

Luther Smith (28:40-30:58)

When you're going through a period where you have the Ku Klux Klan identifying itself as a Christian organization, and a period in which people are leaving congregations on a Sunday morning to participate in lynchings, where you have Christian clergy and laity who are either refusing to say something about the kind of discrimination that occurs and the kind of violence that is occurring or are rather tepid in whatever they have to say. Then one begins to wonder, to what extent does this faith have a claim of relevance to my identity and the transformation of society itself. Thurman spoke to that in a very pointed way and with his examples of what occurs in the life of a community, of the Black community and how easy it is that fear, and hate, and deception could be tools by which Black people could address this, but this does not represent not only the depth of the Christian faith but the depth of their capacities to approach this injustice in a way that aligns more with how Jesus had really counseled people to approach this. Thurman provided a spiritual perspective that was empowering. And it was something that not only the most educated could do, it was something that persons who were laborers in some of the most menial jobs could understand. They were given by God the power and the authority to respond to the realities of their injustice in ways that could be true to their faith, in ways that were true to Jesus' love ethic, and in ways that did not require them to compromise the integrity of who they were as persons who were called to love everybody.

John Lewis (05:04-06:04)

Howard Thurman, in a book, had the capacity to make Jesus come alive, to make him real. That he was not concerned about the over yonder or the by and by, but he was concerned about the streets of America. . . . He was concerned about the here and now, the social gospel. . . . And so it did influence Dr. King a great deal. Because I'm not just concerned with the streets of honey that are paved in gold, but I'm concerned about the streets of Montgomery, the streets of Birmingham, the streets of Selma. He made it real, he painted a picture. . . .

Jesse Jackson (04:38-05:44)

[Thurman] said, 'When your back's against the wall, you have three options. One, you can adjust, and most people adjust to that situation, they find a niche in oppression and some even find a modicum of prosperity in oppression. They wheel, they deal, they operate, they adjust, the home, church, school, they live in small circles. Some people don't even know that they are being oppressed. Sometimes oppression is not evident. Then there are those who resent, they know better and don't like it, but they feel like they can do nothing about it. They look upon the system with contempt, but they really feel they can not change it. Then there are those who resist, who fight back. Do you adjust to oppression and simply resent it, and become angry and self-destructive, or do you resist?' There may be the formidable legal action, legislative action, mass demonstrations, civil disobedience, but he calls upon us to resist when your back's against the wall.

Walter Earl Fluker (1:46:00-1:46:53)

What does the religion of Jesus have to say to those whose backs are against the wall? For Thurman, in order to answer that question, as a Christian, one must make a distinction between the religion of Jesus and the religion about Jesus. . . . The religion of Jesus is a religion where Jesus himself assumes responsibility for his own relationship with God. And out of that works out of his own freedom and responsibility for the oppressed. This becomes the standard line for Thurman. . . .

Jesse Jackson (8:40-9:50)

I carried the book with me, *Jesus and the Disinherited*, every day just as a reference. The way Howard Thurman interpreted scripture. He makes it clear, Jesus was born a Jew and poor, debating about who his father was, on the Roman occupation which looked upon him with contempt. The threat of genocide, of killing the first baby; his mother, Mary, and Joseph took him to Egypt to hide him as a refugee, as an immigrant. When he was called to preach, he would call upon Isaiah's notion of 'I will only preach the Gospel. Good news to the poor, heal the broken hearted, to set the captive free.' That's the character of the religion. Now some characters within the religion don't accept the mission statement; they're just using the name of it. But the character of the religion is 'defend the poor, deliver the needy, set the captive free, and have a spirit that cannot be bought up, but it also cannot be intimidated.' And if it means you will perish, then let me perish. But my sense of dignity is non-negotiable. That's the stuff of Howard Thurman.