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Miscellanea

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Miscellanea

Selective Fellowship

Selective fellowship, which is discussed in Lutheran circles of America these days, is the practice of extending the hand of fellowship to one or several pastors and congregations belonging to a synod with which one's own synod is not in fellowship. It is admitted by conservative Lutherans who advocate such fellowship that the pastors and congregations so recognized must be in doctrinal agreement with those who establish fellowship with them. To put it differently, we are here speaking of cases where pastors and congregations are in doctrinal harmony though their church bodies have not yet declared that they are in full doctrinal agreement with each other. What are we to say of the establishing of fellowship between individual pastors and congregations under such circumstances?

When Christians find that they are in doctrinal agreement with each other, the normal thing for them, of course, is to have fellowship. They are brethren and united through the common faith and confession, and it is certainly in keeping with God's will that this mutual relation be given expression. Cf. Eph. 4:1-5.

But while this is true, a number of considerations must not be overlooked. The question will at once arise, whether the mutual recognition of the pastors and congregations in question is a matter of such urgency that the action of the whole church body cannot be awaited. While our synodical organizations are not divine institutions, they are established in keeping with God's will and are useful, and we perform our extra-congregational and inter-congregational church work by means of them. Certainly such an important matter as the establishment of fellowship with people not belonging to our synod or our federation of synods should be attended to, if at all possible, by the whole body and not merely by segments of it.

Wherever the question of selective fellowship arises, it should not be forgotten that there is a great advantage in having the joint prayerful deliberation and study of one's whole synod center on the problem. In fact, synods are formed for the very purpose of having joint rather than individual action in such an important matter as the establishment of new fellowship relations.

Synods, moreover, are called into being with the design of letting the various constituent organizations not only advise and assist, but supervise each other — of course, in a brotherly, evangelical way. Now and then a member congregation will launch out on an unscriptural course, and disciplinary action will be required. It is generally recognized that the practice of such discipline with respect to matters of doctrine and church activities is one of the legitimate functions of the synod. But evidently the exercise of this discipline is made very difficult if in such a

significant sphere as the establishment of church fellowship with a congregation not of the same synodical connection a congregation acts independently of its sister congregations and simply becomes a law to itself. We believe that there is a great danger inherent in the very principle of selective fellowship unless sufficient safeguards are employed.

Another point that must not be overlooked pertains to the obligations a congregation owes its sister congregations in the same synodical connection. Everybody will admit that, at least generally speaking, its sister congregations are closer to a church than any congregation on the outside. No course should be initiated which will heedlessly or needlessly grieve, vex, or perplex the sister congregations or prove harmful to them. The right thing certainly would be, if a church is thinking of establishing fraternal relations with a congregation not of its communion, first to make full explanations to its sister congregations and to obtain their consent for the step under consideration. If such consent should be withheld for unsatisfactory reasons and the petitioning congregation should feel compelled for reasons of conscience to move ahead, it would at least have fulfilled one obligation which is due its sister churches.

In this connection it ought to be stated that no blessings from above can be expected for a course that flouts orderly procedure. "Let all things be done decently and in order," Paul admonishes us, 1 Cor. 14:40. If congregations should establish fraternal relations with other churches without consulting or even notifying their brethren, a confusion would ensue which would work great harm. If selective fellowship is to be practiced, it would be good for Synod itself to adopt and issue regulations, so that violations of good order will be avoided.

When facing the question of establishing fellowship with a congregation whose synod is not sound in doctrine, while the individual church in question is in full doctrinal agreement with us, we should not forget that this church must be considered as being in *statu confessionis* and must testify to the convictions which it holds jointly with us. How long it may remain a member of its body will depend on circumstances. If its witness will not be heeded, sooner or later a separation will have to take place; for we cannot be for the truth and against it at the same time.

In conclusion, we would urge all pastors and congregations to approach the subject of selective fellowship with utmost caution. To us it seems that it should not be practiced anywhere in our circles before there has been a discussion of the subject by Synod in convention assembled and the opportunity has been given our church body to adopt some regulations concerning it if it finds this desirable or necessary. For, after all, congregations which form a synod take this step with the very purpose of acting jointly and should therefore not go their own way independently of Synod. We close with the words of Paul, Phil. 2:3 f., "Let

nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others."
W. ARNDT

The Present Debate on the Granting of Autonomy to Churches Founded by Mission Organizations

Serious discontent is running through some of the most fruitful mission fields of the world. There is no unanimity of opinion concerning the cause of this situation, some believing that it is due to a few rash and discontented spirits who have been able to influence their co-workers, while others believe that underlying this discontent are causes which are to be found in a mistaken mission policy. Since there is no unanimity concerning the cause of this discontent, there is no agreement concerning the remedy. Those who entertain the first opinion would remedy the trouble by speedy dismissal of the troublemakers, while the latter would remedy it by a thorough revision of the policy of those in control. The writer of these lines belongs to the latter class. On the following pages he will try to diagnose the ailment.

The student of missions is often painfully aware of an ever-widening gap between the missionary organizations, represented by their mission boards, and the churches that have come into being by the efforts of these organizations. This is a phenomenon in all mission fields of the world, not in those of our Church only, but in those of all churches which are conducting world-wide missions. In India, in China, in the Dutch East Indies, in fact, wherever there has grown up an indigenous Church with a membership increasing in numbers and growing in the knowledge of the rights and duties of the Christian congregation, we see a struggle going on between the missionary organization which has not noticed the ground swell rising underneath its very feet and therefore has failed to interpret aright the signs of the times and the native Church which is becoming ever more conscious of its own strength, duty, and opportunity.

The missionary organization tries, for dear life, to hold on to the directing, the managing, the organizing, and the supervising of the work, to the appointing and the dismissing of laborers in the work, to the training of others for the work, to the fixing of policies, and to the controlling of the expenditure of the money. In short, it wants to attend to every phase of missionary endeavor and have the decisive voice in every missionary move. The native churches, on the other hand, growing in membership and in numbers, in faith, in love, and in many Christian graces, also increasing in eagerness to participate in the work of the Lord at home and abroad, showing commendable aptitude in handling their own affairs and evidencing readiness to assume larger responsibilities, now ask for more latitude in the management of their own affairs, above all,

for trust and confidence on the part of the missionary organization. Especially do they insist upon a gradual but steady shifting of authority, direction, management, supervision, of fixing policies and disbursing mission money from foreign shoulders upon their very own.

Here, then, is the conflict. The missionary organization and their respective mission boards, like fond parents, fail to see that the child is becoming a man, while the native churches fret under too strict a parental supervision and under the stigma of irresponsibility, untrustworthiness, and incompetence placed upon them by the unwillingness of the missionary organization to grant them a larger share in the management of the mission. The native churches, in proof that they do not ask too much, point to the native church bodies which have come into being through the missionary endeavors of different missionary organizations during and after World War I. We may mention here a few such church bodies as perhaps some of our readers are familiar with: the Ewe Presbyterian Church in Togo, grown out of the work of the North German Mission; the Tamil Lutheran Church, grown out of the work of the Leipzig Mission; the Jeypore Ev. Lutheran Church, grown out of the work of the Schleswig-Holstein Mission. Not missionary wisdom, however, but World War I brought these bodies into being by an enforced devolution of authority. One should think that Christian wisdom could, in an amiable way, have done as much as Mars has rudely done.

One might now ask: What is it that makes the missionary organization hold so tenaciously to its position, so unwilling to agree to a devolution of authority? Can it lay claim to deeper love for the kingdom, to clearer insight into the needs of the native congregations, to richer spiritual gifts? No, nothing of the kind. There are three, possibly four, reasons.

First, there is the seemingly sound business principle that money should be administered by those who are entrusted with it by the donors and who can be held to accountability for its use. In other words, he who gives the money for the Church should also control its use, either directly or through his chosen men. Now, the native churches are not willing to admit that this principle should apply to the Church. They admit that money rules the world, but they are not as yet ready to admit that money rules the Church. They believe that the Church should not be conformed to the world, but should be transformed by the renewing of its spirit also in this matter. They admit that the Church needs money, but because of that need they are not ready to make money the owner, head, and ruler of the house. They assign to it the position of handmaid. They maintain that the Church is ruled by the Word of God, in faith, love, and with prayer. If the missionary organization is given the grace to revert back to these ruling principles in the Church, it should not be hard for it to assume the attitude of John the Baptist and to say of the native churches, "He must increase, but I must decrease." It will then stand aside, watching

with a smile of satisfaction the bride of the Lord coming into her own.

The second reason is the lack of trust in the ability, competence, and trustworthiness of the native Church. The missionary organization fears that when the native Church gets hold of mission money, that money will be squandered, the widow's mite will be misspent, and a general reckless spending orgy will follow. It fears furthermore that standards of doctrine and standards of morals will not be upheld. It has not the confidence that the Christianity of its own children can mature. To this the native churches reply: "That is a declaration of bankruptcy on the part of the missionary organization. If in fifty or one hundred years the result of all the missionary endeavors is an untrustworthy Christian membership which will be neither honest in the use of money entrusted to it nor faithful to the teachings of the Word of God nor zealous to magnify the Lord by good works and a decent life, then the work of the missionary organization is a complete failure." The churches further maintain that in giving way to these unreasonable fears and to this senseless lack of confidence the missionary organization forgets that the very people whose competence in managing mission funds is doubted are able to take the lead in great commercial, political, and social movements, are successfully conducting co-operative enterprises of tribal organizations, and manage efficiently charitable and banking operations, without the supervision and guidance of a foreign staff. Furthermore, in maintaining standards of doctrine the missionary organization forgets completely to rely on the inherent truth of these doctrines. There is clearly a great difference between contending "earnestly for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints" and this maintaining of a standard of authority. When a Christian earnestly contends for the faith, the emphasis is upon the inherent truth of that for which he contends; when merely a standard is maintained, the emphasis rests upon the exercise of authority. When doubts are expressed whether the native churches will maintain the proper standards of morals, frequently no distinction is made between Christian morals and European or American customs. The power to maintain Christian morals comes from the faith of the heart which works by love, and love is the fulfillment of the commandments. What is in agreement with the commandments of God is Christian morality, and what is not in agreement with them cannot be termed Christian morality. Now, to the faith which enables a man to live a Christian moral life the missionary organization has no greater claim than the native Christian churches. As to the maintenance of American and European customs one could wish that many of them had never been adopted by the native Christians.

The third reason is the unshakable conviction on the part of the missionary organization that the native Church cannot and will not be able to keep up the missionary establishment as it has been built up by the boards during their regime. There have been built up in the several mission fields of the world establishments

consisting of bungalows, manses, boarding schools, hospitals, church edifices, mountain homes, sanatoria, etc., with never a thought that someday the native Church would come into its own, that someday the burden of the maintenance and expansion of the Christian Church in these foreign countries would fall upon the shoulders of the native Church, that someday the leadership would have to pass from European and American hands into those of Chinese, Hindus, Javanese, and others, and that not forever could the churches of Europe and America remain responsible for the work in Asia, Africa, Oceania, and other areas, but that responsibility must shift to the native churches. If ever China, India, Japan, the East Indies, etc., are to be christianized, this must be done by the native Church. The whole present church establishment in these countries is designed to be administered and maintained not by the native Church, but by foreigners, the agents of the churches of Europe and America. It is absolutely impossible, almost unthinkable, that the native churches could ever carry the burden for these highly expensive mission establishments in their countries. They have been built up with a view that the Church in this or that foreign country, for ages to come, will be staffed by foreigners who will need for their health and general welfare spacious bungalows in large compounds, if possible, away from the crowded and usually unsanitary native quarters, health retreats in the mountains, leaves of absence with pay, easily accessible hospitals, school facilities, and the like. Never a thought has been given as to how to adapt the missionary enterprise to the country in which it is carried on and to the people who are to be "ministered unto" by the Gospel. And so it happens, even today, that in some missions younger missionaries have scruples about living in the bungalows built years ago for the health and comfort of a missionary family from across the seas. Such living conditions, according to their thinking, do not reflect the spirit of Him who had not where to lay His head and do not fit into the setup of the Church which is being built up in that particular country. The present missionary establishment gives too materialistic an aspect to a religion which is wholly spiritual and too foreign a flavor to a Church which should be native or indigenous.

Now, if the missionary organization were not to continue administering the affairs of the mission, it would see these laborious accomplishments of a time when little thought was given to the possibilities that someday a native church might grow up and come into its own, go overboard, because the native Church would have little use for an incubus devised mostly for people of other climes and customs.

A possible fourth reason why the missionary organization holds on is the fear of missionary stagnation. Only under the goad of the foreign missionary and under his supervision and guidance, it is thought, will the native son be active in mission work. Wiser men believe that if there is a stagnation in mission work owing to the lack of missionary zeal among native Christians, it is largely

due to the present method of dealing with the native mission personnel. It has been systematically trained always to look to the missionary organization and its agents for direction. Every step the native worker took was carefully planned and ordered by the missionary organization, and it saw to it, too, that it was made exactly as planned and ordered. Individual initiative and spontaneous activity were frowned upon because they might upset the plans of the organization. Such uncontrolled and uncontrollable missionary efforts could not be tolerated in a well-organized and well-supervised mission.

These are some of the main reasons which make the missionary organization so unwilling to give up the hold it has on the mission enterprise and the native churches so determined to take in hand what really belongs to them.

Such is the contest in the mission fields of the world. May its outcome be a strengthening of the indigenous churches and a greater missionary activity in the respective countries. H. NAU

