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May 23, 1968

SOUTHERN BAPTIST AND THE RACE PROBLEM

402

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EDITOR'S NOTE: This is the first of a series of articles on "Southern Baptists and the Race Problem," written by Edward A. McDowell, professor emeritus of New Testament at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Wake Forest, N. C. Before going to Southeastern, he taught for 17 years at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Ky.

The Race Problem and the Gospel By Edward A. McDowell

Years ago when I was a young professor on the faculty of Southern Seminary at Louisville I undertook to express the conviction in and outside my classes that the gospel demanded involvement of Christians in the race problem. Some of my students and I became actively involved in interracial projects in Louisville and the state of Kentucky. Our activity was not altogether pleasing to some of the brethren.

One of them, I was told, remarked to one of my faculty colleagues, "Why is McDowell talking so much about the race problem? He doesn't teach sociology." The brother was right; my subject was not sociology, it was New Testament!

This Baptist minister's observation was a striking illustration of the casual way in which church people of the South for so many years have divorced our attitude toward the Negro race from our commitment to the gospel.

The brother who made the complaint about my interest in the race question was apparently not offended by the treatment in a Baptist seminary of the race question in a course in Christian sociology. He believed that it was a safe subject to deal with so long as it was dealt with academically.

Strangely he did not realize the startling implication of his question and statement. The implication was that a seminary professor could teach the New Testament without applying its central doctrine of love to the treatment of our black neighbors.

I knew better, and I determined early in my ministry that I could not be a sincere preacher and interpreter of the gospel unless I applied the gospel to our attitude and practice toward the Negro. I know now I was right then, and I know I am right now in this position. The years have only added to my conviction that this race question is no mere academic or sociological question. They have confirmed my conviction that the race problem is a religious and moral problem.

My interest in the race problem has always been based upon the imperatives of the gospel and not upon motives derived from dreams of sociological and economic improvement of the Negro race, however necessary these dreams may be. I have always maintained that the more orthodox a person is in his Christian belief the more obligated he is to concern himself with the race question. I do not see how a person who believes the words of the Bible are to be taken literally can get around "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." Also, I remember that Jesus said, "If you love, me you will keep my commandments."

And so I believe that the first obligation Southern Baptists must assume as they confront the race problem is to accept the fact that our commitment to the gospel demands a radically changed attitude and practice toward Negroes. We must repent of our sin of prejudice and our hypocrisy of profession without practice and embrace the gospel of love in all of its demands. No longer can we claim to love the Negro "in his place." We must accept him as a person and treat him as a person, a person who deserves the same rights and dignity that we grant to persons of our own race.



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(Second in a Series)

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The Historical Background of Race Prejudice
By Edward A. McDowell

Why do many white people have prejudice in their hearts against Negroes?

An adequate answer to this question would run into a book, and it is only possible in a brief article to sketch in almost outline form the historical causes of race prejudice.

The roots of the white man's attitude toward the Negro lie deep in the mores of slavery and the old South, and their influence upon the thinking of Southern white people. I include the Reconstruction era in the term "the old South."

The Negro was uprooted from his home and culture in Africa and was brought to America to be sold into slavery. He became property, and as property he lost his real personhood. It was assumed that he came out of savagery and that he had enjoyed no culture in Africa.

There were some who held that he had no soul and was only a higher form of animal. Preachers and theologians gave their blessing to the institution of slavery quoting from the Bible to prove that the institution was just. The idea that a Negro was inferior to any white person became deeply ingrained in the individual and collective consciousness of the white people. The idea became a fixed element in traditional thinking and was handed down to succeeding generations.

The Reconstruction era was indeed what Claude Bowers called it, "The Tragic Era." In this period following the War Between the States the Negro, now free, became a pawn in the hands of unscrupulous white men, "scalawags" who were Southern men, and "carpetbaggers," who came from outside the South. Some good things were accomplished in this era but they were nullified by the compromise of President Hayes with the old ruling class of the South and the tacit agreement between this class and the Democratic city machines of the North. Now the Southern white man was able to put the Negro back in his place. The new slavery of the Negro began. The way the Negro had acted during the Reconstruction era had generated a new sort of contempt for him in the collective consciousness of the white people, and this was passed on to succeeding generations. Fear of the Negro arose in the mind of the average southerner. White women began to brood over the possibility they would be raped by Negro men. Lynchings became commonplace. A total of 3,426 Negroes were lynched in the United States between 1882 and 1947. Be it said to our everlasting shame that the great majority of these lynchings took place in the South. The Negro became the victim of brutal treatment in many places.

He was forced to submit to all forms of segregation and second class citizenship; everywhere he turned he was reminded by the "white" and "colored" signs over doorways and drinking fountains, and by the separate coaches on trains, that he was inferior to the white man. White children grew up in a society that accepted all of this, and more, as a way of life; it was a part of their social inheritance.

The political and religious leadership of the South, with very few exceptions, raised no voice against this accepted "way of life." Even enlightened governors, senators, and congressmen accepted the status quo and capitalized upon it. The Ku Klux Klan rode again, intimidating politicians as well as Negroes. Demagogues, such as Bilbo in Mississippi, and Tillman and Blease in South Carolina (the latter I knew personally), inflamed the white populace and made votes out of racial hatred. For the most part the pulpits of the South were as silent as the tomb. A few courageous voices were raised against racial injustice, and a southern interracial group worked at the problem, but no great change was in the making until 1954 when the Supreme Court handed down its momentous decision outlawing segregation in the public schools. That marked the end of the old era and what was called "the Southern way of life."

Even today many southern people, and northern people, for that matter, do not realize that the old era has closed. They grudgingly accept the decisions of the Supreme Court and the new federal laws, but they cling to the old folkways. And in many hearts there has developed an underlying bitterness which has been added to the prejudice that was already there.

This underlying bitterness and lingering prejudice poses a new challenge to the evangelical churches of the South. Will they keep silent, as most of them did in the old era, or will they bestir themselves on the side of the gospel of love and humanity?



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May 23, 1968

Students Plan Demonstration
Over SBC Silence On Issues

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RALEIGH, N. C. (BP)--A group of Baptist students here who say they are experiencing "a crisis of conscience" over Southern Baptist silence on the crucial issues of the day have planned to picket the Southern Baptist Convention in Houston, in what they call a "responsible demonstration".

Expressing concern over the racial crisis, poverty, and the war in Vietnam, the students said they plan to stage "a non-disruptive silent vigil carrying placards," set up a booth to distribute materials and show slides, and have dialogue with convention leaders.

In response, the executive secretary of the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission, Foy Valentine of Nashville, has set up a dialogue session for the students at 2:00 p. m., Monday, June 3, in the Sky Room of the Convention Center where the SBC will meet.

Valentine said he would invite a number of top SBC leaders to participate in the dialogue with the students. He added that there appeared to be no feeling of animosity or hostility among either the students or convention leaders, and both would welcome the opportunity to have dialogue.

About 35-50 students from North Carolina have indicated that they plan to attend the convention as an expression of their concern, but one of the leaders of the group said as many as 200 might participate in the dialogue and "responsible demonstration."

Stressing that they want to express their concern responsibly, the students listed three main topics for the dialogue in a letter circulated to several Baptist school student groups and leaders:

(1) What the SBC, through its agencies and churches is doing, and what it is not doing in response to the social and economic problems of the 20th century; (2) What the SBC in annual session can do, and what it should do in response to these issues; and (3) How the SBC can be restructured to speak to and act on the vast array of new problems, unforeseen when the SBC was first established.

The topics were listed in a letter distributed by Terry Nichols, student at University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill, and coordinator of "Baptist Students Concerned." Two other students are leading the effort with Nichols--Micky Corn, president of the Baptist Student Union at North Carolina State University, Raleigh, and Roger Sharpe, student at North Carolina State and vice president of the state-wide Baptist Student Union.

Sharpe said in an interview that the students were not really staging a protest because "we won't try to stop anything from going on, but only try to express ourselves." The students did not even want to term their "silent vigil holding placards" as picketing.

Sharpe also commended the SBC leaders who signed a "Statement on Crisis in the Nation" for presentation to the convention, saying it was "one of the most beautiful things that has ever come out" on the race issue among Southern Baptists.

The letter written by Nichols chided the SBC for "conspicuously avoiding even discussing the vital issues facing the American people today: racial unrest, exploitation of the poor, the Vietnam war, and others."

The letter cited as evidence the program for the SBC Pastors' Conference saying, "Many Southern Baptist students believe it is time for the SBC (pastors included) to 'wake up'."

"Many feel, as I do, that the SBC can yet play a much-needed part in rebuilding our society so that there will be hope and justice for every man," wrote Nichols. "Many believe that unless the SBC responds positively and concretely to the crisis in America, it will ultimately fail in its attempts to spread the Gospel of Peace, Justice and Reconciliation among men."

The letter concluded with an appeal for Baptist students to join "in this responsible effort to affect the policy of the SBC with regard to the vital issues of the day."

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Baptist Press

Holloway Named President
Of Corpus Christi University

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CORPUS CHRISTI, Tex. (BP)--Leonard L. Holloway, president of Mary Hardin-Baylor College in Belton, Tex., for the past two years, has been elected president of the University of Corpus Christi, a Baptist school here, effective Aug. 1.

Announcement of Holloway's selection was made by Othal Brand, of McAllen, Tex., chairman of the board of trustees at the University of Corpus Christi. Holloway fills the place left vacant by the death Jan. 10 of Joseph C. Clapp, who had been president for two years.

Kenneth A. Maroney, dean of the college, is the acting president of the school, one of nine major institutions of higher learning operated under the Baptist General Convention of Texas.

Holloway, 45, a graduate of Oklahoma Baptist University and the University of Oklahoma, has held other key posts in Southern Baptist life.

For six years he was director of public relations for the Texas Baptist Convention, and he also has served as vice-president and amember of the faculty at both the New Orleans and Southern Baptist Theological Seminaries.

His business experience includes the vice-presidency of a foundation and service as a senior partner and consultant in a public relations and advertising firm.

"Because of work accomplished by the late Joseph Clapp and the faculty and trustees in achieving accreditation, the University of Corpus Christi is ready for rapid expansion and academic renovation," Holloway said.

He said the college will seek to meet an increasing proportion of the senior college educational needs in Corpus Christi and the immediate area.

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Haggai Indonesia Crusade
Results in 700 Professions

406

115

5/23/68

DJAKARTA, Indonesia (BP)--An estimated 700 persons professed faith in Christ in three stadium rallies concluding a four-week evangelistic campaign led here by Southern Baptist evangelist John Edmund Haggai, a member of the Haggai team reported.

About 60 churches in the Jakarta area cooperated in the effort, with 47 churchmen from the United States leading revival meetings in 28 of these.

Of the 24 ministers and 23 laymen and women on the team, 25 were Southern Baptists. Six Southern Baptist mission churches had speakers.

Attendance during the 10-day simultaneous revival phase of the project totalled about 10,000 per night, according to a report from Gainer Bryan, former editor of the Maryland Baptist who was covering the cursade fot the Haggai Association.

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SOUTHERN BAPTISTS AND THE RACE PROBLEM
(Third in a Series)

407

The Psychology of Race Prejudice

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By Edward A. McDowell
Professor Emeritus, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary

The historical background of race prejudice (discussed in a previous article) explains in part why white people think about Negroes as they do and act toward them as they do. Most white people in the South came by their racial attitudes through their social inheritance.

From early childhood they were taught to believe that a Negro was inferior to any white person. Segregation and discrimination simply belonged to the "Southern way of life". The average southerner grew up, therefore, with these ideas imbedded in his conscious and sub-conscious mind. There they lay as potential sources of reaction in word or deed to any provocation involving sight of a Negro or discussion of the Negro's "place". The reaction might come in a violent way, whether in words of violence, or deeds of violence.

I have been amazed at times at the violent manner in which even church people have reacted when Negroes have trespassed upon the commonly accepted mores of a segregated society. The anger with which they have spoken and acted betrayed a deep seated hatred which seems to be that of which John wrote in his First Epistle: "Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer; and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him" (I John 3:15). Certainly some of the Negroes who were violently ejected from white churches were the "brothers" of those who ejected them! We do know that this kind of hatred was expressed in the murder of Martin Luther King, Jr., and other Negro civil rights leaders.

Fear of the Negro is a basic psychological factor in the white man's attitude growing out of his social inheritance and the "Southern way of life". This fear is expressed in several different ways.

One fear the white man has had since the emancipation of Negroes from slavery is the fear of miscegenation, or intermarriage between the races. Some white racists have called this "mongrelization" of the races. The fear is that desegregation and social equality will lead to marriages between young white women and Negro youths.

Apparently there was little fear of miscegenation during the era of slavery. And yet there was more of it then than in any period since. It was common practice during the days of slavery for white masters to co-habit with Negro slave women. From such unions came the half-white, half-Negro children who were the ancestors of most of our present day mulattoes.

The lesson seems to be that there is far less miscegenation when Negro women are the masters of their own bodies than when they were the chattels of white men. There is little basis today, therefore, for the deep rooted fear that white people have of racial intermarriage.

A certain class of whites fear that the Negro is a rival on two counts: (1) he may take their jobs away from them; (2) he may usurp their place in the social scale. This two-pronged fear is common among white people of the laboring and uneducated groups who resent the elevation of Negroes to job and educational levels equal with or superior to their own. They feel more secure when there is one group in society upon which they may look down. The Ku Klux Klan recruits many of its members from these groups.

Another cause of the white man's fear of the Negro is that the Negro is a stranger to him. White people may think that they know and understand Negro people, but by and large they do not. There still exists a gulf between the two races, even though they live and work side by side. Our animal inheritance causes us to react toward Negroes in the way an animal reacts when a strange animal invades his province -- he bristles and growls and prepares to fight.

The black skin and kinky hair of the Negro are symbols which the white man identifies with all of his fears about the Negro and the ideas he has carried in his sub-conscious mind from childhood. The very sight of these symbols is often sufficient to produce a reaction in him leading to violence in word or deed, especially if he sees them in a context in which the old Southern taboos are being violated.

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NOISE . . .
FOVE . . .



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