

By HERBERT O. EDWARDS, SR.

## Race Relations and Reformation-Oriented Theological Ethics

Black theology has now reached a point in its development where socio-ethical and strategic-political questions are coming into sharper focus. This is a more or less natural movement in the religious experiences of a people for whom the relationship between what we believe and what we do is considered of critical importance.

The theological thrust of James Cone and others, which suggests the need for black and all oppressed people, to *think and believe* differently, which is integrally related to the oppression-liberation continuum, leads inexorably toward the question of *acting* differently.

It seems then, that for those black people who refuse to give up being Christian, the ethical question, raised within the framework of what is and what is not to be done by the Christian, in regard to liberation, is now thrust toward center stage. Consequently, some black theologians are now giving serious attention to the task of providing ethical guidelines for the black Christian who is committed to the goal of liberation.

Those black theologians and ethicists who have attempted to speak to the problems of providing guidance and counsel to the black Christian, either through works specifically written for that purpose, or through criticisms of the works of others, all stand in the Protestant religious tradition.<sup>1</sup> Also, the major white American Protestant theologians and ethicists, who have responded to the plight of black people in America and the racism which occasioned their oppression, have stood in the Reformation tradition.

It is the thesis of this essay that the influence of certain theological and ethical doctrines of the major reformers, e.g., "priders of creation," the theory of "two worlds," and the "doctrine of sin," has had a crucially negative effect on the major white American Protestant Christian theological ethicists as they have responded to the historic plight of black Christians in America.<sup>2</sup> We shall examine some of the influences of these major doctrines on white theological ethics by looking at some of their responses to "race relations."

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<sup>1</sup> See especially Major J. Jones, *Christian Ethics for Black Theology*, and Preston N. Williams, "James Cone and the Problem of A Black Ethic," *Harvard Theological Review*, 65:4, October, 1972.

<sup>2</sup> This essay is intended to serve as a warning signal to those of us concerned with the question of black Christian social ethics. We cannot simply take over the categories inherited from the reformation and used by the white theologians who attempted to apply those doctrines to our situation in America.

## II

The concept "race relations," suggests that races, as individuals, nations, organizations, have some kind of decisional-center; for relations, seem to require some capacity to relate, to make decisions about, to respond to. It would also seem to suggest an implicit assumption that there is or may be, a basic difference between races, a difference which might justifiably find expression in theological and ethical moral terms.

Dabbs states it in a quite instructive way for our analysis:

In our differential treatment of the Negro, we have assumed that Negroes and whites are radically unlike, and that therefore what is just for one may be unjust for the other; that is, that there are two kinds of justice . . . whether it is a question of moral or of legal justice, we have defended *racial justice* on the ground of the supposed inequality of the races.<sup>3</sup>

Gunnar Myrdal saw race relations as comprising ". . . all those situations in which some relatively stable equilibrium between competing races has been achieved and in which the resulting social order has become fixed in custom and tradition."<sup>4</sup> But the concept of "race relations" obscures and defies individuality and reduces the individual to a member of a category. For, "however we may define them, races do not think, or imagine or create . . . they do not have a mentality or a gift or an I.Q. Only an individual actually functions in a society and it is the individual's gift, his ability and his contribution to society that counts."<sup>5</sup>

For Reinhold Niebuhr, groups, racial and others, have a will. He says: "Racial prejudice — the contempt for the other group — is an inevitable concomitant of racial pride; and racial pride is an inevitable concomitant of the ethnic will to live. Wherever life becomes collectively integrated it generates a collective as well as an individual, survival impulse."<sup>6</sup>

Niebuhr, as well as most of those who have written on the subject, appear to agree with E. L. Long that the "ultimate principle of Christian love rules out a permanent policy of segregation."<sup>7</sup> However, most of them also seem to suggest that, although Christian love may rule out a permanent policy of segregation, given the difficulty involved in trying to relate love to various human relations and problems, and the tremendous power and prestige of past practices of segregation, "not-

<sup>3</sup> James McBride Dabbs, *The Southern Heritage*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1958, p. 235 (italics added). (cf. James Sellers, *The South and Christian Ethics*, New York: Association Press, 1962, p. 40).

<sup>4</sup> Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma*, Vol. II, New York: Harper & Brothers, 1944, p. 1050.

<sup>5</sup> Virgil Cliff, et al, eds., *Negro Education in America*, New York: Harper and Brothers, 1962, p. 108.

<sup>6</sup> Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Children of Light and Children of Darkness*, London: Nisbet & Company, Ltd., 1945, p. 96.

<sup>7</sup> Edward LeRoy Long, Jr., *Conscience and Compromise*, Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1954, p. 111.

permanent" can mean almost anything from "immediately," to a "hundred years,"<sup>8</sup> to "this time between the times."

Edward A. Tiryakian, however, introduces a slightly different note from Long and others. "... with a few exceptions," he says "most public statements on racial integration assume or take for granted that racial integration is a necessary and desirable state of affairs, and conversely that racial segregation or racial inequality should be condemned."<sup>9</sup>

Tiryakian proceeds to suggest that if any universal and ethically binding grounds can be advanced for racial integration, they can be located only within Christian theology. The economic and political arguments, including those of expediency and democratic principles relating to the latter, are readily dismissed as offering no moral justification for abolishing racial segregation. Is this not to divest political arguments of moral content? Are democratic principles, however defined, merely a set of a-moral superstructures based on a-moral foundational bases?

Tiryakian then turns to the social scientists, and, drawing upon Waldo Beach's article, "A Theological Analysis of Race Relations," to which we must turn presently, concludes that the findings and/or declarations of the social science community concerning the desirability of eliminating racial segregation, are based on a priori considerations, and not on scientific analysis.

What about the theological arguments advanced in favor of racial equality and desegregation? As Tiryakian sees the arguments they can be summarized in two essential points. Because God has created all men with equal rights and equal dignity, non-whites should be given their full rights as given by a common creator and as guaranteed by the Constitution.<sup>10</sup> Secondly, Christ has taught us to love our fellowman, and as we are united in the Christian brotherhood, we should seek to end all feelings of prejudice and friction between any and all racial groups and to abolish any social system which perpetuates the inferiority of one part of the Christian brotherhood.<sup>11</sup>

Tiryakian concludes his article by answering three crucial questions: 1) Have not religious leaders gone beyond Christianity in lending Christian arguments to support racial integration, and have they become fully aware of the full implications of their pronouncements? 2) What is the message of the New Testament and of the Christian Church concerning equality (or its obverse, stratification?) 3) What should be the position of the church on the matter of equality, what should be the Christian perspective on race relations?

<sup>8</sup> Reinhold Niebuhr, "The historical roots of prejudice have too long accumulated, and the marks of racial distinction are too obvious to guarantee the triumph over them ... all that may be said is that the beginning of the project has been propitious, and that the problem will probably concern the nation for at least a century." *Man's Nature and His Communities*, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1965, p. 105.

<sup>9</sup> "Race, Equality, and Religion," *Theology Today*, Vol. XVII, no. 4, January, 1961, p. 455.

<sup>10</sup> cf. Preston N. Williams, "James Cone and the Problem of A Black Ethic," *op. cit.*

<sup>11</sup> Tiryakian, *op. cit.*, p. 462.

Tiryakian's responses to these questions are predicated upon the assumption that the Christian understanding of race relations is to be equated with the understanding of social stratification in society generally. So he argues: ". . . the present interpretation of Christianity in regards to race relations and social stratification is by no means the traditional interpretation, especially in the light of either the teachings of the Gospels or of the Early Church."<sup>12</sup>

It is argued that the other-worldly orientation of Christ formed the basis of his explicit disjunction of the Kingdom of God from the Kingdom of Caesar, and those who are presently attempting to ameliorate social conditions and to do away with social inequalities are attempting to cement the two kingdoms. Therefore, those Christian leaders advocating racial integration have gone beyond the teachings of Christ and the teachings of the Early Church. "If we consider the teachings of Christ as contained in the Gospels, we find no concern with improving social conditions, but solely with improving moral conditions, with preparing man for the Kingdom of God."<sup>13</sup>

The message of the New Testament concerning equality and social stratification is very clear. "We are all equal in these fundamental aspects: we have all sinned, we all fall short of the glory of God and can only be saved by the grace of God. Equality or extending the notion of religious or spiritual equality to that of social equality is an unwarranted extension of Christian theology.

Consequently, the position of the church on the matter of equality and race relations should be clear. It is to maintain that it is only within the church that racial differences can be transcended. In any event, once the common love of Christ has bound believers together, they can recognize the presence and power of original sin in the social differences that exist in the world. The spiritual realm and the social realm are effectively separated in the best Reformation tradition.

The Christian, then, has no responsibility for transcending social differences which result from the action of social institutions which partake of original sin. In other words, unity in Christ is not to be confused with unity in the social sphere. The racial distinctions which God has established in creation are consistently preserved so long as the intrinsic value of each of the racial groups is maintained and spiritual equality is affirmed without attempting to make that spiritual equality normative for social and politico-economic relationships. Nonetheless, within the fellowship, the Christian can transcend racism.

Paul Ramsey seems to argue that the church, on the other hand, need not feel that it has to be integrated. The transcending of racism in race relations takes place, in the realm of the ideal only, not in the actual church or world.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 463.

<sup>14</sup> cf. Ramsey's critique of Kyle Haselden's *The Racial Problem in Christian Perspective in Christian Ethics and the Sit-In*, pp. 55ff.

In response to the sit-ins and economic boycotts, Ramsey wrote the only full-length analysis of the Black protest against racial discrimination in the light of Christian ethics. The general tone of this work reflects the changing responses of Black Americans to the embodiment of racism in law and custom.

Clearly expressed by Ramsey is the fear that Black Americans will assume that racist practices are sufficient justification for radically changing the social structures; respect for law and order must be maintained; the Christian victim of injustice must learn, not only patience, but the restraining discipline of refusing to exercise a right if to do so will threaten to destroy the "garments of skin" with which God by his own hands has clothed naked human relations.

It is clear that, in this work, "garments of skin," what ever else it may mean to Ramsey (and undoubtedly it means something else), is also a euphemism for "race" and "natural affinities." It is also that, in 1960, all of our social structures and institutions were racist. Therefore, any change in the social structures, any willingness to have the structures and customs of this world other than they were, would require an alteration in the garments of skin. The established order was racist and unjust.

In his 1950 work, Ramsey had argued that: "Even the humblest Christian man must rapidly become willing to have the structures and customs of his world otherwise than they now are."<sup>15</sup> By 1961, things had changed for the "humblest Christian man" (and for Paul Ramsey), so then he says: "But in the Christian view, simple and not so simple injustice alone has never been a sufficient justification for revolutionary change. There is always also the question of order to be considered, and a need for restraints placed upon all and upon the injustice infecting even our claims for greater justice."<sup>16</sup>

Ramsey uses three instances as being illustrative of the fact that, especially in the legal and social order, a limit must be placed upon the means used to advance the cause of justice. These three examples are: The Neighborhood School and Planned Integration, Integration and the Familial Quality in Churches, and State Action and the Protective Role of Private Property. In all of these instances, Ramsey is concerned to support "law and order" (though at times imbued with charity), maintaining the proper distance between man and man, and limiting state action less it become too oppressive in the attempt to create a more just community.

Ramsey is of the opinion that attempts are being made to extend the intent of the Supreme Court's Decision against segregation by converting it into a demand for enforced integration without regard for neighborhood, which is risking the destruction of the "natural communities"

<sup>15</sup> Paul Ramsey, *Basic Christian Ethics*, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1950, p. 35.

<sup>16</sup> Paul Ramsey, *Christian Ethics and the Sit-In*, New York: Association Press, 1961, pp. 48-9.

which must not be shattered because they represent the foundation on which any social order must rest.

As the discriminatory practices in housing helped to determine the character of the neighborhoods, it seems ludicrous to speak of them as "natural communities" as Ramsey tends to do. One of Ramsey's further fallacious assumptions is that the schools have been expected, in the past, *only* to serve the function of providing education for the children of a community. He takes issue with those whom he accuses of wanting to use the schools *now* as an instrument for social reform.

The fact is that, historically, the schools as well as the churches and other institutions, have been used as instruments of social order of one type or another; a child's education includes socializing processes. When black children were sent out of their neighborhoods to other neighborhoods (or towns/counties) because there was no 'black' school in their neighborhood, what was that but using the school as an instrument to help maintain racial segregation?

Ramsey questions whether what he chooses to call "a positive policy of undertaking to provide an integrated education for all children, standing alone in abstraction from other facets of community life, is an ordering principle at all? Did a "positive policy of undertaking to provide a segregated education for all children" stand alone, in abstraction from other facets of community life? Was it an ordering principle? If so, was it because it was a sound and good one; or, was it an ordering principle because all other facets of community served to surround it with supportive (segregated) systems?

There are three main reasons why the church, being now segregated according to the "natural affinities" that constitute this present humanity of ours, must *not* be forced to attempt integration without respect for the actual situation in which we find ourselves. In the first place, the ". . . Spirit and the Church He creates are eschatological realities; and that, while oneness is rightly said to be the life of every Christian with and for his fellow Christian, this life is also declared to be hid with Christ in God. (Col. 3:3)."<sup>17</sup>

Secondly, the ideal community in Christ remains a judgmental standard, calling for radical criticism (as over against radical change) of any actual church or any actual society. But, we must remember that at the present time the church is militant, but not triumphant. To try to act and live as if it were the latter could likely prove extremely disruptive and cause us to respond inadequately to God's creative, judging, preserving, and redeeming power in the world or in the church.<sup>18</sup> This is

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 60.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 61. (cf. Kenneth K. Bailey, *Southern White Protestantism in the Twentieth Century*, New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1964: "In 1886, (white) Methodist Bishops 'decried all sentimental extravagance in the direction of the discolored current of social equality, through the agency of the schoolroom, the congregation, or the conference; for there is no conceivable result that would compensate for the crime against nature this theory deliberately contemplates." p. 6) and: in 1924-28, in reference to the unification of northern and southern methodists: "Nonsigners, lamenting that Negro bishops would be treated exactly like white bishops, that they may be elected to preside over the meetings of the College of Bishops, and that such fraternization would 'weaken the foundations of our social structure and impair the fabric of Southern civilization." *Ibid.*, p. 57.)

very much in line with Reinhold Niebuhr's views: "... We cannot deny the ethnic particularity of all men. We are not universal men and we build communities according to the forces of ethnic kinship which are operative in history. But these *communities of nature* are always subject to divine judgment."<sup>19</sup>

In the third place, we need to remember, when we feel inclined to condemn the white Protestant church for its racial exclusiveness, that the "... factors buttressing exclusiveness in the white Protestant churches are components of the very Protestant concept of the very nature of the church." They are:

1. voluntariness of church membership;
2. complete freedom of the individual to attend the church of his choice rather than the church appointed for his geographical area;
3. the democratic and representative character of church government;
4. the social and familial functions of the church;
5. a sense of solidarity as a requisite of church life;
6. the church as *Koinonia* rather than *Ekklesia*;
7. the freedom of the churches from episcopal edict which more readily can achieve a less worthwhile integration;

Unless one has already assumed that being black automatically precludes one's capacity to voluntarily join the church of his choice, exercising his freedom, participating in the government and social and family life of the church, and feeling a sense of solidarity with the other members, one is hard put to see wherein the integrity of the Protestant concept of the nature of the church is violated if some of its families are Black. Is not a racially exclusive church a perversion and violation of that Protestant concept since it denies the very individuality and freedom which it supposedly exalts?

Finally, in good Reformation, Neo-orthodox and realistic fashion, Ramsey appeals to the character of the world as fallen to justify and explain the distinctions between persons, and the need to keep some distance between man and man and groups and persons and the state. Consequently, the victims of injustice must be careful about making appeals to the state for action which may result in giving the state too much power and/or tend to contribute to disorder.

We turn now to a discussion of race relations based upon Waldo Beach's theological analysis of the problem. After an illuminating discussion of the relationship between theology and the social sciences, crediting the latter with having shown more genuine interest in and concern for the problems inherent in America's race problem, Beach nonetheless concludes that "... In sum, the problem of race is at its deepest level not a factual problem nor a moral problem, but a theological problem." Therefore, Beach turns to a 'theological analysis of American racial beliefs and practices, to assess how the findings of the students

<sup>19</sup> Reinhold Niebuhr, "The Race Problem in America," *Christianity and Crisis*, Vol. XV, no. 22, December 26, 1955, p. 170. (italics added)

of society, in fact do honor to the wisdom of Christian doctrine."<sup>20</sup>

Beach discusses race relations under the rubrics of Creation, Fall, Judgment, and Redemption. Because of the Creator's action, "race" is given ontological status. The clear consensus of Christian theology is to affirm the doctrine of the unity and equality of 'racial' life in creation; but the variety of the order of creation is as much a given as the unity. Hence, unity does not mean sameness, identity, but a community of diverse selves and diverse races who stand on the common ground of creatureliness.

In support of the idea of reading the concept of 'race' back into the mind of the Creator, Beach quotes from the Oxford Conference Report of 1937:

The existence of black races, white races, yellow races, is to be accepted gladly and reverently as full of possibilities under God's purpose for the enrichment of human life. And there is no room for any differentiation between the races as to their intrinsic value. All share alike in the concern of God, being created by him to bring their unique and distinctive contribution to his service in the world.<sup>21</sup>

The Christian doctrine of creation in regard to racial differentiation seems to find support among contemporary social scientists who seem to posit an *a priori* order of equality as ground for distinguishing the essential from the unessential. However, in contrast to Beach's view and that of the Oxford Conference Report, social scientists who have discarded the notion of innate biological differences between races, also seem to assume that 'race' itself is a sociological and legal, not an ontological, category.

Although the Creator apparently intended that equality should obtain in the primal community of diverse selves and races, according to Beach, the Fall in race relations was occasioned by pride, the determination to exalt one's race as a substitute sovereignty displacing God as sovereign. The Christian doctrine of sin gives us insight, supported generally by sociological analysis, into the nature of racial prejudice resulting from the Fall.

It is assumed that racial prejudice is often unfairly classified by some as hatred. Actually, although it is recognized that the evil results of prejudice (exploitation, discrimination, lynching), may seem to the casual observer to be the fruits of hatred, they can best be explained as perverted love. Beach, Henderlite, Gardiner, Tiryakian, and, in some respects, Reinhold Niebuhr, seem often of the opinion that if an evil is differently described, or more profoundly explained, somehow the victims should view it differently and, may suffer a little less. Or, at the very least, the black victims of race prejudice in America ought to be more willing to accept a share of the responsibility for their plight.

<sup>20</sup>Waldo Beach, "A Theological Analysis of Race Relations," in Paul Ramsey, ed., *Faith and Ethics: The Theology of H. Richard Niebuhr*, New York: Harper and Brothers, 1957, pp. 208-9.

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*



The universality of sin leads to the not so evident conclusion that "moral responsibility for prejudice is in greater or less degree a responsibility shared by the aggressors and the victims. For the minority often mirrors and retaliates with prejudice the prejudice shown to them."<sup>22</sup> If the minority recognized that the prejudice that comes their way really stems from "mistaken love" rather than from hatred, they could perhaps respond with something less than bitterness! Curiously enough, however, although the majority is really responding or succumbing, to the sin of pride, one gets no hint that the minority is responding to the sin of pride. Is there an assumed basic and fundamental difference, in creation, between the two groups at this point?

The sharpness of this question is further pointed up in Beach's understanding of the judgment of God in race relations. Conceding that the sociologist would have difficulty following the theologian at this point, Beach nonetheless maintains that the judgment of God is evident within the empirical order.

On the one hand, the judgment of God is felt at the point at which the very intensity of the contradiction between creed and practice appears, resulting in troubled consciences, the formulating of clichés and phrases to justify segregation, and other forms of self-justification. On the other hand, the judgment of God is found in other ways.

The sensitive white Christian can see God's hand in the power of Communism as a judgment on the sins of capitalistic democracy and colonial imperialism. He can also see and acknowledge the chastisement of God upon the white community in the recent demands for justice and equality coming from a more aggressive Negro leadership. This implies the "chosen" character of white society. The black man's unequivocal assertion of his right to be, may be inspired by God or used by God. However, it is not in order that the black man may gain justice and freedom; it is rather, that God is using black restiveness under the yoke of oppression, to chastise his chosen white people in order to redeem them!

It seems clear that Beach is viewing the situation, theologically and sociologically, from the perspective of the white Christian and white society. The white Christian must recognize that, although his church has capitulated to the segregation and prejudice of the world, God will redeem even as He judges. The redemptive process will free men from pride and guide them into an integrated community of mutual respect and service like that originally intended in creation. So we have come almost full circle. As the social theorists view integration as the morally normative form among the viable options of racial relations on their

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 213. (cf. Rachel Henderlite, "The Christian Way in Race Relations." Perhaps a strange and yet undeniable fact should be pointed out here as part of the complexity of our situation. It is love, albeit a mistaken love, that prompts much of the conflict that has arisen in the South in recent months. It is not hatred of the Negro that stirs to violence. . . . it is not even pride of race that is the primary impulse to violent action, but love—love of family, loyalty to community." *Theology Today*, Vol. XIV, no. 2, July, 1957, p. 201).

own grounds, the Christian theologian supports integration because it was what God intended in the beginning.

As over against amalgamation, on the one hand, which would absorb all differences into one 'racial' type, or segregation (parallel cultures), on the other, integration would mean a relationship of equality and mutuality, where every man, woman, and child shall be free to enter into, and contribute to the welfare of all, without any restrictions or disabilities based on color caste.<sup>23</sup>

Here is spelled out part of the agony of white ethicists in regard to race relations. On the one hand there is a felt need to preserve "racial integrity" by opposing amalgamation; on the other hand, there is the felt need to affirm an individual freedom which is neither based upon nor limited by, prior group identification. Tribute must be paid to the white aversion to so-called 'inter-racial' marriages, and in the same breath, tribute must be paid to the claims of justice based on individual freedom of action.

The same built-in contradiction emerges in regard to responses to the Reconstruction Era which was followed by the creation of legal barriers to most forms of 'inter-racial' contact.

Beach describes the situation thusly:

With the master-slave community smashed by the Civil War, the Reconstruction era saw the slow development of segregation in Southern custom and law. At its best, this legislation represented a feasible transitional arrangement, which, in theory at least, by substituting a wall for the ceiling of slavery, proposed to lift all restrictions upon Negro development and enable both Negro and white to achieve peace and concord by separation and mutual respect... By the process which corrupts even good custom and the idolization of an ephemeral institution, this segregation which was partially redemptive has now become the enemy of Christian community, the occasion for the sin of inhumanity of man to man, and the judgment of God.<sup>24</sup>

On the fact of it, this is a clear attempt to re-write the history of the post-Civil War period. The clear object and intent of the brutality inflicted upon the Black communities across the South was to take black Americans out of the political process which they had entered in significant numbers during the Reconstruction period. The developing 'good custom' of segregation in the South was not conservative; it was reactionary. It was a clear attempt, not to provide for a 'transitional period of separate and mutual development,' but to devise and maintain an acceptable substitute to the master-slave relationship which would keep it intact in all but name.

### III

The responses to race relations reflected a willingness to adopt certain positions of the classic reformers, especially Luther, even if under other names, in regard to the structuring of society. The reformers claimed to

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 220.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

be able to perceive essential and stable forms of human society which were permanent norms reflecting the divine will. Of course, the forms which were perceived and which became tantamount to "orders of creation" just coincidentally happened to be the forms prevailing in society at the time which favored their position.

Although the term "orders of creation" used by the reformers, is not used in regard to problems of 'race relations,' clearly something comparable is to be understood. Ramsey clearly uses 'race' as one of the garments of skin woven by God within which man is to dwell with his neighbor. Niebuhr designates race as belonging to the essential nature of man. "To the essential nature of man belong, on the one hand, all his natural endowments and determinations, his physical and social impulses, his sexual and racial differentiations, in short, his character as a creature embedded in the natural order."<sup>25</sup>

The positing of the creation of races, as we understand them, by Beach and others, coupled with the clear willingness if not the desire, to preserve the 'integrity of the races,' by these spokesmen, clearly bespeak something closely akin to a concept of "orders of creation."

The reformers are also appealed to in support of a "realism" in regard to the creating of a just order because of the nature of sin. Henry Bellah's critique of 'Christian Realism' is very instructive in this context:

The greatest danger of the Christian realist and liberal position is that one may be forced into the defense of established interests on the grounds that after all, human nature being what it is, this is the best that we can expect.<sup>26</sup>

Consequently, any concepts of "racial justice," of "racial brotherhood," of an "integrated society and an integrated church," are placed in the eschatological and ideal realm. Thus, the black Christian and the white Christian must understand that their togetherness is hid with Christ in God. "The ideal of racial brotherhood is the law of God in which we delight after the inward man, but racial arrogance is the law in our members which wars against the law that is our mind."<sup>27</sup>

The sinful nature of man, the need for institutions to preserve society against sin, the awareness of the universal and inevitable character of white racial pride, all mitigate against the hope for the establishment of a community beyond caste. The unity which would be a prior condition for such a community is the very fact that the presuppositions and the theological ethics of the reformers, eliminate as a possibility on the historical plane.

#### IV

It is clear that Black Christian ethicists must seek elsewhere if they would provide insight and assistance for the black Christian. Reforma-

<sup>25</sup> Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, Vol. I, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1943, p. 270.

<sup>26</sup> Henry Bellah, "Christian Realism," *Theology Today*, Vol. XXVI, no. 4, January 1970, p. 369.

<sup>27</sup> Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness*, op. cit., p. 142.

tion ethics and its interpreters are all but bankrupt if one is looking to fashion a liberation ethic. Black Christian ethicists must destroy the 'two-world' myth of Luther and his followers; they must refuse to accept the notion that it is either logically or theologically sound to attempt to read back into the mind of God the socio-economic and political arrangements of a white racist western order.

Black ethicists must also rescue the discipline of Christian ethics from its enslavement to prevailing social science and psychological theories. Rigorous honesty must demand that the truth be told about our history. The lies which white ethicists have told about the past in regard to racial problems in America must be exposed and laid bare with pitiless rigor.

It should now be palpably clear that the unjust, undesirable and no longer tolerable concept of race relations which reformation-oriented ethical analysis has supported, no longer has any appeal for anyone with even the barest acquaintance with and/or sensitivity to the minimal demands of justice.

