

85-GS-84 VOTED: The Fifteenth General Synod adopts the Resolution "Human Rights for the Hungarian Minorities in Romania and Czechoslovakia and the German Reformed People in the U.S.S.R."

HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS AGAINST MINORITIES IN THE SOCIALIST REPUBLICS OF ROMANIA AND CZECHOSLOVAKIA AND THE GERMAN REFORMED PEOPLE IN THE USSR

INTRODUCTION

Respect for human rights is central to our Christian faith. As affirmed in the actions of the Pronouncements on Human Rights of the Twelfth and Fourteenth General Synods of the United Church of Christ, human rights have their source in God's acts of creation, reconciliation, and redemption. The Pronouncements also recognize that human rights are grounded in human responsibility to God.

Our faith leads us to affirm that all human beings have equal rights by virtue of their being created in the image of God. Despite differences in matters of faith, nations of the East and West have joined in international declarations on human rights. Thus all persons and all civil orders are under moral obligations to develop policies, programs, and policies which respect basic human rights.

The continuing abuse of human rights in a variety of circumstances is a matter of urgent concern. The Church in many parts of the world is responding to the cries of those suffering from religious and political oppression, economic deprivation and exploitation, cultural alienation and despair. As God calls us to be advocates of justice and mercy, we of the United Church of Christ are especially mindful of our faith-heritage bond with persons in Eastern Europe.

HUNGARIANS IN ROMANIA AND CZECHOSLOVAKIA

The Eleventh General Synod of the United Church of Christ resolved to support the legitimate strivings of minorities in the Socialist Republic of Romania with respect to the freedom of exercising their fundamental human rights and cultural freedom. Hungarians, numbering 2.5 million, are the largest minority in Europe. The March 13, 1985, meeting of the Caribbean and North American Area Council of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches expressed concern over continuing reports of a lack of compliance with the religious position of the Helsinki Final Act in Romania. Our Hungarian Reformed sisters and brothers live and minister under political oppression, economic deprivation, cultural alienation, and religious persecution which includes restricted admittance to theological education, harrassment and incarceration of faithful pastors, and even recycling Bibles into toilet paper.

In Czechoslovakia violations of human rights exist against the almost one million Hungarian minority. Specifically, Hungarians are not allowed to use their native tongue in education and some are imprisoned who demand that the Czechoslovak government fulfill the provisions of the Helsinki Final Act.

WITH REGARD TO HUNGARIANS WITHIN ROMANIA AND CZECHOSLOVAKIA

THEREFORE, the Fifteenth General Synod urges the government of the United States of America to terminate the 1975 United States - Romanian Trade Agreement and The Most Favored National status with the Socialist Republic of Ro-

mania, unless changes are demonstrated in regard to human rights and the exercise of cultural freedom; and

FURTHER, the Fifteenth General Synod of the United Church of Christ directs the Office for Church In Society to contact the American delegation to the Review Committee of the Helsinki Final Act and to urge them to press signatory nations to full compliance with all the Basket III issues, especially those that have direct effect on the witness of the Reformed Church in eastern Europe.

WITH REGARD TO GERMAN REFORMED PEOPLE IN THE U.S.S.R.

Further, that the Fifteenth General Synod reaffirms the rights of the German Reformed people within the U.S.S.R. to full religious freedom, and requests that the officers and staff of the United Church of Christ work with other denominations to help to secure that freedom; and

Further, the Fifteenth General Synod of the United Church of Christ asks that the Officers and national instrumentalities of the United Church of Christ cooperate to enable persons of German Reformed heritage to emigrate, insofar as that is possible without jeopardizing the safety of any person or the life and freedom of any religious body.

11. PRONOUNCEMENT ON PUBLIC EDUCATION

The Moderator called on Mr. Douglas Hatfield (NH), chairperson of committee 6, who introduced the Pronouncement on "Public Education" and referred to the proposed pronouncement in the Advance Materials mailing. Mr. Hatfield moved adoption of the pronouncement on, "Public Education" with the following changes:

Section IV, paragraph 2,—add: "traditionally" as the first word; Section IV, paragraph 3, line 3, change—"raise" to "address"; Section IV, Second Therefore, at end, add—and we advocate more equitable distribution of state and federal funds to accomplish this purpose; omit paragraph beginning: "we advocate more equitable distribution."

Following discussion, Rev. Paul Sherry moved an amendment as follows: "We advocate more equitable distribution of state and federal funds for poor, minority and gifted students with special needs who are 'at risk' of failure in both urban and rural areas"; it was accepted.

After discussion on the pronouncement, it was

85-GS-85 VOTED: The Fifteenth General Synod adopts the Pronouncement on Public Education.

PRONOUNCEMENT ON PUBLIC EDUCATION

SUMMARY

In the past two years, thoughtful public attention has turned to public schools. With confidence in their achievements waning and a rapid growth of "Christian" Day Schools, the public schools seem to be losing public support. Yet this development must not be allowed to obscure the great strengths and accomplishments of American education. The United Church of Christ and its predecessor bodies have been at the forefront of the struggle for equity and excellence in American educational institutions; we still have a unique role to play in the movement for educational reform and renewal. Committed to high standards of literacy and learning, to a ministry of pastoral care and reconciliation, and to justice in all social institutions, we must reaffirm our responsibility for quality public education, and embark upon new cooperative ventures with the public schools.

BACKGROUND

Every generation has addressed critical educational issues. The most severe threat to public education today is an erosion of confidence in the public schools. The "Christian" Day School movement, originally begun to avoid desegregation, but now also serving those unhappy with the public schools, is a sign of this erosion. Because of the aging of our population, a decline in the white birth rate, and a steady exodus from the public schools, fewer people have a personal investment in public education, and support lags. Many people have lost their essential awareness of their stake in and responsibility for a strong system of public schools, schools upon which we must rely to communicate our cultural, historical, and national values.

We must remember that the United States has attempted what no other country has tried: universal, free education. In spite of the difficulty of that task, American education has generally succeeded: it has assimilated successive waves of immigrants, prepared increasing numbers of students for higher education, enabled a large percentage of students to finish high school, successfully desegregated most school systems, and has provided special education for the handicapped.

Today a new challenge is before us. Already, in twenty-three of the nation's twenty-five largest cities, children of ethnic minorities are a majority of the school-age population. This trend can only continue. But while children from many areas have comfortable schools with all the educational trimmings, poor and ethnic minority children often face overcrowded and deteriorated facilities, and a lack of enrichment programs or modern technology. Unless we think and act now, we are on the brink of establishing a two-tiered system of education, a system which separates the wealthy from the poor, the haves from the have-nots.

There are some encouraging signs on the educational scene. Many new partnerships are being formed between business or industry and education, and between colleges and elementary or secondary schools. Other reforms or plans for reform include teacher training, curriculum, salaries, and issues of educational leadership.

Education reform is essential, but we must aim at causes, not at symptoms. We must be aware that schools exist not only to provide workers for business and industry, but also to instill a sense of history, a love of knowledge and the arts, and a critical awareness of the responsibilities of citizenship. In addition, we must be wary of a concern for excellence which masks a lack of concern for equity.

We can and must be effective advocates for educational justice. The major responsibility for public education is close to home for us all: in our state capitals, and, even more powerfully, in the nearly 16,000 local school boards and districts which determine leadership, staffing, budgets, curriculum, policies, and services in the public schools. Here each of us has both a responsibility and an opportunity to bear witness to every person's right to develop fully within a society characterized by justice, decency, and compassion.

BIBLICAL, THEOLOGICAL, AND ETHICAL RATIONALE

In spite of the fact that public education as we know it is a modern institution, the education of the public has been highly valued by the Jewish and Christian traditions. In Biblical times, families bore the primary responsibility for nurture, supported by a community religious ethos and an

environment of religious feast days, festivals, rites and rituals. The Book of Proverbs served as an early textbook, urging the wisdom essential for a good life. In Jesus' time a cluster of institutions provided education, including the household, community, temple, synagogue, and school. Jesus, called "Rabbi," was a master teacher, and through word, parable and example he commissioned his disciples to "go . . . teach." Following this Great Commission, early Christians placed great importance on education. While the medieval Church restricted schooling to a priestly caste, the Reformation revolutionized education and opened the study of the Scriptures to rich and poor alike. Not only did Luther and Calvin promote the priesthood of all believers, but they proposed plans for elementary, secondary, and university education. Luther believed that both the government and the Church were responsible for education.

We are heirs to this Reformed tradition, which planted the ideals of equal educational opportunity and academic excellence in this country, twin goals which are mutually supportive, not competitive. The churches and agencies which preceded the United Church of Christ founded some of the first colleges and universities in this country and were instrumental in the creation of many early elementary and secondary schools. The American Missionary Association founded over 500 schools for newly-freed blacks and others after the Civil War. These schools combined high academic standards with equal access for all persons. More recently the United Church of Christ has recognized inadequacies in public schools and called for specific improvements. It has urged its members to become informed and involved in school policy, has supported desegregated schools, and has opposed sectarian intrusions like public funds for private schools or organized prayer and Bible reading in the public schools. General Synods have called for more funds for public education, urging churches to recruit persons to influence school boards and strengthen accountability for quality and equality in education.

Many biblical and theological principles support the Church's engagement with public education. All persons are children of God; all are created in the divine image; all need an opportunity to grow in wisdom, in stature, and in God's favor. Speaking in the prophetic tradition of justice and righteousness, we must demand educational opportunities for all.

STATEMENT OF CHRISTIAN CONVICTION

The Church is called to serve God in all realms of life; we cannot isolate personal from social ministries or spiritual from political witness. The distinctive American tradition of separation of Church and State necessitates the separation of the institutional Church from the institutional State, but not the removal of the religious voice from public policy or the divorce of faith from learning. Indeed, our prophetic heritage compels us to advocate for justice and peace, for protection for the weak, and for aid for the powerless.

Traditionally, the role of the Church in public education should not be limited to narrow religious issues such as released time instruction, prayer and Bible reading, creationism, or religious holidays. Instead, it should address injustices, such as discrimination on the basis of race, sex, class, language, or national origin, and the inequalities of educational opportunity which we find all around us.

The Church is called by God to work for justice and equity in society and to bring a ministry of reconciliation where