

MEMORANDUM

TO: Those members and friends who have written inquiring about ESCRU's Ash
Wednesday Witness
RE: The central issue of racist curriculum materials
FROM: The Rev. Albert R. Dreisbach, Jr., Executive Director

When ESCRU decided at its 8th Annual Meeting to "burn and expose" examples of racist curriculum material produced and/or recommended by the larger Church and its presses, we were well aware that such action would probably be misinterpreted. Knowing this, we attempted to provide both the secular and Church presses with background material, including a rationale for such action, well in advance of the Ash Wednesday witness. Though in one case we were branded as "religious zealots and totalitarian extremists," not one journal bothered to print a guest editorial, "A Whited Sepulchre in the Church School Curriculum," by Richard E. Quaintance, Jr., Ph.D., a member of NJESCRU and an Associate Professor of English at Douglass College. In the lead-in to this release, Dr. Quaintance noted that he "has for years abhorred and taught against censorship. Only the present crisis in white attitudes toward Afro-Americans and Africa has moved him... to participate in the exposure and symbolic destruction of the sample printed matter" which he goes on to describe in his essay.

As so often is the case, the press and others have chosen to concentrate on the questionable manner of the demonstrators rather than upon the essential scandal of the racist curricula. In typical style, this type of thinking makes the real victim its "criminal" and quickly makes him the focal point of concern, thereby drawing attention and needed commitment away from the real issue.

Unlike those of you who have taken the time and effort to communicate with the national office, with the exception of one secular magazine, none of the Church presses has called or written seeking further clarification. Had they done so, among the facts which they would have discovered are the following:

1. The actual "burning" was a ceremonious or symbolic one (both words repeatedly stressed in our news releases) carried out in the context of a mock litany. Following the burning, the ashes of the racist materials were placed on the foreheads of the participants as a sign of penance for our own sins of commission and omission.
2. We of ESCRU are members of the Episcopal Church purging materials recommended by that Church. Our action was one of lamenting our own sins, not one of forcibly denying the rights of others to express their beliefs through the printed word as was the case in Nazi Germany. There is a world of difference between a guerrilla theater's attempt to expose racist literature and a government's campaign aimed at eradicating the expression of views by those who oppose it.
3. No mention was made in most of the coverage of this witness of the statement of support made by the Rev. J. Metz Rollins, Jr., The Executive Director of the National Committee of Black Churchmen. (Cf. enclosure).
4. No mention was made in most coverage of the recent developments within the ecumenical Joint Exploration on Education in the 70's and 80's - a body which has requested that ESCRU make available to the Exploration their evaluation of all major curricula now in use in the Episcopal Church"
5. No mention was made in most coverage that as a result of ESCRU's raising the issue of racist curriculum materials:
 - a. Investigating committees were appointed in the Dioceses of Missouri, Ohio and Pennsylvania;
 - b. The Diocese of Newark resolved to apply the standard of racism as one of the criteria by which to evaluate all church school materials in use in that diocese.
 - c. The Diocese of Western Michigan wrote to express its appreciation of "the attention being given to this matter throughout the church at the national level under the leadership of ESCRU." Furthermore, the clergy of the diocese have resolved to "support the concerns of ESCRU by notifying in writing the publishers of Church School curricula of their firm request that all curricula be edited to eliminate both explicit and implicit racist elements and to strengthen existing content of anti-racist elements in curricula and to report in writing to the Bishop of Western Michigan of their plans."

If ESCRU has offended you by our tactics, we sincerely regret it. If, despite our methods, the national Church begins a campaign to seriously grapple with this scandal within our educational materials, then we can both give thanks to God that He has chosen to use even the weakness of one group to provide greater fidelity for the larger Church. As your conscience concluded that our tactics were objectionable, our own concluded that, given the context, our black brothers and sisters were correct in their conclusion "that washing by water will not suffice us for the cleansing needed; it is the fire this time."