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Evangelical Integration of Color

CARL M. ZORN

The status of the Negro in America is rapidly changing. Our Church's work among the colored people is no more a foreign work in the deep South. Soon many Negro churches, also of our Synod, will no longer be subsidized. The economic opportunities of the Negro are being increasingly protected by law and sentiment. The sociological trends of our times emphasize the elimination of ghettos. "Without distinction of race, creed, or color" is one of the many American shibboleths. People with Negro features are filtering into every phase of our social structure.

Some will say that the "melting pot" and "equal rights" concept of American democracy never has filtered through the masses and never will. Not even the present trend toward one world will kill race and class prejudices, they claim. According to them, it is natural for class and race prejudices to exist, that nationalism and racism belong to the divine order. All of that is true to a degree. It is true that God does rule the destiny of man individually and as an individual group or race, setting their boundary and habitation.

But God varies His providence and government. True, there was the judgment of Babel, not only creating language trends, but also trends of races. But the Bible nowhere makes the discrimination between races mandatory except to keep from religious syncretism. Rather we find that the Old Testament reports favorably on integration of races whenever the assimilation of the true worship of Jehovah is involved. Thus Ruth said: "Thy people shall be my people and thy God my God," Ruth 1:16. In the New Testament we find both Jesus and the Apostles mingling with the non-Jews. The missionary work of Paul was chiefly in the cosmopolitan cities of the Mediterranean countries, where through war and slavery little of pure racial blood was to be found except in the Jewish ghettos. The later Jewish ghettos were an outgrowth of a false emphasis on the Old Testament concept of the chosen race. The Jewish ghetto is not natural except as God's providential visitation upon both Jew and Gentile. God's providence and government allows the blending of

nations and races. What the Bible does not prohibit is permitted.

That is true also of color. The Bible does not prescribe the observance of the color line; it only refers to it as a matter of fact. Ethnologically we know that in ancient days different races had different colors of skin. But the Bible gives us no biological information on the origin of the various skin colors as it gives us the information on the origin of nations and languages. Genesis 9, which records the blessing spoken by Noah, must be viewed in the light of that blessing. Whatever the significance of the curse of Noah was, it cannot be maintained that it meant the economic slavery for all ages of people of a certain tint of color. The Mediterranean countries of the days of Paul were populated with a mixture of Negro and Caucasian races, while the slaves were often the more cultured people in the household. During the Apostolic age the Mediterranean countries were a "melting pot" for race and color, probably greater than America is today. On such a fertile soil of natural integration of race and color, Paul and the Apostles founded the Christian Church. The New Testament does not prohibit integration. What the Bible does not prohibit is permitted.

The following is submitted as a contribution to current discussions on the problem of the integration of race and color as it affects our Lutheran Church. We shall therefore not discuss the problem of color integration in its economic and social significance. This does not imply that the Church is indifferent to the solution of this social problem, but that as a purely economic and social problem it is not in the province of the Gospel. All slogans of equality and justice for all spring from a sense of civic virtue. The attainment of these ideals can only be mechanistically attempted, at best by legislation, at worst by rebellion. At present there is considerable legislative activity in favor of color integration. But as legislation lags, the rumblings of resentment and even rebellion become louder.

What should be the policy of the Church in the face of this situation? The Church as such has no call to join in any legislative or sociological program of color integration, as such programs may be advanced outside its own evangelical program of Gospel preaching. The temptation to join hands

with the civic reformers is very great. Externally there is very little difference between the concepts of equality and justice as civic virtues and the same concepts as expressions of the Christian life in the Gospel. The one laborer out of ten who is a Negro can operate at perfect ease with the other nine whether he or they are Christians or not. Trends which foster civic welfare should be welcomed by the Church, since the peace of the land tends to the prosperity of the Church. Trends, however, which obstruct the Gospel's progress should be criticized by the Church. The present trend toward integration of color in American society is to be faced as a reality and a natural, sociological development after the Civil War. The Church should examine itself and its policies in the face of these trends. It should not hesitate to criticize itself when attitudes on the integration problem harmful to the Gospel become vocal in its midst. This means that the Church must know where it stands.

At its meeting last summer the Synodical Conference acted in true Christian wisdom with respect to Negro questions. When it was asked to set up a Commission on Race Relations (1946 *Proceedings*, p. 43), it replied with the resolutions "that the Church . . . remain committed to the charge of preaching the crucified Savior. . . . This Gospel, when properly and consistently preached and accepted, will produce the wholesome fruit of God-fearing relationships." At the same time, concerning these relationships, the Synodical Conference went on record, likewise in true Christian wisdom, encouraging a policy of integration and referring the recommendations to the constituent synods. (1946 *Proceedings*, pp. 45—48.) The Synodical Conference thus recognized integration as a principle. It avoided any legalistic trend. It reiterated that the Church must bring all its tasks under the preaching of the Gospel. In other words, it went on record for evangelical integration of color, and it encouraged us to study the matter in its practical aspects.

Yes, the Church must cope with the sociological trend toward integration. To deny this duty is to deny existence. The Church is essentially spiritual, its essential task is spiritual. But the Church lives in a physical world, and its accidental features are taken from the physical world in which the Church finds itself. The integration of the Negro is an

established trend recognized by law. In some quarters, as in New York, some industries voluntarily hire the Negro according to the percentage in the general population, at present one out of ten. It is conceivable that the government may feel constrained someday to make such or a similar arrangement mandatory. At least America already frowns upon the ghettos for Jews. The Church would therefore close its eyes to an accident of its modern existence if it refused to face the trend toward color integration in our country. But neither legislation nor social pressure dare become the motive which prompts the Christian to seek a solution of this problem. His one concern is that also the Negro have the opportunity to feed his soul with the riches dispensed from our pulpits.

Man must live by rules of conduct. Even a Christian, who is freed from rules of conduct when considered as burdens seemingly necessary for peace with God and with himself, does nevertheless submit himself cheerfully to rules of conduct. The fact is, he finds himself impelled to conform. But to conform is no burden to him. He is a temple of God. God's Holy Spirit dwells within him. The Third Person of the Trinity has brought him to the faith in the Second Person of the Trinity. He is wholly a child of the Triune God. Thus he is God's property and is impelled to conform to God's will. What God's will for him is in a given instance must be the Christian's private conviction under the Holy Spirit's influence through the Gospel. That Gospel of the redemption in Christ and the forgiveness of sins will also be the Christian's conscious drive and motivating force to conform to the will of God. That is what, basically, we mean by evangelical conduct. Just as the individual Christian is committed to a life of evangelical conduct, so must the Church ever maintain a program of evangelical policies.

What basically is meant by the term *integration* when used by the evangelical Church? It means that the evangelical Gospel is preached or should be preached to all nations, to every creature. The Church is committed to such an all-inclusive program of infiltration. The Church, whether the divine institution of a particular congregation or the human institution of a federation of congregations, cannot physically and quantitatively carry out that program of infiltration of the Gospel through all nations to every creature. So the

Church looks for open doors. One such open door for us is the Negro society in our land. When a Negro accepts Christ, then he becomes my brother in Christ and is integrated with me in the household of God, the communion of saints. That is evangelical integration in its basic sense.

But the Church's program of evangelical integration has far more commitments than just to recognize the Negro Lutheran as a member of the invisible Church, the communion of saints. The doctrine of the invisible Church, however, is not abstract theology. The fellowship in the invisible Church must and will manifest itself in the visible Church as a corporate, tangible, and visible — a concrete — relationship which is permeated by the consciousness of membership in the Body of Christ.

Thus understood, evangelical integration refers to the physical relationship of the Negro Christians with the Caucasian Christians. This relationship is channeled into certain molds or forms. These molds or forms should be identical with the Law of God, the rule of love, the third use of the Law, according to our traditional dogmatic statements. In all situations where no specific law of God exists, as in the race question, we have only the general injunction to love our neighbor as ourselves. Nothing in the relationship between the Negro Christian and the Caucasian Christian dare violate their mutual Spirit-given understanding of the law of love. In life, then, the mutual Spirit-given expression of the law of love will be an ever-varying entity according to the external circumstances and the working of the grace of God.

Before the Civil War many devout men of God preached to the Negroes in the third-floor balcony of their churches. They did that under the circumstances of their times by the power of the Holy Spirit in a mutual relationship of love. If they were living today under present sociological trends, being the men of God they were, they certainly would preach under an ever fuller integration policy. Just so the Synodical Conference is advancing into further integration.

The law of love is the mold and form of evangelical integration. The substance and material which fills this form of love is the evangelical Gospel. That is to say, the reciprocal Christian love between the Negro Christian and myself is not just something mechanistic or formal. Rather, it is an active,

fervent, energetic, lively thing under the force of the Gospel. Evangelical integration, then, overflows into ever greater expressions of love, into ever-expanding forms and channels. Without this evangelical substance all forms of love in this matter of integration would soon become mechanistic compliances to set, lifeless standards. Legalistic integration methods grasp for straws of misquoted and misapplied Scripture texts, appealing emphatically to their authority. Thus integration discussions can be found which emphasize the economic and social side, while ignoring the Gospel, quoting Gal. 3:28, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female; for ye are all one in Christ Jesus."

This passage (Gal. 3:28) has no reference whatsoever to either a spiritual or a physical integration of classes or races. Paul clearly intended v. 28 to parallel v. 27. The Gospel changes nothing in the domain of the world and of natural life. It does not liberate slaves nor make freemen slaves. Nor does it make female males, and vice versa. This passage does not refer to the physical manifestation of the *Una Sancta*. No matter at whom of us God looks, He sees one and the same Baptism, one and the same cloak of Jesus' blood and righteousness, which He has put upon us. In the eyes of God only with respect to our justification are we all alike or all one. It is as if then, and then only, God is looking at so many identical individuals. Underneath the cloak of Christ's righteousness we remain diversified. To quote this passage in support of economic or social equality for minorities is manifestly not allowed. To quote this passage in support of our principle of evangelical integration of color is equally an abuse of Scripture. Such procedure would be a mechanistic forcing of Scripture to a preconceived mold and would be a legalistic attempt to develop Christian life.

Evangelical integration of color will always vary in form and degree. It is impossible to fix a code of rules for each new situation as it arises. Economic and social conditions will establish varying backgrounds for the work of the Gospel. It seems that evangelical integration of color can at present more readily reach into the social and economic life of the cosmopolitan cities of the North than into that of the communities of the South. This is not because the Gospel has less

power in the one section than in the other. The Gospel is the only dynamic to bring about such integration as Negro congregations becoming affiliated with synodical Districts or individual Negroes becoming communicant members of Caucasian congregations. And the Gospel will solve also the practical questions of the integration of color as such integration continues to make progress.

How fast, and to what extent, evangelical integration will take place in our churches will depend to some extent on the sociological tendencies in our secular society. But the Church would only harm its Gospel opportunities if it ignored or even refused to study the trends of the times as they affect the welfare of the Gospel. Least of all can the Church maintain a sociological position which prevailed of old. The Synodical Conference has, in effect, stated that our Church would be anachronistic if it insisted absolutely on segregation of color. The Church would furthermore become guilty of bad Bible scholarship if it attempted to bolster the concept of segregation on the basis of the old "fundamentalistic" interpretation of Genesis 9. On the other hand, evangelical integration dare not be given an unhealthy impetus by the employment of the secular forces and tendencies which prevail at the time. The Church employs only the Gospel and exercises only the law of love. Everything else is incidental.

Individual Christians or associations of Christians may well lend their weight to healthy social and economic movements of better race relations. In fact, they should do so wherever possible. They have received from the Church the Gospel of redemption in Christ. Thus they possess the only factor that guarantees true and healthy relationships between races. Thus understood, it can properly be stated that the Church gives a healthy impetus and direction to the general social trend.

The race question will successfully be answered only as the Gospel influences those who are involved. Without the Gospel more evil and wrong may yet develop in America's sociological trends. India is no parallel, but is an illustration of the development of discrimination of classes where the Gospel is not known. If America wishes to avoid a similar development, its churches had better resound with the clear Gospel of redemption in Christ, and its Christians had better

grow ever more fervent in giving expression to that Gospel in their lives of neighborly love.

Evangelical integration of color does not include the elimination of all personal likes and dislikes. Some are wholesome, and may well exist under the Gospel. There is, for example, the proper prejudice all around against intermarriage. It should be expected that evangelical Negroes and Caucasians get along with one another on a common intellectual and economic level. But if I have a valid reason for not living with fisherfolk or farmers, whether Negroes or Caucasians, I need not do so, not even under the Gospel.

There will ever be diversity of life even under the Gospel. But the Gospel issues no license to any group to suppress another group into any form of ghetto existence. In our diversity of life we should seek and express our private affinities in an evangelical manner. In that same evangelical spirit we should allow other affinities to develop among other people as they wish them to develop so long as such wish and desire is not criminal or stifling the Gospel. Thus, for example, the Synodical Conference has gone on record encouraging Negro theological students to study in our Northern schools while at the same time continuing to offer a seminary training for Negroes at Greensboro for those who may wish to study there. (1946 *Proc.*, p. 47.)

We Christians will ever remain diversified. We all look alike before God only as we are robed in the white garment of Christ's righteousness. Underneath that garment God sees us in our individuality and differences. We Christians, on the other hand, recognizing our differences as Negroes and Caucasians, rich and poor, male and female, should not lose sight of the fact that we are all dressed alike in the white wedding garment of Christ's righteousness. Thus we should let our daily life show that we are not ashamed of one another, that we all possess equal dignity before God in the dress of Christ.

Many Christians are just now being forced to think through the color question for the first time. The printing press is flooding the market with material on this subject. Most of it discusses the subject purely from sociology, some from the godless evolutionistic and communistic angle, which no Christian can endorse. The Christian must think in terms

of evangelical integration. Our own church literature ought freely and frankly to deal with this matter. These paragraphs are intended merely as an introduction to the subject of evangelical integration of color.

As the Holy Spirit has led us into the truth of the principle of evangelical integration of color, may He now, as the life of our Church continues into its second century, lead us aright in the proper handling of the diversified casuistry which will develop under the evangelical integration of color.

Closter, N. J.

