

ARE WE READY FOR THE PROMISED LAND?

The year 1951 is a most significant one in the history of mankind. It marks the beginning of a new epoch in man's long struggle to achieve freedom and human dignity. The present conflict in Korea may be but the prelude to another gigantic effort to make the benefits of the good life available to a larger percentage of the world's population.

While human progress does not take place in a straight line yet the overall trend seems to be in a progressive direction. Temporary setbacks should but redouble the efforts of men of good will to press forward to make real peace on earth. The emancipation of an ever increasing number of men and women is inevitable but must be purchased by sweat, blood and tears. For example, America must use all of its national and human resources to win World War III - in fact to survive. There can be no wasting of manpower because of physical deficiencies, sex, race or age.

In time of greatest national prosperity, there has been the temptation to disregard the values of certain types of persons and workers. This luxury was possible because of an economy of plenty. In time of emergency there must be a change in emphasis and outlook. All persons must be evaluated and used at their maximum. Both immediately and in the future there is need to utilize the assets of all mankind at their utmost. The luxury of a cast system is beginning to be too expensive. World movements are forcing all people to take a realistic view of American opportunities and obligations in the struggle for world leadership in a world divided into two opposing groups.

In the evolving picture of world events, the Negro in the United States is more than a disinterested spectator. His status since 1619 has undergone many changes and these have been most numerous since his presidential emancipation by Abraham Lincoln on January 1, 1863.

In the years which have followed the enactment of the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth amendments, there have been gains and losses in the fight to attain full American citizenship. The present world fight has focused attention on democracy as it is practiced in the United States. Changes and adjustments in the mores are occurring with unprecedented rapidity.

In connection with these changing social patterns, there is need for many personal and social adjustments by the major group concerned. The so-called etiquette of race relationships is being upset and readjusted to an evolving status, bringing problems which will require tact and discretion in their solution.

The present condition reminds one of the plight of King David of Israel who after devoting his life to the cause of his people found himself set aside and not allowed to build the temple because his hands were "unclean." Likewise, I am also reminded of the Hebrew patriarch, Moses, who was taken to Mt Nebo's lonely heights and shown the Promised Land but was denied entrance because he had repeatedly disobeyed God in his own haste to get things done in keeping with man-made, but contrary to God-made, standards of conduct.

Now that the Iron Curtain is being lifted and the Walls of Jericho are crumbling down, there is need for all of us to re-examine ourselves - to see to it that our hands and hearts are clean, that we have the divine point of view which is essential for men to enjoy peace on earth. In short, are we ready to enter the Promised Land?

The answer to this question, it seems to me, includes a careful consideration of such points as the following: (1) accept civic responsibility; (2) practice brotherhood; (3) pay for values received; (4) forgive and forget past injustices; (5) work efficiently; and (6) accept world citizenship.

When a racial group has undergone the rigors of physical bondage and then emerged to a state of paternalistic citizenship, it is difficult for large numbers to recognize and assume civic responsibility. When one is a slave or a "minor", he is not expected to assume responsibility. He is not held strictly accountable for his actions. In a sense, he is protected from some of the stern realities of life. Since he does not share in making the rules, he enjoys a certain dispensation from the full weight of penalties for their infraction. In short, he receives a negative type of education which emphasizes receiving benefits without exacting the discipline necessary to sharing and giving for the common good.

Now eighty-seven years after Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation, we have yet to learn the full meaning of civic responsibility. It includes such prosaic items as paying taxes, qualifying for and exercising the franchise, owning property, contributing to society through governmental and voluntary agencies such as the Community Chest, American Red Cross, Infantile Paralysis Foundation and the like. For various reasons there is great reluctance on the part of the group to fully participate in many community activities. We offer as alibis for not participating, doubts as to the proper racial distribution of funds received. Yet regardless of seemingly justifiable reasons for not participating, the time is coming, if it has not already come, when it will be necessary to shoulder this responsibility as part of the price for full participation.

Christianity has taught the philosophy of turning the other cheek, of human brotherhood. The fatherhood of God is based upon this assumption. Even if one's brothers do not accept the full share of his obligation, it does not excuse the other brother. Those who would be free must strike the first blow - must make the first overture. Love is a more powerful weapon than hate. In the midst of materialistic America, we tend to forget the powerful truth of the Beatitudes and the potency of the physically impotent Ghandi. Booker T Washington emphasized

brotherhood when he said that he could never allow any man to make him stoop so low as to hate him. True democracy emphasizes the fact that other men are as good as you are rather than that you are as good as other men.

One of the most promiscuous efforts of paternalism is the undermining of a sense of social responsibility. There is the desire to beg, to accept hand-me-downs, to go around with hat in hand. It has long been said that we buy our luxuries and beg for our necessities. To be real men and women is expensive. It means paying for what you need and desire. It means to pay taxes direct - to accept additional levies. It means to sacrifice present pleasures, even Cadillac cars, fine houses and fancy clothes, to have substantial bank accounts and good credit. It means to be able to demand respect because of economic stability and solidarity. No individual, group or race can long expect respect and recognition unless it has proven itself able, ready and willing to pay for what it wants - in the way of churches, schools, and social benefits.

For some peculiar reason it seems as though, to him that hath it shall be given and from him that "hath not" even that shall be taken which he seemeth to have. The final measure of a man economically is the difference between what he makes and what he saves. There are two ways to be happy. One is to get what you want and the other is to be satisfied with what you have.

The ability to forgive and forget truly tries the souls of most professed Christians. Although we boast of intellectual and religious maturity, we tend to be quite immature emotionally and socially. We even forget the Lord's prayer, "forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors." There is so much bad in the best of us and so much good in the worst of us that it hardly behooves any of us to talk about the rest of us.