RACE RELATIONS AND THE CHURCH

Editor’s Note.—Recent newspaper accounts of racial discrimination in the hotels of Copenhagen, allegedly because of the attitude of some of the delegates to the World Baptist Alliance, have brought to the front again the whole question of the position of the Church on race. The very life and effectiveness of the Church at this time demand that it show what it has never shown in modern history—a practical acceptance of the principles of Christ. The fact that some strong liberals are church members or pastors does not relieve the organized Church of its responsibility to stand openly and unequivocally for righteousness in human relations.

For some time the Editors of PHYLON have been interested in publishing a series of articles on the Church and race relation. The following papers, dealing with the organized Church in America, present challenging documented answers to the questions uppermost in the minds of many Christians all over the world: What ought the Church do? What can it do? What is it doing? World leadership in our time implies moral leadership; and the organized Church of the United States will be condemned again by history if it fails the world in this crisis.

By M. F. ASHLEY MONTAGU

1. Racism, Religion and Anthropology

Modern man in search of a soul stands a good chance of finding it at the very brink of the pit in which he is still in some danger of losing it. At the very edge of this deadly chasm he stands with one foot solidly planted on the terra firma of his common humanity and with the other perilously poised towards the disaster of annihilation in the chasm of racism. He has for too long already breathed the poisonous vapors of the pit to the detriment of his powers of independent thought, and too long suffered the debilitating effects of its infectious viruses—the viruses which are, to a large extent, responsible for that most distressing of all forms of social pathology which goes by the name of ‘racism.’ I say ‘to a large extent’ because alone these viruses could not have produced so disastrous an effect had the social agencies charged with the care of the public health, the public spiritual health, fulfilled their obligations to the people. Indeed, it is these very social agencies which have often constituted the worst centers of infection.

It is difficult to think without despair of a church which, drawing its life from the example and death of a great martyr to humanity, one of the greatest of all spiritual doctors, has not only departed so widely from his teaching, but has, in effect, in several of its denominations, negated it, and left the message of Christ undelivered. It is more than a hundred years since Lessing remarked that “the Christian religion has been tried for nineteen centuries, but the religion of Christ remains yet to be tried.” That statement, alas, is on the whole still quite
true. Had the religion of Christ been faithfully brought to the people instead of cults and dogmas, spiritual prevarication, the bigotry and intolerance, and the auto-da-fés which have to so large an extent served in its place, western man could never have fallen into the spiritual uncleanness in which he finds himself today.

I shall not say that the church has failed, but I think it is evident that the church has not succeeded in establishing as a ruling principle of man's social conduct the original and essential teaching of Jesus of Nazareth, the principle of altruism, to "love thy neighbor as thyself." Until the church makes it its undeviatingly consistent purpose to establish this principle in the hearts of men as a compass to steer by on profane as well as on sacred days it cannot claim to speak in the name of Christ, in the name of humanity.

Among Christian denominations the Congregational body has a long and outstanding record of accomplishment in the field of human relations. It is by its works that any human institution must be judged, and neither an institution nor a doctrine possesses any meaning other than the action it produces. We judge people not by what they say but by what they do. It is not the alleged motives but the actual consequences of conduct which make the world what it is. Judged by such standards the Congregational Christian Churches have served the people well. This morning's program, celebrating the one hundredth anniversary of the American Missionary Association, it but one evidence of a long and actively continuous devotion to the cure of the diseases of racism. The stand which, this year, the Congregational Churches have taken on the sin of racism bears witness to the clarity of understanding which exists within them concerning the true nature of the problem and to the determination to do everything in their power to solve that problem. Through their Committee on Church and Race, under the able guidance of Dr. Ronald Bridges and the Reverend Galen Weaver, the Congregational Churches have placed themselves in a position to achieve much in the realization of the fellowship of man and to serve as an example to all other institutions.

As I read the evidence it seems to me that Christ conceived the true task of religion to be the perfection of human nature. William Temple, the late Archbishop of Canterbury, put this very clearly when he said that "the aim of a Christian social order is the fullest possible development of individual personality in the widest and deepest possible fellowship." That is the aim of good men everywhere, and whether they work towards the achievement of such an ideal within or without any particular church is, I think, of little import. It was the genius of Jesus to have perceived this ideal as a universally valid one for all people in all times, everywhere. He did not conceive of it as being
achieved through the exclusive medium of any particular sect. Truth is one, but there are many different roads by which it may be reached. Man's common purpose is clearly to attain this goal through a great diversity of approaches, differently and freely. Every human being is a problem in search of a solution, and so is every society. Indeed, it is his society which creates most of his problems for the individual, for the person. And it is principally by utilizing those values in each society which represent the universal moral truths which each society, in its own way, has discovered that we shall effect the fellowship of man. These values, whatever form they may take, are all reducible to the universal principle of love.

In assisting to achieve the fellowship of man, the anthropologist, the student of the comparative science of man as a physical and cultural being, has, he believes, something to offer which is of value. Particularly to those who have the spiritual care of mankind in their hands he can bring the support of knowledge gleaned and tested in the laboratories of different times and various cultures. He can complement and support and reinforce those basic truths which have been independently arrived at by the great religious teachers of the world.

I am not sure that it is always true that there is no evil but that some good comes of it, but in any event, the great negative good which has come of racism is that it has brought to a head many of those fateful questions which have always confronted humanity, and with which religion in all its forms has from the first been preoccupied.

Racism puts these questions squarely on the agenda of mankind. It declares that mankind is naturally divisible into races which have originated independently of each other, and that these races are each characterized by the possession of inborn physical and mental traits which together serve to distinguish them from one another. These groups are always inferior to the racist's group, and must therefore be carefully discriminated so that no member of such inferior groups is allowed to migrate across the barriers into the ranks of the self-styled superior status-group.

Are the races of mankind independent of each other in their origin? Are they differentiated from each other by inborn physical and mental traits? Are there any groups of mankind that are superior mentally and physically to any other? Has God made each of a different blood all nations of men?

The anthropologist, whose task it is as a scientist to investigate the facts which have a bearing in returning an answer to such questions, finds himself in the happy position of being able to give a scientific validation to those basic truths which have been arrived at by the great religious thinkers of all faiths.
In the first place, with respect to the unity of mankind, anthropologists are generally agreed that the evidence indicates that the existing varieties of mankind are derived from the same ancestral group, and that all belong to a single species, possibly somewhat prematurely defined as *Homo sapiens*. The physical differences which serve to distinguish the members of the various divisions of mankind from one another, represent the end-effects of the operation of such factors as the inherent variability of the human organism, geographic and social isolation, in-breeding, outbreeding, and similar factors. But in spite of even the most marked physical differences all human groups are more or less of mixed origin, and the biological materials of which they are composed, the carriers of their physical and spiritual potentialities are demonstrably common to all mankind.

The genetic structure of the varieties of mankind is so like that the conclusion would on this ground alone seem inescapable that all living men are truly brothers under the skin.

So far as the mental traits of the varieties of mankind are concerned, it is now quite certain that such traits are not linked with physical characters, and it is also quite certain that those traits which are alleged to be racial or inborn are acquired by social heredity and not by biological inheritance. The vast majority of investigators agree that the tests which have been made do not reveal any significant differences in the potentialities of mind between any of the groups of mankind. Indeed, in the evolution of man the one factor which seems to have been at a premium is plasticity, the ability to make rapid adjustments to changing conditions. The emphasis has not been placed on special abilities but on the general ability of plasticity, and in the evolution of man those individuals have tended to survive who were possessed of faculties sufficiently supple to allow themselves to be eclipsed by the selective quality of plasticity. On such grounds alone it is highly unlikely that any differential selection of special traits has been operative in the evolution of man, a probability which is supported even more strongly by the evidences of observation than it is on these theoretical grounds.

The evidence indicates that such mental and cultural differences as are observed to exist between different groups of mankind are traceable to differences in the history of their conditioning, to such influences as social and physical environmental differences, geographic and cultural isolation or otherwise, socio-economic conditions, and opportunities for cultural development. It is the considered judgment of most anthropologists that these differences are due to differences in social experience and not to differences of a biological nature. The major triumphs of civilization have come from the mixture of cultural traditions, and peoples like individuals grow through the interaction of
the stimulating influences to which they are exposed. In the absence of such influences development is slow and unspectacular.

Hence, in order to understand how it is that one people differs from another culturally it is necessary to obtain a specification of the conditions under which each has developed. When this, the accounting of their past history, has been obtained, it is invariably found that differences in cultural achievement by different groups, and to a large extent by persons, may be summed up as due to differences in opportunities for achievement.

If a social order is to be realized in which the fullest possible development of the individual personality may be achieved in the widest and deepest possible fellowship, anthropology is in a position to be able to tell the would-be makers of that social order that no biological barriers stand in the way, that, as E. L. Thorndike has put it, "to the real work of man — the increase of achievement through improvement of the environment — the influence of heredity offers no barrier"; in short, that the best and the surest way of ensuring achievement of such a social order is by affording equal opportunities to all men everywhere.

Since the expression of heredity is a function of achievement, man's potentialities, to a certain extent, are subject to human control and guidance. Heredity, it has been well said, determines what we can do and environment what we do do. It is, hence, the duty of those concerned in establishing the most humane and efficient social order to provide opportunities for all human beings wherever they can, so that they may realize to the full the potentialities that are within them, to do what they can.

Anthropology in providing the facts gives support to the aspirations of religion and enables it with full authority to teach men to see the common humanity which shows through the accidental and finite differences in men, to come to a practical recognition of human equality, and learn to have a common concern and regard for all mankind.¹

Anthropology and religion are, therefore, one in believing in the fundamental unity of mankind. It is now the task of religion to see to it that the implications of that belief are put into practice.

Mankind has been painfully groping its way towards the understanding of the truth that all men are brothers, that there is but one world, and that all men must live together in that world in peace and harmony, that man needs fraternity as he needs his daily bread. The consciousness of a common purpose in mankind receives the greatest reinforcement from the recognition of the fact of the common unity of man. The recognition of the truth proclaimed nineteen centuries ago by Paul on Mars Hill in Athens that "God hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth" (Acts 17:26).
But the common purpose of man goes beyond the “one blood” of all nations, the physical unity of mankind, to the spiritual, the social unity of mankind, in short, to the brotherhood of man and all that that implies, the federation of the world — with national sovereignty a form of social neurosis for scholars to write about but not under which human beings live. This does not imply a leveling of all cultures to a state of more or less uniformity. On the other hand, it implies the right, without fear or threat, to be different as well as free. It implies respect for beliefs which we may not share, and the mutual enrichment and strengthening of us all which the spirit of understanding and cooperation brings.

The scientific validation of the principle of cooperation is an achievement of our own day. It provides the complete answer to the social Darwinists of the “Nature red in tooth and claw” school. The doctrines of “the survival of the fittest,” “the struggle for existence,” and “natural selection,” were fervently embraced by an age which saw the rise of nationalism and imperialism, and the waging of aggressive wars against “weaker” peoples who were alleged to be unfit to govern themselves or incapable of exploiting their own lands. In the United States they gave much needed support to the social philosophy of rugged American individualism and its active state of ruthless competition.

To remain on the biological level for a moment, there is this to say: Modern biological investigations reveal that “Nature red in tooth and claw” has been grossly overpainted. We find rather that while aggressive drives exist in nature there are also healthy non-ruthless, benign, competition and markedly strong basic drives toward social and cooperative behavior. These forces do not operate independently, but together, as a whole, and the evidence strongly indicates that of all these drives those which are directed toward cooperation are dominant and biologically the most important. No group of animals could survive very long were this not the case. It is today perfectly clear to biologists that there exists a “great drive towards natural altruism that extends throughout the whole animal kingdom.” It is probable that man owes more to the social elaboration of this natural drive than to any other in his biological and social evolution. His future quite clearly lies with its further development, not with its abrogation.

In 1939 a group of leading scientists formulated the principle naturally operative in governing human conduct as follows: “The probability of survival of a relationship between individual humans or groups of humans increases with the extent to which that relationship is mutually satisfying.” This principle is but a special case of the more general one that “The probability of survival of individual, or groups of living things increases with the degree with which they harmoniously adjust themselves to each other and their environment.”
These formulations express the essence of the principle of cooperation, of mutual aid, the conscious recognition of which has been the cornerstone of most religious and ethical systems. The biological and social corroboration of the soundness of that ethical principle must be counted one of the great contributions of our time. An inspiring discussion of that principle from the standpoint of the biologist is to be found in the final chapter of Sir Charles Sherrington's superb book, *Man on His Nature*. Man, says Sherrington, “is slowly drawing from life the inference that altruism, charity, is a duty incumbent on thinking life. That an aim of conscious conduct must be the unselfish life. . . . Of all his new-found values perhaps altruism will be the most hard to grow. The ‘self’ has been so long devoted to self as end. A good man’s egotism, it is said, is altruism. Perhaps that indicates a stepping-stone on the way.”

On the social human level it must never be forgotten that even natural selection tends to be more and more replaced by social selection, and that by socially selecting, by behaving wisely, there is scarcely any limit to what we can do toward securing the greatest happiness of mankind.

Man learns to be cooperative, as he learns to become a social being, by being loved. As a puling infant his greatest need is to have his basic urges satisfied, hunger, thirst, air, sleep, being held, caressed, and so on. The satisfaction of his basic needs, of his feelings of dependency, is, for him, love, and it is by being loved that he learns to love, and thus to take the first step toward becoming a human being, a social human being. What the human being most needs is security, and security is for him the equivalent of love. Without love he has no security, and without love he suffers in a state of constant anxiety. In such a case he exhibits, as an adult, all the marks of early privation.

What human beings desire most is to have their needs satisfied, security. They want also to feel dependent, either upon some mother-ideal, a deity, other persons, or narcissistically upon themselves, but dependent they must feel. Man does not want to be independent, in the sense of functioning independently of the lives and interests of his fellows, freely and detachedly. This kind of negative independence leads to lonesomeness, isolation, and fear. What man wants is that positive freedom which follows the pattern of his life as an infant and child within the family, dependent security; the feeling that one is a part of a group, accepted, wanted, loved and loving; the positive freedom which makes the development of the person emphatically a matter of personal realization in terms of his membership in the social group in the mutual interest, more or less, of the person and of society; the opportunity to develop interdependently, not as an ‘individual’ but as a person.
Love is an active state which is learned by the infant, and it is a state which is developed in dependency, and that is the pattern of love which man seeks to maintain throughout his life. We love only those things upon which we are dependent. Those which are associated with frustration we tend to hate, but those which are associated with pleasure, either present, recollected or anticipated, we tend to love.

It is when men are erroneously led to believe that they can be independent of one another, "social isolationists," that they begin to frustrate and hate each other, that they do violence to all that they are and create so much psychological and social havoc. When men are taught to understand how dependent they are upon one another, that they are interdependent beings in a great cooperative enterprise, that it is in their nature to be affectionate, cooperative persons; when they learn that to be anything else is to be in conflict with themselves and with their society, the problem which man constitutes will have gone a long way towards solution.

Those who love their fellow men are secure. Without love there is no security; there is only anxiety, fear, and distrust.

Science gives the fullest validation to the commandment to love thy neighbor as thyself. It does more. It demonstrates that man is naturally inclined to love his neighbor, and all that an intelligent society is required to do is to see to it that his natural urges are given an opportunity to develop. Such a society should see to it that he is provided with the conditions for development which will not transform him into the unloving, vicious, frustrated creature he so often becomes.

It is often said that man is born neither good nor evil. My own studies lead me to believe that this is untrue. I think it can be shown that man is born good. Good in the sense that were the infant's basic needs adequately satisfied in human society, he would develop as a good human being in the ethical or Christian meaning of that term. His drives are towards goodness, and he needs goodness as he needs air. Otherwise he becomes a psychological cripple, unloving and unloved.

It is in the love of the mother that the infant usually finds his satisfaction, the stimulus to develop and grow in goodness.

It is from these satisfied urges that the spiritual urges spring, the strong desires and emotions that are directed toward the attainment of some ideal object, over and above all selfish objects of desire. Love of truth, love of country, love of others beyond oneself. The biologically founded altruism of the mother is the original stimulus which sets off the development of the altruistic potentialities of man. Altruism is the maternal passion. By seeing to it that the child is enabled to grow and develop to adulthood under conditions which do not deprive him...
of love, which give him security and the opportunity to observe and to participate in goodness in action, we can be certain that he will rarely develop the perversion of social self-interest. With the proper encouragement altruism and cooperation can become the passion of all men.

In a recent issue of Science (November 15, 1946, p. 469) America's distinguished neurologist, Professor C. Judson Herrick, drew attention to the back-eddy of selfish concern for personal, group, and national advantage into which we seem to have fallen. "This," he says, "can be changed if enough of us want to and are willing to pay the price. It is fortunate that under the surface of our present disorder there is as there always has been, a strong human craving for decency, justice, and social stability based on individual responsibility for the welfare of the group, and the group has now been enlarged to include the whole world. This key to social progress has not been lost, and it is up to all of us to recognize it and use it."

The craving for decency, justice, and social stability cannot be achieved without love. We know that now. Christianity has always known it, and science has at last demonstrated it. More than anything else man not only wants love but he wants to embrace the whole world within his interest and to extend to everything in it his love and his understanding. Heartened by the support for this knowledge which has come from the wholly unexpected quarter of science the Church much go forward in the renewed faith in its principles.

Devotion to human ideals, love, sympathy, understanding, justice, peace, and the embodiment of these values in human relations, is the true religion of man. Failure to practice this faith is the only real atheism.

Today, and hereafter, the Church, in leading mankind toward the practice of this faith, will have the support of many loyal allies, the social scientists and particularly the anthropologists. Let us, then, join head, heart, and hands, and go forward together.

REFERENCES