but the promotion of active good will among men.

Third, the church should carry out in its own life and in its relations with other groups in society the ideals which it proclaims. A segregated church cannot speak with any sincerity or power about integration in education.

It is scarcely necessary to point out that in this paper the term, "the church," is used without prejudice. It is intended simply as a convenient way of expressing the totality of Christian groups.

Still another preliminary statement as to the place of the church today in American life may well be made. When we begin to think of what the churches can do in reality rather than of what the church ideally should do, there are two basic facts that should be taken into account. The first of these facts is that when we begin to talk about the churches — Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish — we are talking about a very large proportion of the American population, and unquestionably about such an influential proportion of that population that it could, if united in its approach, set standards of thought and behavior for the nation. Statistics of church membership cannot, to be sure, be used without discrimination. Methods of reporting very considerably with religious groups; and in the collecting and tabulating of such figures there is room for considerable error. But the most recent figures, taken from the *Yearbook of American Churches* and sent out by Religious News Service, indicate that there are over 104,000,000 church members in our country. This means that over 60 out of every 100 Americans, including even little children, are members of a church or synagogue. Of this number about 60,000,000 are Protestants, about 36,000,000 Roman Catholics, 5,500,000 Jewish, 2,500,000 Eastern Orthodox, with other small groups. With the exactitude of these figures we are here not concerned but only with the general principle that what America thinks and does is the consequence of what the churches, rightly or wrongly, are thinking and doing.

The other fact that must be taken into account is the unfortunate fact that there are multitudes who are in the churches but not truly of the churches. I would not presume to speak for the Catholic constituency, but it is sadly true that every Protestant church has in its membership a proportion of individuals, for which no man has the right to name a percentage, who are in the church simply by birth or by tradition or as a matter of course, some of them indeed as a matter of social or business policy. They may attend the church on Easter, or patronize the church for weddings and funerals, but otherwise have no real loyalty to it. Or they may attend with some regularity and even become active in phases of its life, but may have no personal com-
mitment to its principles or, what is much more important, no deep understanding of or loyalty to the spirit of its Lord.

Such people have brought with them into their association with the church their own secular conception of life and of human relations. In other words, although they must be counted statistically when we speak of what the churches should do in line with Christian ideals, they cannot really be counted when we speak of what the churches can actually do in the concrete situation. In the days of the Roman Empire, in the Early Church, a sharp line was drawn between church and world. Since there was such a clear dividing line between "church" and "world," there was consequently no sharp line between "should" and "can" in the church's approach to the world. Now that line between the church and the world is blurred, with the consequence that it is necessary to draw much more sharply the line between the ideal and the possible in the church's influence upon secular society. Denis Baly, in his book, *Beseiged City: The Church and the World*, points out that the church is not a group of people called apart from the world to live in seclusion and in fraternal safety, but that she must be right out in the midst of life. Her members are like men who defend against the world's customs, a beleaguered city, and who yet must keep the gates of the city wide open to her besiegers.

The church's efforts are rendered still more uncertain, particularly in such a field as race relations, by the fact that many of us in the church, loyal to the church and wanting to be true to Christian principles, have nevertheless not faced fully the contradictions between these Christian principles and the accepted traditions of the social groups in which we also have our membership. Segregation is only one of those hitherto accepted traditions. It is natural to take for granted that what we have become accustomed to is right. It takes not only courage but something which is much more difficult for most people to achieve, insight, to make us critical of the accepted. It has always been true in social advance, not less so today than in the day when Lord Shaftesbury was fighting for human decency in industrial relations in Britain, that the "best" people are often the enemies of the best action. It is difficult for us to explore new understandings of Christian truth, so as to face each new Day of the Lord with a new attitude.

Not for a moment is all of this said by way of excusing the failures of the churches, but simply in realistic recognition of the inadequacy of their impact on modern life, and in further recognition of the fact that the churches themselves, if they are to help in the solution of the pressing problems in interracial relations, are called upon to repent and to open their eyes. Any clergyman must be very humble and very hesitant as he speaks of the duty of the church in these issues, for he must match what may be the strength of his personal convictions against the feeble results in his own parish.

This disparity between the ideal and the possible, or at least between the ideal and the easily attainable in the life of the church faces us as an ineluctable fact. It explains some of the weaknesses of the church in applying Christian principles. Nevertheless there are things in this particular area of

human relations that the churches not only should but can do, and in some real measure are doing.

The writer trusts that he may be pardoned for drawing most of the illustrative material in this paper not only from the parts of the South in which he has spent his whole life but from the church to which he belongs, the Presbyterian Church in the United States, commonly known as the Southern Presbyterian Church. This is done because of the fact that here specific data can be cited from a strictly Southern and rather conservative church. These illustrations, both in statements made on the higher ecclesiastical levels and in difficulties faced in grass roots areas, would to a large degree be typical of other Southern churches.

The first duty of the churches in relation to integration, it seems to me, is a negative one. The church should refuse to assist in any effort to evade or delay the process of integration in our public schools.

In Virginia, to cite one Southern state, it was proposed to abolish the public school system, if this were found necessary in order to block integration, and to set up a system of private schools where segregation could be maintained. That plan has already been found to be as impractical in its positive aspects as it is dangerous in all of its aspects. Its only possible result would be the destruction of general elementary education. When such a plan was formulated, the natural procedure suggested to segregationists was to turn to the churches, all of which have class room buildings for their work of religious education, and not a few of which are already using these buildings for week-day kindergarten or primary classes.

Happily there has been in Virginia almost no favorable response to such proposals. In reference to one church which had expressed a willingness to permit its buildings to be used for a private school plan for a limited time, the Presbytery of Lexington, located athwart the Virginia Blue Ridge, quoted an action of the 1958 General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States. This action answered "in the negative Overture 47, from the Presbytery of Lexington, asking whether or not it is proper for churches of the Presbyterian Church in the United States to permit the use of their buildings and facilities for schools designed to circumvent the Supreme Court ruling through the maintenance of segregation on the basis of race. In this negative answer, the meaning is that 'it is not proper.' " The point of the request of the Presbytery of Lexington, it may be said, was to bring forth from the General Assembly just such an answer.

Two other Virginia Presbyteries, the Presbyteries of Potomac and Montgomery, had sent up similar overtures, requesting advice on this problem, and had received similar answers. Somewhat later, in July, 1958, the (Presbyterian) Synod of Virginia passed the following resolution as a part of the report of the Committee on Christian Relations: "The Synod of

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7 Minutes of the 98th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S., pp. 88-90.
8 Ibid.
Virginia hereby reaffirms its faith in the public school system and its educators, and its opposition to the closing of the public schools anywhere in the State.\textsuperscript{9}

The Reverend W. M. Elliott, of Dallas, Texas, Moderator in 1957-1958 of the Southern Presbyterian Church, has said: "I am opposed to the churches allowing their facilities to be used in this way... The church must not be used by any group to destroy our public schools, or to circumvent the decisions of our courts."\textsuperscript{10} Similarly, Colonel Francis P. Miller, prominent Virginia Presbyterian layman and President of the Virginia Council of Churches, when asked whether churches should allow their buildings to be used for segregated schools, answered, "Certainly not. To do so would make the church connive with the evil policy of the state; and in so far as the policy of the state was in violation of the law of the nation the church through conniving would become particeps criminis."\textsuperscript{11} In June, 1958, the Virginia Methodist Annual Conference went on record as opposing the use of church property for segregated classes where public schools are closed by the state for attempting racial integration.\textsuperscript{12}

The second step for the church is a more positive one. \textit{The church should give its support to the orderly development of the process of integration in the public schools.}

The church should respect the rulings of the courts. There come times, to be sure, in the affairs of men when for the church the law of God must take precedence over the laws of men, just as American history enshrines the right of revolution when tyranny is clear and harsh. Such a time was reached for the church in Hitler's Germany; such a time is now at hand in some of the communist countries of Europe. But such times are rare. And when the rulings of the courts are for human justice, there should be little question as to the loyal support of the churches.

The ecclesiastical authorities of the Roman Catholic Church have made their position on integration very clear, although not without grumbling and even opposition at times in local parishes. There is also no question as to where the upper echelons in all the major Protestant groups stand, although there is often a patent gulf between the thought of the leaders, laymen as well as clergy, and that at the grass roots areas. The General Board and many sectional officers of the National Council of Churches have spoken out again and again. In February, 1959, for example, the General Board asked all local Protestant churches to encourage their members to sign and make public covenants which commit them to support open occupancy housing in their neighborhoods, declaring that sometimes churches through evasion and indifference have prolonged housing discriminations.

Referring again to the church with which the writer is most familiar, the General Assembly has spoken out from the beginning in support of the

\textsuperscript{9} Minutes, 171st Session, Synod of Virginia, Presbyterian Church in the U.S., p. 88.
\textsuperscript{10} The Christian Century, Jan. 29, 1958, p. 124.
\textsuperscript{11} \textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{12} The Christian Century, July 2, 1958, p. 788.
Court's rulings. Overtures have come up from a number of dissatisfied presbyteries, protesting the actions of the General Assembly, but the higher body has continued to stand firm in its statements. Similar deliverances have been made by the Synod of Virginia and other synods, and by not a few presbyteries. An example is a strong set of resolutions passed by the Presbytery of Lexington in Virginia:

Whereas, the Governor and General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Virginia have established a program of 'massive resistance' to the Supreme Court of the United States, relative to the desegregation of the Public Schools, and

Whereas, this program of 'massive resistance' has resulted in the closing of a number of public schools in the Commonwealth of Virginia,

Therefore, Be it resolved. That the Presbytery of Lexington publicly expresses itself as follows, and that copies of this Resolution together with the above preamble, be forwarded to the Governor of Virginia, the members of the General Assembly, and the Press.

1. As Christians, we cannot accept racial discrimination.
2. As Christian Citizens, we must express disapproval of any violation of rulings of lawfully constituted authority.
3. As Christian Citizens, we deplore the injury done to the public school system and to the children and young people of the Commonwealth of Virginia, which has been caused by the policy of the Commonwealth.

It may be pointed out that in all courts of the Presbyterian Church there is at least equal and in some cases larger representation of laymen with ministers. In the ruling group of the local church, the Session, the membership is, with the exception of the local minister or ministers, made up entirely of laymen. In Norfolk, Virginia, where the “massive resistance” plan met with unusual local opposition, the Session of the Oakdale Presbyterian Church took action in writing the Governor that “the charge that desegregation would 'destroy public education' has no foundation in fact. Such a charge creates more fear and tension. . . . We are prepared to assist our local government and public schools in any program leading to peaceable transition periods.” It must be acknowledged that such a stand by a local church is not common.

In Little Rock, Arkansas, Presbyterian ministers made their position clear from the start. On September 16, 1958, Washburn Presbytery, with fifty ministers and elders present from the area in and around Little Rock, called on Governor Faubus to countermand his order closing Central High School. A few hours later the Governor, in a special television interview, said that he was not surprised at the action of the Presbytery, for he was aware, he said that “a large number of ministers in the Presbyterian Church have been effectively brainwashed.” In answer to specific questions, he proceeded to say that the brainwashing had been done by “left-wingers and Communists.” The Presbytery demanded an apology, saying that it greatly regretted that the Governor had “resorted to name-calling and slander in this hour of crisis when the educational welfare of thousands of children is at

stake," and then went on to make an entirely unnecessary denial of the Governor's charge. The next day Methodist ministers of North Little Rock joined in the demand for an apology, a demand which was soon echoed by other Methodist and Baptist leaders.14

This outrageous statement by the Governor of Arkansas is just one example of a very dangerous tendency in American life at this time. While this paper was being written, a group of ministers and church workers meeting in Nashville, Tennessee, found it necessary to protest against "a new and disturbing trend in the South" among some segregation leaders to link desegregation ideas with subversion. The first victims of this illogical and unjust kind of attack are often members of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, with the inevitable consequence that the name-calling then seeks out any white Southerner who dares to express any opinion, however mild, in this sensitive field.

In Virginia the support of the ruling of the Supreme Court would be typical of church groups. A Religious News Service survey of the situation in the state reported, "There could not be the slightest doubt where Virginia's churches stood. They favor peaceful acceptance of racial integration, immediate re-opening of the schools, and an end to all the state segregation laws." This is true if by "Virginia's churches" is meant the leaders and official meetings of the churches.

One of the most significant statements of Southern ministers, both because of its clarity and completeness and because of the number (312) and variety of ministers and rabbis signing it, was made in Atlanta on November 22, 1958.15 This was a follow-up and enlargement of a statement made on November 3, 1957, by 80 ministers, which has received wide publicity and which has become known as "The Atlanta Manifesto." This "Second Statement" set forth six principles and outlined three practical steps. The principles were as follows:

1. It is clearer now than ever before that, at all costs, freedom of speech must be preserved; 2. It is clearer now than ever before that we must obey the law; 3. It is clearer now than ever before that the Public School System must be preserved; 4. It is clearer now than ever before that hatred and scorn for those of another race, or for those who hold a position different from our own can never be justified; 5. It is clearer now than ever before that communication between responsible leaders of the races must be maintained; 6. It is clearer now than ever before that our difficulties cannot be solved in our own strength or in human wisdom but only through prayer, obedience to God, and under His blessing. . . . Believing sincerely in the principles set forth in this statement, we therefore propose the following practical steps: 1. We appeal to our churches and synagogues to encourage and promote within their fellowship a free and intelligent discussion of the issues we confront. . . . 2. We appeal to our community and state leaders to give their most creative thought to maintaining a sound public school plan. . . . 3. We request the appointment of a Citizens' Commission to preserve the harmony of our community. . . . We call upon all citizens

14 The Presbyterian Outlook, October 6, 1958, pp. 3-4.
to unite with us in dedicating ourselves to the solution of our problems humbly, patiently, in a spirit of realism, and with God's help.

Although for certain understandable reasons, no members of the Roman Catholic clergy signed the statement, a number of them gave strong verbal support. Bishop Francis E. Hyland said:

I would readily have signed the document and endorsed its signature by our Catholic clergy had the committee been in a position to make slight verbal changes on three points. Since the manifesto had already been approved and signed by about 150 ministers, the members of the committee did not feel that they were authorized to make any changes however slight in the text... On the whole, the manifesto is a splendid and most timely document. I hope its message will be taken to heart by all right-thinking people in the Atlanta area so that the problems which confront us may be solved in a truly Christian and American spirit.16

In Dallas, Texas, in April, 1959, 300 ministers from thirteen denominations signed a similar statement. The following month, however, 330 ministers in the same area, under the influence of the white citizens' council, the president of which is a Baptist minister, passed a resolution opposing forced integration.

It is the rare minister in any church who has given any comfort to the citizens' councils, although there have been instances of this in Virginia and in most states. In some of the more intransigent states of the deeper South, and in isolated cases even in the border states, ministers have suffered persecution and have even been driven from their pulpits. When at Front Royal, Virginia, Governor Almond closed the county's only high school rather than accept the courts' ruling that 22 negro students must be admitted, pressure was put on the churches to make their facilities available for segregated "private" schools. One of the churches which gave way to the pressure was the First Baptist Church, whose minister, the Reverend Paul L. Stagg, has served the church for twelve years following service as an Air Force Chaplain. Spokesman for thirteen Protestant ministers when they protested the Governor's action, he was deeply embarrassed when his church voted to permit this use of its property. He stated that with 800 resident members in the church, only 153 of them voted on the question in the meeting of the congregation, and of these 43 voted against the proposal.

As many as 50 others who were present did not vote... Some walked out of the meeting when they saw the vote would not be taken by secret ballot. They could not bear to stand against the motion and face the threat to their security... If you have ever been in a totalitarian situation, you will know the psychology which has prevailed here. It is fear — fear of job, status, prestige, loss of business.18

But a substantial minority did stand firm.

There have been many instances, it should be said, where, although the large majority of the members of a congregation were not in sympathy with their minister's viewpoint, they nevertheless suffered him to speak his conscience.

16 The Presbyterian Outlook, Dec. 8, 1958, p. 8.
17 The Presbyterian Outlook, May 19, 1958.
18 The Presbyterian Outlook, Nov. 3, 1958, p. 6.
In facing this dangerous threat to free speech, the General Assembly of the "Southern" Presbyterian Church in April, 1958, adopted and approved for distribution to all of its churches a long statement, the gist of which is quoted:

According to the Scriptures, we must conclude that a minister is one called and set apart under God to "proclaim the whole counsel of God." If the ministry of our Church is to be anything more than the priestly preservation of tradition, it must involve not only the proclaiming of the "Good News" of the Gospel, but also something of a prophetic nature, in that each minister, feeling the burden of the Lord upon his heart, must speak forth, "Thus saith the Lord." The Scriptures, the Book of Church Order, and the Confession of Faith do not warrant the dictation by session or congregation to an ordained minister as to how he shall interpret the message of salvation and its application to life.\(^3\)

Recognizing that some ministers, lacking judgment along with their courage, have rubbed their hearers raw in talking about this one issue all the time, and recognizing that to maintain the Christian family may be at times as important as arousing the Christian conscience, the deliverance went on to exhort ministers to season their preaching with wisdom and charity:

It is possible to speak boldly yet with humility; to take a position without emphasizing it out of proportion to its proper place; to speak persuasively; to maintain the authority of the Word of God without claiming infallibility in interpreting it. The minister should speak in love. . . . The minister should remember that God alone is Lord of the conscience and Judge of our deeds and hearts.\(^4\)

The church should take a further step, one more significant than giving lip support to the ruling of any human court, and, strangely enough, one that sometimes appears more difficult. The church should open its doors freely to all men without reference to race or color.

There are requirements, proper and inevitable requirements, that narrow entrance into the fellowship of the church. As has already been pointed out, formal entrance into that fellowship has been too matter of fact, with a resultant disastrous dilution of the quality of church membership. There should be standards and requirements, but only as pertains to inner realities. Externals, however important they may seem to a secular society, cannot be set up as requisites to the sharing of the Christian fellowship. As Saint Paul has said, "There is neither Jew or Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus."\(^5\) On no true basis, on no other basis than that of human prejudice, can segregation within the church be maintained. Here no court will likely speak, except the high court of the mind of Christ, who in the significance of His incarnate human life has already spoken.

It is just this broadening of the Christian fellowship that seems to be the most difficult step for the churches to take, as the recognition of great abstract principles is always easier than the application of such principles in

\(^{19}\) Minutes of the 98th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S., pp. 76-78.

\(^{20}\) Ibid.

\(^{21}\) Galatians 3:28.
the concrete situations of life. The progress of this phase of interracial integration has been lamentably slow, so slow that in many areas of the South there has simply been no progress at all. From slavery times there has been a tradition of negro worshippers in the churches, often involving membership in those churches; but that has nearly always been on a status of inferiority, with separate (usually gallery) seating for Negroes, and with no real participation on their part in the life of the church. In the present century even that degree of integration has practically vanished. This has been due in part to the unwillingness of Negroes to accept inferior status, but due even more to the development of churches entirely Negro in their membership. At the same time such church segregation has been practically as complete in the other parts of the United States, except in places where negro families have been few. Within recent decades, to be sure, ecclesiastical integration has been proceeding with some rapidity in the North and West.

The churches must be liable to the charge of insincerity when they speak for principles but are not ready in actual practice to carry them out. Shortly following the promulgation of the forthright "Atlanta Manifesto," an American Legion post came out with a telling criticism when it asked why the churches represented by these leaders had not integrated their own congregations. Against this, to be sure, for the ministers who spoke must be balanced the fact that no Protestant minister can integrate his congregation by fiat. He can only do so with the consent of the membership. It is scarcely fair to call it hypocrisy when the leader speaks more truly than his associates are willing to act. It is no doubt open to question how far these critical American Legion members would have followed their ministers in any proposal to integrate the churches to which they belonged. Here is the democratic paradox in the lives of such churches. The situation has its hopeful side too. While it cannot be denied that integration has gone farther and faster in some other fields than in the life of the churches, it can scarcely be doubted that when it comes in church life, it will come with more meaning and more warmth than elsewhere.

Joseph Martin Dawson, in an article, I Belong to a Southern Baptist Integrated Church, relates the experience of the University Baptist Church of Austin, Texas. This is a church which abandoned segregated seating in 1945, and which received its first Negro member, an Air Force Sergeant, in 1950. It is now fully integrated. There has been some dissension over this in the congregation, but only four families have withdrawn. The author of this article states that there are fourteen such integrated churches belonging to the Southern Baptist Convention. There are one or more interracial churches, not limited to those just mentioned, in Oklahoma, Arkansas, Texas, Missouri, Maryland, Virginia, and West Virginia. A recent survey of 1,054 city congregations of the more than 5,500 Congregational Christian churches in the United States showed that 27% of these metropolitan churches were racially inclusive, about half of them accepting negro members and half accepting other minority group members but not Negroes. It may be pointed

out that the Moscow Radio, leaping to the advantage of commenting on this survey, but using language quite unnatural for Moscow, said, "One is struck by the glaring contradiction between the teachings of Christ and the situation prevailing in contemporary America."23

This difficulty of integrating churches at the local level seems to be but one phase of the difficulty of assimilating people of different types into the life of the church. Protestant churches tend so easily to become class churches, with their membership cutting horizontally across society instead of vertically through all classes and groups. This, paradoxically, is due to the informal and democratic fellowship in local Protestant churches. The stratification makes for cohesion and comfort within the individual church; it more easily becomes a close-knit family group; but it militates against the democracy of a widening fellowship. Members are apt to be welcomed to the degree in which they "fit" in the local group rather than on the basis of a universal Christian brotherhood. So true is this that in certain instances a whole denomination is considered as adapted to a particular economic or cultural level of society. Ironically enough, in the light of the questions this symposium is considering, this same kind of social stratification is taking place in many negro churches in the cities of the South.

The recognition of this natural tendency to stratification in churches is by no means meant as the justification of an attitude which is indeed the abrogation of a Christian principle. It is simply a realistic facing of conditions as they are, which we must understand as we seek to change them. It is an indication of the fact that in the churches, in spite of our high Christian beliefs, which are steadily urging us toward full integration, the practice of real assimilation, social as well as racial, is not going to come without real thought and effort on the part of Christian people.

In all this discussion of what the churches can do, it must not be taken for granted for a moment that this means only what churches of white membership can do. Ours indeed has been the perpetration of inequalities, and therefore ours is the heaviest responsibility; but negro churches have played a large and often an admirable part in breaking down discrimination. That has been more dramatically shown in the fight against segregated transportation than anywhere else. The story of the groups led by the Reverend Martin Luther King in Montgomery is an epic of courage, of patience, and of good spirit. The negro churches have also in many cases been centers of support for efforts on the part of their fellows against educational discrimination. From the Christian standpoint the finest thing about the struggles of negro leaders and their churches has been the gracious spirit shown. Some negro groups have made their fights with bitterness, a bitterness easily enough understood, one not even to be too much deplored by us whose past and present injustice has engendered it, but at the same time a bitterness that reacts unhappily even in the moment of victory upon those who tolerate it. More admirable is the attitude of those who, with dogged determination and the readiness to sacrifice but also with spirits kept wholesome, press toward

23 The Presbyterian Outlook, March 23, 1959, p. 7.
their goals, and who with the winning of victories win also the respect of those against whom they have had to struggle.

It is often said by white people that the Negro does not want to come into the churches that are made up of those of the other race. Where that is true, that is his privilege; but it should be his right to choose his church. This is exactly the point: that it should be his right to choose. What the Negro has a perfect right to object to is the denial, simply on the ground of his color, of the chance of making his own spiritual choices. From the standpoint of white Christians, the thing that matters even more to their own spiritual sincerity than it can to the Negro's sense of justice is that they should not be willing to have churches that are closed corporations, and therefore, it seems to many of us, churches that are not fully Christian.

As a fourth procedure in helping to make the way of integration smooth, the church should continue its quiet campaign of education. Not enough in itself, certainly not rapid enough in its effect, it is nevertheless the foundation for any successful social change. This quiet effort has been in progress for many years in Sunday schools and in youth groups. The value of this is all too easily ignored by those who condemn the churches for inaction. The strength of this program of education is indicated by the great difference between the attitudes of young people and of adults on questions of race. This is not just because a freshness of viewpoint is natural to youth. Young people can be more intolerant on such matters than their elders; and often are more intolerant in areas where discussion of the problems has not been tolerated in youth meetings. The result of this education is seen in the fact that when integration does come in any community there is rarely any trouble over it among high school boys and girls unless it is stirred up by their parents or by pressure groups.

The statement is frequently made that by the decision of the Supreme Court race relations have been set back fifty years. Such statements are scarcely true. Unquestionably that decision has caused unprecedented tensions; unquestionably it has brought race hatred to a head. It has for a time cut the lines of communication between white and negro leaders in many communities, until all the patient achievements of understanding and good will may seem to have been nullified. Actions by leaders in the extreme groups on both sides have emphasized the barriers and have created new distrust. In the face of practical difficulties easy idealists on the white side have been shocked at the lengths to which their theories seem to be leading them and have drawn back.

But are not all these things the inevitable results of any definite effort at social change? Do they not simply indicate that we did not really have as much understanding as we thought? As long as paternalism was accepted as noble by the whites and servility as natural by the Negroes, a false understanding was achieved. In a report presented at the meeting of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Atlanta in April, 1959, the Committee on Christian Relations said:

Many people recall nostalgically what formerly appeared to be good racial relations, over-looking the fact that previously existing relations
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Many of us in the South feel that wide-spread integration would not be reached in the foreseeable future on a purely voluntary basis. There is little doubt, too, that any gradual achievement of integration would uncover every one of these sore spots, simply spreading their appearance over a longer period.

There are indications already that when integration has actually begun on a reasonable basis the difficulties soon pass away, if indeed they appear at all. Those of us who feel deep concern in the field of interracial understanding and cooperation tend always to stress the failures, to see the weak places. We well may, since it is our responsibility to overcome these lacks. But we must not fail at the same time to appreciate the real progress, nor fail to rely on the quiet, slow, transforming forces that are moving beneath the surface of things. A survey made by a Princeton University group in Guilford County, North Carolina, in 1958 indicated that the extremes of readiness for and resistance to integration are found in 20% of the people at each end of the column, while 60% will follow strong leadership in either direction.25

As a concurrent effort with all of its other steps, the church should emphasize the ironic in its approach to the problems of race. It must be repeated that in this as in all human relationships it is not a battle which we are trying to win but a fellowship which we are trying to achieve. Any success here that leaves bitterness is far less than the best. If it be true, as some of us firmly believe, that we are nearer a solution of our problems than is apparent on the surface, it behooves us to move in the spirit of peace so far as that may be consistent with continuing to move.

In areas in our country where there is tension over integration in any phase of our life we should encourage moderation and the spirit of good will between men, even where they must continue to differ widely in their viewpoints. We must call no names; we must not let contempt or hatred creep into our feelings; we must try to respect the sincerity of those who differ with us. There is too much evidence in the lives of all of us of mental and social lacunae for us to be scornful of the gaps in the lives of others. However strongly we feel in our opinions, we must never become so self-righteous in our judgments as to say that the man on the other side of the argument is not a Christian.

In the book that will become a classic in race relations, Stride Toward Freedom, Martin Luther King reminds us that the law can only touch the outside, however important that may be at times, but that the church should try to reach and change the ideas and feelings that are at the bottom of racial misunderstandings and prejudices. As strange as it may sound in the light of recent turmoil, the churches in large areas of the South have been doing just this. A foundation has been laid. The Supreme Court ruling has been a catalyst to precipitate both evil and good, in places an unbelievable storm of

24 Id. at 5.
hatred, but also in many places a crystallization into new motives of much of the hitherto naive idea of love in church people. There are some of us, thoroughly at home in the South, who have faith to believe that a few years will see considerable shifts in attitude and action and that we are nearer a solution to our race problems than in the smoke of battle is now obvious.