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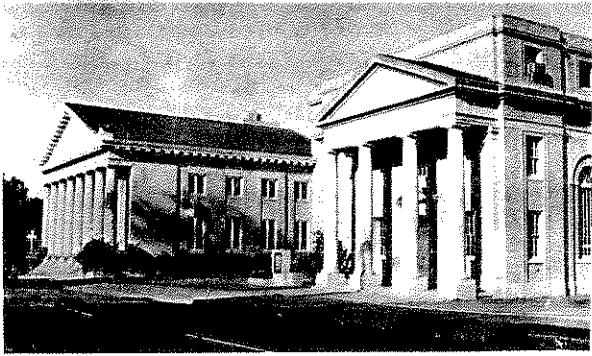
BROTHERHOOD

A SERMON BY

DR. W. B. SELAH, Minister

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Galloway Memorial Methodist Church

Jackson, Mississippi

BROTHERHOOD

Jesus said, "One is your Father and you are all brothers." According to Jesus, all men belong to the family of God and are therefore brothers. The doctrine of the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man is fundamental in Christ's teaching. We cannot be right with God until we are right with our brothers; and all men are our brothers.

Prayer is a method of tuning in with God. But Jesus makes it clear that we cannot reach God in prayer if we have wronged a brother. He said to the worshipers of his day, "If when you bring your gift to the altar, you remember that your brother has aught against you; go first and be reconciled with your brother and then come and offer your gift." Coleridge caught the spirit of Christian prayer when he said:

"He prayeth best who loveth best
All things both great and small;
For the dear God who loveth us,
He made and loveth all."

Jesus taught us when we pray to say "Our Father" — not my Father. Do I have a right to ask God to bless me or do something for me that I am not willing that He should do for every human being?

Jesus makes it clear that we will be judged not by our theological opinions but by the way we treat men, not by our creeds but by our deeds. Jesus identifies Himself with every man, and says, "Inasmuch as ye did it unto the least of these my brethren ye did it unto me." God is concerned with the way we treat His other children.

Now, in the light of this central teaching of Christianity that God cares how we treat other people, let us look for a moment at our race relationships.

For sixteen years I have preached from this pulpit the law of Christian love. This law means that we must seek for all men, black and white, the same justice, the same rights, and the same opportunities to find the abundant life that we seek for ourselves. Nothing less than this is Christian love. To discriminate against a man because of his color is contrary to the will of God. Forced segregation is wrong. We should treat men not on the basis of color but on the basis of conduct.

At a meeting of the Official Board of this church in June, 1961, the question was discussed about how to handle the Freedom Riders if they came to the church. During the discussion I made a statement and asked that it be made a matter of public record. Here is the essence of that statement.

Only in an atmosphere of goodwill can we hope to reach a peaceful solution of the race problem. I would say to the Freedom Riders that their coming here had not increased inter-racial goodwill or helped in the solution of the race problem. My advice to them would be to go home and let the Southern people, black and white, solve this problem by orderly and constitutional means.

Let me nail down this Christian principle — there can be no color bar in a Christian church. It is not sinful for white people to prefer to worship with white people or for colored peo-

ple to prefer to worship with colored people. The sin comes when a church seeks to erect a color bar before the Cross of Christ. As Christians, we cannot say to anyone, "You cannot come into the house of God." But we can raise the question — Do you come to demonstrate or to worship? There can be no color bar to keep sincere worshipers out.

Neither the General Conference, nor the Annual Conference, nor the Council of Bishops, nor the preacher, nor the Official Board of the local church can put up a color bar in the church. That matter is determined by the nature of Christianity. The house of God is a house of prayer for all people — black and white.

There is nothing in the regulations of the church to bar colored people from membership. When a person seeks membership, he is not asked about the color of his skin. He is asked about his faith in God as revealed in Christ, and he is asked to promise to support and to attend the church. Salvation is not by color but by faith.

Since, as a matter of Christian principle, colored people cannot be barred either from worshiping here or from membership, what would I do in the present tense situation if a colored person applied for membership? I would have to tell him that he would feel more comfortable with his own people and that it was his duty to join a Negro church and help it.

What should a white church do in a community that contains only a few Negro families, not enough to support a church of their own? The white people should invite the Negro people to come in with them.

Negroes are not apt to seek membership in

white churches. The Negro preachers in Jackson tell me that their people do not want to intermingle with the whites but that they do resent the color bars. As someone has said, "Take the dare out of it and ninety percent of the problem is solved." There can be no color bar in a Christian institution. Racial bigotry is a denial of Christian brotherhood.

Religious bigotry is a denial of brotherhood. I do not minimize the differences between Catholicism and Protestantism. I respect Roman Catholics and honor their right to hold and propagate their faith. But I could not be a Catholic. I do not believe that the Pope is infallible even when he speaks *ex cathedra* on matters of religion and morals. No man is infallible. No institution is infallible. Only God is infallible. I do not believe that public money should go to the support of Catholic schools or the schools of any denomination. I disagree with the Catholic interpretation of the sacrament of the Lord's supper. I dislike the Catholic attitude that it is the only true church, the only authorized agent of Christ on earth. I do not believe that the Catholic church or any church has a monopoly on truth. The truth of God — and all truth is of God — belongs to any man who finds and follows it. I believe in the separation of church and state and in religious liberty.

I do not minimize the difference between these churches. But I think that in a world where every spiritual interpretation of life is denied by the Communists and other materialists we would be wise to stress the things we have in common. After all, the things we hold in common are more

fundamental than the things that divide us. Let us look at some of the things we have in common.

We worship the same God. "One is your Father and ye are all brethren." "What doth the Lord require of thee but to do justly, to love mercy and walk humbly." "I perceive that God is no respecter of persons; but in every nation he that feareth Him, and worketh righteousness is acceptable with Him." These things are taught in all the churches.

Jesus Christ is Savior and Lord. He is "the Christ, the Son of the living God." In Him God has revealed His purpose and His love. Catholics and Protestants agree on that. Our Jewish friends revere Jesus as a great teacher and prophet but not as the Son of God.

Man is a child of God. "Now are we sons of God." The dignity and worth of human personality in the sight of God is a proposition held by Jews and Christians alike. Good religion stands before every social order with one pointed question — What are you doing to God's children?

The moral law, woven by the Eternal into the fabric of life long before it was given verbal expression, is recognized as the will of God by both Jews and Christians. "Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not commit adultery, etc. — Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. Do unto others as ye would that others do unto you." All these rules for living are expressions of that great moral order in which we live; and they are accepted as such by Jews and Catholics and Protestants.

Like the islands of the sea which display many surface differences but basically are united in the floor of the ocean, so the churches have

their surface differences but basically they are united in reverence for God and human personality and in acknowledgment of His moral law.

In 1787 the Constitutional Convention composed of representatives from the thirteen colonies met in Philadelphia to form "a more perfect union." At one time in the proceedings it seemed that, due to colonial jealousies, the convention would fail. At this point Benjamin Franklin reminded the delegates that the predatory powers of Europe stood ready and eager to seize them, colony by colony. "Gentlemen," he said, "we must hang together or we will hang separately." It was good advice and fortunately for us it was heeded.

Today the churches — Jewish, Catholic, Protestant — are engaged in a life and death struggle with Communism. We had better hang together or we will hang separately. If the Communists win, our churches will be turned into museums, our leaders liquidated, and our children will be educated as atheists. The philosophy of Communism and the philosophy of Christianity are forever opposed. Communism denies God; Christianity affirms Him. Communism says that man is a puppet of the state; Christianity says that he is a child of God. Communism claims that man's freedom and rights come from the state. The state gives and the state can take away. Christianity claims that "all men are endowed" — not by the state but — "by their Creator with certain inalienable rights among which are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." The state does not confer these rights; neither can it take them away.

The methods used by the Communists to further their cause are diametrically opposed to the

methods Christians may employ. (By their methods ye shall know them.) Falsehood and fraud, violence and intimidation — these are the methods of Communism. Reason and persuasion, goodwill and truth — these are the only methods Christians may use. Because Communism and Christianity are incompatible in philosophy and in method of operation, every great church has publicly declared itself opposed to Communism.

Now, in view of the Communist threat, the churches — Jewish, Catholic, Protestant — would better hang together or they will hang separately. We cannot afford the luxury of unholy contention and bigotry. Bigotry weakens a nation by dividing it into contentious groups. It sets sect against sect and thus plays into the hands of the men in the Kremlin. They certainly will rejoice if Catholics and Protestants and Jews are at each others' throats.

Brotherhood strengthens a nation. It teaches a man to say to his neighbor who belongs to a different church — I don't agree with your theology but I will defend your right to hold it. I find your form of worship uncongenial but I will defend your right to worship God as you see fit. We serve the same God. We pray for the coming of the reign of righteousness on earth. We hold to the same moral standards. So let us have done with pettiness and bickering. Let us stand shoulder to shoulder against the forces of paganism and bigotry, and work together to make America strong, remembering that strife among us causes the Communists to rejoice while cooperation among us fills them with dismay.

But do I hear you say that you are out to

beat the Catholics? But how will you do it? You cannot do it by the methods of bigotry, slander, vilification, hate, persecution. In 1924 I lived in Clinton, Missouri. Out of the darkness came the Ku Klux Klan, claiming to be 100% American. "They trusted in themselves that they were righteous and despised others" who sought to live in love and charity with all their neighbors. They gathered in pastures at night and sang hymns around a fiery cross. The saddest spectacle under the stars is a group of men singing Christian songs around a cross while they engender hatred. One day I met the Catholic priest and said to him, "Father, the Klan is going to put you out of business." He grinned at me and replied, "Don't worry about me. Before the Klan came I had difficulty getting my people to church and getting them to support the program. Now they all come and the treasury is full." The Klan's bigotry did not stop those Catholics; it only caused them to rally to the support of their church.

Do you want to see Protestantism triumphant? The only decent and effective way to do it is to make Protestantism strong; to give the world a better interpretation of the meaning of religion; to display a finer form of loyalty and reverence; to do more for the widow and the orphan; to live a more Christlike life; to be more brotherly. In the long run bigotry fails; love wins.

But, someone says, Catholics are narrow and bigoted. But it is not fair to say that all Catholics are narrow. Officially, I suppose, the Catholic church does not recognize our churches as churches, and that attitude smacks of bigotry. But it will do no good to fight bigotry with bigotry.

We have been told that we must fight fire with fire, bigotry with bigotry. Must we? When we fight fire with fire the only result is a bigger conflagration. When we meet bigotry with bigotry the result is the crucifixion of Christian love and a weakening of the nation. One thing is certain — bigotry does not pay. It curdles the milk of human kindness. It destroys the goodwill without which a good community spirit is impossible. It blinds men to the glory of God and the beauty of brotherhood. It robs the bigot himself of peace; for prejudice and the peace of God cannot dwell together in the same heart. And what is more, in the present struggle for the survival of spiritual values, it plays into the hands of the dictators.

Bigotry is a threat to freedom. We teach our children to repeat the pledge of allegiance. "I pledge allegiance to the flag — with liberty and justice for all." "For all" — that means for black and white, Jew and Gentile, for those who agree with us and those who do not. Only as we grant freedom to those who disagree with us can we hope to preserve our own freedom. When we seek by harassment or intimidation to silence our opponents we imperil our own liberty. Moreover, men who have faith in their own views are not afraid of opposition. They know that when truth and falsehood are given a fair field, truth will finally prevail because God is with it.

"Truth crushed to earth will rise again,
The eternal years of God are hers;
But error, wounded, writhes in pain
And dies among her worshipers."

Even the bigot must be allowed to speak his mind. He may win a temporary following but sooner or later men will turn away from him in disgust and disillusionment. For most men want the truth and they will not be content forever with falsehood. They know that only the truth can make them free.

Recently some bigots bombed a Jewish synagogue. Do we not realize that when that Jewish church was blasted your church and mine were threatened? For the blind hate that strikes one church would destroy every organization dedicated to justice and brotherhood.

A mob lynched a man. It does not matter whether he was black or white. That mob did more than kill a man; it struck at the foundation of law and order. It struck at every man's liberty; for there can be no liberty apart from obedience to law. As Thomas Jefferson said, "Obedience to law is liberty." That mob was the incarnation of bigotry.

Bigotry weakens our nation by dividing it into hostile groups. It sets race against race, church against church, section against section. This makes it easier for the Communists to do their diabolical work.

Brotherhood strengthens our nation. It creates an atmosphere in which men who differ in color and creed can work together to make America great.

"America! America! God shed His grace
on thee,
And crown thy good with brotherhood
From sea to shining sea."