

to make the natural world conform to the needs of human character. Man must work out his destiny both as a *child of nature* and as a *servant of the absolute*.”

Years after the Palm Sunday march to Jerusalem a devoted disciple of Jesus, the Elder John, sought to nourish his spirit upon the memory of his experience of comradeship with the Master and broke forth in a proclamation. “This is the victory that over-cometh the world, even our faith” (1 John 5:4). When we today behold Jesus who is both a child of nature and a servant of the absolute we find ourselves certain of where to look for victory.

In Henry David Thoreau’s *A Rhapsody on Sound*, we hear him say as he reflects upon the *drum beats* from an insignificant drummer in the night: “The simple sounds related us to the stars. Aye, there was a logic in them so convincing that the combined sense of mankind could never make me doubt their conclusions.” Men take different strides in life. They set their marching according to the distant drum beats they hear. It seems to me that as Jesus rode on that memorable Palm Sunday He set his soul to the beat of a drummer in the sky.

“In the beauty of the lilies Christ was born across the sea with a glory in his bosom that transfigured you and me. As He died to make man holy, let us die to make men free. Our God is marching on. Glory, Glory, Hallelujah! Our God is marching on.”

This is the victory that over-cometh the world.

§25 Dr. T. R. M. Howard

Dr. T. R. M. Howard’s biography appears in the introduction to his October 2, 1955 speech in Baltimore, Maryland.

In this speech before a northern NAACP audience, which had something of an uneasy relationship with the RCNL, Howard demonstrates his considerable rhetorical skill. Known as a captivating orator, Howard’s chief weapon is in demonstrating the hypocrisy of American democratic theory and American democratic practice. And yet, as Howard notes, “we have not lost faith in our American democracy. The fact that there has been no violence on the part of Negroes in Mississippi in retaliation for the violence heaped upon us is everlasting proof that the religion of Jesus the Christ and American democracy has done more for the Negro in Mississippi than it has done for our White brother.” Howard and his Mississippi supporters were willing to believe in America’s civil religion—even if southern whites were not.

Part of Howard’s rhetorical mission before a northern audience is also to raise awareness of Mississippi’s racial violence and the legislative mechanics of state-sponsored racism. The former involved the under-publicized murders of Reverend George W. Lee of Belzoni and Lamar Smith of Brookhaven; far more knew about the Emmett Till murder and trial. The latter was ably illustrated by absurd voter

registration tests in which applicants had to read and interpret perfectly the state constitution—to a white registrar. But the point Howard draws is not a regional one. Rather, “A chain is not stronger than its weakest links; as long as Mississippi, South Carolina, and Georgia are weak links in the chain of American Democracy, our whole democracy is weak.” The inferential subtext lays bare the rusted chain of American Christianity.

Mississippi's Challenge in this Grave Hour

NAACP Civil Rights Rally, New York, New York

May 24, 1956

Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen:

I wish to thank the Program Committee for inviting me to appear on this program. I come to you from the State which gave America Theodore G. Bilbo and the present Chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, James O. Eastland. I come from a State where the Governor is thinking about calling a Special Session of the State Legislature to have the letters N and A and C and P removed from the alphabet used in the Mississippi schools and to have the words Desegregate and Integrate removed from the English language. I come from the State where the White Citizens Council or the modern K.K.K. was born. I come from the State that would have liked to have seceded from the Union again on the afternoon of May 17th, 1954 if there would have been any place for Mississippi to have gone on that afternoon. But there was only one place that she could have gone and since the infamous Mississippian, Bilbo was giving them so much trouble down there, Hell just refused to let Mississippi move in.

As I journeyed from my home in Mississippi, U.S.A., the very last outpost of American Democracy, I wondered what I might say to this vast group of American citizens to cause you to double your efforts in fighting for complete freedom, liberty and democracy for all American citizens, regardless of Race, Creed, or Color.

We know that our theory of American Democracy is the greatest philosophy of government that has been given to man since the dawn of creation. We, who accept the simple truths of our American Democracy, profess faith in the intrinsic dignity of all humanity without stopping to think whether it is white humanity, black humanity, Jewish humanity, Catholic humanity, Latin American humanity, or oriental humanity; we profess faith in the reasonableness, the integrity, and the sense of moral and spiritual responsibilities in the human personality. Our basic concept of American Democracy takes on the plain principle of faith in the equality of man, in the right of all men to a free, a full and abundant life, socially, politically, economically and spiritually. Our American concept of democracy also

declares that every man must have the freedom of opportunity to release the potentialities for greatness and for good that are implanted within man so that a form of wealth is created in artistic, scientific, cultural and economic contributions which is possible of distribution to all men in more abundant and richer living.

The historic edit of the Supreme Court of the U.S.A. on May 17th, 1954 declaring segregation in the public schools of America a serious violation of our American concept of democracy, has been met with mingled emotions throughout our nation. In the deep South it has been met with open hostility. In my state, Mississippi, the reaction has been most violent. No state official in Mississippi has said, up until this very hour, that ten years from now or a hundred years from now that they would comply with the decision of the Supreme Court. They are still saying: "We will never comply." In an all out effort to discourage the Negro people of Mississippi from demanding first-class citizenship, a state constitutional amendment has been enacted to abolish the public schools of the state, rather than comply with the Supreme Court's decision.

They have also enacted another state constitutional amendment which is aimed at preventing the Negro from voting in Mississippi. The Negro who tries to qualify to vote in Mississippi today is given a reading test. He must be able to read any part of the Mississippi Constitution that he is called upon to read, and he must be able to write an acceptable Essay on "What is meant by a Constitutional Form of Government." A grade of 99 will not pass the applicant; he must make 100% in order to vote in Mississippi, U.S.A. today. It will be of interest to you patriotic American citizens to know that today, 93 years after the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation, that Negroes are allowed to vote in only 22 of Mississippi's 82 counties, and yet Mississippi's Congressional Representation is based on the total population. We have 986,000 Negroes in Mississippi today with less than nineteen thousand registered Negro voters in the entire state. The frightful methods of intimidation and the dastardly boldness of the wholesale disfranchisement of the Negro citizen in Mississippi, and the total disregard for the 14th and 15th amendment of our Federal Constitution by Mississippi, is the blackest spot on our American Democracy today.

Fellow Americans, how can we go to Geneva and before other Deliberate International Bodies and talk about free elections in Germany or any other place in the world, so long as we have a Mississippi with the conditions that exist there today? Rev. George W. Lee of Belzoni, Miss. and Mr. Lamar Smith of Brookhaven, Miss. have been murdered in Mississippi during 1955 for the simple reason that they wanted to vote in Mississippi, U.S.A. Until this day, no one has been brought to justice for the death of these men.

Our so-called judicial system in Mississippi is without parallel in the annals of American history. The entire civilized world was shocked and is still stunned over the kidnapping and lynching of 14 year old Emmett Till, and the subsequent freeing of the murderers by a Mississippi court. As I sat through this trial down at Sumner, Mississippi, and saw the worst miscarriage of justice in the history of American crimes, I was made to call upon the judge of all mankind and ask of him: "How long, oh God, will we have a double standard of justice in this democracy, one standard for the White American and another for the Negro?" A chain is not stronger than its weakest links; as long as Mississippi, South Carolina, and Georgia are weak links in the chain of American Democracy, our whole democracy is weak.

But, you say to me: "Dr. Howard, that is the South and her problem." My answer is that it is not a southern problem, it is an American problem.

Go with me if you please, any Sunday morning to the churches in the hamlets, villages, towns, and cities of the nation. Here we find a cross section of American men and women, who in addition to their profession of Christian faith have suffered three wars in this generation to preserve democratic ideas—among which is the principle that all men are created free and equal and are endowed with certain inalienable rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness—these men and women sit in their segregated churches worshipping in a feeling of virtue, the God who commands that man love his brother, while denying church membership as a positive policy because they cannot conceive of a personal level of an association with fellow men who are not of the same race or color or creed.

Go with me any week day morning into the offices of our nation where jobs are denied to Catholics, to Jews, to Negroes, to Latin Americans and to Orientals, and there we find many professed Christians, many patriotic Americans formulating these policies which promote these rejections.

These violations of our American profession of faith in our Democracy cannot help but reflect themselves in our national and foreign policy.

A consideration of these facts to which I have called your attention in this brief message should not beget pessimism, but as patriotic American citizens these facts should cause us to realize that race prejudice is the greatest enemy that faces our American Democracy today and these facts should stimulate resolutions in all of us to work and fight until these enemies from within, which are undermining our Democracy, are destroyed.

Notwithstanding all of the economic pressure, terror and violence that has been heaped upon us in Mississippi, we have not lost faith in our American Democracy. The fact that there has been no violence on the part of Negroes in Mississippi in retaliation for the violence heaped upon us is everlasting proof that the religion of Jesus the Christ and American Democracy has done more for the Negro in Mississippi than it has done

for our white brother. We are not afraid—we have sent our courageous Negro soldiers to the ends of the earth to fight, bleed, and die for a democracy that they did not know anything about in Mississippi, and we have grown tired of dying for something in Korea that we cannot vote for in Money, Mississippi. We are on the march and the Citizens Councils, with all the Eastlands and Talmadges and Timmermans and James Byrnes, are not going to stop our triumphant march. Just after the Battle of Dunkirk, when the faith, hope and courage of the people of Great Britain were at their lowest ebb, there were cries of despair on every side and faint hearted men were saying: “Let us surrender now.” That towering genius and courageous statesman Sir Winston Churchill said: “We shall go on to the end. We shall fight with growing confidence and growing strength; we shall defend our rights, whatever the cost may be, we shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills, we shall never surrender, until in God’s good time the new world, with all its power and might, steps forth to the rescue and the liberation of the old.”

These words seem to fit my feeling as I conclude this message, armed with the Constitution of the United States of America, the Declaration of Independence, the Bill of Rights and the Decisions of the Supreme Court, and with God on our side, with your votes and your dollars we shall fight with every legal means until the Rebels of the entire South shall know that God’s clock of time has struck the hour in this nation when all second class citizenship shall be cast into the depths of the sea.

Thank you.

§26 Roy Wilkins

Roy Wilkins’s biography appears in the introduction to his May 22, 1955 speech in Belzoni, Mississippi.

Before the largest religious body of blacks in the United States, Roy Wilkins takes as his biblical text Paul’s second letter to the Corinthians. In bearing about in our bodies the death and life of Jesus, Wilkins urges “above all” that the faith from Christ’s dying would bring “new and abundant life for all people forever.” That faith and promise were particularly acute in 1956 since “we are confronted with a great moral problem, a problem of how to do justice under our laws and our Constitution to those who heretofore have not had either justice or equality under those laws and that Constitution.” Less a legal or a political problem, by defining segregation as a moral and thus a spiritual problem, Wilkins brings contemporary problems of race directly into the convention hall of this conservative group. And, whereas Wilkins had been critical of the black clergy’s inactivity in previous addresses, in Denver he has nothing but praise: “the church and the ministers have stood like a rock. Not only have the Negro Churchmen (with but few exceptions) resisted all efforts to get them to take sides with the segregationists, but they have

spearheaded an offensive action for decency.” Wilkins singles out for special commendation Martin Luther King, Jr. “and others, for the part they have played in the bus protest of that city.” Wilkins singles out for special derision the president of the United States, Dwight Eisenhower, who had said or done nothing in the school crises of Clinton, Tennessee and Mansfield, Texas. “Here is the one man who, without favoring your child or mine, could set a moral tone for the nation in this sorry mess, but he chooses to stand mute.” Wilkins ends his address by asking for financial help amid “a great conspiracy to make time stand still and to maintain injustice on the throne.” With state legislatures in Louisiana, Florida, Alabama and Mississippi appropriating large sums of money to fight desegregation and the work of the NAACP, Wilkins assures his Baptist listeners that God’s will and the promise of America will win out over the “rulers of darkness.”

Speech to the National Baptist Convention

Denver, Colorado
September 6, 1956

I appreciate greatly the opportunity to bring greetings to this great convention of Baptists from the national officers, board of directors, branches and members of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

It is appropriate that this word be brought [to] you because of the cooperation and support which your members throughout the nation have rendered the cause and program of the NAACP through the years. The church has been a bulwark of strength in the NAACP crusade from the very first days of its existence. Pastors and lay leaders of many faiths and denominations were represented among those who signed the call to organize the NAACP in 1909.

All along the way the church has stood with the NAACP in the fight for justice and equality, which is another way of saying the kingdom of heaven on earth. As I have moved about this convention I have seen men who are leaders in our branches all over the country, men who are presidents, vice presidents, and members of executive committees of our units from coast to coast. I see men in whose church edifices we have been welcomed to hold our annual conventions, our state and local conferences, and our mass meetings on questions of the day. I see men who have gone to Washington, to state capitals, and to city council meetings to urge justice for our people. I see men who have raised funds from their congregations to help finance the crusade for first class citizenship, who are life members of the Association and who have urged their members to join the NAACP.

In short, I see a leadership of the people which is concerned with man’s opportunity and happiness here on earth, and which realizes that this is