

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

A Social Document from the
Augustana Lutheran Church



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.

A Series of Statements of the Augustana Lutheran Church, 1939, 1941, 1942, 1946, 1947, 1948, 1952, 1956, 1957

1939 Minutes, p. 266

Wars, the occasion of war, and all situations which conceal the fact of conflict under the guise of outward peace are marks of a world to which the church is charged to proclaim the gospel of redemption. War involves compulsory enmity, diabolical outrage against human personality, and wanton distortion of the truth. War is a particular demonstration of the power of sin in the world, and a defiance of the righteousness of God as revealed in Jesus Christ and Him crucified. No justification of war must be allowed to minimize or conceal this fact.

1941 Minutes, p. 234

In view of the present situation which calls for serious and prayerful thought concerning the problem of war, Be it resolved: That the Lutheran Augustana Synod recognizes the authority of properly constituted government. However, we respect the attitude of the conscientious objector relative to war. We believe the government should not violate the Christian conscience by seeking to compel conscientious objectors to engage in combatant military service. We ask exemption from all forms of combatant military service for all conscientious objectors who may be members of the Augustana Synod.

1942 Minutes, p. 233

It is with heaviness of heart that we contemplate the fact that our beloved country has been drawn into the world war. We reaffirm our love and loyalty to our country and our willingness to give our lives in its service. We cherish the ideal of a free, just and democratic society. We realize that this disaster has come upon us because the will of God has not been honored in the world and in penitence we bow before the judgment of God, confessing our sin before Him.

In this time of crisis the Synod recognizes its responsibility to set before the judgment of God's Word the sin which has brought this calamity upon us. We are aware of our obligation as a Church to bring a message of faith, hope, and courage to all men, to bring a message of comfort to the distressed, and to preserve a worldwide Christian fellowship.

The Synod urges its members to remain loyal to Christ; to be on guard lest the sanction of the Church be given to anything which is contrary to the spirit of Christ; to seek to maintain civil and religious liberties during this period when passions can so

easily be aroused; to withstand all propaganda of hatred and revenge; to manifest a spirit of good will toward those among us who spring from nations with which our country is now at war; to manifest generosity to those who suffer because of the war, including prisoners of war; to support the work of ministering to the spiritual needs of the men in the armed forces of our country; to work for justice and good will among groups and nations; to seek and support national policies in harmony with the will of God and to work for a just and lasting peace.

1946 Minutes, p. 297

The world today stands between life and death. Men's hopes of a better world have not been fulfilled. Millions are enduring intolerable suffering. The nations seem impotent to deal with the crucial problems of international order. A heavy burden weighs upon all mankind.

We face this crisis as Christians, whose own consciences are gravely disturbed. Yet God in His mercy has committed to us the ministry of His Word, and that Word we are bound to declare. Men are going the way of death because they disobey God's will. All renewal depends upon repentance, upon turning from our own way to God's way. He is calling men to a supreme decision. "I have set before you life and death: therefore choose life."

War is the result of human self-will and of men's tragic inability to find the true solution of their conflicts. We pray God that the United Nations will choose the way of life and save future generations from the scourge of war. But the time is short. Man's triumph in the release of atomic energy threatens his destruction. Unless men's whole outlook is changed, our civilization will perish.

An illusory peace is little better than war. No peace can be lasting unless it is built on true spiritual foundations. We appeal to all men of good will and who believe in spiritual values and forces to work together for an order of justice and humanity.

All nations are under the judgment of God. Those that have been defeated are suffering a fearful retribution. But the springs of their recovery are within; and if they turn to God and heed the voices of those among them who, even in the darkest days, withstood the forces of evil, they can yet take their proper place in a world community. The victorious nations have also suffered greatly, but their victory brings with it a new responsibility to God. They should combine justice with mercy. To seek vengeance against their former enemies by depriving them of the necessities of life, or by mass expulsion of their populations, or in any other matter, can only bring fresh disaster. There must be a new beginning in the relationships of all nations. The nation has its own place in God's purpose for mankind, but national egotism is a sin against the Creator of all peoples, great and small alike. No nation can fulfill God's purpose for itself which fails to answer His call for full cooperation and fellowship with other nations as members of one family. There is a mutual interdependence between social order and international order.

We therefore appeal especially to the Governments of the Five Great Powers to rise to their responsibilities to the world. It was by the union of their forces that they won victory in the war. We ask them to unite their whole strength in a common purpose now for the establishment of justice, for the relief of hunger, and for the development of a world community of free peoples. Unless they turn from their old ways of reliance upon mere might and own their subjection to God's law of righteousness and love, they pursue the way of disaster and death. "I have set before you life and death: therefore choose life."

A special duty is laid upon the churches to help the nations to choose the way of life. Christians are called to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world. To them is given the ministry of reconciliation. It is their responsibility to bear witness by word and deed that the law of God finds its fulfillment in the love of Christ. We call upon all followers of Christ to do whatever they can to help those who are enduring the terrible need and suffering of the present day, and to strive after a better order in which the rights of man will be fully recognized and protected. We trust that those churches which are stronger will continue to aid the churches in the liberated and suffering countries, and that all will increasingly support the world mission of the Church. We earnestly urge that all will pray without ceasing for forgiveness, for unity, and for real human brotherhood.

We give thanks to God for ecumenical fellowship in Christ and for its broadening and deepening even during the war years. We rejoice over the clear evidences that the spiritual unity in Christ has transcended all differences of races and nations. In this case we see a sign of hope for all mankind, that in the fullness of time God will gather together in one all things in Christ. He is our peace. In Him is the life of mankind.

"I have set before you life and death: therefore choose life"

1947 Minutes, p. 328

In the light of the fact that Marxian Communism involves a materialistic interpretation of life which excludes God as the ultimate ruler of history, Synod is aware of the challenge which this movement presents to the church and the Christian faith, and urges its pastors to present the perils involved and its members to fight the aggressive propaganda of this philosophy of life by a wholehearted application of our Christian faith to the social maladjustments of our time.

1948 Minutes, p. 341

We urge our national leaders to work for a stronger international organization of cooperation and understanding.

1948 Minutes, p. 342

We view with great concern the pressure being exerted to establish compulsory peacetime military training for American youth. We recognize the evils of regimentation, militarization international suspicion, and excessive cost that are inevitable concomitants of compulsory peacetime military training.

1952 Minutes, p. 53

We commend our members who exerted influence in helping to defeat the Bill for Universal Military Training and urge our constituency to maintain an active interest in political and social problems as they affect the life of our nation.

1954 Minutes, p. 231

Whereas, the Augustana Lutheran Church historically has stood for a clear Christian witness to truth and godly living, and Whereas, the Church Militant beholds perils of diverse kinds in today's world, as a vicious materialism and atheism espoused by Communism and likewise many similar dangers of intolerance, bigotry and injustice sponsored by various forces loose in our midst,

Now therefore be it resolved,

That the church hereby recognize the urgent need of the State to guard the national security from all dangers within and without, and That the Church approve of appropriate governmental action to deal with the complex problem relating to the menace of subversive elements in government and other vital American institutions just so long as the right of free conscience and free expression and other traditional liberties remain untrammelled, and

Be it further resolved,

That the Church condemn movements and activities which, ostensibly to achieve the good purpose of insuring the national security, actually have endangered our society by sowing seeds of suspicion among us, and,

Be it further resolved,

That we hold ourselves to be alarmed by the easy excuses given for the instances of the abandonment of the accepted orderly method of investigation, the misdirection of legislative inquiry to propoganda ends and the usurpation of constitutional safeguards resulting in the violation of the rights of the accused; and

Now be it therefore resolved,

That we remind ourselves and all men of these dangers which if unchecked may develop into a tyranny that will not only shatter American ideals of liberty and freedom but will also ultimately prevent the full and free proclamation of the Christian gospel.

1956 Minutes, p. 386

Whereas, the international tensions now existing between the East and West have virtually transformed the world into two armed camps, imposing a heavy economic burden on all mankind and constantly disastrous to all the peoples of the earth; and

Whereas, it is our conviction, based on the Gospel, that war is a sin against God and humanity and that it is in direct conflict with the Christian law of love; and

Whereas, we are convinced that a continuation of the present international race in armaments will never bring a solution of our problems but will only increase the distrust and suspicion that already exists in the world;

We call upon our government to make use of the United Nations in resolving difficult tensions wherever they may threaten world peace; to insist that our western allies recognize the right of colonial peoples to liberty and self-government; to work progressively toward universal disarmament, including an international agreement to ban the use of atomic weapons; and to take steps to bring about an end to the present practice of drafting young men for the armed services during peacetime, and

We instruct the officers of the Church to bring these resolutions to the attention of the President of the United States and the Armed Services Committees of the United States Senate and House of Representatives; and that we request the members of the Augustana Lutheran Church to make known to their respective representatives in the Congress this action of our Church.

1957 Minutes, p. 199

WHEREAS, man's natural inclination toward sinful destruction by unceasing warfare and brutality is written in the record of history, and

WHEREAS, the present generation of men has fought a most devastating, bloody and bestial war which culminated in an atomic explosion portending the awful possibility of the obliteration of the race, and

WHEREAS, mankind now lives in a climate of cold war with suspicion, fear, intolerance, false trust in armaments and general arrogance which results infrequent crises, costly armament burdens and intrigue among nations and

WHEREAS, the United States has had thrust upon it responsibility for world leadership which it cannot evade and which, at the same time, is beyond the power of mere men to discharge,

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, That we declare that it is our firm conviction as Christians that international relations must be in their essence a practical application of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, to wit:

- a. That we recognize the United Nations can be a good instrumentality for the pacific solution of the world's troubles and that it promises to be our best vehicle on the road to world friendship and peace, and
- b. That we reject as totally unworthy of any nation a foreign policy whose goals are the acquisition of strategic military bases around the world, the building of powerful military alliances, and the consequent subservience of peoples out of fear of military and commercial might, and
- c. That we endorse a foreign policy aimed toward building between nations bridges of trust, mutual aid, exchange of ideas and culture, as well as the free flow of commerce and communication, and
- d. That we propose to further human welfare everywhere in the world by helping men in all places to achieve the ends of justice and liberty under law and elimination of the tyranny of base and cynical despots, and likewise an elimination of the tyranny of hunger and disease in less-favored parts of the world, and
- e. That for such ends of human welfare to be achieved we propose to lead all nations in mutually aiding under-developed areas by providing opportunities for economic advancement, cultural enrichment, and educational enlightenment and that we share generously of our own rich resources to that end, and
- f. That we commend our leadership in foreign policy to exemplify a national respect for the dignity of men regardless of color, culture, and condition and to manifest a due regard for the rights of all groups to self-determination limited only by each nation's proper respect for the law of God and the rights of other men.

1957 Minutes, p. 200

We urge the government of the United States to exert all possible influence among the nations of the world to bring about the cessation of the testing of nuclear weapons which might endanger the welfare of the human race.