"....To Fashion as We Feel"

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"Out of this nettle, danger, we pluck this flower, safety."

Margaret Halsey used these appropriate words of Shakespeare as the last line in her book of some ten years ago, Color Blind. Her point was that we in America face a magnificent task. She wrote: "The integration of the Negro into American society is one of the most exciting challenges to self-development and self-mastery that any nation of people ever faced." All of us these days see the nettle; she saw the flower.

It is a most useful reminder. We are accustomed to stating the problem, not the chance of solution. We hear all around us the threats of disaster, not the possibilities for overcoming prejudice and fear. As for the South, we give ear too easily to such defeatisms as "The decision of the Supreme Court has set us back twenty-five years," or, "The actions of the N.A.A.C.P. have postponed good relations for fifty years." We have emphasized too much the difficulty the South faces, and much too little the opportunity.

But you, I daresay, are not impressed. Your presence here, the very existence of this Conference, indicates the conviction of Christians all across the South, as well as of course in other parts of the country, that there are affirmations that can be made and ways of advance that can be mapped, that our problem has an enabling as well as a disabling aspect. Neither Christianity nor democracy can show its real fibre in days of ease and clear sailing; on the other hand, neither Christianity nor democracy has any chance in a situation in which disciples of firm commitment are not present to make their testimony. Here in the South are days of stress; here in the South are also persons of faith ready to testify to it. Here, then, both conditions are fulfilled. The South today is the best laboratory I know anywhere for testing both Christianity and democracy.

In such a conviction this Conference was called. To the effort to seize our opportunities this Conference is dedicated. When the printed program first came to hand I was struck by the reference on the first page not only to the task but to the timing of these sessions. The explanatory comment read, "Conference on Christian Faith and Human Relations....toward the building of Christian community in a time of trouble -- a post-Easter evaluation." It was that last phrase that caught my attention. In the Gospel of Mark the account of the first Easter morning includes an item that is omitted from all the other gospel records. We are told that "When the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. And very early on the first day of the week they went to the tomb when the sun had risen. And they were saying to one another, 'Who will roll away the stone for us from the door of the tomb?' And looking up, they saw that the stone was rolled back."

Mark's addition is in the question that the other gospels skip over in order to get as quickly as possible to the telling of the empty tomb. But the question is important, for it is our question. The stone of racial discord sometimes seems to block our access to the presence of the living Christ. And because we of the South know the peculiar potency of the question, "Who

will roll away the stone?" we can perhaps understand more fully the promise in the answer, "Looking up, they saw that the stone was rolled back." The way is open! The path is not blocked except for those who think it is blocked. I for one am grateful for Mark's additional comment in the Easter account; and I am grateful that this Conference is being held so close upon the Easter season.

And so we are met in this final session to take stock. Where do we as Christians stand? What can we say to ourselves and our fellows in this hour of turmoil? What ought we to do? This is a great hour, and we would be faithful to it. We approach it as a time of opportunity.

And as we pause to analyze the position at which we have arrived, two main categories take shape in our conclusions. A number of the items of our concern fall within the category of what we know, a number of others constitute the area of what we don't know. I propose, then, that we spend our attention upon each of these in turn. And if the larger share of our consideration should logically be spent upon what we don't know, we need to give at least introductory notice to what we do know, that our knowledge may be pinned down and that the extent and limitations of our uncertainties may be the better defined.

Let us begin, then, with what we are fully aware of. We know at least four things. First, we know that we must have facts. It is not my task, as I conceive it, to summarize the factual situation. This is being done by any number of individuals and institutions. It has been done in this Conference. It will continue to be done well, by scholars and newspapermen, churches and foundations, universities and governmental agencies. The facts are available -- facts on every angle of our problem: the progress and lack of it in the desegregation of the public schools, the thought of the Old and Tew Testaments, the advantage that communism is trying to seize elsewhere in the world because of our Southern strife, the status of restrictive and permissive legislation in the various states, the incidents of discord and of courage.

All this and much more is to be had for the searching, but the availability of the facts is not my point. My emphasis, rather, is on the wide awareness that we must have them, that we cannot safely tackle our task without them. The problem that we as Americans, and particularly that we as Southerners, face is of such crucial dimensions that we must not talk off the top of our head, or act at the irresponsible urging of our feet; and we know this. That we know it is one of the healthy factors in the present situation.

A second thing we know is the Christian ethic. Here, of course, is occasion for quibbling, if we had the taste or the time for it. Fortunately we seem to have a little of either, though it might well have been otherwise. We could have tried to manipulate the words of Scripture to fit our fancy. There is some of this, of course, but real scholarship has not succumbed to such temptations, and ministers and laymen generally have had little truck with it. We as Christians could have closed our eyes to our problem, or tried to, but we realize it wouldn't have worked. There is some of this, too, but aren't you surprised by how little rather than how much? We could have blamed God for our troubles: he is color-blind, and in his sympathies distressingly lacking in discrimination; but I have heard none of this at all. We could have debated, and we do, about particular elements in the Christian ethic, the

derivative items of moral sensitivity as to how much, how far, when and where. But we know, even as we discuss them, that they are secondary; and the remarkable thing in the picture is that on primary matters we are in substantial agreement.

As I wrote that sentence I had spread out before me on my desk official statements from a host of plenary church bodies in the South, representing various interchurch councils and the following denominations: Baptist, Catholic, Congregational, Disciples, Evangelical and Reformed, Episcopal, Methodist and Presbyterian. All these statements were drawn up in the last three years or so, in consequence of the Supreme Court decision of May 17, 1954; and all but one of them expressed the approval of the sponsoring body for that earth-shaking development. I am sorry to have to record that the sole dissenting voice was that of an annual conference of the church to which I belong. It is tempting to quote at length; but since they say much the same thing, and since you are already aware of their content, I shall read only one as an example. It is the statement of an interdenominational Council of Church Women; as we all know, the ladies go to the heart of such matters. They said:

> 1. Because of our high calling of God in Christ Jesus, we reaffirm our belief in human brotherhood and the inclusiveness of Christian fellowship. Therefore, we feel we are impelled to promote a Christian society in which segregation is no longer a burden on the human spirit.
>
> 2. We accept with humility the Supreme Court decision as supporting the broad Christian principles of the dignity and worth of human personality and affording the opportunity of translating into reality Christian and democratic ideals.

We know what the Christian ethic compels us to say -- the love of neighbor in the light of God's love, and the impartiality and universality of God's love. As a result of his meeting with Cornelius, Peter suffered considerable stress of mind before he was forced to admit, "Truly I perceive that God shows no partiality." The brethren in Jerusalem were suspicious of Peter's reluctant mission until he finally persuaded them to conclude, "Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance unto life." And so it has been to this day: the insight comes slowly, but eventually it comes. It has come to the Christians of the South. One of the greatest assets in our present distress is our near-unanimity as to what the Christian position is.

<u>The third thing we know is the shallowness of our defenses</u>. As white Christians of the South, we would gladly escape the cutting edge of these first two entries in the account of our knowledge. We would if we could! But the facts don't add up as we'd often like them to, and the Christian ethic simply refuses to go away and hide. And so the defenses of us who are white Southerners and presumably Christians get pretty motheaten and decrepit. But again, that they do is not my point; rather, my point is that we know this. Others know it, the world knows it; but it is conceivable that the realization might not have dawned upon us. It is conceivable but not actual, for the actual circumstance is that we have become convinced of the absurdity of our own shibboleths.

Let us not spare ourselves. Let us pull our pat formulas out into the sunshine of both our data and our ethic, and see how they wither in that light. Since we know these defenses by heart I will take time only to list them; and since we know quite clearly that they are not conclusive, I will

refer only in passing to their patent frailty. There are at least thirteen, unlucky number for us:

1. "The situation is easier elsewhere." So what? Does this mean there is less for us to do?

2. "Our people are not ready." Maybe not; but what are we doing to make them more so? Do we just wait? "Sit down, O men of God; have done with greater things."

3. "The Negroes are not ready." Again, maybe not; but when and where can we cut into this vicious circle? The Negroes aren't ready for first-class citizenship because we haven't given them the chance to be; and so we won't give them the chance to be because they aren't ready!

4. "The Negroes don't want desegregation." All right, then that's their argument, not ours. But isn't it strange how few of them are making it?

5. "The Negroes lack our standards in health, morality and marital fidelity." Then if so, let's get to work on it. What do we do when the house catches fire? Even the back room? Take a walk?

6. "What will it lead to?" You will note, I hope, that I have not phrased this question in its KuKlux form: "You don't want a nigger marrying your daughter, do you?" I haven't done so because I have respect both for your integrity and my daughter's judgment. "What will it lead to?" It might lead to a chance for the integrity of the Negro, too.

7. Here we begin to turn on our Northern tormentors: "Leave us alone!" We've been left alone a good long time, with nothing but our Christian consciences to guide us.

8. "You've got your problems, too." Right! There's not a Yankee in the land that doesn't share in our damnation, and we ought to dislike the condition as much as the company.

9. "We believe in states' rights." Oh, so this is the real reason; and if it weren't for states' rights we'd be glad to do the decent thing -- is that it?

10. "We've got a state law." Yes, we've got one where I come from, too. And it hasn't kept us from doing a thing which our feeble courage persuaded us to try. We've got a Federal Law now; and all along we've had a Christian command.

11. "The Supreme Court was pressured." Right again! It was! But by what? By the mounting evidence of injustice and discrimination. Is that what we want to perpetuate?

12. "The N.A.A.C.P. is suspect, probably subversive." How awkward that the F.B.I. can't prove it. Or maybe the Bureau is in on the conspiracy, too.

13. "We love the Negroes!" We do! And I love my dog!

There they are! In all their stark poverty, there are the pretexts we use for dragging our feet. But the truth is breaking upon us, and we begin to see these shibboleths for what they are. There is good news in this sorry picture, I submit; and the good news is that most of us are getting tired of seeing ministers and laymen react as Southerners first and Christians second. We know the shallowness of our defenses.

Fourth, and because of these first three, we know one final thing. We know our own guilt. Outside commentators all the way from Gunnar Myrdal to the Editors of Time have pointed out that the most decisive opponent of the segregationist is his own conscience. Well and good; let them point! For they speak the truth. In a sensitive little article on "The Racial Crisis and the Prophet's Task," published in the Duke Divinity School Bulletin, Waldo Beach recently wrote: "The troubled conscience of the Southerner... may be deeply hidden beneath layers of custom and rationalization, but it is there. Even the fury of the fanatic racist (and there is usually at least one in every church), which seems so sure and unambiguous, is the more frenetic because it covers an anxious insecurity or hides a deep alienation from self."

Now the "fanatic racist" often succeeds in his cover-up, succeeds with himself, at any rate. But you and I don't. We know within our own hearts the conviction of sin and the need for repentance. Yes, and more: we often repent. It was a Presbyterian group in the South, though it might have been any group of Christians, that stated: "The action of the Supreme Court ... points up the failure of the Church..." Sense of guilt is our portion, and penitence is increasingly our response.

These, then, are the four insights of which we are fully aware: first, not only the facts but the need for them; second, the central emphases of the Christian ethic; third, the shallowness of our own defenses; and fourth, our sin. Others may or may not possess these understandings in as large a measure. For example, one often suspects that our brothers in other parts of the country are so alert to our sin that they fail to see their own. But that is not our concern, except to help them toward their own self-enlightenment as they have helped us. No, our interest is in our self-understanding, the analysis of the self-knowledge of white, Southern Christians; and at the mid-point of this task we find that we can safely take these four things for granted.

But the second part of our introspection is more difficult, for it has to do with what we don't know. The list is large, and the temptation to make it less exhaustive then it ought to be is even larger. Is it not true for all of us that we know much less than we like to think we know, whereas we fail really to know much more than we pretend? If we were to allow ourselves the luxury of exaggeration, we might have mentioned many more than four items in the listing of what we know; but fewer might suffice for what we don't know, if we were to give ourselves the benefit of the doubt. Yet symmetry must be preserved at all costs! Thus I shall again compress into four the items of ignorance, unawareness and misunderstanding that beset us.

First, we are perplexed as to what to do. We know what the Christian ethic says, to be sure, in its broad directives of faith and practice, but we don't know how to use it. So we content ourselves with simply talking about it. In solemn assembly we speak the truth as God has given us to see it, but when

we go home we quickly lose the courage and certitude we felt while still in conference session. Back in the corporate body -- such a one as this, perhaps -- we had a sense that the world was watching, and we painted a portrait of God's commands on a broad canvas. But now each of us is alone in his own community, only the corner store or the courthouse square is watching, and we daub away at picturing man's desires in a limited frame. The courthouse square is speaking as well as watching; the citizens are counselling together, and some of them are donning their cowardly sheets. Too often we play dead before the drumbeats; or worse, we may even carry a drum. Not long ago I was cut to the quick by the plaintive comment of a Negro friend of mine, a sponsor, incidentally, of this Conference. He said: "If only some local churches would act on what their denominations say..." and the rest of the sentence was tactfully unspoken.

But how shall we act? We really are puzzled as to what to do. Protestants among us are especially bewildered. We admire what has been accomplished by such Catholics as Bishop Vincent S. Waters in North Carolina and Archbishop Joseph F. Rummel and Bishop Jules B. Jeanmard in Louisiana, and yet we Protestants know that we must employ different tactics. This was recognized by Lee Nichols and Louis Cassels in an article in Harpers entitled, "The Churches Repent." They said:

> While Protestant spokesmen acknowledge that the Catholics have moved farther and faster in race relations in the South, they also assert that the Roman Church faces a somewhat different problem, both because of the relatively small number of Negroes involved and because of the much greater authority that Catholic priests and bishops exercise over church affairs. No Protestant bishop could successfully end segregation in a diocese by edict. A Protestant clergyman bent on breaking down racial barriers in his own church must have not only the personal courage and determination to do so, but also the leadership to carry with him the laymen who, through vestries, presbyteries, boards of deacons or congregational meetings have the final word on church policy.

The position is sound, of course, but we need not make it a crutch to lean on. To the contrary, it can serve as incentive for us to do a better job, as well as one more fitted to our Protestant principles and polity. Since our church leaders cannot issue edicts, their leadership can assume the proper Protestant form of guidance rather than fiat. Since we must educate our laymen, then our program can be stronger because it must depend upon an understanding and sympathetic laity. Moreover, since one or another individual cannot speak or act for all of us, we can gain the strength that comes from cooperative endeavor. The difference between Protestants and Catholics represents a greater ease of movement for them, but may represent a larger opportunity for us, if we see it that way.

I keep skirting the central concern, don't I? For the question of the moment is, What can we do? and all that I'm doing is to underline the question. And I think I know why -- let the cynical point out that here comes another deferment of the answer! One of the major reasons that we don't know what to do is that the methodology of the Christian ethic has seldom been discussed by philosophers and theologians. Take a look, if you will, at any of the so-called standard works in Christian ethics that have spoken meaningfully to the life of our times. Take a look, as I have done, at the volumes that appear most often today on the reading lists in our seminaries. They deal with brilliance, though

often with many a contradiction of emphasis, on the content of the Christian ethic, but almost never do they turn to the problem of its methodology. They are strong on theory; they are short on practice. Stray references in the books are helpful; numerous magazine articles give guidance on what has happened, or might be tried, in specific situations. But we still wait for a systematic examination of the general strategy which the Christian ethic calls for.

And while we wait, perhaps we ourselves can make an indirect beginning on the task simply by adding up what we have learned from our own experience. Every one of us has learned a lot, enough to keep us from speaking ex cathedra, yet also enough to point fingers of useful direction toward, hopefully, the eventual answering of our question as to what we can do. Let me be so presumptuous, therefore, as to try to pull together the major hints of a successful strategy that any one of us could call to mind. Since my reminiscences in illustrating them would be no more illuminating than your own, I'll spare you the stories I could tell, and leave you to furnish your own examples. I shall mention seven suggestions that grow out of our common experience -- and perhaps this will be a lucky number for us:

1. We realize that in preparation for any particular action designed to lessen prejudice and foster the Christian spirit we must consider all the factors that have gone to create the situation we face, or as many of them as we can get our fist around. We ourselves can't know them all intimately; and thus part of this realization is the recognition that we must call upon the experts for those aspects of the situation that we do not fully understand. Some of these experts may not share our Christian inclinations, but that doesn't matter,' for we can still learn from them. The problem in "Human Relations" to which the title of this Conference refers is in the field of what we have come to call "social ethics"; and the juxtaposition of those two words suggests that we must understand society as well as ethics, before we can act intelligently and helpfully.

2. Yet even the mastery of all relevant information will not enable us to act alike in every circumstance. On the contrary it will lead us to realize that we can't and ought not to try to. We learn that each local situation is different from every other, and that any contemplated action must be fitted to the local community. Thus we eschew sweeping conclusions and prescriptions, and point whatever program we have in mind to the particular place and problem it is designed to serve.

3. But to take a whole host of factors into consideration, to try to give each its proper weight, and to be guided by particular circumstances as well as by general premises mean that we must make adjustments among the concerns we feel. Thus we realize that compromise is inevitable, but the corollary also occurs to us, that rationalization is inviting. To recognize that adjustments are always called for is to open the door for the play of extraneous considerations and for self-justification. Compromise and rationalization! -- let's have as little of both as possible, but let's distinguish between them. The former will be present whether we will or no, and may not be altogether deplorable; the latter must be dispensed with as far as we are able.

4. But we cannot rid ourselves of rationalizations if each of us operates to himself alone. No more can we, on the positive side, attain the full measure of our effectiveness if every person works in isolation. We need the

sense of community that such Conferences as this provide; we need to engage in as much cooperative endeavor as possible; we need to develop sinews of association, to the end that facts and tactics may be widely known. If we use the churches, the professional societies and the other organizations to which we belong, then the Citizens' Councils and the Ku Klux Klans will not be the only agencies that know the meaning of fellowship in pursuit of a common cause.

This may be as good a point as any to bring the Negro into the circle of our concern. Thus far we have spent our attention on the role of the white Christians in the South, but the Negro must play his part,too, and we must be willing for him to do so. An important element in this fourth realization, therefore, is that lasting progress takes place when Negro and white work together, not when either tries to fight his battle for brotherhood alone.

5. It will be a battle! Opposition is unavoidable, whatever we attempt to do. Those who "mean to keep the Negro in his place" are angry, frightened men, and sweet reasonableness will not be enough to defeat them. But we who seek to respond to the Christian gospel are not thereby promised escape from strife. We expect it. We have it. We are engaged in it right now.

6. Yet in the ordering of our plan for battle we find the military metaphor breaking down. Our efforts must be educative, not punitive. If the Negro can't be moved back to Africa, no more can the bigot be annihilated. And to do our bit toward enabling the Negro to become a full citizen of our society means that we believe in full citizenship for all, the perpetrators as well as the victims of injustice. This takes education, and our opponents are in direr need of it than any other Americans I know.

7. Our purpose must be redemptive as well as educative. Here we draw upon our Christian rather than merely American understandings. We have good news of God's love to share, and we are committed to sharing it. Those who hate need to be rescued from it, as from a treacherous sea. It is a better metaphor to guide our actions than that of the clash of arms. For it suggests a quality that is necessary, a temper we need to possess, an atmosphere we must seek to create. One who undertakes a rescue operation identifies himself with his human derelict, and bends every effort to save him, yes, even when he doesn't want to be saved. Some people enjoy their prejudices, even as some enjoy their idols; but Christianity still has a missionary impulse. Any person who stands athwart the development of decent human relations is the object of our missionary endeavor and the subject for redemption.

All these things we have learned through our experience. When we add them all up, and illumine them with the Christian ethic itself, do we not begin to see a general strategy taking shape? Let me repeat these realizations quickly: our experience has taught us that, one, we must consider all the factors and call upon the experts; two, any contemplated action must be fitted to the local community, for we must eschew sweeping conclusions and prescriptions; three, compromise is inevitable, and by that token rationalization is inviting; four, we need to build a sense of community and to develop sinews of association, and this means that Negro and white must work together; five, opposition is unavoidable -- we expect it; thus, six, our efforts must be educative; and seven, our purpose must be redemptive. When we join to this totality the ethic of love that we already know, we discover, I believe, the outlines of a methodology. Is it not what has come to be called by that most inadequate term "gradualism"?

Our question is still with us: What can we do? What must we do? Gradualism at best is only a generalized answer; specifics are not available. But until the time when some wise theologian develops a dependable methodology for the Christian ethic, gradualism will have to serve, for it embraces the best that we have observed and experienced. We must move ahead, with courageous prudence. We must not move precipitately, for that way is to fail. On the other hand, not to move at all is apostasy. As to the temper in which we act, the Christian ethic calls us to be neither sentimental nor mean. It demands loving, gradual, stubborn advance toward enabling all men to realize their birthright as children of God. Even as we have already learned to speak affirmatively in the full freedom of the Gospel, so each of us in his own limited area must learn to act affirmatively to the full limit of the particular possibilities we face. Nobody can tell us exactly what we ought to attempt; but <u>each of us must be prepared to take the step just beyond the one that caution says is all we can do</u>.

Which leaves us still with a large measure of perplexity. But that was my point, for the first item in the listing of the things we don't know was, we don't know what to do. <u>The second</u> follows close upon it. <u>We don't know the nature of the personal demand that the Christian ethic lays upon us</u>. The previous puzzlement had to do with the what; this has to do with the why. Why should we respond to the claim of the Christian ethic? In order to be virtuous? In order to achieve personal perfection, or as close to it as we can come? Or maybe our concern is still with the what after all, though now in a different sense. What is the Christian moral imperative? Be righteous? Be moral? Conduct yourself so that, no matter the outcome of the cause in which you are engaged, you at least will emerge unspotted from the world?

Confronted with such direct questions we would probably reject their sanguine simplifications of man's moral predicament. We can't be virtuous, we would say; we can't achieve righteousness. All men are sinners, and we are the chief. That is the orthodox response to the overt challenge. Yet without such confrontation, and allowed to live out our normal days in the safety of our normal reflexes, we give unwitting, though continuous, evidence that the contrary is what we really believe. How many of you, for example, had a twinge of disappointment when it was suggested, a moment ago, that the Christian methodology is one of gradualism? How many of you caught the tone of apology with which I offered the suggestion? "That most inadequate term, 'gradualism.'" I said. What is actually inadequate about it? It fits all we know about the difficult task of making fruitful contact between the Christian ethic and the social situation. Yet many of us don't like it because it has, we think, the mark of expediency about it. And somehow, we have been trained by all the idealism imbibed from church and home and school, to believe that the man who is fully loyal to the Christian ethic is the one who mounts his great white charger and dashes off to glorious battle for the Lord. It doesn't matter if his strength is of ten, for, lo, his heart is pure.

Let me tell you a story. About twenty-five years ago at a Southern college that sought to govern itself by Christian principles, the student body became concerned over the subject of better race relations. This college was way ahead of the procession, and at that early date was allowing Negroes to eat in its dining hall as guests of the regular students and faculty. But the students, in their idealism, were not satisfied. They went to the president with a petition that Negroes be allowed the full freedom of the institution, and asked that it be presented to the trustees, so that by their proclamation the position of the col-

lege could be made forthright, for all the world to see. The president agreed to present the petition, but added, "If you ask my opinion about it, I think it is unwise." "Why?" they said; and so he explained in words something like these:

"We are still living in a stratified society here in the South. The trustees, I can assure you, won't pass any such petition as this at the present time. They can't do so, and still maintain any sort of connection with their constituency. If they are faced with the issue, they will have to vote against you; and then they'll be on record, and it will be at least a full generation before your desire can be considered again. You'll have a good fight ; you'll give yourselves a holy glow of righteousness; you'll take a stand -- but you'll lose. And what is more, far from advancing the cause, you will actually retard the whole problem of better race relations. For once the trustees are forced to go on record, you won't be able to do the things you now do. Leave them alone, and you can be sure they won't raise the question either. And thus you will be free to continue working on the problem as you are now doing, quietly, slowly, efficiently. What do you want to do? Have a fight, or help the cause?"

To the credit of that student body it should be added that they saw the point and dropped the petition. It should further be added that that college has continued through the years to be in the vanguard. Incidentally, it is no accident that this illustration should come to mind, for the college was the one on whose campus we are now meeting, and the president was my father. Quite simply, that is how I come to know the story. "Aha," one might say, "you've got gradualism in your blood"; and my only answer is to confess it gladly. And since this has turned into personal testimony, perhaps I'd better say that I am a gradualist simply because I am a bad loser. And I say, in the effort to bring the Christian witness to bear upon the ordeal of the South, we can't afford to lose.

But what I am and what I say don't make any difference. The point is, What does the Christian ethic ask of us? Remember the final comments in the story, for they give a clue, I believe, to the proper answering of our question. "What do you want to do?" the president asked the students. "Have a fight, or help the cause?" The alternative might have been phrased, Be virtuous, or be effective? Be righteous, or be faithful to the task? You and I don't like to have the dilemma posed in that fashion; we would prefer to believe that that kind of choice isn't required of us. All right, it isn't, ninety percent of the time. But what about that tragic ten percent? When that time comes we don't always know which option to exercise. Thus too many of us too easily take the answer, Be virtuous, in one of two possible and self-deceptive interpretations: either, I'll protect my virtue by staying away from the problem, or, I'll assert my virtue by self-righteous attack on the evils all around me. As long as either of these reactions is tempting to us we give evidence that we don't know the nature of the Christian demand upon our lives.

In pursuing the second half of our self-analysis, the part dealing with what we don't know, I have hinted at answers that are available to our quandaries and in the process suggested that we are loath to adopt them. First, we don't know what to do, and the available answer to the effect that we should follow the method of gradualism is not always the one we want to hear. Second, we don't know what should be our response to the Christian imperative, and the proferred suggestion that we be effective in the task rather than protective of our own virtue, is often distasteful to us. The third thing that we don't know grows logically

out of these first two, and of our reluctance to follow the little light we see. Here, however, we use the word, "know," in a different sense, for the third is, We don't "know" the requisite will. Thus far we have used the word to refer to cognitive understanding, but now we mean something more, namely, emotive possession. We simply don't have a sufficiently strong purpose, a determination, to get ahead with the job. This is my reluctant conclusion as to the third thing we don't "know."

In Time magazine's recent magnificent and deserved tribute to Martin Luther King, Jr., the writer inserted an editorial comment to the effect that "the influential white clergy ... could -- if it would -- help lead the South through a peaceful and orderly transitional period toward the integration that is inevitable." That little slur, "... could -- if it would --," made me mad. But before I could take my protesting pen in hand, I had a second thought. "What's wrong?" I said. "It's true." The fault is not that we can't do anything; the fault is that we won't. On the one hand we have suffused the subject of better race relations with sentimentality -- we have made sweet statements. On the other we have succumbed to caution and finally to fear. We don't know what to do, sometimes, and we don't know the freedom from righteous self-protection with which to do it. But we know more than enough to outweigh these uncertainties if we were willing. We know the facts of the present situation, or know where we can get them. We know the essence of the Christian ethic. We know that our defenses against its applicability are frail. And we know, in a measure, our guilt. But there may be the key: we don't know the depth of our guilt and our sin. For the depth of our guilt is that, knowing it, we are still satisfied to rest in it. We are willing to be unfaithful. We are unwilling to be faithful.

> We know the paths in which our feet should press,
> Across our hearts are written thy decrees,
> Yet now, O Lord, be merciful to bless
> With more than these.
>
> Grant us the will to fashion as we feel,
> Grant us the strength to labor as we know, ...
> Knowledge we ask not; knowledge thou hast lent;
> But,Lord, the will, there lies our bitter need; ...

There is a fourth and final item in our catalogue of what we don't know, and it can be briefly told. In the present distress that is upon us, and in our efforts, sometimes feeble, mayhap earnest, to seize upon the opportunities it presents, we have to admit that we don't know what the future holds. We don't need to know. All we need is to be faithful both to the Christian goal and to the Christian method.