

CONFESSIOAL LUTHERANISM IN EUROPE:
WELS AND THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH-SYNOD OF FRANCE
AND BELGIUM AND TRIANGULAR FELLOWSHIP

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Introduction

The instructor will be glad to hear that the reason for the choice of this paper was a result of a personal experience I had while attending Bethany Lutheran College rather than an arbitrary search for a topic not dealt with by someone else. It was at the annual "Reformation Lectures" of 1978 that I came in contact with the Evangelical Lutheran Church/Synod of France and Belgium in the person of Prof. W. Kriess. The topic of his lecture concerned the Confessions. I was impressed with Prof. Kriess' handling of the material and even more impressed at the fact that the panel of reactors, whom I had seen find fault with just about anything (it is sad to have to admit that the WELS men had the reputation for excessive negativity) were for once at a loss for words and criticism. The thought of a confessional Lutheran body in Europe and in France yet was more than my interest could stand. From that point I have been interested in the European Lutheranism issue. This paper is a direct result of that three day lecture series, and although the more I understand the problems the less I see to be encouraged about, I expect the subject will always be of particular interest to me.

In preparing the paper I realized that a brief (?) time would need to be spent in laying down the background of confessional Lutheranism in Europe and our associations with the various bodies. Thus the paper will be divided into two main parts: I. The European Setting, and II. The Issue with ELC/S France and Belgium.

I. The European Setting

With the severing of fellowship with Missouri Synod in 1961, the dissolution of the Colonial Conference in 1963 and especially the Denver Convention of 1969, came the need for many changes in our synod. One of these changes was the necessity to contact our fellow confessional Lutherans in Europe to inform them of the problems and issues so that they could further define their own position.

The Lutheran church bodies that will take our primary attention will be: the Evangelical Lutheran Free Church (Saxon), the Evangelical Lutheran (Old Lutheran) Church - Breslau Synod, The Independent Evangelical Lutheran Church (pre-SELK), and the Evangelical Confessional Church of Germany (Bekennniskircke), along with the Evangelical Lutheran Church/Synod of France and Belgium.

Unionism has been plaguing Lutheranism since its beginnings. Philip of Hesse had attempted to merge Lutherism with Zwingliism for political reasons. Philip Melanchthon had always seen a united "reformed" church and was willing to grant concessions in true doctrine to produce that end. The Prussian Union of 1817 caused many to leave family, friends, and possessions to start a new life in the New World where freedom of religion was practiced, far away from the influences of European monarchies. This constant pressure to merge and conform to the status quo has never stopped. It remained in Europe and was also brought to the New World as an attitude rather than a clear dogmatic statement. It is this problem of unionism that we must direct ourselves

primarily in this section and also through the entire paper.

To set the tone for the following discussion it would be helpful for us to quote the following:

"Following our Synod's severance of fellowship relations with the Missouri Synod in 1961, our commission realized that we could hardly expect overseas church bodies in fellowship both with our Synod and the Missouri Synod to weigh and evaluate immediately the developments which had occurred in our country in the 1940's and 1950's. During the past sixteen or seventeen years, however, we have attempted to acquaint such overseas church bodies with the doctrinal issues which led our Synod to take the course which it is presently following...."¹

It must be said that for the most part the Synod was a patient brother to our friends on the other side of the ocean, and I think that this tone was always in evidence as matters became worse for confessional Lutheranism in Europe.

We will not go back as far as 1961 but back, rather, to April of 1970. In the Report to the Ten Districts of that year it was recorded that the three Federated Free Churches were initiating steps to form an organizational union. Also, an agreement had been reached to establish and exercise church fellowship with a group of Bavarian pastors of the so-called Kirchliche Sammlung um Bibel und Bekenntnis, a conservative group within the German territorial church bodies.

WELS was not in fellowship with the largest of the three church bodies, the Independent Ev. Lutheran Church, and had not been able to reach full agreement with them with respect to the application of Scriptural inerrancy, particularly with respect to

its ramifications concerning the creation account; also, with the doctrine of church fellowship; and with the doctrine of the ministry with respect to ordination. As to the Kirchliche Sammlung, they still retained their membership in the German territorial church which allowed for a wide toleration of conflicting and un-Scriptural teaching. With our sensitivity for unionism this situation could not be allowed to continue if our own fellowship was to be continued. The fact that our mission in Germany, the Ev. Confessional Church of Germany (ELBK), was being influenced by this unionistic move, was a cause of great concern for our Synod. It was felt, by the CICR, that our sister congregations "are not carrying through their professed doctrinal position on church fellowship and the Scriptures."²

Meanwhile, Pres. O. J. Naumann, chairman and Vice-President Carl Lawrenz, and Gerald Hoenecke were invited and attended the convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Free Church in Germany at Steeden on the Lahn, Germany, on October 14-18, 1970. Attention was primarily directed to the planning of the merger of the Ev. Luth. (Old Lutheran) Church, and the Independent Ev. Lutheran Church.

Since the LC-MS convention of 1969 at Denver had already happened the CICR had hoped for some reassuring resolutions concerning Missouri's lax fellowship practice, since this issue seemed to be the crux of the problem. As they reported to the WELS 41st Conv., they received those reassuring resolutions:

That it rejects the resolutions made by the LC-MS in Denver regarding the establishment of fellowship

with the ALC, and that it does not find itself in a position to go along with this resolution or to look upon it as binding for itself.

That it supports all brethren in the LC-MS who resolutely contend for the observance of Scripture and the Confessions.

That for the time being it would like to await further developments in the LC-MS with the hope that the mis-development which came about through the Denver resolution may be overcome.³

Unfortunately not everything went so well. Concerning altar fellowship with the Bavarian pastors who were in a state of protest in the German territorial Church, the convention conceded that "the procedure of establishing a proper consensus in doctrine and practice for intercommunion had really not been followed, and that only by taking the proper steps to provide such a consensus could the declaration stand and be put into operation."⁴ As a result, a meeting between the representatives of the Ev. Lutheran Free Church and these Bavarian pastors was arranged to take place at Ebrach, Germany. Concerning this meeting, nothing was solved and joint communion practices continued between the two groups.

The CICR then received position papers from the Independent Ev. Lutheran Church to begin movement to fellowship. In the papers it was clear that they failed to commit themselves to the "absolute inerrance of the Scriptures." This became a more urgent problem since the plans for merger continued.

This merger caused much grief because of its influence on our mission in Germany, the Bekenntniskirche, which was supported by our Synod. They had also established a joint parish with a congregation in the Independent Ev. Luth. Church without doctrinal

consensus. It was conceded by us that such joint church work had compromised its confessional position and ultimately also the position of our own Synod.

These revisions concerning proper preliminaries towards fellowship, were not fully accepted by the other two Free Churches. The meeting at Steeden left doctrinal differences unresolved and still the move for merger continued.

WELS and SELK

The merger went ahead without the resolution of doctrinal differences in June of 1972. The church body formed was called the Independent Evangelical Lutheran Church or Selbstaentige Ev. Lutherische Kirche (SELK).

In an act of the utmost patience the CICR met with the representatives of the German Free Churches and the Ev. Luth. Church/Synod of France and Belgium scheduled July 17-20, 1973 to be held at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary in Mequon, with the representatives from the Evan. Luth. Confessional Church also participating. The representatives were:

SELK: Dr. Jobst Schoene
 Dr. Manfred Roensch
 Dr. Gottfried Hoffmann
 Pastor Guenther Schultz

ELC/S F&B: Pres. John Brick
 Pastor Wilbur Kreiss

Bekennniskirche: Pres. Karl Wengenroth
 Pastor Armin Zielke

The agenda contained the controverted issues of the previous years

years:

1. the doctrine of the Scripture and its inerrancy, especially its application to the Genesis creation account.
2. the doctrine of church fellowship.
3. the doctrine of the ministry with respect to ordination.⁵

On the third day, a statement was prepared by the CICR and submitted to the member's reps of SELK:

The public ministry with particular reference to ordination

Resolved, that on the basis of our discussions this week with the SELK representatives we find ourselves in agreement with the position expressed in the discussions with reference to the doctrine of the public ministry - particularly relative to ordination.

The inerrancy and external clarity of the Scriptures with particular reference to the creation days

Resolved, to advise the SELK representatives:

- 1) that it is our conviction on the basis of the Word of God that the creation days cannot be understood as anything else than ordinary day;
- 2) that we do not contend for the term "ordinary" as such, but that in keeping with the truth of the external clarity of Scriptures we would ask the SELK representatives whether they are ready to commit themselves as representatives of the SELK to the understanding of the creation days as days whose duration was controlled by the functions of the sun and moon as specified in Genesis 1:14 (cf. also Ex. 20:11).

Church Fellowship

Resolved, to advise the SELK representatives:

- 1) that we agree with the substance of the Overseas Statement "Fellowship in Its Necessary Context of

the Doctrine of the Church" (not including the addendum beginning with the words "This statement bears...") as being in accord with Scriptures. With respect to the term "regularly" in the second sentence of Thesis 3, we assert our agreement in the light of the explanation given in our discussion of this week. As we understand the explanation offered, the term "regularly" is used to indicate that Christians under all normal circumstances will regularly "gather about the Sacraments," but that identification of the church's presence is not dependent upon the regularity as such of such gatherings, even as this truth is set forth in our Synod's statement of the church, I,D,3;

- 2) that we have attempted to give careful attention to the SELK "Stellungnahme..." to our Statement on Church Fellowship, but feel constrained to state that we find no Scriptural reason for altering our Statement or the principles outlined therein;
- 3) that we do not expect church bodies in fellowship with us to formulate their position on church fellowship according to our approach or in line with our terminology, but only that our position be acknowledged as being in harmony with the Scriptures;
- 4) that we would respectfully request the SELK representatives whether they are able, in the light of our discussions and explanations of the past few days, to withdraw any criticism of our Statement on Fellowship - as being unscriptural;
- 5) that we would respectfully request the SELK representative that we would not find any conflicting or divisive principles on Church Fellowship between the SELK and the WELS, if the SELK representatives find themselves able to withdraw their prior charges, but in the interest of further clarity would request additional discussion on some practical questions dealing with meetings at Ratzeburg and Hamburg, and with the SELK's future relationship to the Missouri Synod.

After considering the CICR's response SELK replied:

The Public Ministry of the Church with Special Reference to Ordination

With thanks we take note of the statement of the WELS Commission on this matter.

The Inerrancy and the Outward Clarity of Scripture with Special Reference to the Creation Days

- To 1) We find ourselves in agreement, that - as stated here - the concept "day" also really means day.
- To 2) The understanding that the Creation Days are days whose duration was determined by the function of sun and moon (Gen. 1:14) is also our understanding, to which we obligate ourselves as representatives of SELK.

Church Fellowship

- To 1) and 2): We accept the position of the WELS Commission expressed here.
- To 3) and 4): On the basis of the discussions and clarifications we see no cause for Scriptural reasons to call into question the position of WELS relative to church fellowship, without, however, settling upon the approach and the terminology of WELS as the only possibility. On the basis of the discussions and of the declarations made on the part of WELS, our criticism, as though the Statement on Church Fellowship were contrary to Scripture, no longer obtains.
- To 5): We are agreed, that we, too, no longer see any divisive and contradictory principles pertaining to church fellowship between WELS and SELK, therefore on our part we no longer raise the previous strictures against WELS, and ask the Commission of WELS on their part not to raise any strictures against SELK. We are very ready to supply additional information and to enter upon discussion concerning practical questions.⁶

After the Commission had received SELK's reply the practical questions were dealt with concerning SELK's relations with the LC-MS. It was found that SELK concurred with the Lutheran Free Church of Germany's protesting fellowship with the issue of LC-MS's fellowship with the ALC and its membership in LCUSA. A letter communicating the same was sent to Pres. J. O. Preus, of the LC-MS by SELK Pres. Dr. G. Rost. It seemed that the problems might be worked out and that what had seemed a tense situation might result in yet another victory for the pure Gospel and Confessional Lutheranism.

Unfortunately the positive feelings were not to last. At the

43rd Convention in 1973 the CICR reported that they thought they had good reason for recommending the announcement of fellowship with the SELK with the discussions at Mequon as a basis for agreement but it was found through later communications with the Kirchenleitung of SELK that although formal endorsement was given it had declared itself "unwilling to implement all aspects of this agreement in the practice of doctrinal discipline and church fellowship."⁷ It had become obvious that SELK had not recognized the Scriptural premise of the Mequon agreement that "full consensus in doctrine and practice is necessary for the exercise of church fellowship."⁸ All at the Mequon meeting had agreed to the "unqualified rejection of the historical-critical method of Scriptural interpretation"⁹, but SELK Kirchenleitung did not give full endorsement to the rejection. It was not ready to "dogmatize" the agreement concerning the nature of the creation days (ie, whether the word "day" was actual twenty-four hours).

Mequon replied that "the granting of such latitude in teaching disregards the external clarity of Scripture in this matter, limits the authority of Scripture, and violates the Scriptural principles of church fellowship." Meanwhile, while all this is happening, the worst fears were realized with the announcement of the merger of the Evangelical Lutheran Confessional Church of Germany (Bekennniskirche) with SELK as of January 1, 1976. With one move all the German Lutheran churches had or were in a position of severing fellowship with WELS.

The problem was not dealt with again officially until the next convention of the WELS in 1977. It was reported to the convention

body that the CICR had received a letter from Dr. G. Rost, the Bishop (-Pres.) of SELK, written June 25, 1976. The letter revealed that SELK's Kirchenleitung still did not accept the Mequon meeting premise that "full doctrinal agreement is an indispensable prerequisite for church fellowship."¹⁰ And so the CICR was forced to recommend to the convention:

"In view of the foregoing we must now state as a commission that any further doctrinal discussions would have to deal with this basic issue before any other doctrinal issues could be considered on our part..... We will most certainly make our decision in accordance with convictions which our WELS already expressed in 1945: We realize clearly and deeply deplore the harm that is being done by the division in the Lutheran Church, but we are firmly convinced that the welfare of our Lutheran Church and of the Christian Church as a whole will be truly served only when we frankly acknowledge these differences in doctrine and practice as actually existing and as begin divisive of fellowship, and when we then by a prayerful searching of the Holy Scriptures endeavor to arrive at the Unity that is the work of the Holy Ghost. You will always find us most willing to take part in doctrinal discussions which have this purpose."¹¹

and as a result the convention resolved:

WHEREAS the Evangelical Lutheran Confessional Church of Germany (ELBK) merged with the Independent Evangelical Lutheran of Germany (SELK) on January 1, 1976; and

WHEREAS we have found it impossible to declare confessional fellowship with the Independent Evangelical Lutheran Church of Germany (SELK) because of its unwillingness to recognize the basic premise of the so-called Mequon agreement, namely, that full doctrinal agreement is an indispensable prerequisite for confessional fellowship; therefore, be it

Resolved, That our Synod notes with sadness that through this merger the Evangelical Lutheran Confessional Church of Germany (ELBK) has severed its confessional fellowship with our Synod.¹²

With the declaration of non-fellowship with SELK, it was necessary to watch our other European interests that they not become influenced by this unionistic body. This problem did occur and brings us to the purpose of this paper; the triangular fellowship of the Evangelical Lutheran Church/Synod of France and Belgium with the WELS and LC-MS.

II. The Issue with ELC/S France and Belgium

"Among the isolated groups of confessional Lutherans in various parts of the world still contending for Scriptural inerrancy and God-pleasing fellowship principals, mention should be made of the Free Ev. Lutheran Church of Finland, the Ev. Lutheran Church-Synod of France and Belgium, and the Free Ev. Lutheran Synod of South Africa."¹³

This was the situation between the WELS and ELC/S of France and Belgium up to the 39th convention of 1967 of WELS. As a result of a meeting at Limburg, Germany on June 16-18, 1966 this could be said by the CICR.

By 1971 the ELC/S F&B had initiated steps to lead to a protesting fellowship with the LC-MS. The convention of that Synod was held at Strassburg, Germany, Oct. 30 - Nov. 1, 1971 with Prof. John F. Sullivan as our delegate. Prof. Sullivan reported that "the Ev. Lutheran Church/Synod of France and Belgium has resolved that it will terminate its fellowship with the Missouri Synod if the Missouri Synod at its next convention in 1973 still continues its fellowship with American Lutheran Church and its membership in the Lutheran Council of the United States of America (LCUSA) and if by 1973 the Missouri Synod has not exercised the doctrinal discipline required by the Scriptures

toward Missouri Synod theologians who teach and defend error."¹⁴

Unfortunately things did not change within LC-MS by 1973 and the conditions set down by ELC/S were not met at the LC-MS convention at Denver. It was not ELC/S's place to act as witness to Lutheran orthodoxy, what actually happened was, to say the least, disheartening to the CICR. According to the minutes of the General Synodical Assembly of the Ev. Luth. Church/Synod of France and Belgium, which had been held at Schillersdorf on March 26-28, 1976, reported again by Pastor John Sullivan, the church body included resolutions

"maintaining a protesting fellowship with the Missouri Synod, suspending fellowship with daughter churches of the Missouri Synod that have joined the Lutheran World Federation, and expressing approval of the merger of the Bekenntnis Kirche with the SELK."¹⁵

This loose attitude toward fellowship became a great concern to our Synod's CICR and began a series of urgent letters to the Pres. and English correspondent of Ev. Luth. Church/Synod of France and Belgium. At this time they were Jean Bricka and Pastor W. Kriess respectively. It seemed to be a complete turn around from opinions given in 1966. Why did they not follow through their resolution voiced at Strassburg? We will deal with this question in this section of the paper.

It was probably the approval of the merger of Bekenntnis Kirche that broke the proverbial camel's back with WELS. They had just finished another year of frustrating deliberation with the newly-formed SELK and found it wanting in many areas of fundamental doctrine and watched helplessly as our own mission was

drawn into the fight and showing signs of joining the other side, finally doing so in 1976. This approval indicated to the CICR that there were some obvious weaknesses in their understanding of doctrine of fellowship and we sought to correct that understanding. So, as a result, at the CICR meeting of Sept. 25, 1976 the committee resolved that then Pres. Lawrenz write a letter to Pastor W. Kreiss.

A reply from both Pres. Jean Bricka (Nov. 10, 1976) and Pastor W. Kriess (Nov. 19, 1976) were received by the CICR. The letter written by Pres. Lawrenz was presented to the ELC/S F&B synodical council on Nov. 1, 1976. Pres. Bricka opened up with the comment that the letter sent to the CICR earlier "was poorly prepared and does not clearly say what we wished to say." It was understood by them that the Mequon meeting of 1973 with WELS and SELK that the difficulty was one that did not "deal so much with the essential nature of the matter, but the question of how the content of the resolutions was to be understood and evaluated in the various churches." Therefore the ELC/S F&B did not consider the underlying assumption that the Scriptures were inerrant and inspired to be a necessary controverted point before full fellowship could be practiced. A following point shows the problem of differing historical development when dealing with the SELK problem. "the SELK has become what it is through the growing together of various parts, where each part was with various binds and a unique, often divergent tradition." In other words, they go from the ground of common doctrinal beliefs, merge to gain internal strength, and then try to work out the problems. It is not hard

to see why the WELS was not able to accept the SELK decision to merge first and deal with problems later. It is our policy to deal with problems and create doctrinal unity and consensus first and then declare fellowship. The ELC/S F&B stated that they understood this as the issue and replied: "We see ourselves motivated much more to operate in a fraternal manner, and to strengthen those in our sister church who are working to a process of clearing things up within itself."

It is this author's opinion that this is the main issue when examining the whys and wherefores of the triangular fellowship that resulted between the WELS, the LC-MS (along with SELK), and the Ev. Luth. Church/Synod of France and Belgium. Was the WELS CICR too inflexible in its approach with a church body that had a totally different theological development and cultural mentality? Should they have tried to work with the system in Europe and put up with weakness of a brother to reach the goal that these European brothers openly confessed as their own, the formation of a Lutheran church body built on the confessions and the inerrant and inspired Scriptures? Can we expect our European brothers to see all as we do? As a result of these letters a motion was made by the CICR to have a reply drawn up by chairman Prof. Lawrenz and Pres. Naumann and that said reply "include some reference to the continuing relationship between the French-Belgium church body and the LC-MS".¹⁶ The letter was presented and approved at the CICR's next meeting of Apr. 18, 1977 with the additional remark that the "communication be sent to the same people that had previously been receiving SELK-WELS communications."¹⁷

As the 44th convention rolled around in 1977 replies had still not been received, and so the convention resolved:

- b) That our Synod concur with the suggestion of the CICR that the Ev. Luth. Free Church of East Germany invite representatives of the Ev. Luth. Church/Synod of France and Belgium to participate in a proposed doctrinal discussion in Leipzig in March 1978.¹⁸

A letter from Pastor W. Kreiss was received Apr. 1, 1977 but was not reviewed by the CICR until its annual meeting in January of 1978. In it Pastor Kriess asked for patience in the matter of fellowship with LC-MS and SELK. He said

"A church which numbers some 10 or 100 thousand members and includes individuals in its ranks can easily deal with ALL problems of time. But this is not the case with us. Our pastors have their hands full in our difficult diaspora dealings with caring for their little flocks and strengthening them....We must be self-conscious and observe that we do not have the gifts and the ability to deal with the administration of the present problems."

And as to the proposed meeting with the East German Lutherans in Leipzig:

"In this sense it is indeed better if we, as Bishop Rost suggested in his letter of June 10 of this year, do NOT take part in the discussion at Leipzig, if it takes place."

As to their continued fellowship with LC-MS there is an indirect reference to the fact that they have been receiving financial aid from LC-MS.

"I am of the opinion that such a difficult decision as the dissolution of our ties with Missouri or the SELK would demand much time because our little church in its history is so closely connected to the history of this church, and because we have received so much good constantly from them."

In a letter dated Nov. 5, 1977 Prof. Lawrenz replied to Pastor Kriess's letter. After some comment on the wish for the France and Belgium church body's attendance at the Leipzig discussions he ends with this paragraph:

"The continuing trilateral relations in our fellowship, which bring with them further and new ramifications, cause truly great concern to our commission. One fears that Missouri is satisfied with them. With this the clear sense for loyalty to the confessions, as it is commanded us in the Holy Scriptures, is gradually lost, as one can observe more and more with Missouri. One is drawn into the false ecumenical movement, and many thereby lose their tight hold on God's Word and finally the Gospel itself."

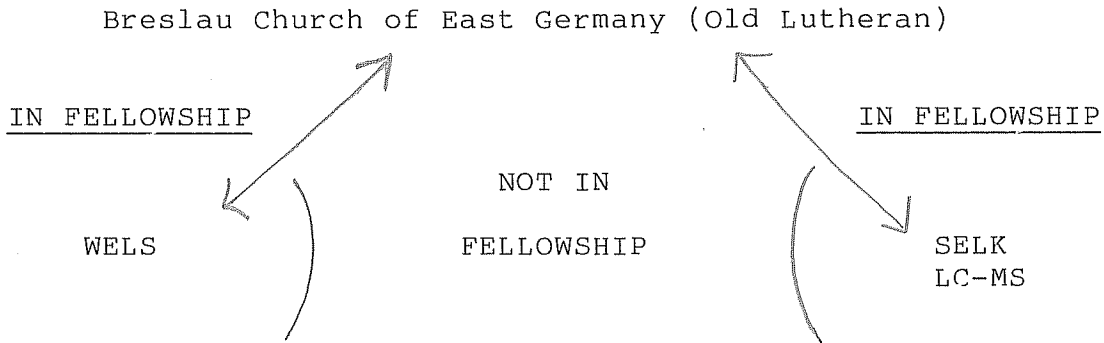
One must remember the issue at hand with ELC/S F&B, that they included themselves in fellowship with SELK and LC-MS. It is this authors view at this point in the research that there was never, at any time, a wish by the confessional churches in Europe to become involved in the "false ecumenical movement" mentioned by Prof. Lawrenz. The common basis for fellowship was not as strong as WELS would have liked it. The European Free Churches did not view fellowship as the WELS did because of historical development and small numbers who were constantly fighting liberalism and non-confessional theological viewpoints. Can we disregard these factors as unimportant? An answer to this question could be considered in the resolution of the 45th convention in 1979:

Resolved, that we encourage the CICR to pursue a course which will, in God-pleasing way, soon resolve the ambiguous relationship between the WELS and the Ev. Luth. Church/Synod of France and Belgium, the Free Evan. Luth. Church of South Africa and the Evan. Luth. Free Church of East Germany. 19

A diagram of the triangular fellowship was also presented in the Proceedings of the 45th convention:

Ev. Luth. Church/Synod of France and Belgium
 Free Ev. Luth. Church of South Africa
 Ev. Luth. Free Church of East Germany

(LIST CONTINUED NEXT PAGE)



"It has been the opinion of our commission that such triangular relationships involving also church bodies not in doctrinal agreement were beginning to create a justifiable impression of inconsistency on our part relative to our position on church fellowship.....When the Leipzig meeting did not materialize, our commission decided in Jan. of 1979 to send these representatives (Prof. C. Lawrenz, Dr. S. Becker, and Rev. H. Wicke) and Pres. Naumann to France, South Africa, and East Germany for the purpose of acquainting these church bodies with our intention of recommending to our Synod a clarification of the ambiguous relationships now existing between these church bodies and our Synod....Final arrangements for such a visitation have not been completed as of this writing."²⁰

In the meeting of Aug. 1979 the three delegates were able to discuss the problem at hand and reported to the Ten Districts that: "while the overseas church bodies appeared to appreciate the inconsistency inherent in prolonged continuation of triangular fellowship relations, these same church bodies have still not come to an understanding of what church fellowship is (a proper definition of church fellowship) according to the Scriptures (e.g., an inclination to place altar and pulpit fellowship on a different level from joint prayer and other forms of fellowship).²¹

A brief statement entitled "On Defining Church Fellowship" was prepared to aid in the discussion. In an attempt to clarify the France and Belgium church bodies position the point was made that

joint proclamation of the Gospel and joint celebration of the Lord's Supper was an expression of fellowship "not because they are a Means of Grace, but because ... I am expressing my faith together with others."²² In other words, doctrinal consensus is necessary before we can publicly admit to the fact that we are in agreement as to faith and belief.

Since the 1979 meeting in Leipzig didn't plan out another meeting was set up for September 1980 and ELC/S F&B was again invited to attend by the Ev. Luth. Free Church of East Germany. The purpose was "to draw up a comprehensive doctrinal statement (with special emphasis on the Scriptures and church fellowship)". Although the CICR agreed with the basic purpose of the meeting it felt that it would have to deal with the problem of SELK separate from the controverted issues involved with the church bodies still in fellowship with us, considering a joint meeting to "becloud the testimony brought to them in our visitation of August 1979; it would also serve to delay still longer any definitive decision or action on the part of the church bodies in East Germany, France, and South Africa."²³

During the summer of 1980 the CICR received a written report by Pastor Jean Haessig, secretary of the ELC/S F&B, concerning the May 1980 convention of that church body. Along with a four page document entitled "Situation and Problems of Our Relations With the Sister Churches - Report - Questions - Challenges for Identification" was a resolution of the convention which included the approval and adoption of the first document. President Mischke also received a letter from the newly appointed president

of the French-Belgian church body, President Frederic Bohy, in which the new president expressed the opinion that his church body "considered it a duty to remain in some kind of protesting fellowship with church bodies where members were still contesting for the truth." As a result, the CICR, at the 1980 convention resolved the following:

WHEREAS a committee of the Commission on Inter-Church Relations of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod met with official representatives of the Evangelical Lutheran Church-Synod of France and Belgium in August of 1979 to express our Synod's concern about the so-called triangular fellowship relations that exist between us, and

WHEREAS our committee made it clear to the representatives of the Evangelical Lutheran Church-Synod of France and Belgium, that even if it felt that after almost twenty years of fellowship in protest it had not fulfilled its fraternal obligations to The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, we on our part could no longer bear that burden with it, lest we nullify our own testimony to the fellowship principles of Scripture, and

WHEREAS The Evangelical Lutheran Church-Synod of France and Belgium has, according to communications to us, testified against aberrations in doctrine and practice by the Independent Evangelical Lutheran Church of West Germany (SELK) but has not indicated any willingness or intention to break fellowship relations with the Independent Evangelical Lutheran Church (SELK), and

WHEREAS The Evangelical Lutheran Church-Synod of France and Belgium has made it clear that it intends to continue its fellowship in protest with The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod and its fellowship with the Independent Evangelical Lutheran Church (SELK) with no apparent prospect of terminating either fellowship; therefore be it

Resolved 1) That the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod notify the Evangelical Lutheran Church-Synod of France and Belgium that it can no longer continue its ~~the~~ fellowship with that church body; and be it further

Resolved 2) That as we notify the Evangelical Lutheran Church-Synod of France and Belgium of this action, we express our willingness to consider the reestablish-

ment of fellowship with it when conditions are such that triangular fellowship relations are no longer involved.²⁴

Comments

One can see the dilemma that the CICR was in with the French-Belgian church body. Even though they might have agreed with its stand and wish to be a representative of confessional Lutheranism in Europe, their continued fellowship with LC-MS was putting us in a seeming position of compromise here in America. It seems now that the action that the CICR took was the only way out for it in terms of our integrity here in America. But one does wonder if the situation could have been different in certain ways.

There has been mention made earlier in this paper, and has also been mentioned by Prof. C. Lawrenz, of the fact that the French-Belgian church was receiving financial support from the LC-MS. If this financial support was so vital to the continued existence of the church body, and could have colored and influenced their stand on the fellowship issue, why didn't our Synod agree to take on that responsibility ourselves? If it was a matter of continue or dissolve if they broke fellowship with Missouri wasn't it our duty to offer our financial aid to take away an admittedly human road block from their path of true confessionalism? The financial issue was not revealed in any of the research done by this writer. Could things have been different if the delegates at the convention were aware of this fact? As usual, this writer could not have all the facts as to motivations and the like, but it does leave one with the feeling of frustration that a

European brother was left in the lurch for lack of funds. This writer admits his limitations as to his knowledge, and does not wish to point fingers but rather ask the question of all endeavors into history of any kind, why?

ENDNOTES

1. Reports and Memorials, 45th Convention, 1979, p. 133
2. Report to the Ten Districts, April 1970, p. 75
3. Reports and Memorials, 41st Convention, 1971, pp. 116, 117
4. *ibid*, p. 117
5. Report to the Ten Districts, May 1974, p. 86
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