

A Lonely Missionary Has His Problems

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TIEFEL'S EARLY YEARS

This work is a brief account of some of the experiences of Reverend Fredrick Tiefel, missionary to Japan for a small religious group, the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, headquartered in Milwaukee Wisconsin. It shall endeavor to prove his independent tendency was defensible.

Fredrick George Tiefel was born the son of Pastor and Mrs. George Tiefel on July 28, 1914 at Orchard Nebraska.¹ In his childhood life he desired to become a pastor and so followed into his denomination's school system. He attended high school on the Dr. Martin Luther College campus in New Ulm Minnesota in September, 1928, graduating from there in June, 1932.

He took the next big step toward his goal when he entered Northwestern College of Watertown, Wisconsin in the fall of 1932. He graduated from college with his degree in 1936.² The final big step of his journey he took when he entered Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary at Theinsville, Wisconsin, the Fall after his graduation from Northwestern College.³

Upon his graduation from the Seminary in May, 1938 he served a year on a vicar assignment.⁴ His first call to the ordained ministry was to St. Paul's Congregation of Leavenworth, Washington, a member of his Synod's beautiful Pacific Northwest District

¹Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary; President's File on Students

²Ibid.

³Catalog, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, 1936, (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House) student roster.

⁴Ibid., 1939, student roster.

in 1941.⁵ He served the congregation then for four years, leaving in 1945. 1945 then found him ministering to the Withrow Evangelical Lutheran Church of Withrow, Washington.⁶ Here he served until 1948, when he was called to Shadle Park Lutheran Congregation of Spokane, Washington. This call he accepted.⁷ He might have thought he was to settle here, but the Lord had other plans.

PROBLEMS BUILD, WHICH MAKE THE CONTACT PASTOR A MISSIONARY

His Synod had decided to render spiritual care to the servicemen serving their country in Asia during the Korean War. The result? His Synod's Lutheran Spiritual Welfare Commission extended him the call to serve as military contact pastor to the servicemen on furlough or stationed in Japan.⁸

On February 16, 1952 he took up residence in the Yokohama Hotel, Jokohama, Japan, leaving his wife and family behind in his native land until more permanent and certain conditions could be maintained. By Synodical directions, his primary purpose was to serve Wisconsin Synod members in the armed forces of the United States in Japan. His Synod had given him a four wheel drive Jeep for transportation. Thus he became Wisconsin Synod's first paid full time contact pastor in a foreign area.⁹

However, the Lord intended otherwise. The Lord, working through

⁵Yearbook, Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, 1941, (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House). (Hereafter in footnotes labeled Source D plus year indicating issue.)

⁶Source D, 1945 ⁷Source D, 1948

⁸Report to the Districts, Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, 1952, (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House) p. 19. (Hereafter, Report to the Districts labeled: Source C in the footnotes with year of issue)

⁹Ibid.

natural means, changed the primary thrust of a synod resolution in His way. The Wisconsin Synod had resolved in the same connection, that the civilian chaplain also explore the possibility of starting mission work there among the Japanese.¹⁰

Desiring very strongly to learn Japanese, being also so instructed by the Commission, he attended a school of higher learning, a mission arm of a then sister synod, the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod.¹¹ One would think such a situation would be ideal, but instead it became loaded with problems along with splendid opportunities.

According to his correspondence with the state-side synodical officials, the practices and doctrine of some of the missionaries of the sister synod were not always in harmony with God's Word. His attempts to correct them met with a degree of animosity in talking with them in class situations¹²

While he was attending there mainly to learn the Japanese language, others were there trying to learn English and other courses this mission school offered. Certain of the Japanese who heard these classroom clashes and could understand English, became interested in what Pastor Tiefel had to say and they desired further instruction from him.¹³

¹⁰Reports and Memorials to the Convention, Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, 1953, (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House) p. 24. (Hereafter in footnotes, Reports and Memorials are labeled Source B plus year indicating issue)

¹¹Convention Proceedings, Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, 1957, (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House) p. 40. (Hereafter in footnotes The Proceedings are labeled: Source A plus year of issue)

¹²Source A, 1957, p. 71.

¹³Source A, 1953, pp. 47-48.

Missionary Tiefel welcomed this splended opportunity, but the problems thickened. He scheduled five afternoons a week for Bible Class instruction. He had three mornings a week in language study. He needed time to prepare catechism classes, Bible classes, and sermons. This would exhaust fairly well the remaining two evenings and four mornings. Yet in addition to all this he served the servicemen who were willing to contact him. This load on his time prevented him making rounds to visit the servicemen in various stations all over Japan on a regular basis.¹⁴

In addition to these problems there was the desparate need for proper Christian literature in Japan. The Missouri Synod material was very deficient. A decent expression of Biblical terms was sought after. They needed a good catechism and Sunday School materials for adults and children. An adult Bible study course was needed. Japanese terminology for particular Christian concepts had to be sought to convey proper expression, for Christian doctrine and thought. It involved a communication barrier. If they did come up with material to publish they had neither sufficient money nor machinery to publish them. Prices were extremely high in Japan.¹⁵

The language school of the Missouri Synod held practices and doctrines that the 1957 Floor Committee #25 termed obnoxious.¹⁶ The Japanese converts and co-workers were so disturbed, they themselves addressed letters for help and guidance to the mission board.

¹⁴Source C, 1954, p. 26.

¹⁵Source C, 1954, p. 26; 1956, pp. 20-21; Source A, p. 42

¹⁶Source A, 1957, pp. 70-73.

It was difficult for them to see how the Wisconsin Synod could maintain relations with the Missouri Synod in Japan. They hoped the Wisconsin Synod would solve the problems quickly by granting permission to separate from Missouri in Japan.¹⁷

In addition there were personal problems for the missionary not of his making. The Japanese government taxed any foreigner 60% of his income.¹⁸ This cut drastically into the missionary's means of self-support from an already meagre income of \$3600. A residence was needed. His wife and family had arrived in March, 1953. But property and adequate facilities were extremely high priced and very difficult to find in over-crowded Japan and especially Tokyo. His schedule left little precious time for finding suitable quarters.

Because the majority of his work involved training native Japanese, Tiefel requested transfer to Synod's Board for Missions. The Spiritual Welfare Commission agreed and arrangements were completed to effect the transfer.¹⁹

PROBLEMS BUILD STATESIDE

This, being under the Mission Board, however did not solve all problems; it raised more. Synod was completely new in the field of foreign missions outside of the country. Its only independent mission field endeavor was the Apache Mission stateside in Arizona. There was the Mission in Germany but that was in an

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸Source C, 1956, pp. 20-21.

¹⁹Source A, 1953, p. 31; Source B, 1953, p. 24; Source C, 1954, pp. 26-27.

advisory role and mostly in financial help to people there. The African Mission it had under the Synodical Conference was predominately Missouri operated. So it had no direct acquaintance with the problems ^{which} foreign cultures, societies, laws, and feelings of natives, cause in a mission field run by strangers.²⁰

Should the gathering of believers in Japan have a church body status or should it have only a congregational status under Syond? When and where was the final authority to be for situations requiring immediate action? Would the Japanese government allow the type of organization that all felt was needed, should all decide on one? Should it be an affiliate or a subsidiary, an ~~and~~ association or some other level?

So the mission board was approached with policy, jurisdiction and doctrinal problems right from the start for which it had no precedence, experience, power or tools to deal with!

The head of the Japan Board, Pastor Dorn, had taken ill. He was not always able to attend to every matter as he would have liked. Letters had to go unanswered and requests postponed and delayed. Decisions concerning policies and doctrinal matters had to be postponed because his illness limited discussion of them with the appropriate people.²¹

Funding too for the Japanese Mission was a problem. Certain necessary items should really be decided and appropriated by the synodical body. Others needed approval of other officials.

²⁰Source A, 1959, p. 76; 1955, p. 52.

²¹Source A, 1957, pp. 70-73; 1955, p. 42.

Yet the needs Tiefel presented were urgent almost to the point of emergency. They deserved more immediate attention which the board could not provide at that time.²²

Added to those problems was the problem of funding. Tiefel's requests might have seemed extravagant to an American cultured person. It may have seemed his evaluations were distorted out of proportion, again to an American cultured person. The funds for missions were limited and cut-backs in spending were urged and even approved by the synodical body. One can easily understand the complications and frustrations this would cause.²³

Two other factors were yet to enter. Synod was endeavoring to restructure the Mission Board to suit and facilitate mission field demands. These plans had not yet been fully completed in 1955.²⁴

The second factor was that Pastor Schiley was chosen to replace Pastor Dorn as chairman of the Japanese Mission Board. Pastor Schiley entered a situation loaded with problems. Being new he was perhaps also somewhat green, although very dedicated and devoted to fulfilling the Lord's work. Had this been done earlier the situation in Japan may have been greatly relieved of tension. As far as the Japanese mission could see, Pastor Schiley was an excellent selection, but a late one. Possibly too late.

THE PROBLEMS CLASH

²²Ibid.

²³Ibid., p. 40

²⁴Ibid., 1955, pp. 11, 52.

The problems only increased in the matter. A clash of some sorts was inevitable. The situation in Japan demanded immediate action, which Synod could not give immediately given its circumstances.²⁵ A dedicated, frustrated missionary would eventually have to talk things over with equally dedicated frustrated synodical officials and maybe even brought before an at times hard-nosed, dedicated, stubborn, misunderstanding Synod.

For Synod was also having its problems and crisis. Relations with Missouri had become closer and closer to the breaking point. Men threatened to leave Synod because we did not break. Others threatened to leave Synod if we did break. Doctrinal differences in practice was very apparent especially in the field of fellowship. Additionally, Missouri had internal discipline problems along with concerned officials who feared and wanted to avoid a split in Synod. They tended to down play the serious matters of the situation among themselves and before others.²⁶

Some of their members wanted a more liberal doctrinal stand. Others held for the old position even to the point of outdated methods. Stateside Missouri held fingers with the ALC and sought to embrace them as brothers.

Wisconsin Synod felt constrained to protest such action as simply unscriptural and not to be held by a body who wanted to be considered as standing fully on God's word.²⁷

²⁵Source A, 1955, p. 42.

²⁶Sources A,B,C, 1951-1961, Union Committee Reports.

²⁷Ibid.

Missionary Tiefel's evaluations and the faith and needs of the people he served, dictated that he come stateside to get action on the situation. He was right, the officials were astounded. Yet they could not give the solution he and his people sought. It was particularly over doctrine and practice with the Japanese Mission of the Missouri Synod.²⁸

The Wisconsin Japanese Mission viewed the problem as demanding immediate attention and the breaking of relations with the Japanese Missouri Mission. How should they go about it? Even Floor Committee #25 was constrained to admit Missouri's Japan practices were just plainly obnoxious.²⁹ Wisconsin Synod officials probably felt, "We're handling the whole Missouri situation through our Union Committee now. That's enough, isn't it?"

But Missionary Tiefel felt constrained by conscience he could no longer continue in the relations with Missouri in the Japan case. He therefore tendered his resignation and withdrew from Synod on January 31, 1957. He was asked to postpone that action until another meeting could be arranged under more favorable conditions and at a more favorable time.³⁰

They encouraged him to talk the matter over with his brothers in whom he could confide. He complied. In his conversations he presented both doctrinal and financial problems to them and asked their help and guidance. The more he talked the more he

²⁸Source A, p. 39, para. 3 and 5, Japanese Mission Board Report, pp. 70 - 73.

²⁹Ibid. p. 71; 1955, p. 42.

³⁰Source A, p. 39, para. 3 and 5, Japanese Mission Board Report, pp. 70 - 73.

undoubtedly became assured that his requests and position were right and proper. ³¹

On February 6, 1957 Pastor Tiefel followed through with his former action. He withdraws from his Synod firmly but regretedly and perhaps somewhat bitterly. ³²

THE AFTERMATH

But there was yet hope in Synod's eyes. Tiefel still felt obliged to help the second missionary Synod had approved and called. ³³ Previously, on January 17, 1957 Pastor Schiley had made arrangements for himself, Chairman Hoenecke and President Nauman to visit the mission and see what the situation was like. It was set for April 26, 1957 at 10:00 AM. Synod officials arrived early and checked out the appointment with Pastor Tiefel. ³⁴ Pastor Tiefel claimed a hospital call. He would be unable to meet with them at that time. A further conversation disclosed he would not even let them into the house. He breathed II John 5-6, 9-11 down their ears. He would not see them except to negotiate settlement for property and possessions and to help the new missionary, young Pastor Richard Seeger. ³⁵

The officials took care of notifying the Japanese government that they were no longer responsible for the policy and action and

³¹Ibid.

³²Ibid., p. 39

³³Ibid., pp. 72-73

³⁴Ibid., p. 39.

³⁵Ibid., pp. 39-41, 70-71.

transaction of Missionary Fredreck Tiefel.³⁶

The case was not closed yet. The matter ^{was} needed the 1957 Synodical body's attention for approval, rejection or redirection. The answer was an endeavor to negotiate. It seems Pastor Tiefel might still be willing to help our work there.³⁷

A photostatic copy of a portion of their deliberation is included at the end of the report. (Section D, found on page 72 of the report is omitted. There they suggested negotiation and hoped for fruitful results.)

THE THESIS DISCUSSED

It is the author's intention to show that both parties' positions were defensible and with God's forgiveness for them, justifiable. History has shown it. Since Synod seemingly justified its stand in the 1957 convention we deal mainly with the Tiefel aspect. Given: 1) There were separate indefensible incidents on both sides, yet none was made with deliberate and intentional evil malice or hate.³⁸ 2) The anger that flowed was from a desperate situation rather than from a heart bent only on revenge. (Missouri relations, administrative changes, and funding on Synod's side, funding, obnoxious situations and doctrines on the Japanese side were but some of them.) 3) Each had and showed dedicated ardent service to their Lord.³⁹ 4) It was God who placed these

³⁶Ibid. p. 41

³⁷Ibid. pp. 71-72.

³⁸Ibid.

³⁹Ibid., 1955, p. 52.

problems upon both. 5) It was God who knew and had provided the inexperience and the limited tools and problems (methods, structures, subsidiary or affiliated associations in Japan; administrative personnel stateside, finances, capabilities for time) 6) Both had internal as well as external problems. 7) Problems were similar only in that both involved doctrines under negotiation. The individual nature of the problems almost precluded exact treatment. 8) Synod recognized Missouri practice in Japan as obnoxious. 9) Tiefel, being closer and in the thick of it would naturally have to view it as atrocious and intolerable.

Many questions could be asked. Could not Synod have bestowed on the Japanese Mission an autonomous affiliate structure rather than a subsidiary structure? Was the ground work there actually researched sufficiently before hand? Could deeper research have shown an affiliate structure was perhaps the most feasible? Should Synod have sent just one man alone to fend for himself? In all other Synod foreign ventures afterwards, two or more were sent in the beginning stages. How far is a foreign missionary responsible for Synod inexperience in a desperate or emergency situation demanding immediate decision? These are questions which ought to have been considered and acted upon immediately. Yet were they?

But all these are side issues. The greatest issue is the matter of conscience. Had Tiefel not done what he had done, would the mission stay together? Would the people understand, being only five years old or under by rebirth of faith? Besides, many in Synod felt that a break with Missouri was necessary!

Synod accused Tiefel of presenting one sided issues and sol-

iciting for funds in the matter among individual members. Yet he was urged to present and discuss his problems with others in Synod by its officials. Incidents such as presenting and soliciting happens when one is given the order to discuss issues with friends especially when situations were tense and tight as they were.⁴¹

Had the body approved the restructuring of Mission Boards earlier, and changed the chairman or appointed one pro-tem earlier, the clash might have been averted. As it seems, Tiefel had to leave for conscience sake or feel he was trampling on the young faith of his flock. Both sides were fighting^a modern war (so to speak) with ancient and outmoded equipment.

Tiefel obtained his modern equipment immediately, independence and an independent source of support. Synod too obtained its equipment immediately as Synods do, in a matter of years. The department of Missions became restructured completely in a short time. (See Mission reports and reports and bylaws of those and succeeding conventions.) The president had been put on a full time basis. Additional administrative personell were added. Financial income for Synod was increased. This was the modern equipment Synod needed to handle situations like Japan but by God's grace it was lacking at a time when it was needed. The situation may have served to reshape Synod thinking to more modern and diverse yet completely Scriptural alternatives and methods. As a Synod body it may need more modern restructuring and other methods to help

⁴¹Source A, 1957, p. 39.

keep its pastors independent yet united.

CONCLUSION

Yes, Pastor Tiefel was justified in his decisions as well as the Synod. God blessed Synod through all this as well as Pastor Tiefel and his affiliates. Synod has expanded explosively as a result of restructuring and redirection. The Wisconsin Synod also has a watch-dog on its doctrine and practice in the form of Pastor Tiefel's present associates known as the CLC, the Church of the Lutheran Confession. Though Synod regrets their loss, (they were a splinter group from the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod) Synod has thrived and its mission efforts and training programs have prospered. To date, Pastor Tiefel still remains in Japan.⁴²

We of Synod as said above have prospered in our mission work. We immediately sent Pastor Seeger and Pastor Poetter followed soon. Both have now accepted calls stateside. At present the Japan mission is an independent affiliate body to Synod, the Lutheran Evangelical Christian Church in Japan, rather than a subsidiary body under Synod. It has already ordained three native Japanese as pastors, has two native lay workers and one of the three native pastors is its Deacon. In addition there are four American pastors and one American teacher.

Synod also has established mission affiliates on other

⁴²Directory, Church of the Lutheran Confession, 1975, (New Ulm, Minnesota: The CLC Book House) p. 12, 16.

continents and in other countries. It appreciated its past experiences. It sent first pastors by twos rather than alone. The strife of the conflict between WELS and CLC has prospered at the Lord's hand and at His bidding. May God continue to shower blessing upon both their labors to His glory. Amen.

V. Lay Member of the Executive Committee for Refugee Mission in Germany to fill the unexpired term of Mr. Herman Fricke until 1959

1. Dr. Alfred Westendorf, Toledo, Ohio
2. Mr. Paul Unke, St. Paul, Minnesota
3. Mr. George Reul, Helenville, Wisconsin

Your Committee No. 6 was also requested to nominate four (4) lay members as candidates for the Wisconsin Synod representatives on the Negro and Nigerian Mission Board of the Synodical Conference. We submit the following nominations from which the convention will elect two (2) to be submitted to the Synodical Conference.

1. Professor Theodore Binhammer, Northwestern College, Watertown
 2. Mr. Fritz Petersen, Seattle, Washington
 3. Mr. John Frey, Ann Arbor, Michigan
 4. Mr. Robert Lewis, Jamestown, North Dakota
- Lee Sabrowsky, Secretary
- G. E. Schmeling, Chairman

REPORT OF FLOOR COMMITTEE NO. 25

(Re: Missionary Tiefel and the Japan Board)

Your committee has been appointed to study and evaluate the matter relating to the differences existing between Japanese Missionary Fred Tiefel and the Board for Foreign Missions of the Wisconsin Synod. Because of the limited time available and because of the volume of material at hand, the committee begs your charitable judgment of the observations it considers to be weighty and especially pertinent. We present the following report:

A. On the one hand these observations must be made:

1. We regret that the illness of Pastor Dorn, the former chairman of the Japan Mission Board, prevented his sharing Missionary Tiefel's 1955 letter of caution with the rest of the Board. In his letter Missionary Tiefel urged a delay in calling a second missionary until the intersynodical relationship had been cleared up.
2. A lapse in the contact of the former chairman with Missionary Tiefel contributed to a divergence between Missionary Tiefel and the Board.
3. In their letter of 1956 to the Board, the Japanese Christians expressed a sincere desire for a second missionary.
4. The Board was understandably concerned about the interference by Missionary Tiefel and the Japanese Christians with the second missionary's call. Missionary Tiefel and the Japanese Christians had urged a delay in sending the second missionary.
5. Missionary Tiefel and the Japanese Christians displayed too little confidence that a second missionary would share their position in Japan, in view of the fact that the Board had supported their position in the past.
6. Cooperation between the Board and Missionary Tiefel in resolving their differences was made difficult by Missionary Tiefel's aggressive minority position on intersynodical relationships.
7. The minutes indicate that Missionary Tiefel was not showing a charitable and respectful attitude over against the consciences of the members of the Board who held to the majority position on intersynodical matters.
8. The Board gave adequate assurances to Missionary Tiefel that his position in Japan would not be undermined by the Board or by a second missionary.
9. The Board made positive efforts to persuade Missionary Tiefel to withdraw his resignation and to continue his work as our missionary in Japan.

10. By failing to present his case to the Synod, Missionary Tiefel did not follow charitable, orderly procedure.
11. It was highly improper on the part of Missionary Tiefel to circularize societies in our congregations and to give them an incomplete picture of the case.
12. It must be recognized that the members of the Board are the divinely appointed overseers of their mission fields.
13. The extreme discourtesy of Missionary Tiefel in not receiving the visiting committee in Japan is indefensible.

B. It must, however, also be observed:

1. The obnoxious practices of the Missouri Synod in Japan deeply influenced Missionary Tiefel's attitude toward the entire intersynodical situation.
2. We note that already in 1955 Missionary Tiefel questioned the advisability of sending a second missionary during a period of unsettled intersynodical relationships.
3. Missionary Tiefel felt conscience-bound to apply Rom. 16:17 to the intersynodical situation.
4. In view of Missionary Tiefel's concern for the spiritual welfare of the Japanese Christians, more convincing assurances of cooperation from the Board and the second missionary in the work in Japan might have been given.
5. Missionary Tiefel's proposal to cooperate with the second missionary, if the responsibility for the possible confusion in Japan that might result from the action would rest on the Board, indicated his willingness to continue to serve as our missionary in Japan.
6. A truer appreciation of Missionary Tiefel's isolated position might have called forth a more sympathetic consideration for his problems.
7. An unfortunate error in copies of the Board's minutes of its January 17, 1957, meeting strengthened Missionary Tiefel in his feeling that the majority stand of the Synod was being forced upon him and his Japanese Christians. ("... our mission must be fully on the Synod stand ..." should read "... our mission must be fully informed on the Synod stand ...")
8. The report of the Japan Mission Board and the report of the General Board for Foreign Missions in "Reports and Memorials" show a degree of inconsideration over against Missionary Tiefel.

* * * *

C. We have found it extremely difficult to arrive at a final evaluation of this matter because we feel that the following factors have beclouded the issues:

1. The responsibility for doctrinal practice in Japan was not clearly defined.
2. The very tense atmosphere in which the meetings were held was not favorable for achieving a harmonious settlement.
3. Distinctions were not always made between synodical relations in Japan and those obtaining in our country.
4. The attitude of the Japanese Christians, as indicated in their letter to the Board, is capable of being interpreted in various ways (expressing fear, joy, concern, anxiety, protestation).
5. This case is only an outgrowth of the confusion obtaining in general in intersynodical relationships.
6. The minutes indicate that both Missionary Tiefel and the Board often "talked past each other."
7. There was misunderstanding concerning the purpose of the Board's visit to Japan.
8. There are evidences of hasty action on both sides.

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