

*the  
church  
speaks  
on  
race*



# The Church Speaks on Race

## This Booklet

*brings together in one place key statements which speak with authority to members of the Episcopal Church on the subject of race. Sources of original material are identified in the main headings. In most cases, statements have been excerpted or abbreviated. The statements included here have been issued over almost a quarter-century – 1940-63.*

## The Book of Common Prayer

*provides for the worship of the Church and articulates its basic faith as received from Holy Scripture. Typical of the concern which this book of worship directs that Churchmen should show to all men is the response in The Offices of Instruction to the question "What is my duty toward my neighbor?"*

My duty towards my neighbour is to love him as myself and to do to all men as I would they should do unto me: to love, honour, and succour my father and mother: to honour and obey the civil authority: to submit myself to all my governors, teachers, spiritual pastors and masters: to order myself lowly and reverently to all my betters: to hurt nobody by word or deed: to be true and just in all my dealings: to bear no malice nor hatred in my heart: to keep my hands from picking and stealing, and my tongue from evil speaking, lying, and slandering: to keep my body in temperance, soberness, and chastity: not to covet nor desire other men's goods; but to learn and labor truly to get mine own living, and to do my duty in that state of life unto which it shall please God to call me.

## The Constitution & Canons

*of the Church are binding upon the communicants, congregations, and dioceses of the Episcopal Church. The*

*Canon is clear on the right of communicants to transfer to another charge regardless of race or color:*

CANON 16, SECTION 1.a A communicant or baptized member in good standing removing from one parish or congregation to another shall be entitled to receive and shall procure from the rector or minister of that parish or congregation of his or her last enrollment, or if there be no rector or minister, from one of the wardens, a certificate addressed to the rector or minister of the parish or congregation to which the removal is desired, stating that he or she is duly registered or enrolled as a communicant or baptized member in the parish or congregation from which he or she desires to be transferred, and the rector or minister or warden of the parish or congregation to which such communicant or baptized member may remove shall enroll him or her as a communicant or baptized member when such certificate is presented.

## General Convention

*Under the Constitution and Canons of the Church the government of the Episcopal Church resides in the General Convention. In this bicameral legislature, each diocese is represented in the House of Bishops by its episcopate and in the House of Deputies by its clerical and lay delegates. Resolutions adopted by General Convention are authoritative for every diocese.*

### 1952

IN 1952, stating that "we believe that the nature and destiny of man by virtue of his creation, redemption, and calling, and man's activities in family, State, and culture establish limits beyond which a government cannot with impunity go," AND "that respect for an observance of human rights constitutes an essential cornerstone for building a world society where peace and justice can prevail; and the violation of human rights and fundamental freedoms in many parts of the world both degrade men and jeopardize world peace," the Convention resolved that its members:

Encourage and support full participation by the United States in international action through the

United Nations to the end that observance of human rights and fundamental freedoms for all men may be promoted, without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion.

Use every reasonable means to overcome longstanding discriminatory practices in our own land, and, particularly in these days when we seek to oppose the threat of totalitarianism from without, to guard against our own use of the methods which we condemn in others.

*The same General Convention stated that:*

Almost every country today, including the United States, is guilty in greater or less degree of mass racial or color discrimination (and resolved) that we consistently oppose and combat discrimination based on color or race in every form, both within the Church and without, in this country and internationally.

*The Convention also resolved that:*

This Convention affirm its conviction that no branch of the Christian Church should rest content while any injustices in racial relations obtain in parishes, schools, and agencies under her control or in association with her; and that it urge every member of the Church to labor unceasingly for the elimination of such injustices.

1955

To all the clergy and people of this Church that they accept and support this ruling of the Supreme Court, and, that by opening channels of Christian conference and communication between the races concerned in each diocese and community, they anticipate constructively the local implementation of this ruling as the law of the land, and further that we make our own the statement of the Anglican Congress that "in the work of the Church we should welcome people of any race at any service conducted by a priest or layman of any ethnic origin, and bring them into the full fellowship of the congregation and its organization."

1958

RESOLVED That the 59th General Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church takes note of the bombing of the temple of the Hebrew Benevolent Congregation of Atlanta, Ga., and expresses its

regret and sorrow to the members of its congregation.

All acts of violence and irresponsible and wanton destruction are abhorrent and totally indefensible in the eyes of Christ and His Church.

WHEREAS, The Church has generally taught as part of the Christian ethic, the obligation of Christians to obey the Civil Law under which they live; and

Whereas, It has generally been clear that the right of civil disobedience and of revolution should be undertaken by Christians only for the gravest reasons of conscience and as a last resort; and

Whereas, The Constitution of the United States is the supreme law of this land; and

Whereas, The Supreme Court is the ultimate interpreter of the Constitution; and

Whereas, Those who are in disagreement with Federal and Supreme Court's interpretation of the Constitution have the legal recourse of amendment of the Constitution; therefore be it

Resolved, That this Church call upon its members to face seriously their obligation to conform to Federal and Supreme Court Orders in regard to giving to all students equal access to our public schools.

WHEREAS, We believe in the natural dignity and value of every man, of whatever color or race, as created in the image of God and as one for whom Christ died, that discrimination by reason of color or race between men has as its root human sin; that the Church must confess its own sin in this area; and

Whereas, We acknowledge that there are no easy answers to the problems created by the effort to apply these convictions to special and local situations, particularly in times of cultural and social change, and that the composite thoughts of Churchmen in conference or convention may or may not be the will of God because we all stand under the judgment of God and not finally under the judgments of fallible men; and also that, despite honest differences of opinion, we are bound together, through our union in Christ and His fellowship of love, to seek God's will; therefore be it

Resolved, That we call first upon our fellow Churchmen by God's grace to cleanse themselves of all spirit of racial discrimination; and then upon all persons, especially the members of our Church, to work together, in charity and forbearance, towards the establishment, without racial discrimination, of full opportunities in fields such as education, housing, employment and public accommodations.

#### 1961

*The following Resolution was adopted by the General Convention of 1961. The Resolution was supported by the concurrent Triennial of the Women of the Church.*

WHEREAS, prejudice is inconsistent with the Gospel of Jesus Christ; and

Whereas, God in His providence is leading this country towards a desegregated society; therefore be it

Resolved, that this Church, expressing penitence for marks of racial discrimination and segregation both in her past and present life and structure, take what steps she can to conform herself to the reconciling comprehensiveness of the Body of Christ, specifically by recognizing ability in whomever it may be found, for example in considering persons for positions at national, diocesan and parochial levels here and abroad, and by encouraging studies in race relations and in the integrated society; and be it further

Resolved, that dioceses and parishes be encouraged to establish worship and study programs in this area.

#### National Council

*Between Conventions, the work of the National Church is carried on by the National Council. Statements by this Council are for the guidance of the General Church.*

#### 1943

*With the formation of the Bi-racial Committee, a set of Guiding Principles was adopted for the use of the Episcopal Church. Listed in condensed form, they are:*

1. Fellowship is essential to Christian worship.
2. Fellowship is essential in Church administration.
3. High standards must be maintained in every area of the Church's work for all persons.
4. Desegregation must be the goal for all church institutions and agencies.
5. It is both the function and the task of the Church to set spiritual and moral goals for society, and to bear witness to their validity by the witness of her own life.

#### 1954

*In its resolution in regard to race relations, National Council commended Some Guiding Principles to the Church. In brief they are:*

1. All races are responsible for seeking and applying a Christian solution to their mutual problems, regardless of initial responsibility.
2. Leaders of all races are concerned and have a vital and necessary contribution to make. . . . Responsible and representative leaders of all races should be included from the outset in the councils which seek to effect desegregation.
3. Individual Churchmen have an obligation to seek constructive contacts and to create and utilize channels for discussion and co-operation in the community.
4. Every Churchman is clearly called to work unceasingly to create and foster genuine Christian fellowship between races in his own congregation and church school, in hospitals, homes, and institutions, and in every aspect of the Church's life.
5. Parents have a special opportunity and responsibility to set an example for their children. . . .
6. Each Episcopal Church can give vital leadership by making it clear that all Churchmen are invited into full life and fellowship of the Church, including its services of worship, parish organizations, diocesan activities, church-sponsored schools and institutions. Each parish and mission has a primary responsibility for this leadership.
7. Each parish church and mission faces its old obligation with new force and urgency . . . to seek diligently for every unchurched person in its



neighborhood, to bring the Good News of Jesus Christ to such persons, and to welcome them into the fellowship of that church or mission.

1956

With the statement that "much is lost in seeking answers to problems of human relations when committees are not representative of all races and attitudes on both sides of the question involved," *National Council in 1956 adopted a resolution recommending* "that the dioceses of the Church be encouraged to create interracial committees to consider problems of human relations on the community, congregational, and diocesan levels."

## Pastoral Letters

*The House of*

*Bishops at its meetings may issue Statements or Pastoral Letters which by Canon must be read to every congregation in the Church on some occasion of public worship on the Lord's Day within thirty days after the clergyman receives his copy. Such Pastoral Letters are for the guidance and general edification of the Church. Pertinent excerpts from the Pastoral Letters, and Statements follow:*

1940

THE Christian Gospel proclaims the eternal worth and dignity of every human soul. . . . The Gospel, by its very nature, abhors all regimentation, all totalitarian schemes of mass control, all claims of class or racial superiority, and all economic injustices, because they deny the sacredness of human personality.

The Church must stand boldly for freedom of conscience, of speech and of worship. In the Christian religion is found for all men everywhere, the hope of social progress, the conquest of poverty, disease and of every condition that makes for moral failure and degradation. . . .

1943

OUR Church must prepare . . . to witness to a warsick world . . . by confessing now her corporate sins which are grievous and, in part, responsible for the darkness that covers the earth . . .

class distinctions that are anything but brotherly and racial discriminations that are anything but just. These are some of the things that have crept into the life of our day. We confess that they are sin, trusting that He who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins. . . .

1945

BUT no international union can be effective for lasting peace unless it is based on eternal principles of justice and infused with a spirit of mutual trust and goodwill. . . . It is impossible to abolish the differences between nations, races, and individuals. These differences without a principle of unity are chaos; but these differences animated by the Spirit of Christ, are richness. . . .

1946

WHILE opposing resolutely injustice to minorities, we must strive to give a positive demonstration personally, and by groups, to the fact that Christians, at least, act toward all men as brothers under the one heavenly father. . . .

1955

We are summoned as Christians to recognize the judgments of God, which are the disclosures of the contradictions between our human ways and His design for His people. . . . Before God and men we can make no case for contempt and assumptions of racial superiority. . . . For these there is no answer but repentance. . . .

1956

We can remember that our own racial divisions and misunderstandings at home are part of the same sad story of division which we see on the international scene.

Since the world is one, what we do at home with our divisions and misunderstandings is reflected for our own good or ill among the nations of the earth. It is the will of God that every member of the Church exercise his reconciling ministry in the community in which he lives, that every member seek to create fellowship by breaking down the barriers and suspicions that divide us. . . .

WE write to you on the subject of unity and reconciliation . . . with a great sense of urgency, not to tell you what to do in your specific situations, but rather to share with you five great truths that will help us all act more truly wherever we may be.

*The first point dealt with the need for meeting between representatives of groups between which there is conflict and tension.*

Our own Episcopal Church has within its fellowship rich and poor, white and Negro, Orientals, Indians, and Latin Americans. Meet and know your brethren in Christ.

*The second truth, the Sacredness of Law, dealt with the Biblical doctrine of the authority of secular power.*

(The Law) restrains our selfishness and wildness, and, while it cannot change our hearts, it does provide the indispensable outer framework for our unity.

*The third truth was the active Judgment of God on our divisions.*

God's judgment is the response of a just God to the offenses of mankind against His living will. . . .

We must remember that the majority of mankind belong to the colored races, and that the American racial problem is discussed the world over. . . . If America continues to lose friends as others become convinced that we do not mean what we say about justice and equality, the reason will be obvious. The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether. These judgments are the plain cost we pay in God's universe for not practicing what we preach, and for not being ready to grant to others the opportunity and equality we cherish for ourselves.

*The fourth point dealt with our Christian duty to think rationally and not emotionally about issues that divide men.*

If we build on emotion, the end is conflict. . . .

*The final truth had to do with our Christian commitment as members of God's Church to the redeeming and reconciling love of Christ and fellowship in the Holy Spirit:*

This Spirit raises us above self to see God's will and plan for all men. It is the Spirit of humility, of inclusiveness, and of love ever warring against our hard hearts.

*The Bishops concluded this Letter by saying:*

If we suffer in that endeavor, count it always a privilege to suffer for God and His truth. Care for your souls, brethren, amid the passions and prejudices of our day, and remember that truth alone is strong.

## 1963

*In a series of resolutions, the House of Bishops took action which*

. . . urges the Congress of the United States to pass such civil rights legislation as shall fairly and effectively implement both the established rights and the needs of all minority groups in education, voting rights, housing, employment opportunities and access to places of public accommodation.

. . . recognizes not only the right of free citizens to peaceful assemblage for the redress of grievances, but also that participation in such an assemblage is a proper expression of Christian witness and obedience,

. . . welcomes the responsible discipleship which impels many of our bishops, clergy, and laity to take part in such an assemblage and supports them fully,

. . . prays that through such peaceful assemblage citizens of all races may bring before the government for appropriate and competent action the critical and agonizing problems posed to our nation by racial discrimination in employment, in access to places of public accommodation, in political rights, in education and housing.

. . . commends to all people the Presiding Bishop's letter dated Whitsunday, 1963, as appropriate and helpful in the present racial crisis; and that we support the Presiding Bishop in this wise and timely expression of Christian leadership.

## The Presiding Bishop

*made the following statement to the Church at Whitsuntide, 1963:*

RECENT events . . . underscore the fact that countless citizens have lost patience with the slow pace of response to their legitimate cry for human rights. Pleas of moderation or caution about timing on the part of white leaders are seen increasingly as an unwillingness to face the truth about the appalling injustice which more than a tenth of our citizens suffer daily. While we are thankful for the progress that has been made, this is not enough.

Our Church's position on racial inclusiveness within its own body and its responsibility for racial justice in society has been made clear on many occasions by the General Convention. But there is urgent need to demonstrate by specific actions what God has laid on us. Such actions must move beyond expressions of corporate penitence for our failures to an unmistakable identification of the Church, at all levels of its life, with those who are victims of oppression.

I think of the words we sing as we hail the ascended Christ, "Lord and the ruler of all men," and of our prayers at Whitsuntide as we ask God to work His will in us through His Holy Spirit. And then in contrast to our praises and our prayers our failure to put ourselves at the disposal of the Holy Spirit becomes painfully clear. Only as we take every step possible to join with each other across lines of racial separation in a common struggle for justice will our unity in the Spirit become a present reality.

It is not enough for the Church to exhort men to be good. Men, women and children are today risking their livelihood and their lives in protesting for their rights. We must support and strengthen their protest in every way possible, rather than give support to the forces of resistance by our silence. It should be a cause of rejoicing to the Christian community that Negro Americans and oppressed peoples everywhere are displaying a heightened sense of human dignity in their refusal to accept second class citizenship any longer.

The right to vote, to eat a hamburger where you want, to have a decent job, to live in a house fit for habitation: these are not rights to be litigated or negotiated. It is our shame that demonstrations must be carried out to win them.

These constitutional rights *belong* to the Negro as to the white, because we are all men and we are all citizens. The white man needs to recognize this if he is to preserve his own humanity. It is a mark of the inversion of values in our society that those who today struggle to make the American experiment a reality through their protest are accused of disturbing the peace—and that more often than not the Church remains silent on this, our greatest domestic moral crisis.

I commend these specific measures to your attention:

1) I would ask you to involve yourselves. The crisis in communities North and South in such matters is housing, employment, public accommodations, and schools is steadily mounting. It is the duty of every Christian citizen to know fully what is happening in his own community, and actively to support efforts to meet the problems he encounters.

2) I would also ask you to give money as an expression of our unity and as a sign of our support for the end of racial injustice in this land. The struggle of Negro Americans for their rights is costly, both in terms of personal sacrifice and of money, and they need help.

3) I would ask you to take action. Discrimination within the Body of the Church itself is an intolerable scandal. Every congregation has a continuing need to examine its own life and to renew those efforts necessary to insure its inclusiveness fully. Diocesan and church-related agencies, schools and other institutions also have a considerable distance to go in bringing their practices up to the standard of the clear position of the Church on race. I call attention to the firm action of the recent Convention of the Diocese of Washington which directed all diocesan-related institutions to eliminate any discriminatory practices within six months. It further requested the Bishop and Executive Council to take steps necessary to disassociate such diocesan and parish-related institutions from moral or financial support if these practices are not eliminated in the specified time. I believe we must make known where we stand unmistakably.

So I write with a deep sense of the urgency of the racial crisis in our country and the necessity

for the Church to act. Present events reveal the possible imminence of catastrophe. The entire Christian community must pray and act.

## Lambeth Conference

*Every ten years the Bishops of the Anglican Communion at the invitation of the Archbishop of Canterbury meet at Lambeth Palace for conference on matters of common concern. In the Anglican Church this Conference is of paramount influence in matters of faith and doctrine. The results of the Lambeth Conference are not binding on any of the independent Churches represented, but are rather for their guidance.*

1948

THE Conference is convinced that discrimination between men on the grounds of race alone is inconsistent with the principles of Christ's religion. We urge that in every land men of every race should be encouraged to develop in accordance with their abilities; and that this involves fairness of opportunity in trades and professions, in facilities for travelling and in the provision of housing, in education at all stages, and in schemes of social welfare. Every Churchman should be assured of a cordial welcome in any church of our Communion, and no one should be ineligible for any position in the Church by reason of his race or color. — *Resolution #43*

1958

THE Conference affirms its belief in the natural dignity and value of every man, of whatever color or race, as created in the image of God. In the light of this belief the Conference affirms that neither race nor color is in itself a barrier to any aspect of that life in family and community for which God created all men. It therefore condemns discrimination of any kind on the grounds of race or color alone.

The Conference would urge that in multi-racial societies members of all races shall be allowed:

A fair and just share in the government of their country;

A fair and just share in the control, develop-

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ment and rewards of the natural resources of their country, including advancement to the highest level of attainment;

The right to associate freely in worship, in education, in industry, in recreation, and in all other departments of the common life. — *Resolution #110*

## Anglican Congress

*At intervals midway between each Lambeth Conference, an Anglican Congress is held (of which the one in 1954 was the first). Bishops, priests, and laymen serving as delegates to this meeting represent all the Churches in the Anglican Communion. The resolutions of the Anglican Congress are not binding but are rather for the guidance of the independent Churches represented.*

1954

We reaffirm the statement on race relations of the Lambeth Conference of 1948, and are penitent for our failure to put it into full effect. We urge members of the Church to continue to witness strongly and wisely against all forms of discrimination, to work in each land for justice in racial relations, and to teach the full implications of our faith with regard to race. Those living in multi-racial areas must put Christian principles into practice by improving social relations between people of different color. In the work of the Church we should welcome people of any race at any service conducted by a priest or layman of any ethnic origin, and bring them into the full fellowship of the congregation and its organizations.

1963

God has called us to affirm the unity of the human race.

Segregation and other forms of discrimination are sin. We voice our deep concern and compassion for all who suffer on account of their race, color, or creed. We pledge our active support for all those who, in various parts of the world, are witnessing for Christ by their courageous stand against discrimination and segregation. We are ashamed that barriers of race should still persist in the life of the Church.

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