

## RELIGION IN THE SOUTH (USA)

Accuracy is better served if what follows here is by definition recognized to be a description of one's impressions and images - or imaginations of "religion in the South."

In this context, "the South" is a descriptive term. It may represent a "state of mind," in addition to referring to a combination of states geographically situated in the southern and near southwestern region of the United States of America. That historic tragedy of civil war in the life of this country (1861 - 1865), still referred to by many as "The War Between the States," and by a diminishing remnant as "the War of Southern Independence," has provided for our purpose in this particular reflection, the unofficial and unmarked boundaries of what is referred to herein as "the South."

In reality, it is difficult, if not impossible today, to determine a universally acceptable set of boundaries of "the South." One of the unwritten agreements reached at the Appomatox Courthouse, in the Commonwealth of Virginia on April 9, 1865, was to leave the task of surveying such boundaries forever unfinished - and hopefully, to erase from maps, and eventually from memories, such lines as had been drawn.

For our purpose here, the reflections regarding religion will be drawn from an area bounded by the Mason-Dixon line on the north, the Atlantic coast on the east, the Gulf of Mexico on the south, and a line of uncertainty and vagueness, running somewhere in Texas on the west, and curving off through a portion of Arkansas and Missouri, along the Ohio River, above Kentucky, in a gesture toward intersecting the Mason-Dixon line. Such is the vague precision or precise vagueness wherein "the South" has always been placed.

To proceed with a consideration of the phenomena of religion in "the South," a workable definition and determination of "religion" should be available. Herein the word "relation" will serve as a definition, even synonym, of the word "religion."

Accordingly, religion can be understood in terms of the relationship between a people and their God or gods, and the resulting relations among those people with one another and with other human beings.

The Judeo-Christian tradition expresses this precept clearly in the commonly shared "summary of the Law": "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God, with all thy heart, with all thy soul, with all thy mind, with all thy strength and thy neighbor as thyself." (Matt. 22:37-39)

A study of "religion" in the south might be limited to a review and evaluation of the Judeo-Christian traditions in this area. Certainly the effects of Torah and the Gospel plus the distortions

and/or departures from the Law and the Gospel provide abundant phenomena and issues for such studies. However, a broader scope is needed to examine the full range of the phenomena, forces and influences of religion in the South.

To illustrate this claim, there are to be found both devotees and critics alike of that which is referred to as "the Southern way of life." Without using the word religion, they describe and demonstrate "the Southern way of life" to be "a religion." To some it is "the religion" of the South.

This "way of life, southern style" describes God in various terms, many drawn from the Holy Bible. Relations with God are also varied.

Throughout the history of the South, there have been the "deist type," who believe God created the South to be a very special place in the world. God, just patriarch and gentlemen that He is, then went off to his own place - called heaven - leaving to those called "southerners" the responsibility of developing a society of proper relations and good living.

There are human beings who believe they have been chosen and called to be "southerners," that there must be a proper place for everyone, and that proper relations are maintained when everyone is in their proper place.

Some will think this description archaic and/or romantic and/or absurd. It may be all three. Religious descriptions often so appear and so sound, while still representing reality.

The fact to be noted here is that religion, in the South and everywhere, is more varied and inclusive than the more obvious religious or church signs and symbols indicate. The "religion of the South," for example, has ancient and modern patriarchs and prophets, temples and arenas, varieties of rites and ceremonies, fetes and celebrations, codes and customs, as characterize any given religion.

For example, one may observe the gathering of great crowds on the Sabbath day - to celebrate the tribal deliverance from defeat, conquest and subjection. See the order and array of priests in brightly colored vesture and head dress. See the chanting choruses led by the dancers and singers "going before." Hear the trumpets and brass instruments, the clashing cymbals.

See each petitioner place their offering in the box when entering the gates of the great congregation.

Hear the devotions of the multitudes, the shouts of praise.

All have come, the faithful and hopeful, over long distances and through difficulties, even bad weather.

Each week in this religious season they gather, huge congregations in such places of devotion all over the South.

These sabbath celebrations are called football games.



The phenomena here described and designated as "the religion of the South" might be compared poetically to a hybrid perennial, upon which both hardy and delicate branches have been grafted. It was rooted originally in a rich soil within a climate considered to be favorable. That climate has since been discovered to be subject to violent storms.

Like a great vine, drawing life from the earth, the South's religion has required structures for support. The branches and tendrils of that vine entwine and relate all of those structures and other branches, too, not directly a part of the vine. Storms have torn and broken the vines of southern religion and some structures over and around which the vine has grown have been separated and toppled.

Yet people continue living in this vine of religion in and of the South, striving to relate and be related more abundantly to life. After each storm or devastating flood, efforts to reassemble, rebuild and relate the life support structures and systems have begun again.

Before considering further the nature and development of religion and related structures in the South, it should be of value to recall from whence, how and why religion came to the South.

If some personal testimony is permissible, my experience of religion in the South began April 22, 1921. On that date, I was

born in the small Arkansas town of Helena, located by the Mississippi River about sixty-five miles south of Memphis. Helena had become a town in 1820.

On January 15, 1922, my parents had me baptised in St. John's Episcopal Church. The congregation of St. John's was first organized in 1853.

The pastor who baptised me had come to St. John's from Connecticut. The place of my first pastor's origin has been a personal reminder to me that religion (Christian as well as others) in the South did not spring full blown from southern soil.

Living by the Mississippi, one becomes aware not only of the rich soil deposits brought from far distant places by such a river, but also of the stream of human resources - economic, artistic, cultural and religious, - many of the earliest of which were also borne by the river from distant places.

Southern provincialism, except perchance in a few extremely remote coves or swamps, has always been only a state of mind, an unfounded prejudice, a contrived condition. Both professional and amateur observers of Southern history agree, though some with reluctance, that religion and civilization and sin and slavery were all imported into the South.

Slavery, being in every sense an ill fated evil, never became a southern export.

Contributions in religion and to civilization, however, have been exported. And like high water marks on sharecropper cabins, there are tell tale signs across the whole region which bear witness to the rise and fall of more sin than the South in all her states, ages or conditions, could contain. As one aged southerner said to me a long time ago: "When the boll weevil gets loose, folks get religion; but when the cotton is high, the sinning is high."

Helena, Arkansas, a river town of about 8,000 in the 1920's, had a flourishing cotton market and ten churches and one Jewish synagogue in a central area, four blocks wide and eight blocks long. Additional churches were on the fringes of the town, and during this period a temporary tabernacle with greater seating capacity than any one church in town was erected for the traveling evangelist "Gypsy Smith."

Considering geographical location and historical development, Helena, Arkansas, can be fairly classified as a "typical southern" town, with a population never exceeding 12,000. During the first hundred years of Helena's history, in addition to the Jewish congregation, organized in 1876, the African Methodist Episcopal, the Assembly of God, the Baptists of the Southern Convention, the Baptists of several associations of Black people, the Land Mark or Independent Missionary Baptists, the Primitive Baptists, the Church of Christ, the Church of Christ of Latter Day Saints (Mormon),

the Church of Christ Scientists, the Church of God, the Church of God in Christ, the Christian Methodist Episcopal, the Disciples of Christ, the Episcopal, the Methodist and the Methodist, South, the Nazarene, the Roman Catholic, the Seventh Day Adventist and the Southern Presbyterian Churches all founded congregations.

Admittedly impressive is the number of religious congregations in a typical southern city or town. Even more significant, however, is the number of people in any typical southern town who are not members of any religious congregation. The relating process of formally organized religion is obviously incomplete. Ironically, the congregating process often has been more of a "separating from" than a "gathering together."

As in the rest of the world, the missionary process of religion has not been equal to the relationship needs in the South.

A false interpretation is given to those described conditions, however, if the assumption is that the creative relating Spirit has abandoned human beings. Neither is it correct to assume that there is no vision of or longing for or responsibility to relations of justice and peace by all sorts and conditions of people. Equally incorrect is the assumption that the missionary motivation to relate life to more abundant life has ceased or never existed.

The record of religion in the South is the accounting of that movement of the flowing and intermingling of efforts to relate to



the source of life and the sharers of life, securing in every perceivable way the means of life against the forces of destruction. The record contains accounts of confused and distorted visions, of false pretenses and fraudulent claims, of failures and shortcomings, of human inadequacy and sins. Moreover, such records of human inadequacy, separations and loneliness provide even greater emphasis to the purpose and need for righteous relations (i.e., wholesome religion).

The lack or absence of righteous relations has moved more human beings to seek new lands of promise, new life opportunities, new relations than has the desire for silver and gold. Material possessions of great riches can overcome and possess the possessors in due course. Yet that course normally begins with a desire and search for a better life. So many came to the South. So many went from the South to Chicago and Detroit. Such a search is more of a religious pilgrimage than normal definitions allow. Such pilgrimages populated this country and began the cultivation and developments of religion in the South.

When those first official representative of the established religions of Europe, the Franciscan Friars of Roman Catholic Spain, who left names like St. Augustine, San Juan, the Virgin Islands, - the Jesuits, LaSalle, Marquette, Tonti, who came down the Mississippi for Roman Catholic France, the Rev. Robert Hunt for the Church of England to the Jamestown Settlement, all found people in tribes

throughout the "new Indies", the Floridas and the upper reaches of the great rivers. Though the signs, symbols, forms and functions of religion in the South today reflect European and Near-East traditions after the advent of so-called "Western civilization," it must not be assumed that God was absent from the South before that coming.

The history and religion of the native American Indian, aborigines or earliest wanderers/settlers have been so over run and scattered that recognition, understanding and appreciation by succeeding generations have been extremely limited. Additional limitations may have resulted from a sub-conscious desire in later generations to forget or ignore those of earlier age and culture who had been driven from their lands. The increased concern and pressure for human and civil rights in the sixth and seventh decades of this century have recalled attention to the Seminole people in Florida, the Cherokee in Carolina and Tennessee, the Choctaw in Mississippi and the departure trails of sorrow marked by other tribes across the South.

It is not difficult to understand how the earliest explorers and settlers, who brought their chaplains and Bibles with them, and for whom survival became a pre-occupying priority, might have assumed the only real religion in this southland was brought here by them. Slowly has understanding been developing in the present age of the native American Indian's awareness, appreciation, awe, fear, reverence

and sense of relationship to the glory and power wherein God is identified.

Early on some efforts began to incorporate the native American into the imported religion which has been rooted in the South. On the other hand, only a few small leaves and branches, as it were, of the earliest known religion in the South, relating the Native American to earth and stream and sky and within tribes have, within very limited circumstances and conditions, been grafted into the vines of southern religion.

Even while considering the failures of the early European explorers and settlers to develop more extensive and peaceful relations with the aborigines in this country, the motivation which brought streams of human beings into the South can be described as religious mission. There are religious implications and missionary motivation generated by the basic human need which sends human beings in quest of a situation and condition wherein greater life resources become and continue to be available, conflicts and threats to safety are minimized, and there is relative order and harmony. The motivation is more readily recognized as missionary and religious when generated by the Christian Faith.

Like streams of water, though the source be pure, as the water becomes defused and diverted it becomes subject to impurities. Although the early explorers and settlers came from and often represented nations with "established Christian churches," their



primary purpose was to secure life means rather than to share means of life. The sad truth is such predicaments continue in the world, the nation and the South today.

Nevertheless, in spite of the impurities, the diversions and dilutions, the religious missionary streams have flowed and ebbed and flowed again, falling and rising like seasonal floods unto this day. It is well to remember the earliest missionaries were included and shared dangerous expeditions to this country for two causes. In that age of exploration and settlement in this country, nations with national "established" churches - such as Spain, France and England, included church officials in their enterprises - imperialistic or commercial as the enterprises might have been.

This cause has been greatly tempered by the second, of which there is much evidence: brightly burning faith has motivated and motivates souls in every generation to carry their convictions concerning the sharing of life unto "the uttermost." The impress and influence of religious faith from the earliest colonial period are evident throughout the South today. The faith that the way of and to life has been revealed in prophets, in Torah and in the Christ has continued to flow forth again and again, like rain filled creeks or freshly discovered springs.

The South has experience of droughts, both on the land and of the spirit. Yet there has never been a time when someone couldn't be found who remembered the effects of spring rain, believed more



to be coming, and hoped and prayed the Lord wouldn't allow the whole system to get out of hand.

The various religious traditions flowed westward, like living streams, becoming increasingly diversified. Colonial churches of the establishments tended to follow established courses. Those called "the free churches" sought new channels. Along such courses, congregations in southern towns, like Helena, were formed and fed.

Through the Cumberland Gap, along the river routes, on foot, on horse back, in wagon and stage, flatboats, packets and in time, by rail, religion came into the South.

Bibles in saddle bags, belonging to preachers of the Good News of hope and salvation and/or the dire threat of hell fire and damnation, were readily brought forth under brush arbor or in borrowed hall, courthouse or school house. In crude and rustic locations, in new settlements, in growing villages and developing towns and evolving cities, the language of the Holy Scriptures, of the religion and faith and cultures of preceding generations have generated religion and faith and visions of "the beauty of holiness" amid people seeking hope, reassurance and, at times, entertainment. So it has been in the South and so it continues.

In the history of the South, the decade 1850 - 1860 marks an ante-bellum period which has been extensively romanticized and criticized. Rather than "extensively," perhaps the more precise word is: "excessively."

Images of "the ole south" which emerged from that period reflect the high hopes for an idyllic, if not ideal, society which an aspiring aristocracy were endeavoring to realize and impose in the South. The plan and pattern which had become predominant for the coveted "golden age" anticipated in that era were in terms of social structures and strata. The instruments and tools for constructing the society were political. The power sources were economic. The comprehensive dynamics and definition of that era are (in terms) religious.

The "glory that was Greece" is reflected to many people the first time they gaze upon the Parthenon situated high and lifted up on the Acropolis above Athens. Imaginations are stimulated more when one sees drawings or paintings of this great temple in its completed form. Education in the ante-bellum South included an appreciation for the Greek spirit. Accordingly to include the form of a Greek temple in a parable of religion in and of the South should be reasonably appropriate.

Envision, please, the Parthenon in finished form. The great copy erected in Nashville, Tennessee, for the World Exposition in 1896, celebrating the Centennial of Tennessee's admission as a state, while lacking an inspiring elevation might help spark the imagination.

Now add to your vision a vine from deep roots in the earth, growing upon the columns and over the roof of the temple, and

appearing to entwine and relate all four sides and the columns thereof. So the religion of the South inter-related and gathered the major components of life into a social structure.

The columns on each side of this imaginary temple of religion represent for us the pillars of religion on the front, economics on the one side, the pillars of politics on the other side and the pillars of recreation on the fourth side.

The vine growing upon and entwining this structure represents the living traditions of religions, a hybrid of many contrasting branches. Thus is life institutionalized.

Lest you have difficulty in relating a vine covered Grecian temple to the religion of the South, especially when it comes to including politics, economics and recreation, please be reminded of the number of court and government houses and the number of banks and schools and the number of churches (across the South) which feature facades of Greek columns.

The religion of and in the South never has been just an aggregation of Christian or Jewish congregations. The religion of the South, embraces more than Judeo-Christian tradition and faith.

During the ante-bellum period of the 1850's, the composite religion of the South paradoxically related the people to life, to land, to one another and to God in four separated categories. The aristocratic class of land owners, the emerging mercantile and managerial class, the poor-whites on the fringes of society, and



the slave population, all were both inter-dependent and separated economically, socially and in their practice of religion. With religious fervor the aristocratic and mercantile classes regulated the system politically. The abundance of rich land and natural resources with developing river and rail transportation, gave support to an ordered way of life wherein ideally those by birth and good fortune blessed with intelligence and wealth were to make place and provision for the less fortunate and lowly classes. The "enlightened" were thought to be responsible for those from the dark places. System and order, being recognizable both in creation and the Bible, were recognized as part of the Divine plan. The environment was religious.

In these as in other ages, the threat of plague, pestilence, and famine, lightening and tempest, battle and murder, fire and flood and sudden death kept active the religious hope of heaven. Both by Biblical definition and personal experience there was widespread awareness of sin.

There were also many definitions of "the good life." Moreover, many believed full well the meaning of the scriptural text: "to those who have shall be given, and from those who have not shall be taken away." (Mark 4:25)

That Biblical text is more easily remembered than the words "to whom much is given, of them much shall also be required." (Luke 12:48)



A human refrain oft heard in the South is the phrase: "not just now." Unconsciously for many the order of these words have been: "just not now." The meaning for many more, accordingly becomes: "not now justice."

The process of acquiring and possessing great wealth can separate rhetoric from reality and cause negligence and distortion and destruction of relations and the related. Religion becomes superficial as relations become superficial.

Comprehensive relations - i.e., religion - pure and undefiled, may never be achieved in this life. Like those who have received great wealth of possessions, so of those who claim much zeal in religion and great ideals, much is also required. "Mene, mene, Tekel Upharsin" (Dan. 5:25). The judgment upon Belshazzar interpreted by the prophet Daniel, has appeared often upon the walls of our society. "Weighted in the balance and found wanting. . . .!"

The tragedies and failures of any region, nation or society are compounded when later generations fail to recognize the nature and cause of the tragedy and fail to learn a better way towards justice and peace.

As in the parable of the house built upon sand, so our metaphorical religious temple of the South, built on the edge of a river sand cotton field economy with a political system subject to

the distractions of a leisured class and a religious zeal enflamed with pride, fell victim to the storms of war. With the overwhelming rage of a Gulf Coast hurricane, the Civil War devastated the South. The branches of the vine of religion being supported by the temple, were broken and pulled apart. The pillars of religion, of economics, of politics, and recreation which lined the temple were toppled and scattered.

Slavery was a cause, but not the only cause of the war between the states. Independence, self-determination, states-rights, limitation of governmental power were all factors in the complex cause of war. A whirling diversity of convictions around such relationship issues caused the war between the southern Confederacy of States and the northern United States. It was a religious war. God was claimed as an ally by both sides. "The Battle Hymn of the Republic" continues from those days a stirring hymn in many churches. Revival meetings for evangelistic preaching greatly increased during the war period. Religious piety and patriotism took root and grew together in this land.

Many who have viewed the monuments and read the markers up and down the Shenandoah Valley have been led to a biography of General Stonewall Jackson. His strong and solemn religious faith is reflected in shared memories of that Presbyterian General. Remembered as one who often paused for prayer in the field, a moving expression of faith and concern echoes in his last words as he lay mortally

wounded: "Let us cross over the river and rest under the trees."

In those days of separation, churches Methodist, Presbyterian, Baptist, Episcopal, all severed organizational relations. The Episcopal Church of the Confederacy and the Episcopal Church of the United States were reunited in the Church's General Convention of 1865, when the names of the southern Bishops were called for on the attendance roll of the opening meeting.

The Methodist Church was reunited in 1938.

The Presbyterian Church U. S. and the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America are presently engaged in approaches to unity.

By policy the Baptist churches continue in many regional associations.

The post war period beginning in 1865 in the South, became identified as "the Reconstruction." "Rearrangement" is offered here as a more accurate word. The immediate effects of the Civil War were as destructive and drastic as the effects of a full blown hurricane. Goods and evils alike were temporarily submerged; some of both destroyed; all rearranged.

The religion of the South, as previously described, was left in great disarray by the destructive war. The temple of proper relations - as the society of the South might have been envisioned - was destroyed, as indeed many church buildings in the South had been left in ruins. Politics was rearranged. The economy was

depleted. There was need throughout the South for the recreation of an exhausted population. The religion of the South and in the South was to enter a period of rearranging relations which would continue for more than a hundred years.

During this period of rearrangement and slow recovery, the people of the South experienced, with the rest of the nation, two World Wars and three area wars (Spanish-American, Korean and the Vietnam). There has been a major economic depression, minor recessions and periods of recovery, sometimes falsely stimulated by war-time economics. During this period many people have departed from the South to the North, the East and the West. Other people have migrated to the South. In recent years, there are increasing numbers of those who had previously left who have returned. This ebb and flow has contributed to the rearrangement.

As the South in this period began somewhat slowly the transition from an agricultural economy dependent upon single crops such as cotton, tobacco, and peanuts and prepared for a balance with industry, so the churches of the South have begun slowly through the years to share in the ecumenical movement and seek ways for closer cooperation and approaches that might lead to union. Real progress in ecumenical development among some main-line churches in the South, has only occurred during the last 24 to 30 years.

The churches of the various traditions and some new varieties have increased. The evangelistic churches increased more rapidly



than the more liturgical churches. The congregations of Black people rapidly gained in number and prominence.

Every tradition seemed satisfied to gather "like minded" people into their congregations, or people of similar ethnic or cultural backgrounds. Most churches believed the Kingdom of God would arrive when all worthy people became members of their particular church. There has been more competition than cooperation. The irony is that in place of the one mission to bring all people into relation with the one God and establish righteous relations among all mankind, the more ecclesiastical congregating that has occurred, the more sectarian separations have resulted.

Whereas once the religion of the South may have been described as "proper relations in a golden age" the religion of the South had now come to be "Everyone get to heaven the best way you can." There are also choruses of "Everybody talking 'bout heaven ain't going there."

Then in 1954 the Supreme Court of the United States rendered a decision in the case of Brown vs. Board of Education. The decision said that "separate but equal facilities" as a doctrine or practice in the United States of America was not in accord with the Constitution of the United States of America. Ironically that doctrine was not in conflict with the doctrine of churches in the South.

The court decision called for, caused and stimulated rearrangements in the South. It also caused a great deal of resistance. Nevertheless, it meant different arrangements - in courthouses, schools, churches, rest rooms, bus stations and at water fountains.

There were those who believed in 1960 that history was being repeated. The rearrangements of 1960, they thought, must surely be as drastic as those of 1860.

In fact the effects of events in the 1860's were coming to fruition in the 1960's. The rearrangement process had yet to be completed. Processes of new arrangements of relations can be initiated by law. Bringing such processes of rearranged relations to fruition, however, requires more than law.

The vine of religion in the South which for a time prior to 1865 seemed to have gathered much of organized religion into a civil religion after being scattered, had become rooted in many different ways. The primitive roots of Black people's religion to which had been grafted various branches of Christian and other religious traditions, or vice versa, had become increasingly productive in the South, during this rearranging period. Some predominantly white churches had always had some congregations of Blacks. Major Black denominations like the African Methodist Episcopal Church, the Christian Methodist Episcopal, the National

Baptist Association, meanwhile, grew more rapidly throughout the South, becoming increasingly centers combining again political, recreational and social life within the religion of the Black constituencies.

During this period of rearrangements of more than a hundred years, new and different relations had been recognized as needed and been stimulated. As within all relations between and among human beings, there was potential for good and for evil.

"Sharecropping" for example, a post Civil War development with reasonable potential for good, proved to be too easily subject to abuse. Usury is a plague which has flourished and does flourish in the South.

The developing educational system presents another example. While the "separate but equal" doctrine was being maintained during this "century of rearrangements," there was growing recognition between the Black and white systems, growing relations between public and private schools and provisions to compensate for some of the separations. To illustrate this, for thirty or more years before 1960, the State of Mississippi provided total scholarship costs for Black college students who had satisfied undergraduate requirements, to acquire graduate degrees in major universities outside of the South. The University of Indiana graduated many such students for the State of Mississippi.

No such provision was made for white students who had access to



graduate schools within the State of Mississippi.

Wars and depressions force people to consider new life-sharing relations. Different races and religions and peoples of different cultural and economic backgrounds all had their relations rearranged in the military services during five wars. Courage and compassion and empathy and sympathy and appreciation and gratitude are religious or relating qualities which many experienced genuinely for the first time in an hostile environment.

People sharing poverty often develop recognition and natural relations which affluency cannot provide. This is not to say the poor are always more religious. They simply have more uncomplicated opportunities to be.

Ironies persisted in the South during the developing days of 1950-1960. For example, southern governors, while insisting militantly they were dedicated to maintaining the status quo of "separate but equal," at the same time campaigned with even greater vigor, claiming success in bringing new industries, and - thereby - new jobs into southern states. Both Blacks and whites where needed for work forces and employment pools. Both become subjects of common government regulations and union membership. People found themselves in new employment and new economic relations. Old obstacles to better relations remained, old resistance sources continued, but new relation potential emerged. Economics were bringing races into new relations.

There are religious dynamics within this process. Most southern governors keep up their church attendance.

The irony has long been apparent to casual observers of the more formally defined expressions of religion in the South, that from the same pulpits sermons were often preached calling for the extension of Gospel relations into the "uttermost parts" of the earth, while at the same time attempting to justify the separated conditions and lack of relations within the local community.

Let it be noted, however, that any observation or consideration of religion in the South is short-sighted or distorted which fails to recognize throughout southern history those who endeavored to develop, maintain and extend just and peaceful relations. Many recognized the evil of slavery in the 1860's and worked to abolish the evil. Many southerners sought to remove the barriers of prejudice and fear which divided and separated the South in the 1960's, and did so with courage and humility.

Some clergy leadership and leading lay leaders within southern congregations, becoming aware in the 1950's and '60's, of increasing tensions, of re-enforcing prejudices and organizational expressions of paranoia, became increasingly aware of the needs to open lines of communication between Black leadership and white leadership and between civic leaders and business leaders. They were faced in the process with the realization that communication and cooperation

within and among the religious community were superficial, ineffective and in places non-existent. Many clergy alliances and associations in the early 1960's did not extend beyond color lines.

Local leaders of congregations belonging to national or international communions often had more leeway and support in efforts to develop relations ecumenical, civil or racial, than members of independent churches with congregational polity. Clergy in the South, or anywhere for this matter, whose tenure is limited by the fifty-one percent vote of their congregation feel those limitations more acutely in times when issues either divide or solidify the congregation.

Clergy, civic and business leaders alike have often been pressed hard from opposite sides during the prelude period to this present age. Many a church member, familiar with southern history, in recent years has been empathetic with spiritual forebears of the 1860's who credited the concerns expressed by their northern and eastern cousins, friends and critics, discounted their idealistic rhetoric and resented their intrusions and interference. Many a conference has been assembled, resolution passed, and instructed messenger dispatched to lead or organize a demonstration which would be more aggravating and exaggerating than transforming and reforming.

Perhaps judgement day must finally come before it can be known whether or not religion in the South contained the spirit and



capability of freeing the South (country) of slavery and enabling an emerging age of civil rights and responsibilities within a span of two hundred years. If all available evidence is analyzed, there should be little surprise to find both the agents of religion within the South and the agents from without were all alike far short of what was needed. The Holy Scripture: "When ye have done all, say I am an unprofitable servant," (Luke 17:10) is fulfilled with regularity.

There is also evidence in the study of southern history of two deficiencies within organized religion in the South which seem to be the norm for organized religion everywhere. Logistics and strategies for mission are sadly lacking. It is well to inquire as to whether this results from definitions and perspectives of religion being too limited, too narrow.

Church people, at least when they begin to confer and congregate, do often give the impression of talking much better than acting. In the face of many claims to the contrary, we church people continue to have difficulty in being open channels for the translation and transmission of the Word and Spirit into effective sacraments (i.e., "outward and visible signs and instruments of inward and spiritual graces.") of new and reconciled relations.

In the middle of the heat and distress, the conflicts and confusions of the 1960's, a bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of

Mississippi was seated next to a bishop of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Mississippi in a meeting of clergy and lay leaders concerned and distressed with the plight of civil rights in the South, the divisions among the peoples and the lack of reasonable communication. An address concerning the churches "making a statement" or "taking a stand" or some other bold action was being given to the group. Suddenly the Roman bishop turned to his Episcopal colleague with this quietly spoken aside: "You know, the problems plaguing us will not be solved by wordy resolutions. The solution is economic."

The bishop understood and understands both the sacramental system and people. His statement is correct. Marches and demonstrations, speeches and resolutions draw attention to problems of need, deprivation and oppression. Effective economic management produces results.

Human beings are sacramental creatures, outward visible physical bodies of otherwise invisible lives. Life in this world is shared sacramentally. We are related in life by what we are and have as well as by who we are. Being sheltered and fed, we are gathered within the relations of households: Economics - the law of the household; the laws of producing and sharing.

Up to what does this add? What is the bottom line?

The general, yet specific region on the southeastern portion of the North American continent identified as "the South" is a place

that has been endowed with resources and climate capable of supporting an abundance of life. Life and resources have been abused and improved in this region.

The region contains beauty and charm and has proven capacity to produce talented human beings. The talents of many who have lived through difficult and distressing times in the South have been developed and tempered and honed. Throughout the history of the South, there has been evidence to support the religious "doctrine of the remnant." There have always been some human beings present who are dedicated to serving in the sharing of life. There have always been some human beings present and believing life can be improved. There have always been some human beings present and believing there is a creative just and merciful God to whom they are meant to be related and with whom and for whom they are to relate to others.

After reviewing and evaluating the history of the South, to face the future the question becomes: Does the South have a future? Or what does the future hold for the South?

The answer offered here may be more an expression of hope than an answer. It is offered nonetheless. It is this. The South has a future so long as the faithful remnant continue, namely those who offer themselves in the service of righteous relations.

There may well be reason to question whether the South can stand prosperity. The dream of the "golden age" led to disaster. Projections of so-called "sun belt" developments could forebode



increased competition and divisions, waste and obsolescence.

There are many in the South who join many others around the world in questions regarding the future. Will there be an enlightened age of just and peaceful relations or a descent into darkness?

Such questions of hopes and fears and faith and courage and relations sooner or later lead to God by name or to the need for God if God be not defined. Such questions are in terms of relationship religious!

Should the search for the answer to such questions turn one to the South, surely if the answer is to be found in the history and experience of the South, it must be the opposite of the concept of slavery: the voluntary offering of service which benefits humanity.

The vocation of the Church is to the ministry of serving others - the one relating to others through service.

If the South has a future it will be because it is a place where the service of a sufficient and increasing remnant is voluntarily offered for the benefit of all.

The future of religion in and of the South is also dependent upon that remnant.