

## Part III: Selected Articles

### TOM WILSON'S STATEMENT TO THE 1963 ANNUAL CONFERENCE

I speak as few in this audience can. I wear the badge of color and, therefore, speak as one who has suffered the injustices you now discuss.

Whether by coincidence or destiny or the will of God, history has made us travelers on the Jericho Road. We are confronted anew by Christ's command to love and to be neighborly. This is the challenge and the opportunity we face in the racial crisis of the hour.

The problem has both historical and practical antecedents. Historically, it is rooted in custom and tradition, hundreds of years of servitude and second-class citizenship. For the Negro it is a quest for power and for the white a struggle to maintain the power that has rained blessing upon him.

As long as whites insist upon metering out to Negroes rights which are constitutional and God-given, rights which they enjoy and take for granted, racial conflict will not abate but grow to an ever-worsening state, until it erupts with the madness and devastating destructiveness of a volcano--when brokenness will be compounded and healing made much more difficult.

I am aware of some of the dangers involved in the Negro quest for full equality under the law. It is paradoxical that the Negro in his insistent bid for equality may in essence seek inequality. It is my judgment that the Negro must not ask for any more than any other citizen, and certainly he must never settle for less. Another real danger is that the Negro may seek to retaliate in kind to the white man for the injustices and suffering inflicted upon him, by trading insult for insult, by throwing stone for stone, or by swapping violence for violence.

As I perceive the situation, the Negro has a unique role in this conflict. It is incumbent upon him to suffer, not in docility or cowardice, not in humiliation and despair, but in love, dignity, and poise that he might project a new self-image and thereby reveal to his white brother who he is and who Christ is.

What is at stake in this growing racial conflict? Apart from the restoration of human dignity and worth, and the need for bringing relief to those who have suffered long and patiently at the hand of injustice, nothing less than the integrity of the church itself is at stake. The world, and more specifically, the Negro communities, have grown weary of the church's lofty pronouncements and pious platitudes. They await our answer today. They want to see, to feel, and to taste of the redemptive love of Christ.

I am not unmindful of the fact that if the Negro is to achieve his full rights under the law he will need the aid and assistance of white brothers who will dare to risk themselves in the struggle for justice. Many of you as individuals hold positions and status that could effectively influence the power structure in your local community. And, certainly, if the church as a corporate body would dare speak with integrity and purpose, much of the world's brokenness could be healed.

If the precipitation of racial crisis by Negro leaders and communities across this land of ours has done nothing else, it has given "white" churches and communities an "excuse" to confess their sins and to redeem themselves with resolute and courageous action. The question of the moment is whether this assembly convened under the deepening shadows of racial conflict and discord, of brokenness and alienation, can effect within its life a reasonable measure of reconciliation. Indeed, the hour is late, but not too late. The storm is upon us, but Christ still has the power to calm the raging winds and the troubled sea—if only we would put our trust in him.

God forbid that this Conference, amidst the urgency of the hour, should simply pass another resolution. May we stand in His strength until he has wrought in us his holy will.

Reprinted by permission from *Gospel Messenger*, official publication of the Church of the Brethren, 1451 Dundee Avenue, Elgin, IL 60120. July 27, 1963. Thomas Wilson made this statement during the discussion of the statement *The Time Is Now*, at the 1963 Annual Conference. Tom is an ordained minister in the Church of the Brethren and was the pastor of a Brethren congregation at the time.