Assistant Bishop Alfred Randolph

Excerpts from Protestant Episcopal Church Annual Council Journals

Journal of the Eighty-Ninth Annual Council of the Protestant Episcopal Church in Virginia (Richmond: Wm. Ellis Jones, Steam Book and Job Printer, 1884)

“February 18th—Visited Normal School at Hampton in company with Rev. J.J. Gravatt. I mentioned this to speak of the enthusiastic labors of Rev. Mr. Gravatt, the earnest Rector of St. John’s, Hampton, among the negroes and Indians at the Normal School. I am sure his work will be blessed by both races.”

“March 2d, 1884—Visited St. Stephen’s Church for colored people, Petersburg, Rev. Giles B. Cooke, rector. I would earnestly commend the work of our church among the colored people, as represented by these two missions. I was impressed with the prudence, the Christian fidelity and enthusiasm with which these missions are conducted. The only remedy for adverse criticism and speculative skepticism as the reality of this work of our Church among the colored people is the knowledge and the observation of the work itself were it is conducted with ability and Christian prudence. Every effort for the generation of races which have been for long centuries without the moral and spiritual education of the Gospel, must be attended with difficulties, and to a weak faith in the power of the Gospel, with discouragements, compared to missionary efforts in the foreign fields, among the negro and the oriental races, the discouragements are less and the hopes far brighter in the work of the moral and spiritual education of the negro population of our own country. Questions of organization and of the relation of these missions to the government of the Church can afford to wait.

The question of infinite importance is to win these souls to Christ, and to train them by the power of regenerating grace into moral and spiritual obedience to the ten commandments of God.

This work demands patience and unwavering faith. In my opinion the liturgy, the teaching and the training of the Episcopal Church are most effective for this great end. The people of Virginia will miss an opportunity for obeying Christ’s command and securing the Divine blessing if they fail to contribute to this work among our colored population, and to pray for those who are engaged in it.” (38)
A doubt exists in the minds of many of our people as to the adaptation of our Church to the religious education of this race. That doubt is theoretical. Wherever the practical effort has been made the results have dissipated the impression. The Episcopal church, more than any other, relies upon the saving power of Christian education. From the dawn of intelligence in the child, it associates with the story of redemption the teachings of the commandments of the Decalogue. Its catechism, after the creed, teaches the duty towards God and our neighbor as springing out of the regenerating power of the gospel, and as the mark of the new man in Christ Jesus. It teaches the child, and the adult, too, that his salvation by the gospel involves not only the regeneration of his spiritual life, but the reconstruction of his whole conception of moral duty; at the same time giving him new foundation upon which that moral duty is to rest. It teaches that a Christian is not only one who prays in private and in public, who reads his Bible, who spends time in religious thought and meditation, who is studying to work out his salvation with fear and trembling, but he must be truthful and honest and just and temperate and pure and self-controlled and kindly and loving toward his fellow man. The negro, and indeed all the races in the lower stages of civilization, tend toward a divorce of religion from morality. That tendency exists in various forms among all classes of the white race, modified and controlled by long ages of discipline by Christian law and public sentiment, by the churches and the Bible. The superstition belongs not only to the negro race, but it is the inveterate tendency of all the races. With the negro it is the inheritance of generations of pragmatism from the dawn of his history. The proposition that he is incapable of education out of a religion of physical excitation and antinomianism and superstitious emotionalism is equivalent to the proposition that he is incapable of salvation by the gospel. Surely only the ignorant and the unthinking among us can adopt such a conclusion. The church that addresses itself to the mighty task of bridging over the gulf between Christian faith and Christian morals, in the mind of the negro, is the one best adapted to bear to him the message of the gospel.

‘If I were a politician I would advocate the Christian education of the colored population, as the strongest ground for the stability of our political institutions. An acknowledgement of the awful authority of God and obedience to the ten commandments as His law, must be recognized by all political parties as lessening the difficulties of human governments and securing readier obedience to human laws. As a political economist I would advocate the evangelizing of the race, as contributing to national wealth and material prosperity. To have a nation, a vast population with thriftless habits, living from hand to mouth, with no instincts to accumulate property, clothed with the right of suffrage but with no interest in the laws for the protection of property, must always be an element of danger and a barrier to material progress. Christianity and Christianity alone will teach them the divine authority of marriage, the sacredness of property, purity in the control of their bodies, honesty in their relations with their fellow-men, industry in their common toil, and all the virtues that contribute to the wealth of nations. If I were
engaged in a trade I would advocate their Christian education, for as they are elevated by the power of the gospel all the conditions of their temporal life would be progressively improved. They would live in better houses, they would wear better clothes, they would accumulate property which would advance the resources of the State and diminish taxation. They would be better customers of the merchants in our cities and towns, as their wants would increase through the refining influences of a Christian civilization, and thus contribute to the prosperity of the whole community. But these are not the motives which impel the Christian Church in the work of their evangelization. These incidental blessings follow in the pathway of the Christian faith, but they are as nothing compared with the infinite (47) blessings which Christ brings to all the children of men. We must refuse to estimate the value of our missionary efforts in terms of material progress. Could we train the uncivilized race in all the arts and the literature and the social refinements of the foremost nations of Europe, could we banish poverty and spread the blessings of wealth and enlightenment over all the nations that sit in darkness, we would have done nothing after all compared to the work of bringing souls home to God and making them heirs through Christ in eternal life and glory.

The conversion of the heathen abroad and at home may add to our commercial prosperity, may lighten the cost of government by diminishing crime and taxation to support poorhouses, and increase the wealth of the nation. (1) With what withering contempt would the early apostles have regarded such a conception of the motive to preach Christ to the lost world.

'We must believe that these have souls to be saved; we must believe that Christ lays upon Christians the responsibility of bringing these wanderers home to God. This alone can kindle the enthusiasm and inspire the self-sacrifice needed for the work. If we do that, Christ will take the future of the two races, living together in the same home, into His own hands. He will cause them to dwell together in peace, each filling its own sphere and working out its own destiny. He will solve the problems that statesmen cannot solve with reference to the relations and development of the races under a common government; He will bless us in the great work He has given us to do, and open the way, perhaps in the near future, for our colored population, Christianized and civilized, to bear to their own race, in the long darkened continent of Africa, the salvation of the Gospel for the life here and the life that is to come.'

“The views here expressed have been confirmed by contact with this work, and reflection upon the problems it involves, during thirteen years of my ministry. I would call the attention of the clergy and laity to the special organ of our work in Virginia, published in Petersburg, and edited by one of our colored Theological students. It is an interesting and most creditable paper, and by subscribing to it we would furnish ourselves with information of the progress of the work, and encourage a Missionary cause.”