

## Book Study Questions for Chapter 2

1. On page 35, Cone reflects on Reinhold Niebuhr's "trans valuation of values".
  - A. Do you agree that Jesus was crucified because people expected a Messiah "perfect in power and perfect in goodness"?
  - B. How do you see Jesus?
2. On page 51, Cone asserts that Niebuhr's failure to deal with racial issues is a serious failure by someone often called America's greatest theologian.
  - A. How well do you think the Church today treats issues of race?
3. Would you agree with Cone's statement that "groups don't love" (p. 53) and that, therefore, "love is the motive, but justice is the instrument."
  - A. Reflect on what this means in practical terms.
4. On page 55 a Rabbi is quoted as saying, "the most tragic problem is silence." (even more urgent than bigotry and hatred!)
  - A. Do you agree?
  - B. How can this quote guide our actions?
5. "Niebuhr speaks about 'God's judgment on America. He calls 'racial hatred, the most vicious of all human vices,' 'the dark and terrible abyss of evil in the soul of a man,' a 'form of original sin,' 'the most persistent of all collective evils,' 'more stubborn than class prejudices.' 'If the white man were to expiate his sins committed against the darker races, few white men would have a right to live.'" (p. 38)

Niebuhr supported the "separate but equal" Supreme Court ruling which made Jim Crow segregation legal and was pleased that the Court added "with all deliberate speed" to their decision ending segregation in schools. "The Negroes will have to exercise patience and be sustained by a robust faith that history will gradually fulfill the logic of justice. He also said: "I never envisaged a fully developed interracial church at Bethel. I do not think we are ready for that." (p.43)

- A. How could Niebuhr call racial hatred a "form of original sin" while sympathizing with White families' fears of sending children to integrated schools, and urging Black Americans to stay patient and seek faith when they do not receive justice? (39) What was the impact of this major theologian's perspectives on White American Christians and especially clergy?
6. While visiting Detroit where he headed the Mayor's Inter-racial Committee to study racial problems there, Niebuhr said: "Thousands in this town are really living in torment while the rest of us eat, drink and make merry. What a civilization!" (43)

- A. What is the role of religion, and especially Christianity, in the situation Neibuhr describes and that still applies today?
- B. How does a racially integrated congregation function successfully?