



Social Statements

THE LUTHERAN CHURCH IN AMERICA

RACE RELATIONS

Adopted by the Second Biennial Convention, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania
July 2-9, 1964

The current racial revolution has thrust the church into a time of travail and perplexity but also of opportunity and hope. Injustice, which for a long time was either ignored, rationalized, or mutely borne, is now seen more clearly for what it actually is. Injurious discrimination based on race is a violation of God's created order, of the meaning of redemption in Christ, and of the nature of the church.

Implicit in such discrimination often are unbiblical views of God and of humanity. The church must oppose such false views with all the power of the truth of God: in its prayer and worship, in its theological thought, in its nurture of the personal life, in its institutional forms, and in individual and corporate action in society.

At the heart of the life of the church is prayer. In the Prayer of the Church, we find the great pleading and thanking voice of hundreds of thousands of Christians assembled each Sunday for the worship of God. Unless we mean what we say, and live as persons who intend to do what we mean, the holy gravity of our prayer itself condemns us.

In the Prayer of the Church we petition: *Sanctify and unite thy people in all the world, that one holy Church may bear witness to thee, the God and Father of all.*

Here we pray that God may heal—"Sanctify and unite"—the church in order that it may "bear witness" to the "God and Father of all" in whom alone the world finds healing. We pray that, our unity of communion being manifest, we may hold out to a broken world the salvatory meaning of God's parenthood.

This requires a unity that is visible and tangible.

It requires Christians to seek out and receive one another as brothers and sisters without regard to nation, race, or culture.

It means that a racially segregated church is institutionalized disobedience.

Having thus prayed for the integrity of our witness as a church, we pray for the nation and its structures of law and authority: *Preserve our Nation in*

righteousness and honor . . . Grant health and favor to all who bear office in our land, . . . and help them to acknowledge and obey thy holy will.

When spoken in the Prayer of the Church, "righteousness" points to the "right" that God wills; "honor" implies being approved by God because of our obedience to that "right."

This petition indicates that the church supports the rule of law and the civil government which administers and interprets it. At the same time it means that the church must oppose any law or governmental practice which under the guise of rightful authority perverts justice. In particular it means that the church must oppose any force which would prohibit the expression of its inclusiveness according to "thy holy will."

Next we pray:

Give to all persons the mind of Christ, and dispose our days in thy peace, O God. Take from us all hatred and prejudice, and whatever may hinder unity of spirit and concord. These sentences are related. Our days cannot be lived in God's peace unless hatred and prejudice are removed from us. The prayer is realistic: it recognizes that we are guilty of harboring hatreds and prejudices which we are inclined to hold dear. Therefore, nothing less than a mighty, holy, act that can "take away" will do. We believe and confess there has been such an act in Christ! In blood and agony, God's decision has been made and sealed.

The problem of the relations between persons of different races, particularly between white and Black persons, is here exposed. To stand before God and pray, "take from us all hatred and prejudice," and then as a praying church to discriminate among persons on any such sinful basis is a contradiction of this prayer.

Finally we pray:

All these things . . . grant us, O Father, for his sake who died and rose again, and now liveth and reigneth with thee in the unity of the Holy Ghost, one God, world without end.

In prayer God's peculiar people acknowledge that they are freed for a strange new life before God and among their neighbors. The Prayer of the Church illumines the way of the church. Some things are no longer ours to decide. The decision has been made—and forever. In a time of travail and opportunity, perplexity and hope in race relations, the church needs to pray—and to act in accord with its prayer—"for his sake who died and rose again" and who reigns "world without end."

The substance of the church's action in all matters of racial discrimination is determined for it and stands as a permanent testimony each time the church prays or confesses its faith or proclaims its message. The forms of the church's action on the specific ecclesiastical, political, economic, and social expressions of racial discrimination are subject to human judgment and must be directed to specific times, places and circumstances.

In obedience to the Lord of the church and in repentant acknowledgment that urgent occasions require fresh resolutions, the 1964 Biennial Convention of the Lutheran Church in America issues a renewed call to action to include the following elements:

1. No congregation, synod, agency, or institution of the church in its communion and varied ministries should discriminate against any persons on the grounds of race.
2. The publications of the church should present an objective picture of racial diversity and emphasize the Christian's responsibility in the struggle for racial justice. Editors should be realistic in their use of pictures and descriptive materials for such publications so as to reflect the inclusive character of the church.
3. The church, together with its congregations, synods, agencies and institutions, should support its concern for racial justice in all its business involvements and should give critical scrutiny to its own employment practices. In the calling of pastors and the employing of staff the congregations of this church should not make the race of the candidate a qualification for consideration.
4. The church, its congregations, synods, agencies and institutions should initiate programs and support occasions in which Christians acknowledge the imperative of worship, fellowship, and mission without regard to race.
5. The church, its congregations, synods, agencies and institutions should initiate and participate in efforts to bring about understanding at points of racial tension.
6. The church, its congregations, synods, agencies, institutions and individual members should support the enactment and enforcement of federal, state or provincial, and local legislation which seeks to guarantee to all persons equally, without racial discrimination
 - a. civil rights, including the right to vote and full protection of law;
 - b. access to education;
 - c. opportunity for employment, promotion, apprenticeship, job training, and union membership;
 - d. the right to rent, buy, and occupy housing in any place, and the right of access to means of mortgage financing;
 - e. access to public accommodations.
7. Christians are committed to the rule of law as an expression of the moral law of God. Nevertheless, it must be recognized that laws have been and may in the future be enacted, or social customs may exist, which are believed to be in basic conflict with the constitutional law of the land or the moral law of God. In such circumstances, the church, its congregations, synods, agencies and institutions, including their representatives, as well as individual members, are recognized as free by all lawful means, including participation in peaceful public demonstrations, to urge repeal or invalidation of such laws or to effect change of such customs.

If and when the means of legal recourse have been exhausted or are demonstrably inadequate, Christians may then choose to serve the cause of racial justice by disobeying a law that clearly involves the violation of their obligations as Christians, so long as they are

- a. willing to accept the penalty for their action;
- b. willing to limit and direct their protest as precisely as possible against a specific grievance or injustice;
- c. willing to carry out their protest in a nonviolent, responsible manner, after earnestly seeking the counsel of other Christians and the will of God in prayer.

In all of this, we are guided and supported by the normative teaching of the church in Article XVI of the Augsburg Confession: *Christians are obliged to be subject to civil authority and obey its commands and laws in all that can be done without sin. But when commands of the civil authority cannot be obeyed without sin, we must obey God rather than men* (Acts 5:29).

RESOLUTION ON CIVIL RIGHTS ACT

Adopted also by the 1964 Convention

WHEREAS, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was signed into law on July 2, marking a historic advance in the long struggle to secure rights to which we, as Christians, believe all citizens are entitled; and

WHEREAS, countless organizations and individuals have contributed to this result, many of them at great personal sacrifice;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Lutheran Church in America record its appreciation for the action of the President and the Congress of the United States, and for the efforts of the countless private citizens who have contributed to the enactment of the Civil Rights Act of 1964; and

RESOLVED, that the Lutheran Church in America urge all citizens to join in compliance with the Civil Rights Act in letter and in spirit; and

RESOLVED, that the Lutheran Church in America call upon its members to take the lead in their communities to encourage obedience to this legislation, and to undergird by prayer and action those whose duty it is to enforce it.

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