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B A C K G R O U N D

Since 1965, there has been concern within ESCRU that curriculum materials used by the Episcopal Church provide an inadequate account of the nonwhite person, his role in human society, and the problems arising within society because of its attitudes and behavior toward the nonwhite person.

This concern has, to our regret, not received priority attention of our members. Other concerns over the years have seemed more important, and so ESCRU made only peripheral efforts toward reforming these curriculum materials until its Annual Meeting of November, 1968. By that time, the "racist" nature of these materials had become so repugnant to members of ESCRU that they felt they had no recourse but to burn them publicly. Thus the action of burning we are taking today is a result both of our contempt for the materials, and our sorrow that in the past we have not acted on our concerns.

The following is a brief account of ESCRU's concern:

1. In September, 1965, a member of the ESCRU Board of Directors urged the Board to create opportunities for young people to study the history, culture and social significance of the black people. The board recommended two approaches: a careful critique of the adequacy of educational materials then available, and planning and application of "political pressure" to increase the response of Christian Education to this need.
2. In January, 1966, the Board of Directors met again and discussed a proposed demonstration of concerned children and parents before the Episcopal Church Center in New York City. It was suggested that the demonstrators carry examples of "lily-white curricula" and also of suitable alternatives to take their place. No action was taken because other matters were considered to be of greater concern.
3. In the ESCRU Newsletter of May 29, 1966, the National Office urged members to volunteer for a study of "Church School curriculum materials and how they affect racial attitudes for good or bad." A member of the Chicago Chapter agreed to conduct the study, which was begun, but not completed.
4. In September, 1966, the National Office sent a memo to the Board of Directors and chapter chairmen suggesting local efforts to replace biased textbooks in both church schools and public schools. The memo suggested that "a community effort, initiated by ESCRU, to obtain more adequate texts will go a long way in eliminating the stereotyped images which reinforce notions among whites of their superiority and among minority group members of their inferiority." Six bibliographies of textbooks were recommended.
5. At ESCRU's Annual Meeting in New York City in November, 1966, a petition was drafted to the 62nd General Convention of the Episcopal Church, which began: "We, the undersigned members of the Episcopal Church, charge ourselves and the Church to which we belong and which we love with heretical and blasphemous distortion of the Christian doctrine of man." One sentence said: "Our efforts in Christian Education reflect an image of false dignity and human separation." That petition, with more than 10,000 signatures, was presented to the General Convention in Seattle the following September.

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6. In October, 1968, a priest and member of the New Jersey ESCRU chapter sent the Executive Director copies of materials being distributed by the National Office of the Episcopal Church for use in the study of Africa in connection with the Lenten Mite Box offering. He wrote, "The map (of Africa) was first produced in 1957 and revised in 1964. The accompanying pictures are hardly more up-to-date. There is no sense of awareness of Africa today, of the explosive and tragic human conflicts, but rather an old-fashioned and condescending approach which is worse than irrelevant. If you feel that this is something which ESCRU can take up effectively, we will help ~~you~~ in any way we can." The letter and the materials were put on the agenda at the Annual Meeting the following month, where the decision was made to conduct today's demonstration.
7. In December, 1968, the Executive Director of ESCRU urged all ESCRU chapters to approach Bishops and/or persons in charge of Christian Education in the dioceses on "racist curriculum materials," and to report on the response from the dioceses to the National Office. In response to this memo, the Bishop of Ohio, the Rt. Rev. John H. Burt, directed his Department of Christian Education to review Lenten Mite Box literature to see if there were substance to the charges that it contained "racism." He said: "If our conclusion agrees with that of ESCRU, we will not promote it (the literature) in this Diocese, of course, and I will keep you informed about our attitude on this matter."
8. In December, 1968, the Rev. Charles M. Pond of Chicago, member of a committee to survey curriculum materials in use and to recommend acceptable substitutes, reported that he had begun discussions with the Morehouse-Barlow publishing firm, and that the company is "open to seeking ESCRU's counsel in the development of a new curriculum."

In conclusion, it should be noted that when ESCRU members voted at the Annual Meeting in November to conduct this demonstration, it was emphasized that the action was to be "aimed at effecting a real change in such curriculum materials -- not merely a dramatic exposure of them." Follow-up actions are, therefore, being planned.

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