

From Douglas E. Moore

3 October 1956
Durham, N.C.

An acquaintance from King's graduate school days at Boston University writes about his experiences as a proponent of Christian nonviolence and proposes "a regional group which utilizes the power of love and non-violence."¹ On 7 December King's

1. Douglas E. Moore (1928–), born in Hickory, North Carolina, earned his B.A. (1949) from North Carolina College and his S.T.B. (1953) and S.T.M. (1958) from Boston University. He served as pastor of several North Carolina churches from 1953 to 1960 and as executive secretary of the board of education of the North Carolina Conference of the Methodist Church (1956–1960). An NAACP activist, Moore led a 1957 desegregation sit-in in Durham, served on the executive board of SCLC, and in 1960 participated in the founding conference of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC).

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secretary, Maude Ballou, wrote that his letter had been misplaced and would be answered soon. That reply has not been found.

Dear King;

This is Doug Moore, graduate of Boston University's School of Theology of 1953. In that you get a heavy volume of mail, I thought that I would use this type of introduction in order that you might know who it is that is writing.

I believe the last time I saw you we were talking together with Jean Martain and ironically enough, as I recall, the discussion centered around whether or not there were many Negro women that we knew who were pacifist.

First let me commend you for the tremendous job that you have done in Montgomery. I feel that what you have done is in keeping with radical Christianity but also in keeping with personalism at its profoundest depth.

I would have written earlier but felt that it would be better to write after the great surge of popular feeling settled down.

The thing that you have acted out in mass in Montgomery, I have been putting into practice here in North Carolina and Virginia. I have consistently refused to move to the back of buses because I was a Christian and I have never used law as a threat against drivers, but relied completely upon the force of love and Christian witness.

My first encounter of this nature took place in Newport News, Virginia. This was on a local bus. After telling the person that I would not move, the driver got off the bus and stayed for twenty minutes then he got back on and drove off.

Once when I was coming from Richmond Va. the driver asked me to move but I refused as a Christian. He said to me, "Well, I will not be responsible for what happens to you," and to this I replied that I would die praying for him before I would move. Each time that he stopped he gave me a mean look but he only received a smile from me. We arrived in Greensboro with no difficulty. I would have died in that seat. Whenever a person threatens us with brutality and even death he is assuming that we value our lives more than eternal principles. I feel that my philosophical and theological belief in immortality comes to my aid in this situation as well as my Christian faith which does not conflict with the other two disciplines mentioned. When a man is afraid to die for what he believes to be true his concept of what is ultimately real is shallow.

I also reason from this point of view in that our government can call out young men to die for it; I feel that I as a Christian ought to be willing to die for Jesus Christ and truth. This I have expounded very forcefully in speaking at Bennett College, Lovingsstone College, and will present the same challenge to the students at Clafin University in Orangeburgh this winter. I am to speak at Morgon College this Sunday when I then too shall present the challenge.

It is a strange thing that we will ask a man to bail out at forty thousand feet to perfect a military weapon but think it is neurotic if he is willing to die for justice.

Here in Durham I was asked to move to the rear and I refused as a Christian and the driver asked me for my ticket. Then he said "You are not an interstate passanger, go on to the back and give these White people your seat." I replied, "I know that I am not an interstate passenger; I am familiar with the Iren Morgan

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Case of 1948 which said in essence that it was a burden on interstate commerce to segregate passengers; but as a Christian I refuse to move to the back. If I have to make a choice between Jesus or Ceasar and Ceasar in this instance being the state of North Carolina, then I will take Jesus." So the driver got off the bus which was an express and stayed thirty minutes trying to figure out with the company what to do. However, after this passing of time, he returned to the bus and drove off.

But one of the most memorable experiences that I have ever had occured in a little town in the center of North Carolina named Asheboro. This particular day I sat directly behind the driver and he of course asked me to move to the back. I again refused on the ground of being a Christian. Then he started to loud talk me, "I am not going to move this bus until you move." I have often thought that if he had said that to me ten years ago before I got to know the way of love I would have replied to him "I got news for you" but I said, "I am sorry you feel that way but as a Christian I can not move."

Then he went for the police and they came to see what was happening and I can recall the sherrif saying "Well, I an not going to arrest him." The driver had no other course to follow than to drive the bus. As we went down the road I sang some of my favorite spirituals and hymns and then I asked him if he were angry with me and he replied, "Don't say a word to me. You took advantage of me." To this I replied, "No my action was not directed at you but to the state of North Carolina who is responsible for the immoral segregation laws being on the books." As I got off the bus in Ramseur which is located in the country I told him that I loved him as a person.

When I arrived at where I was staying, I told my parishoners little grandson that I had sat on the front seat of the bus again but that was not enough, my job is not complete until I win the soul of the driver. At our regular morning worship we has a special prayer that this man might realize that my action was not directed at him but at the state of North Carolina.

About a month later I was on my way to Salisbury, N.C. and I had to make a bus change in Lexington, N.C. It had been raining all that week and was still raining that day. I saw a greyhound bus come into the yard and there was this driver. So I went out to wave at him. He stopped his bus and opened the door and said to me, "Preacher, which way are you going?" I told him which was in the opposite direction of the way he was going. Then he said this to me "Preacher, I have been having it pretty tough lately, will you pray for me? I told him I would at ten thirty that night when I remember others to our heavenly Father. He then replied, "Thanks very much preacher."

This is perhaps the most meaningful experience that I have ever had in the winning of a person on the other side of the fence.

I have maintained for years that one-hundred well disciplined persons could break the backbone of segregated travel in North Carolina in less than a year. Again whenever I speak at colleges or at special meetings this is the content of my message for I feel that so much of what students hear does not challenge them. To explore such topics I usually use these subjects "Who's in Your Gallery," "Facing the Rising Sun," or "Jesus or Ceasar."

My three years in North Carolina have been interesting. During that time I have picketed the New York Philhormonic orchestra because the Greensboro

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3 Oct 1956 music company wanted to segregate me and I refused to go anywhere that I am denied full rights. Whenever I have an opportunity to speak on radio or on television I do the same thing that I do at the colleges. On one occasion they almost cut me off but the manager told me that that would be the worst thing they could have possibly done.

Well let's talk about something else and that is your coming to Durham October 15. You have a great opportunity to do us a great job. I have only been here since last June 10, prior to that I was in Leaksville, N.C., the Governor's home town. While I was there we organized an N.A.A.C.P. chapter; a voters league and I helped the laundry workers organize and go out on strike. I was the most unpopular Methodist preacher in town, that is the White people thought so.

The people of Durham have a great class problem and in addition to this they are materialist. There is considerable exploitation of Negroes by Negroes. The buses in this city have been desegregated as far as policy goes but the Negroes still ride in the back from custom. Here the preachers could be of great help.

There are no Negro drivers and the line that the company makes its most money is in the Negro section. I would think that something could be worked out with the company. If you could give us the incentive we could create the right psychological moment.

I don't know what your schedule will be when you are here but if you had the time we might get together to discuss the possibility for a regional group which utilizes the power of love and non-violence. I was supposed to have attended the Atlanta meeting but at the time I was doing some teaching at Livingstone College, where George B. Thomas is teaching. In addition to this I was also pastoring.

I feel that there is need of such a group because it casts the problem and it attacks in a new dimension. In talking with some of the top NAACP persons they felt that other forces must be used in this struggle.

A group of this nature would solidify our efforts and give a coherent philosophy behind what we are attempting to do. As you probably know there are not many Negroes or Whites who have a firm spiritual or intellectual grasp upon this whole idea of love and non-violence. This power has been in the Negro Church for generations.

Such a group would help to give us direction on national movements. For example it will help us to have a recognized spokesman rather than an opportunist like Adam C. Powell trying to interfere on something that he has neither the moral or intellectual power to do. Suggestion about days of prayers should have come from you and not him.

With your influence I think that we could do the job very well. I am anxious to hear how you feel about this for now is the time to make our move. Now I have been a member of the FOR many years, almost ten, and know many of its top men like John Swomley, A. J. Muste and Glen Smiley.² Whether or not we would

2. John M. Swomley, Jr. (1915-), born in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, received his B.A. (1936) from Dickinson College, his M.A. (1939) and S.T.B. (1940) from Boston University, and his Ph.D. (1958) from the University of Colorado. From 1944 to 1952 he led the National Council Against Conscriptation. From 1953 to 1960 he served as national secretary of the Fellowship of Reconciliation.

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want to patter a group along this line or be an affiliate of this group or establish an indegious all together could be worked out.

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I feel that we can not let this get cold on us for the work that you have done in Montgomery is but the starting of a work that needs to be done throughout the South. To do this job that needs to be done there must be direction that is systematic, consistent and above all coherent and Christ like.

In that I am a new comer, although I finished college here and have a small mission church of 25 members, I doubt very seriously whether or not I will be able to see you at anytime personally. For those who love to laud it over celebrities and Durham most illustrative dignitaries will roll out the carpet for you, I have taken the liberty to speak to you about some of the things that are on my heart through the noisy keys of the typewriter.

Yours in Christ,

[*signed*]

Doug Moore

THLS. MLKP-MBU: Box 62.