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THE VANGUARD



... THE CHURCH IN HUMAN RELATIONS

Volume 3, Number 5

July, 1956

Missouri Synod Pronouncement on Race Relations

It was perhaps the first time in the history of The Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod that delegates and guests at its convention (St. Paul, Minnesota, June 20-29) were noticeably interested in the race question. This interest was evident in the convention auditorium, in the corridors, at refreshment stands, at the dinner table, in the convention's public relations office, and in the convention press room, second only to interest in the question of Lutheran World Federation membership and inter-synodical relationships.

A number of overtures, printed in **Reports and Memorials**, called upon the Synod to make definite pronouncements of principles involving race relations and outlined a plan of procedure based on these principles. Little wonder, in view of what is happening in the world and in our nation today, that even the Missouri Synod with its tradition of conservatism would at least evince a degree of interest in the race question.

Two Things Happened

A memorial on race relations was presented to the convention and the convention adopted its own pronouncement on the subject as drawn up by the convention floor committee; and all other related memorials were, upon recommendation of the floor committee, referred to the Synodical Conference for study and action. (The VANGUARD will perhaps comment on the second happening later.)

For the purpose of an analysis of the convention's pronouncement, we are printing both the pronouncement adopted by the convention and the race relations memorial presented by two congregations and printed in the book, **Reports and Memorials**.

First, the Memorial

Whereas, The Gospel of Jesus Christ, when properly taught and faithfully accepted, unites people

in the body of Christ, the communion of saints; and

Whereas, This unity has its expression in all phases of the life of the church; and

Whereas, The temper of our times is toward the desegregation of the racial groups in our land, to the end that members of all groups may freely enjoy the blessings of our institutions, not indeed as groups but as individual citizens; and

Whereas, In every phase of our national life it is necessary to demonstrate to the peoples of the world that we are sincere in our desire that all people may have equal opportunity for justice and economic and political stability; and

Whereas, The church is not unconcerned for the well-being of the nation and society in general; and

Whereas, The church today, as perhaps never before, has opportunity to bring its message of salvation through Christ to all people, and the people look for evidences of our sincerity in the outward expression of the unity of faith that we profess, in the togetherness that we practice, sometimes contrary to the ways of the society in which we move; and

Whereas, The church not only can, but has the God-given responsibility to, establish a pattern of living which symbolizes unity in a world of hatred, sinful pride, and disunity; and

Whereas, The Holy Scriptures are replete with forthright statements acknowledging all men the sons of Adam, members of the same human family, equal both in sin and in the love of God in Christ Jesus, to be united in His mystical body, which is the church, to enjoy the fellowship of the saints in the local congregation; and

Whereas, The Holy Scriptures make it the duty of members of the church to seek the welfare of all men, not only by giving to the needy but also by working toward the establishment of such a pattern of living for all people as they (members) would like to have for themselves, in education, in

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A LOOK AROUND

By Martin H. Scharlemann

The press has given a lot of play to Father (Anglican) Trevor Huddleston's **Naught for Your Comfort**. The book was treated at some length in the **Saturday Review of Literature** and also in **Time**. Both reviews were very favorable. However, the point was made in each instance that the book lost some of its effectiveness because of the author's frank admission that he writes with a strong bias. The reviewers have felt that Father Huddleston might have been more objective.

This analysis of the book is completely unfair to its message. Father Huddleston treats the racial problem of South Africa as only a devoted Christian could. In this area there is no gray. There is nothing that is half-right, or half-wrong. That is the fundamental approach of this particular book. That is why it is worth reading. It comes red-hot from the soul of a sensitive individual who has been seared by the moral degradation that follows on racial segregation.

The most illuminating chapter in this book is the one entitled "The Christian Dilemma." This is a presentation of the attitude of the various churches to the problem of race. In this chapter he quotes from a most recent pronouncement of the Commission for Current Problems of the Reformed Churches in South Africa. We have copied the quotation because the various arguments found in this official document are sometimes heard in our own midst. Here is the quotation:

Every nation and race will be able to perform the greatest service to God and the world if it keeps its own national attributes, received from God's own hand, pure with honor and gratitude.... God divided humanity into races, languages and nations. Differences are not only willed by God, but are perpetuated by Him. Equality between natives, colored and European people includes a misappre-

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Missouri Synod Pronouncement

(Continued from Page 1)

work, in housing, in political rights and responsibilities, and in courts of justice; therefore be it

Resolved, That we confess our sins where we in the past have acted contrary to the principles hereinbefore set forth and that we call upon all our members, both pastors and people, to confess and repent of those sins which they in the past have committed contrary to the principles hereinbefore set forth; and be it further

Resolved, That we acknowledge a fourfold responsibility of the church in the area of race relations:

(a) To teach and to practice the unity of faith which transcends the barriers of race or ethnic origin;

(b) To condition its members to work in the capacity of Christian citizens for the elimination of discrimination based on race or ethnic origin, in the home community, the city, state, and nation;

(c) To teach the Word of God so that specific application is made to what is God-pleasing in the Christian's relation to his fellow man of a different racial or ethnic origin, so that in these modern times, when the whole world has become one neighborhood, Christian people may be found establishing a pattern of social living in keeping with justice and equity according to the Second Table of the Law;

(d) To make such application of Christian teaching to life (in keeping with the foregoing) not only to help men in their temporal needs but primarily for the sake of the kingdom of God, so that men may, as our Lord has taught, "see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven."

The Synod's Pronouncement

Whereas, Every redeemed individual, regardless of race or ethnic origin, is most precious in the sight of God; and

Whereas, It is the duty and desire of the Church to bring the Gospel to these souls in order to win them for Christ; and

Whereas, The Church will measure its task and opportunities in the light of our Lord's imminent return to judgment, and will hold itself accountable to its Lord, looking forward to the great day of His appearing when men of all nations and kindreds and tongues shall gather around His throne and praise Him eternally for having washed their sin-stained "robes and made them

white in the blood of the Lamb" (Rev. 7:14); therefore be it

Resolved, a) That The Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod affirm its adherence to and application of the Scriptural principles of fact concerning race relations and church work as adopted by its representatives in conjunction with the sister synods of the Synodical Conference, and as reported in the Proceedings of the Forty-second Convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America of August 12-15, 1952, to-wit:

"1. God 'will have all men to be saved and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.' 1 Tim. 2:4.

"2. His plan of salvation embraces the world. 'God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life.' John 3:16. 'He is the Propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.' 1 John 2:2.

"3. God's grace in Christ should be proclaimed to all nations in accordance with the Savior's Great Commission to His church; 'Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature.' Mark 16:15. 'Ye shall be witnesses unto Me both in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.' Acts 1:8.

"4. In the executions of Christ's command, viz., 'to preach the Gospel to every creature,' no line of demarcation should be drawn relative to nationality, race, or color, 'for there is no respect of persons with God.' Rom. 2:11; Eph. 6:9; Col. 3:25; Acts 10:34.

"5. The holy Christian Church, the communion of saints, is the recipient of Christ's injunction to 'teach the nations to observe all things whatsoever He has commanded.' Not only did Christ instruct His Church to 'teach all nations,' but also to 'baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost.' Matt. 28:19, 20.

"6. The Church's chief function and task is to spread the news of Christ and His salvation to men, women, and children, irrespective of any national or race make-up, so that souls may be won for, and retained with, Christ, in whom alone they 'have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace.' Eph. 1:7." and be it further

Resolved, b) That in all problems which arise in connection with the application and conduct of these above-mentioned principles of Scriptures, all members of our church unreservedly obey the Savior's command "that ye love one another," and practice Chris-

tian charity, forbearance, and understanding with each other, knowing that the same Lord is Head over all, and that His Spirit dwells by Word and Sacrament in all the Churches; and be it further

Resolved, c)

1. That all congregations of Synod regard all persons regardless of race or ethnic origin living within the limits of their respective parishes, and not associated with another Christian Church, as individuals whom God would reach with the Gospel of His saving grace through the ministry of the local congregation;

2. That congregations operating in changing communities be encouraged to continue operations in those areas rather than relinquish their properties through sale to other denominations, and that the various District Mission Boards be encouraged to subsidize these congregations when this becomes necessary, so that the souls in those communities, regardless of race or ethnic grouping, may be won and served;

3. That synodical institutions, agencies and offices continue to make no distinction, based upon race or color, in their entrance requirements or employment policies, and be it finally

Resolved, d) That since Christians are constrained to do justice and love mercy, we acknowledge our responsibility as a church to provide guidance for our members to work in the capacity of Christian citizens for the elimination of discrimination, wherever it may exist, in community, city, state, nation and world.

Editorial Comments

The convention, in making this pronouncement, did more in the right direction than many of us had anticipated. The very fact that the matter was discussed and acted upon is a mark of progress for the Missouri Synod.

No evangelical Christian could find fault with the statements of the preamble to the pronouncement. The restatement of certain Scripture texts bearing on the universality of the grace of God as well as on Christ's will and intent of bringing the Gospel to all people is good.

Much of what the pronouncement says is good. There are, nevertheless, very unfortunate omissions. The pronouncement, unlike the memorial, does not point out unmistakably the difficulties and the opportunities involved in the race question for the Church of today. (Many of the statements are so general that they would have been just as rele-

vant in the days of Martin Luther.)

Unlike that of certain other church bodies with a much larger constituency in areas of open hostility to the mandates of the United States Supreme Court, the Missouri Synod pronouncement lacks a clear and ringing challenge to the Church to get into the vanguard in establishing a pattern of fellowship that would do justice to the demands of the Second Table of the Law and cause the heathen world to say "there must be power in Christianity; we can see it in the fellowship that Christians practise."

A Bit of History

Not one congregation of predominantly non-Caucasian membership was before 1946 an organic member of the Missouri Synod or any other Synod of the Synodical Conference. For decades since the turn of the century congregations of the Missouri Synod have bypassed in their mission outreach non-Caucasian people of their community; and all the while nothing was said or done about it by many otherwise mission- and kingdom-minded synodical officials and periodicals. In view of these evident historical facts and without reading anything between the lines of the pronouncement, one must concede that by it the Missouri Synod is now charting a new course in race relations, different from the past eighty years.

Mere honesty, therefore, would require at least a statement calling for repentance where the Church has been in error. The memorial called for such a statement; the adopted pronouncement omits all reference to the need of repentance. On the other hand, it presents the past in a halo of goodness.

The Missouri Synod would have done well to have adopted the memorial presented to it by two of its congregations. The pastor of one of these churches has written since the St. Paul convention: "It seems to me that the resolution (we have referred to it as a pronouncement) was well watered down. The note of repentance was completely omitted, no specific mention was made of the necessity of integration, and the resolution left the impression that we are simply reaffirming the 'fine' position we have always held."

In spite of its evident weaknesses, though, the pronouncement is a mark of progress. We may do well to thank God for the good involved in it and pray that His providence will so direct the Church that it will be unaffected adversely by the weaknesses of the pronouncement.

Other Convention Notes

When the floor committee made its first recommendation to the Missouri Synod convention held last month, one Southern gentleman took the floor and recited every argument that has been produced by Southern demagogues to "keep the Negro in his place," every argument from the one about "intermarriage" to the one that says "the Negro is happiest with his own kind." But the gentleman stood alone; not one person spoke to encourage him in his stand.

Soon, because certain speakers thought the committee's recommendations did not go far enough in expressing the need for the elimination of discrimination, the whole matter was referred back to the committee for further consideration and possible change.

At the close of the evening session, at 9 o'clock, the committee announced that there would be an open hearing to which all interested persons might come. A half hour later about two hundred delegates and guests appeared before the committee.

The Southern gentleman once again restated his die-hard, post-bellum philosophy. A Negro pastor most eloquently "laid it on the line," giving answer to every pseudo-argument that the Southern gentleman had presented.

A heartening circumstance of this meeting and others in which this matter was discussed was the Christian attitude assumed by pastors from the South. Though they were mild in their statements, it was evident that they saw the light and were minded to guide their people into the way of the light.

Among those who attended this 9:30 p.m. meeting were men of strength in the Missouri Synod; and everyone soon learned where they stood in the matter. The only one who spoke contrary to what is obviously Christian in this area

was the gentleman referred to above.

As a result of this night hearing, the floor committee two days later returned to the convention with a better recommendation; they made practically every good change suggested by those attending the open hearing.

And yet the pronouncement finally recommended by them and unanimously adopted by the convention was weak. Though good changes were made, the structure of the original committee recommendation was weak and of necessity remained essentially so. If a strong pronouncement was to result, the committee would have been compelled to change the whole structure of it rather than merely to make some good changes.

If the committee could have had time to restudy the whole matter and to think it through objectively and dispassionately in the light of the world in which we are today living and of our holy Christian faith, the results might have been not only an improved pronouncement but a clear and authentic voice in a confused world and age. Withal, the Missouri Synod is moving forward; we may expect even better things tomorrow.

Supports Negroes in Bus Boycott

The following lines are quotations from a news release of the National Lutheran Council, March 28, 1956:

"Montgomery, Ala. — (NLC) — A young Lutheran pastor, the Rev. Robert S. Graetz, who has become known here as the 'nigger-lovin' white preacher,' urged Lutherans all over the United States to work within their own congregations and communities toward solutions of race problems.

"How easy it is to send missionaries all over the globe and to

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overlook the large masses of people right on our doorsteps who also need the Gospel,' he said.

"The 27-year-old minister came to Montgomery last June to serve Trinity Lutheran Church, an 'almost' all-Negro mission congregation of the American Lutheran Church.

"He has gained nation-wide attention by being one of the few Montgomery white people to join the much-publicized Negro protest against abusive treatment and unfair seating policy in the city's bus system. The movement, Mr. Graetz stresses, is a 'protest rather than a boycott.'

"Late in March he was one of the very few white defense witnesses at the trial of the Rev. Martin Luther King, a colored Baptist minister, whom the local circuit court found guilty of leading the movement against the bus system that has gone on since December 5.

"On that date, Mr. Graetz was the only white man among 5,000 Negroes who rallied to protest against the arrest of Mrs. Rosa Parks, a Negro, for refusing to obey a bus driver's order to move from her bus seat to make room for a white passenger.

"He has sent a weekly newsletter about the protest to other white ministers in the city 'to acquaint you with certain facts which have been almost completely overlooked (intentionally or otherwise) by the local press.'

"These activities have exposed the Lutheran minister and his pregnant wife to abusive telephone calls almost every day, an attack by vandals who slashed two tires of his car and put sugar into the gas tank, as well as to arrest.

"He was detained by the county sheriff on charges of 'running a taxi service without a license' as he helped protesting Negro friends, but was released after 30 minutes in the county jail, Mr. Graetz said.

"During that half hour, the sheriff told him that 'no white man in Alabama would have Negro friends,' and a deputy

sheriff claimed that 'the Bible supports segregation,' the Lutheran minister reported.

"Nonetheless, Mr. Graetz has continued to support the Montgomery Negro movement because he feels he 'cannot minister to souls alone.'

"My people also have bodies,' he stated. 'My people deserve the opportunity to live a decent life in this world, too.'"

As these lines go to the printer, Lutherans from all parts of the country are beginning to pack their luggage for a trip to Valparaiso, Indiana, where they will attend the Seventh Annual Valparaiso University Institute on Human Relations. Pastor Graetz is scheduled to address the Institute on "The Montgomery Bus Boycott—My Part in It."

A Look Around

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ciation of the fact that God, in His providence, made people into different races and nations... Far from the Word of God encouraging equality, it is an established Scriptural principle that in every community order there is a fixed relationship between authorities... Those who are culturally and spiritually advanced have a mission of leadership and protection to the less advanced... The natives must be led and formed towards independence so that eventually they will be equal to the Europeans, but each on their own territory and each serving God and their own fatherland.

This is the theological foundation for the attitude of the Reformed Churches. Father Huddleston throws the light of the Incarnation on this peculiar theological statement. He calls attention to the fact that no less than the Son of God Himself identified Himself with men in their misery. He goes on to say: "It is this mystery of identification which finds its very expression in the stable

of Bethlehem: God, almighty and eternal, identifying Himself with man at his most helpless, with man in his utter littleness and poverty. Surely, if the Incarnation means anything at all, it must mean the breaking down of barriers, not by words, but by deed, by act, by identification."

Those who within our own church body view segregation or integration as an adiaphoron will do well to look at this whole problem in the light of the Incarnation. They will do well, moreover, to read this manifesto from cover to cover. True, the locale of the book is in South Africa; however, its message is as applicable to the United States of America as to South Africa. The formation of Citizens's Councils in our Southern states is only our own device for practising the same kind of discrimination as that found in South Africa.

The chapter on "The Christian Dilemma" opens with the description of a church meeting in a "zoned" hall. White and black delegates were not permitted to sit together. During the meeting one African minister prefaced his speech by asking the question—which may well haunt us!—"If our Lord Jesus Christ came into this room this morning, on which side would He sit?"

MISCELLANEA

Comments on the **Seventh Annual Valparaiso University Institute on Human Relations** will appear in the next issue of **The VANGUARD**. The Proceedings of this Institute will be published at an early date and may be purchased from the office of the Lutheran Human Relations Association of America.

St. Paul Congregation of the Bronx, New York, has for three consecutive years sent, and paid the expenses of, a delegate to the Valparaiso University Institute on Human Relations. Incidentally, this congregation is also supporting LHRAA financially.

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