
The Joint Commission on the Church in Human Affairs

Members:

The Rt. Rev. George M. Murray, *Chairman*
The Rt. Rev. Hal R. Gross
The Rt. Rev. John T. Walker
The Rev. Joseph N. Green, Jr.
The Rev. Charles L. Hoffman
The Rev. Thomas Pike
The Rev. Richard F. Milwee
Mr. Donald Belcher
Dr. J. Campbell Cantrill
Mrs. Richard T. Hawkins, *Vice-Chairman*
Ms. Carol S. Hoge
Mr. Ray Richardson
Dr. D. Bruce Merrifield
Mrs. James E. McElroy, *Secretary*
Donald R. Hopkins, M.D.

(The Rt. Rev. John T. Walker, Mr. Donald Belcher, and Dr. Donald R. Hopkins resigned from the Commission, leaving a total membership of twelve.)

All continuing members of the Commission concur in the report and recommendations.

In addition to its assigned membership, the Commission utilized the services of the Rev. Everett Francis, Public Affairs Officer of the Episcopal Church Center, and called upon the following consultants and specialists: Dr. Rodney Cocking, Educational Testing Services, Princeton, N.J.; the Rev. Ray Avant, Dekalb Council on Aging, Decatur, Georgia; the Rev. Caroline Leach, Columbia Theological Seminary, Atlanta, Georgia; Mr. J.D. Hudson, Director, Bureau of Corrections, Atlanta, Georgia; the Rev. Mike Milligan, St. Catherine's Episcopal Church, Marietta, Georgia; the Rev. John Snow, Episcopal Divinity School, Cambridge, Massachusetts; the Rev. John Gill, Metropolitan Community Church, Atlanta, Georgia; Dr. Sheldon Cohen, Psychoanalyst, Atlanta, Georgia; the Rev. Canon Clinton Jones, Counselor, Christ Church Cathedral, Hartford, Connecticut; the Rev. Robert Herrick, National Gay Task Force, New York City; Dr. Louie Crew, Founder of Integrity and Editor, *Episcopal Gay Forum*; and Mr. Jim Wickliff, President, Integrity.

The Commission members express great appreciation to these consultants for their valuable contributions to our deliberations.

PREFACE

The Commission members recognize the importance and necessity for the creative involvement of the Church in human affairs. We affirm the value of a national group to develop policy for the consideration of General Convention, to produce discussion papers for study by the Church, to regularly evaluate Church policy and programs, to reflect on contemporary issues, and to make recommendations for strategic action. However, the Commission members question the present role and function of the Joint Commission structure of General Convention, for the following reasons:

1. For it to be representative, the Commission has to have broad geographic representation, which incurs heavy travel expense.
2. The accountability and responsibility of the individual members, and of the Joint Commission as a whole is unclear; the competent, busy volunteers therefore

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find it difficult to assess the impact of their contribution to the life of the Church.

MEETINGS

The Joint Commission on the Church in Human Affairs held three meetings of its full membership: June 3-4, 1974 in Louisville, Kentucky; March 13-14, 1975 in Atlanta, Georgia; and January 28-30, 1976 in Atlanta, Georgia. In addition, sub-committees met and worked throughout the triennium on Commission assignments.

At its first meeting, the Commission reaffirmed the statement of purpose originally adopted by this Commission in 1959:

1. The Commission shall continually remind the Church of its prophetic role in society.
2. It shall be the function of the Commission to report to the General Convention on its study and work in the area of the Church in Human Affairs, and to suggest action to the Executive Council and its duly constituted departments.
3. It shall be the function of the Commission to focus the thinking and influence of the Church in General Convention on the concerns of practical matters and resolutions—not attempting to cover the whole field of social action, but concentrating on two or three issues having priority of significance.

No specific matters had been referred to the Commission by the 64th General Convention. Some twenty-seven issues of concern were raised by individual members. The field was narrowed to the over-all concern for a Christian understanding of Justice. Each of the members was assigned responsibility for developing a resource paper on some aspect of this subject and sharing it with the others. In November, 1975, the Presiding Bishop also requested that the Commission establish dialogue with the homophile community within the Church, and deal with the subject of homosexuality in its report.

Family and Human Sexuality

A Sub-Committee on Human Secularity met in Woodshole, Massachusetts, September 13-14, 1974, and recommended the entire Commission deal with this issue at its next full meeting, in an attempt to raise our consciousness and awareness on the subject; to see and affirm in many of the changes within society's attitude toward sex, the movement of the Holy Spirit. The Commission next met in Atlanta on March 13-14, 1975. With the assistance of consultants, areas of the family and human sexuality were discussed, ranging from sex typing in early childhood, sexual needs of the elderly, problems in the prisons, attitudes about women seeking ordination, to ministry to homosexual persons.

Social Ministries and Social Action in Dioceses and Parishes

It is the opinion of the Commission that parishes, missions and dioceses need guidelines, examples, and resource materials to enable them to be involved creatively in social issues. Attached to our report (Annex A) is a study paper by the Rev. John Snow, Professor of Pastoral Theology, Episcopal Divinity School, Cambridge, which we recommend to any parish or diocese contemplating a program of social ministry or social action. As a guideline to evaluating a present program, or planning a new program, we offer suggestions (Annex B) originally designed when we proposed compiling a series of case studies, or signs of the spirit moving. Insufficient time and funds prevented completion of that task. It is our hope however, that parishes and dioceses with effective ministries in the areas of hunger, prisons, aging, transients, alcoholism, etc., will take the time to share their ideas with other parishes and dioceses. We firmly believe that social ministry and social action are an integral part of the mission of the local Church, and would suggest

that the Committee on Christian Social Ministries of the Executive Council develop a Primer for Social Action, using specific examples of ways the Church has been involved on an individual, parish, diocesan, and national level.

The Church and Homosexual Persons

The Commission held its third meeting in Atlanta, on January 28-30, 1976. In September, 1975, the House of Bishops, meeting in Portland, Maine, adopted a resolution asking the Presiding Bishop to designate this Commission as the agency through which dialogue with the homophile community within the Church should be continued. This topic largely set the agenda for the meeting. Consultants were invited to the meeting to share their knowledge and insight on the broad scope of this subject. The following statement was adopted by a majority of the members of the Commission:

This subject was assigned to our Commission by a resolution of the House of Bishops, meeting in Portland, Maine, in September, 1975. As a result of our deliberations, we wish to make the following statements:

1. Homosexual persons are children of God, who have a full and equal claim with all other persons upon the love, acceptance, and pastoral concern and care of the Church.

2. We make grateful recognition of the substantial contributions which homosexual persons have made and are making to the life of our Church and society.

3. The question of the causes of sexual orientation, the personal meaning of that orientation, and the ethical implications of homosexual acts are shrouded in great obscurity. This is clearly but one aspect of a confusion and tension which exists in the consciousness of the Church and many individual Christians concerning the relationship between the traditional Christian ethic and current developments and concepts of pastoral ministry, understanding of human psychosexual development, and the sexual practices of contemporary society. Our awareness and concern in these areas arises from within our own experience as a Christian community in ministry and dialogue with one another. We are conscious of the personal suffering experienced by many homosexual persons and the various unnecessary ways in which society contributes to that suffering.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Resolution A-68

Resolved, the House of _____ concurring, that this General Convention recommends that the dioceses and the Church in general engage in serious study and dialogue in the area of human sexuality, including homosexuality.

Resolution A-69

Resolved, the House of _____ concurring, that it is the sense of this General Convention that homosexual persons are children of God who have a full and equal claim with all other persons upon the love, acceptance, and pastoral concern and care of the Church.

Resolution A-70

Resolved, the House of _____ concurring, that this General Convention urges the legislatures of the several states to repeal all laws which classify as criminal conduct any form of non-commercial sexual conduct between consenting adults in private, saving only those portions which protect minors or public decorum.

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Resolution A-71

Resolved, the House of _____ concurring, that this General Convention expresses its conviction that homosexual persons are entitled to equal protection of the laws with all other citizens, and calls upon our society to see that such protection is provided in actuality.

Resolution A-72

Resolved, the House of _____ concurring, that a Joint Commission on the Church in Human Affairs be appointed to report to the next General Convention, that it consist of four bishops, four presbyters, and eight lay persons, and that its major concern be the subject of Human Sexuality, and that it be empowered and adequately funded to seek the assistance of experts in this field.

Resolution A-73

Resolved, the House of _____ concurring, that for the expenses of such Joint Commission on the Church in Human Affairs there be appropriated in the General Convention Budget the sum of \$29,568.00.

FINANCIAL REPORT

Appropriations by 64th General Convention	\$8,500.00
Late expense report from previous Commission	<u>156.50</u>
Total funds available	<u>\$8,343.50</u>
Disbursements	
For meetings, including travel, hotel accommodations, meals, telephone expense, and printed materials for members:	
1974	2,386.05
1975	1,546.32
1976	2,976.25
For meetings, including travel, hotel accommodations, meals, for resource persons and consultants:	
1975	394.36
1976	929.79
For telephone calls and mailings - 1976 -	<u>65.07</u>
	<u>8,279.84</u>
Balance unspent	<u>\$ 63.66</u>

ANNEX A

A Primer for Social Action

The title of this booklet may be misleading if it is interpreted to mean that some experts in social action are going to explain its basics to beginners. We call it primer because we want to get back to some essentials. We want to begin again.

There are people who claim expertise in effecting social changes and who have, in the past, had some success with their theories and methods, but even these "experts" are increasingly baffled by their lack of lasting achievement. Change, significant needed change has indeed been effected in social institutions in the last decade, but today many stand by appalled as they see these achievements caught in an inexorable backlash and fighting desperately to maintain themselves. Urban neighborhoods which had achieved a lively and inclusive participation in managing their own affairs a few years ago today find themselves pervaded by apathy and falling back into old habits of dependency and despair. Innovative and effective educational programs in the ghetto and elsewhere find themselves unable to continue now that seed money is exhausted, and not only because the money is not available, but also because the energy and will of earlier days seems to be exhausted

as well.

In our cities, in our schools, in health care and care for the elderly, in our penal systems, we discover a curious absence of leadership where leadership was abundant a few years back. In the Black community we discover that some of the men and women who provided trusted and powerful leadership a few years ago have first been abandoned by their constituencies and then in despair or cynicism, have reluctantly abandoned their constituencies and having been given the middle class name are now playing the middle class game, living in the suburbs, working as media or educational or industrial consultants.

Experimental and brilliant teachers of the sixties have disappeared into the comfortable anonymity of educational administration. Doctors, even the hopeful new breed willing to commit themselves to ghetto or rural practices, are increasingly plagued with the resistance and distrust of patients. Others, appalled by the implicit lack of trust reflected in the rising cost of malpractice insurance go to work for Drug Companies or, again, find a comfortable niche in hospital administration.

There seems to be a slow, inexorable withdrawal of concern and commitment by those most gifted in leadership and creativity from situations where leadership and creativity are at once most needed and, inexplicably, most hated. Increasingly, and quite suddenly, there seems to be a growing social gap between leadership and constituency, where the leaders become winners and the constituency become losers. The two groups seem to be more and more willing to regard themselves as members of these categories.

Winners make it up and out. Losers may destroy themselves or may become social predators lashing out where possible at the winners, or at their peers, proving at least their predatory superiority to both. The name of the game is survival. But it is no game. It is deadly serious.

Social action, then, effecting needed social change, is not as manageable a matter as it appeared to be in the sixties. One of the pioneers of organizational development and now an internationally known expert and author in the field was recently made president of a major university. After several years in his new post he was heard to say, "What used to take me two hours to write or half an hour to say to a client I discover will take at least six years to implement, if I can implement it at all. It's very discouraging." So much for experts in engineering social change. Society becomes more intractable as it begins to view the expert social engineer as the winner, the enemy, rather than as a facilitating person or a leader.

For individuals or for society to change, change must make sense, must take place within a structure of agreed upon meaning. As the changes of the sixties are worn down and bent back upon themselves it becomes clear that many of them, do not make sense to a majority of those who were and are affected by them. Yet at the same time, if we notice, we see far more radical and disruptive changes taking place all around us in the seventies which must be making sense to us since we seem willing to give our consent to them.

There is, for instance, a rapidly growing consensus that traditional marriage and family life are simply two possible options among many for the ordering of our sexual and social lives. Changes effected by the Supreme Court's decision on the racial desegregation of the public schools are nothing compared to this radically disruptive change, yet one notices only isolated pockets of resistance to it.

Or we discover from a poll sponsored by the Department of Labor that 80% of Americans hate their work. This in a country which has traditionally lived by the Protestant work ethic and which has come close at times to giving work salvific power. Although this is only a change in attitude it must inevitably have very concrete consequences for our corporate life. Yet so far Americans continue to go to work and work hard and it is logical to assume that working at what one hates is

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making sense somehow.

The fact is that society does not hold together without some kind of theology, some kind of consensus about the nature of reality, and since Western Industrial Society is not really falling apart, it might be wise to look for the view of reality which members of Western industrial society hold in common. If we do this we may discover that many of the things which seem to be happening to us, we are actually choosing, because they make sense within a structure of meaning which we have accepted, however unknowingly.

The most radical change we have experienced is in the way we see ourselves as inhabitants of the earth. Until very recently, perhaps until Sputnik, for all our scientific knowledge, we had not *experienced* ourselves as limited, as inhabitants of a closed system, as mortal and perishable as any closed system and as limited in its resources. By the early sixties we literally *experienced* ourselves as mortal and finite, and along with this came the statistics and computer projection with frightening indeed, apocalyptic prophecies about overpopulation, pollution, and the rapid diminishment of natural resources. From dim outs in the middle sixties to the fuel crisis in the middle seventies, we have not been allowed to forget the urgency of our predicament as humans on a small planet. Increasingly, the word heard more often than any other in public discourse is survival. It has become or is becoming, the standard by which we measure all things, not just the corporate human endeavor on this planet. When politicians speak of the politics of survival, we wonder if they mean our shared survival as humans or their survival as politicians or the survival of them and their constituencies. When we hear economists speak of the economics of survival, we wonder if they mean the survival of the human family or the survival of the team they are coaching. Here the team analogy is apt, because the most popular word for survival today is "win." The second most popular is "success." Where there are winners there must be losers; where there is success, there must be failure, where there is victory, there must be defeat. Somehow, if we use game or career or war analogies to make sense of our dilemma, because they make our ultimate dilemma seem comfortably manageable, we seem to feel better about ourselves.

But at the other end of the spectrum from the "Pop" world, in the recondite worlds of Ethology, Psychology, Biology (particularly genetics) we discover a new interest in the Darwinian concept of natural selection, and its social application by Spencer captured in the phrase, "the survival of the fittest." Although only the extreme right-wing would claim it openly, it is becoming the assumption underlying most of our crucial decisions that it is in the best interests of humanity for the intelligently aggressive to have first priority on survival. Again, since Sputnik, the most "managed" segment of our society has been that engaged in the culling of this "elite." Elaborate national testing programs ranging from reading readiness in kindergarten through biennial achievement tests and intermittent I.Q. tests, to Graduate Record Exams or special screening tests for various professional schools, select out the intelligently aggressive to be spared by the draft, given many years of sophisticated training and convinced that they are fit not so much to provide intelligent or responsible leadership for the human enterprise, but to survive. To be among the winners, equipped with the spoils of victory (various academic degrees, "prestigious" or "interesting" jobs and other symbols of one's place in the winner's circle) has become the primary motivating factor within a value system with survival at its core.

The enormous difficulty which Christians are finding in bringing about social change in the name of justice is not due, then to inadequate methods or even a faulty theoretical framework, but to the simple fact that within a view of reality which is best defined as Social Darwinism, justice seems too maladaptive a value to be taken seriously unless its meaning is changed to make the privileged survival of

the intelligently aggressive the essence of justice. A day spent watching sentencing in most criminal courts in the country today will show that this redefinition of justice is on its way to becoming normative. The middle class college student or college graduate will get very careful treatment by the court. The high school drop-out or welfare person will get the book. A lawyer asked recently why this was, replied: "Statistically there is almost no recidivism among middle class people. Arrest and a sharp word are enough. The others are born losers. It is the judge's job to keep them off the street." It was a cruel piece of hyperbole, but it came close enough to summing up his experience as a criminal lawyer.

The issue, then, is not primarily method, but meaning. The issue is, in fact, theological. In a system where the primary motivating factor is survival it is no distortion to claim that its God is death. It is the fear of death, of failure, of defeat, that becomes the shaping power, the most meaningful dynamic of such a system. All human activity is trivialized to adaptive and maladaptive behavior in survival terms.

Committing ourselves to others in marriage until death us do part violates the first rule of adaptive survival behavior which is keeping open as many options as possible. It is also avoiding the selective process of sexual competition and probably bad for the human species.

As the point of sport is to win, the point of work is to succeed. That one's work should have any more significance than permitting one to "be a success," that is, survive in a grand way, is not immediately apparent. However, *really* to succeed is to end up with an interesting and/or prestigious job.

Where the Social Darwinist does take responsibility for leadership, he takes responsibility for making sure that the intelligently aggressive survive, that the winners keep on winning, that the successful continue to succeed on terms of intelligent aggression set by themselves. His responsibility to the losers is to convince them of the logic of the system so that they can enjoy watching the winners win on T.V. The primary function of television in the Social Darwinist scheme is to keep the loser tranquilized and passive.

Perhaps the greatest danger in the kind of Social Darwinism that we have is precisely that it is *not* yet a fully articulated political ideology which a Christian might examine, and accept or reject. It is a mass of quiet assumptions arising from our understandably fearful first reaction to the felt knowledge of our cosmic finitude. These assumptions, as is the case with all assumptions which are confirmed by a fast growing consensus, are being quickly incorporated into our institutions affecting their customary way of doing their business and thereby seducing most of us into regarding them as true.

We can discover and clarify these new value assumptions only by observing carefully what social change, especially radical change, is passively accepted and what social change, however minor, is bitterly resisted. An evaluation of Western industrial society by these standards reveals a coherent pattern of Social Darwinism informing an increasing number of major decisions of individuals and nations.

To the extent that this is the case, Christians find themselves theologically in radical conflict with this growing consensus about the nature of reality. The Gospel tells us that God is love and that death shall have no dominion over us, and that to the extent that death does have dominion over us we are subject to Satan. The theological issue is clear enough. The trouble is that most of us Christians by now, in the absence of any theological consensus among ourselves, have pretty much bought into most social Darwinist assumptions. We tremble when the S.A.T. scores arrive, convinced that a 500 will declare our child a loser for all time. We accept a transfer to a place we have no desire to move to, not just for the raise, but because we fear that any loss of momentum upwards means failure, defeat, destruction.

We are fearful of voting for a political candidate whose platform describes a

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program in line with our conscience and our vision of reality because we do not wish to “waste our vote on a loser.”

Stated most simply, those whom Jesus declared would inherit the earth, those whom he singled out to love—the poor, the mad, the bereft, the losers, we are taught by our institutions to regard as contemptible and soon, perhaps, as expendable.

Any attempt to change society to make it more just, with justice understood in terms of intelligent benevolence, must begin with a change in our own value system, must begin, in fact, with repentance. We must examine ourselves first to determine the extent to which our own values are social Darwinist and then determine for ourselves how these values are in conflict with what Gospel reveals as true. This kind of sorting out is essential because the kind of energy which will sustain and continue an extended commitment to social change comes from a structure of meaning, a profound conviction that what one does makes sense. Unless one can work at building a theological consensus as one attempts to change society, one is engaged in an exercise in futility.

In the end, though, all edifying energy is spirited energy, and it is the Holy Spirit who guides us most deeply into the ways of truth.

The Rev. John H. Snow

ANNEX B

The following is offered as guidelines or criteria in evaluating a social ministry/social action program or as a basis for planning one.

A. Origin of concern – from community or Biblical reading of the scriptures

B. Form

1. How started?
2. Who involved in planning?
3. What approaches were involved?
4. Were the recipients of services in on the planning?
5. Goals of the program?
6. Changes in the goals?

C. Multiple issues, local, diocesan or national level, tactics utilized

D. Questions to study:

1. What aspect of the program makes it different from others?
2. Could it serve as an example for others?
3. Would your program be an inspiration to other groups?

E. Reflection – evaluate the process, variety, involvement and effectiveness in terms of Christian theology and goals (*not* in terms of success of the project)

F. What resources would you recommend to others wanting to start a similar program?

1. Organizations (Both religious and secular)
2. Books
3. Pamphlets
4. Films
5. Projects

G. Do you feel your experience is of value to others and would you be willing to share your knowledge and experience with the Church at large? (For those with a program underway)

H. (For those contemplating a program) Would you be interested in learning about another group's experience and success or failure in the area of concern you are considering?