

TUESDAY EVENING

7. RECONSIDERATION OF RESOLUTION "500 YEARS OF AMERICAN INDIAN AND EURO-AMERICAN CONTACT: A CALL FOR NEW BEGINNINGS"

In response to a motion by Mr. John E. Aeschbury (IS) and a second,

91-GS-83 VOTED: The Eighteenth General Synod reconsiders Resolution "500 Years of American Indian and Euro-American Contact: A Call for New Beginnings."

Mr. Jeffrey H. Bates (OHIO) moved that the resolution be amended as follows: In Committee Reports, Part VII, page 8, last "Be It Further Resolved" paragraph, include the Commission for Racial Justice and African/Americans. The motion was seconded. In the discussion period, Mr. Thomas Harry Eisentrout (OHIO) suggested a break for silent prayer and calmness. By consensus, the body approved a few moments of silent reflection. The Eighteenth General Synod failed to accept Mr. Bates' amendment to the resolution.

The Moderator advised the body to vote on the entire resolution since it was reconsidered.

91-GS-84 VOTED: The Eighteenth General Synod reaffirms adoption of the Resolution "500 Years of American Indian and Euro-American Contact: A Call for New Beginnings" as originally voted in 91- GS-84.

8. RESOLUTION "SELF DETERMINATION OF PUERTO RICO AND AMNESTY FOR PRISONERS OF CONSCIENCE"

Ms. Gosselink recognized the Chairperson of Committee 15, Mr. Calvin True (ME), for the presentation of the Report of Committee 15. He directed the delegates to Committee Reports, Part VII, page 9, and indicated areas where the Committee made changes while preserving the original objectives of the resolution. He shared committee and personal frustrations of time limitations on debate and the inadequate opportunity for adequate discussion on resolutions that warrant actions. On behalf of the Committee, Mr. True moved that the Eighteenth General Synod adopt the Resolution "Self Determination of Puerto Rico and Amnesty for Prisoners of Conscience."

The Rev. James Gray (NH) spoke on behalf of the committee.

The body paused for a moment of silent prayer.

There was some favorable discussion. Mr. Terry White (SC), a member of the Business Committee, on a point of information regarding the different parties in Puerto Rico, asked for clarification about sides being taken. The committee responded that its intent was not to take sides but rather to encourage the national government to give the Puerto Ricans the opportunity for self-determination.

Mr. James Blume (SC) moved to refer the resolution to the Executive Council for action. The motion was seconded, and Mr. Blume spoke to the motion. He expressed concern over the body taking sides in a potential political debate and preferred the Executive Council to use its resources to investigate the issue and provide a proper recommendation without entering a political war.

There was some discussion on the referral motion, but the Eighteenth General Synod failed to approve referral of this resolution to the Executive Council for action.

The Rev. Jennifer Russell (NH) moved the question.

91-GS-85 VOTED: The Eighteenth General Synod adopts the Resolution "Self Determination of Puerto Rico and Amnesty for Prisoners of Conscience."

SELF DETERMINATION OF PUERTO RICO AND AMNESTY FOR PRISONERS OF CONSCIENCE

THEOLOGICAL RATIONALE

The Scriptures inform us that Christ had a concern and an interest for those who were in captivity and imprisoned. This concern is reflected in the beginning of His public ministry where in Luke 4:16-20 He says that He is the One who has come to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and release to the captive and freedom to the oppressed.

The Scriptures commit us to bring to your attention the cry for justice and mercy from our Puerto Rican prisoners who are subjected to discriminatory treatment from the prison officials. Because we are called by Christ to bring the good news to the captives and to preach release to the oppressed, we have a responsibility to improve the prison conditions of the Puerto Rican prisoners and to eliminate the colonial condition of the Puerto Rican people.

WHEREAS, we as Christians are called to follow the mandates of Scripture and to work for justice wherever injustice is found;

WHEREAS, the Decolonization Committee of the United Nations has since 1972 recognized that Puerto Rico is a colony of the United States;

WHEREAS, the United Nations has declared this the decade to end colonialism;

WHEREAS, Puerto Rico is one of the last remaining colonial possessions in the world;

WHEREAS, the United States is one of the few who refuse to recognize that Puerto Rico is its colony;

WHEREAS, the Puerto Rican people have never been consulted as to their status since the 1898 invasion of Puerto Rico by the United States;

WHEREAS, the Puerto Rican people have suffered under colonization for 498 years;

WHEREAS, 17 Puerto Rican women and men, whose only crime has been to advocate the cause of Puerto Rico's independence, have been tried unjustly, sentenced, jailed, and denied the basic human rights afforded common prisoners;

WHEREAS, 18 of the Puerto Ricans have invoked the international law status of Prisoners of War taking refuge in the Geneva Convention of 1949 and resulting Protocols adopted by the United Nations;

WHEREAS, the "Freedom Now!" campaign is working toward the freedom of the prisoners of conscience;

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WHEREAS, the colonial situation of Puerto Rico is dehumanizing, and immoral.

BE IT THEREFORE RESOLVED, the Eighteenth General Synod demands that President Bush and the Congress undertake a process for Puerto Ricans to achieve self-determination and, as a gesture of good will, take the following steps, which are part of any legitimate process of self-determination:

grant immediate and unconditional amnesty to all Puerto Rican prisoners of conscience (as defined by Amnesty International) and political prisoners;

grant amnesty to those advocates of independence in exile;

cease prosecution and persecution of advocates of independence.

AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the Eighteenth General Synod calls upon the United Church of Christ to be involved in the justice work in the following areas:

support the "Freedom Now!" campaign through the use of petitions and presence and support during trials of advocates of independence;

engage in an educational campaign on issues of Puerto Rico;

urge local churches to adopt a prisoner of conscience;

encourage local church members to write to their national representatives;

request the President of the United Church of Christ to make pastoral visits to prisoners of conscience to offer the support of the church.

AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the Eighteenth General Synod reaffirms the Seventeenth General Synod Resolution "Ministry of Prisoners of Conscience."

Subject to the availability of funds.

9. CONCERN EXPRESSED FOR MOBILITY IMPAIRED

Ms. Diana D. Good (ILL) spoke of the discomfort endured at this Synod by persons who are mobility impaired. She called for an awareness of the mobility impaired and their minority status and for the sensitivity of leadership to this.

10. RESOLUTION "WITNESS TO HUMAN RIGHTS IN GUATEMALA"

The Moderator recognized Mr. True for the presentation of the Report of Committee 15. Mr. True referred the delegates to the revised resolution as found in Committee Reports, Part VII, page 11. On behalf of the committee, Mr. True moved that the Eighteenth General Synod adopt the Resolution "Witness to Human Rights in Guatemala."

The Rev. Nancy E. Wright-Gray (MASS), spoke on behalf of the committee.

Ms. Gosselink responded to Ms. Good's comments and spoke of her courage of speaking from the heart.

There was some discussion on the resolution.

91-GS-86 VOTED: The Eighteenth General Synod adopts the Resolution "Witness to Human Rights in Guatemala."

WITNESS TO HUMAN RIGHTS IN GUATEMALA

It is written in the letter to the Hebrews, "Remember those who are in prison, as though you were in prison with them. Remember those who are suffering, as though you were suffering as they are" (Hebrews 13:3).

WHEREAS, Guatemala has been called "A Nation of Prisoners" by Americas Watch which, along with many other organizations, has recounted that since 1966 in excess of 100,000 civilians have been killed and an additional 38,000 have disappeared. Their accounts report that these inhuman acts were mostly the result of actions by the Guatemala military and paramilitary organizations.

These actions have resulted in eliminating an entire generation of leaders in the urban areas and have taken the form of indiscriminate massacres, sometimes of entire communities, in the countryside;

WHEREAS, the Central American Peace Plan signed by the five Central American heads of state in Guatemala City in August, 1987 called for respect for human rights, complete freedom of the press, democratization and urgent attention to the needs of refugees and the displaced. After the planned and deliberate suppression of many relevant details by the administration of President Cerezo, the International Commission on Verification and Follow-up issued a cautiously worded report in January, 1988, which stated that:

1. They have received information from non-governmental organizations that the Guatemala Accords have had a limited effect on the human rights situation in Guatemala;
2. They have learned of the existence of fear, not only about this situation, but also about the lack of sufficient guarantees to publicly discuss the questions; and

WHEREAS, the Guatemalan Army has granted itself de facto emergency powers in Guatemala's highland provinces, severely restricting freedom of movement, residence and association for the nation's Indian majority and continuing to force peasants to perform onerous civil patrol duty;

WHEREAS, the violent suppression of the free press has intensified, resulting in the closing of one newspaper and two international news agencies; intimidation by groups allied to the military continues to limit press freedom severely. While the majority of journalists eschew reporting on military violence, the New York based Committee to Protect Journalists stated that between 1976 and 1985, Guatemala had the western hemisphere's second highest rate of violence against journalists. At least 48 Guatemalan journalists were abducted or killed by government security forces; and

WHEREAS, the Central American Peace Plan calls on the governments to "give urgent attention to the estimated two million people who have fled their homes as a result of fighting and counterinsurgency" and whereas the Episcopal Conference of Guatemalan Bishops issued a statement recognizing serious obstacles to refugee repatriation, recommending that