

the convener to move and guide the Commission in the direction he adopted. To solve this basic problem of financial autonomy of the Gossner Church he propounded the principle of "Decentralisation" He believed that this principle of decentralisation would not only solve the basic problem of financial autonomy, but it would be an effective solution to other subsidary problems in the Gossner Church. He writes: "My proposal is therefore the opposite of what the Federation Commission and Mr. Ranson suggested, at least for the centre. They proposed centralisation while I propose decentralisation, and I make this proposal not only for financial reasons but also for the sake of greater efficiency of administration and in the interest of a more vigorous policy of aggressive evangelism (Strocks same letter p.3)

In 1950 constitution the 35-member Commission proposed the Synodical System of administrative units in the Gossner Church. The formation of 16 synods with considerable independence from the Central Office or the Church Council meant "decentralisation" It was envisaged that decentralisation would solve the following problems: i) financial: that the Centre or the CC would be relieved of many financial responsibilities - such as schools, evangelistic work etc, because these items would be directly under the synods. It was also faithfully hoped that this arrangement would give an incentive and provide an opportunity for the sixteen synods to be autonomous financially, and hence the whole Gossner Church be automatically autonomous even financially in course of time. Out of these 9 years' experience the Synod Presidents and the officers of the Church Council will bear to this fact whether this firm expectation of the 35-member Commission has been fulfilled. Except for the Centre others might speak in favour of this hope (ii) That administrative efficiency would come in the machinery of the Government of the Church. It was hoped so, because only limited responsibilities were left to the centre. The detail and down to earth problems of the Church were left in the hands of the Synodical Councils. As far as my knowledge goes this expectation of the 35-member Commission has not been fulfilled. It seems that the principle of decentralisation has made the administration lethargic instead of making it more efficient.

In the principle of decentralisation, a second principle - the numerical principle is implied in the synodical system. By numerical principle we mean, representation to the Church Council and to the Mahasabha on the basis of certain numbers of confirmed members (5000 is represented by one). This representation was applicable both in the case of the clergy and the laity, Th CC and Mahasabha delegates were direct representatives of the people. On the synodal level care was taken for the proper representation of the minority communities too.

What do we have to say of the work of and path the 35-member Commission adopted? In all fairness let us admit that the Commission was sincere and did its best for the welfare of the Gossner Church. We acknowledge the experience and the integrity of the convener and other members in the Commission. But with this tribute and honour paid to the Commission let us try to examine the work of the 35 Commission with great care and caution.

i) To begin with the convener and the whole Commission were a victim to the environments. The convener could think only in terms of what he knew and had seen in his own Church - the united Lutheran Church in America. This church functions on decentralised and numerical principles in the American environment. He basically thought in terms of material problems and individual members of the Church. In the immediate environment there was the Jilo-Jojo case which had financial implications (The case between Rev. J. J. P. Tiga and Rev. L. Jojwar, the then known case as Jilo-Jojo 1945). Moreover the subsidy to the Gossner Church from the LWF went on increasing from Rs 15 000 in 1939 to Rs 66 000 in 1947. This rapid increase in subsidy amount alarmed Dr. Strock. He thought that this would endanger the autonomy of the Gossner Church.

ii) The members of 35' commission knew the history of the Gossner Church But at the time of the consideration of the problems they lacked the historical perspective, it seems. Their concern was for the then present moment. It appears that while taking up the problems for consideration this Commission almost forgot the past events of the Gossner Church - particularly

the events of 1935 and 1945. So they were handicapped to fathom the depth of situation because of the want of/consideration/historical/ of problems.

iii) Representation of the people on numerical basis in the CC. and in the Mahasabha solved one problem. It provided greater opportunity for the laymen in the Church to exercise their equal rights and privileges in the policies and programmes of the Church. But the bone of contest and the weapon of majority vote for the decision of matters in the Church were kept sharper and made even more pointed.

lv) The 1950 constitution provided clauses for an adequate representation of minorities communities at the synod level. But there was no change suggested in the methods, procedures and power and function of the Mahasabha, even for the decisions of the major decisions-affecting the welfare of the Church.

Hence with all sympathy and appreciation of the work of the 35-member Commission and paying all due respect to the 1950 constitution we are bound to conclude our consideration over them with a note of despair. The problem of the Gossner Church was not solved by this great attempt and the noble task of the 35-member Commission under the guidance of Dr. Strock. History is a living witness of this fact. An explosion took place in 1955 in the Gossner Church. This has shaken the very foundation of the life and faith of this great church. It has created a genuine feeling that the 1950 constitution is not workable for the welfare of the Church. It seems to us that the very foundation of the 35-member Commission's work was wrong. The Commission and its convener basically misunderstood the basic problem. The financial problem was taken to be the fundamental question. So inspite of the attempt to give a new constitution, the Commission could not smash the point of dispute and dissension in the Gossner Church. The mistake was that the secondary problem was taken to be the primary one. This misunderstood understanding of the secondary problem became the guiding principle in the solution to the problems of the Gossner Church.

4). Then what is the problem or problems that the 13-member Ecumenical wants to solve for the peace and unity of the Church in its best interest?

We do not seem to be definite about the basic problem of the Gossner Ch. Or even if we are definite, we are either unable to verbalise it, or unwilling to speak it out. Our thought on the matter seems to be quite hazy. If we sincerely ask ourselves, why and what for are we quarreling against one another today? We answer to this question differently from person to person. The answers vary from people to people and from group to group.. Some of us say there is no proper safeguard for the minority communities in our church; others maintain that the quarrel is for a particular post between two persons; still others hold that the central body of the Church is exercising undue power and so nepotism is the greatest evil in our Church. We do not brush these problems aside, but if we do not go deeper than these obvious facts, we would be deceived as the 35-member Commission with regard to the understanding of the basic problem in the G.Church. The above mentioned answers to our questions are important but secondary problems. They need our serious attention. But the basic or primary problem of the G.Church is not autonomy as the convener Dr. Strock of the 35-Commission understood it; nor is it along the line we have mentioned in the answers given above. The basic problem of the G.Church is Christonomy. To clarify our statement let us put the problem in question form. The problem is i) wherein lies the unity of the Church and which form would serve the best interest of the G.Church?

To understand and analyse the basic problem we have to have a close look on the present constitution and the conventions of the Gossner Church.

i) Decentralisation brought an administrative and spiritual weakness in the central body in relation to the synods. Considerable constitutional freedom and independence of synods opened a way for spiritual and moral slackness in the synods in relation to the CC. Christonomy was replaced by constitutional autonomy and hence a great disturbance in the relationship between the CC and the synod authorities. They were separate administrative units yet they felt they belonged to the one undivided Gossner Church.

ii) The present constitution offers a clause (clause 3 art.II in Principles of conducting meetings, p.30 of 1950 Constitution) by which matters are decided by majority of votes in the Mahasabha. This means that a democratic majority becomes instrumental in announcing the programmes and policies of the G.Church. This article in the Constitution introduces

a system comparable to Dr. E. V. Benn's "Calculation system" (Memorandum of Dr. Ernest Victor Benn, Germany). There are about twelve different language and social groups in the membership of the Gossner Church. Among them the Munda brethren (about 115 847) form about 2/3 of the total membership (about 1/3 of the total along with the rest of the language and social groups). The numerical principle of Strock Commission supported and strengthened the principle of democratic majority as the deciding power for all the matters in the Mahasabha. Humean elements work even in the Church Mahasabhas. They work more prominently in the ecclesiastical elections. So it has been natural that the democratic majority in the case of the Gossner Church Mahasabha would in fact in many major instances mean the linguistic and social majority. In this case it has been that obvious majority meant Munda majority. It cannot be helped because of the human weakness. Any other community would have done the same thing if they would form an overwhelming majority. In support of this human weakness I know personally the Walk-out ~~independen~~ incident of April 1955 Mahasabha. Majority (61 delegates) walked out of the Masabha among whom here might have been 2 or 3 Oraons and a couple of others. The whole lot was a Munda group. A democratic majority in principle was demonstrated a communal majority in praxis. Other events also speak for this practise. This principle of changing the democratic majority into a communal majority in practise can be seen even in the major conventions of the Gossner Church. Ever since I have begun taking interest in the Church matters I know that the central office has been represented in communal terms. Since 1942 I have noticed that central officers have been elected in the ratio 2 Munda, 1 Oraon. Democratic principle of majority is openly expressed along the ~~majority~~ numerical proportion of the two major communities (Munda and Oraon) in the Church. So we conclude that majority in principle of the 1950 constitution is not democratic but definitely communal. Dr. Ernst-Victor Benn totally disapproves of this sort of calculation system and qualified majority in the Ecclesiastical environment. He says: "I most urgently warn against introducing a calculation system according to which all functions and offices are to be assigned to the groups proportionally, or that all voting would have to result in qualified majority, comprising at least part of the minority vote. That would needs lead to ungodly schematism". Memorandum of Dr. Ernst Victor Benn, Germany p.1).

iii) The 35-Commission left the bone of contest lying at the cross road. The 1950 constitution did not provide a solution to the bone of contest post: The Presidentship of the Gossner Church. It could not devise ~~ways~~ ways and ~~means~~ means by which this position could be made not subject to election contest. Moreover this highest office in the Church was left in the secularised form. The secular nature of this office gave a chance and provided an incentive for the majority to do anything it liked with this post by its democratic power as applied in the political spheres. Democratic means were used to justify oneself, in passing the vote of no confidence on the President, and nominally on the Church Council also, by majority of vote in April 1955 Mahasabha. I was present in this Mahasabha as one of the visitors. This unchristian element under the guise of democracy and legalism has torn the Church asunder, both inwardly and outwardly because there is a serious lack of understanding of the meaning of unity of the Church and the major and basic problem is on the question of the form of Unity in the Church.

The 1950 constitution was an attempt to solve the problems in the Gossner Church. It wanted to preserve and strengthen the unity and maintain the peace in this Church. The form of unity provided by this present constitution has proved to be a failure in our eyes. An inner discord and dissension has broken the inner fellowship, and the unchristian element openly used in the name of democracy has disrupted the outer structure of unity of the Gossner Church. Hence we conclude that the present constitutional (1950) is not workable in the best interest of peace and unity in the Church. So we earnestly need a re-thinking from a new base and work out a constitution that would maintain the inner concord and outer unity eliminating the chronic disease of the Church as described above..

5. What is the way out for the 13-member ecumenical commission?

a) An inadequacy: An inexperienced person, ~~they~~ able to annunciate ^{through}

the problems, cannot give an effective solution to them. So instead of a clear suggestion for solution, the writer is led to request the Ecumenical Commission to kindly take the following items very seriously before embarking on the sacred task entrusted to her.

i) Social and cultural facts in the Gossner Church: We note that this church is constituted of about 12 different linguistic, social and cultural groups. The Mundas are in predominant majority forming nearly 2/3rds of the total ~~gross~~ membership in the Church. The Oraons are the second large social and cultural group and form a little less than 1/3rd of the total membership of the Church. Other minority communities are the Kharias, Hos, Santhal, Bengalis etc, who make up the want of 2/3 and 1/3 on both sides. Whether we like it or not the two major linguistic groups have some sharp different characteristics. Though not opposed to one another yet sufficiently different to separate them apart in many major issues, ecclesiastical and otherwise. They occupy roughly separate geographical areas which can be demarcated for any operational purposes if need be. (This statement does not rule out the fact of some mixed population of the Oraons in the midst of the Mundas, even in the interior and vice a versa).

ii) The Gossner Church has seen and experienced three major explosive events in her life - the 1935 event, 1945 incident, and the ~~Commission~~ final eruption in 1955 April Mahasabha. Each member of the Ecumenical Commission ought to stake a stock of these events in terms of their reason, happenings, and their results. This will help the members in thinking soberly at the time of the consideration on problems of the Gossner Church. This suggestion is not a hint for going back and repeat the old stories, but for a point to assist in getting a historical perspective of the entire case. The writer hopes that this recollection of the most important events would be an aid to the forward movement of the Commission and consequently it will help the Gossner Church to move forward.

iii) The writer feels that the question at stake with the Gossner Church is the right understanding of the meaning of Unity of the Church and the expression of this unity in a form that would form that would serve the best interest of this church. The members of the Commission are requested to ponder over the Lutheran doctrine of the Unity of the Church. The "Book of Concord" gives a clear statement on this point. And then they would further find out the form that would be suitable for the Gossner Church to maintain peace and unity in the Church. This is, I hope, the ultimate aim of the Ecumenical Commission.

iv) The Commission should kindly remember the indigenous nature of the thinking of the Gossner Church. Also the autonomous Status of the Church should never be overlooked, even at the point of crisis. There must be at least some hand, if not full of its members in deciding the fate of the Gossner Church. This means that the opinion of the member of the Gossner Church, be he either from the Church Council or from the North Zone, must be given a due weight in course of discussion and at the moment of final decision of all matters.

v) Though not directly related, yet the question : what is the Church or a church? seems pertinet in the order of things for the consideration of the Ecumenical Commission. Members of the Commission would kindly realise as to what they mean when they talk about the Gossner Church. Is the Mahasabha or the Church Council the Gossner Church? If not, what is that entity which we call "Gossner Church" This question seems to be vital because the Ecumenical Commission has pledged itself to find a unanimous solution to the problems to bring peace and unity in this Church.

b) The layman seeks support from an expert for the further guidance; Dr. Ernst-Victor Benn, a constitutional expert in Germany suggests two ways for the Gossner Church to come out of the present mess.

i) The first way he proposes is: "On the one hand maintenance of Unity guaranteeing minority protection" (Memorandum of Dr. Ernst-Victor Benn, Germany, p.1). By this Dr. Benn perhaps wants to suggest a unitary form of Church administration in which proper protection is provided for the minority communities in the Constitutional. Broadly speaking this proposal of Dr. Benn is already adopted and is under trial at present according to the present constitution. If this proposal is accepted then the problem of the Gossner Chruch would again be misunderstood and a

work patch-work will be done for a temporary lull in the Church. We have experienced the bitterness of its extremity working under a unitary system of administration) this is one form of unitary system) based on 1950 constitution. This constitution we have already analysed and have found not workable for the good of the Gossner Church.

ii) The other path suggested by Dr. Benn is "On the other hand division of parties maintaining communion in one form or another." Memorandum of Dr. Benn (Germany, p.1) If I understand Dr. Benn correctly he means to suggest "a grouping system" along cultural lines for the administrative purpose and at the same time he wants the communion between these groups in one form or the other. The word "division (Teilung)" seems to be quite unfortunate here. It would have been better had he used "grouping" (grupieren) which conveys not a separation but certain adjustment for administrative and other conveniences. Moreover the word (Communion) (Gemeinschaft) seems to mystify the concrete flesh and blood relationship between these groups. Instead of "Communion" (Gemeinschaft) there should be unity or oneness (Einheit) in one form or the other between these groups. In my opinion Dr. Benn's second proposal should read as follows: "On the other hand grouping of parties maintaining unity in one form or another" (my wording). I think that Dr. Benn has given a clue to the solution of the problems in the Gossner Church. He has hinted a principle for reorganisation of the entire Gossner Church. If accepted, and accepted upon this proposal, I feel that this will bring a permanent solution to the age-long existing problem in our midst.

c) In the conclusion we would like to emphasise the following: The Commission may kindly go into the deeper problems than the practical and the obvious ones. The question at stake is a question of Unity and the form of unity of the Gossner Church. Recollecting all that has been mentioned above we propose that the Ecumenical Commission draft an entirely new constitution in which cultural groupings would play an important role. The constitution should avoid i) calculation system that deceives the people in democratic disguise. In this particular Church democratic system, though alright in theory and principle does not work for our good. It should be avoided and a way should be devised so that the democratic principle may be found true to fact in life, being guided by a theocratic principle.

ii) The bone of contest should be totally rooted out and thrown away outside the church. A way should be found by which the outward symbol of unity of the Church may be had without any election contest. iii) That the unity of the Gossner Church be maintained at all costs. But the ~~manifestation~~ manifestation of this unity be in some other form than that we do have at the present time. We have seen and experienced the defects of the existing form and so we do not want to entangle ourselves any more in the mutual tug between us on things, sacred or secular.

This paper is presented to you for a genuine consideration over the problems of the Gossner Church. We should never close or shut our eyes to the hard facts in life, and should never try to brush aside a problem quite easily. Let us face the present crisis realistically with prayer and faith. Our Lord is with us and among us even in the midst of our struggle against one another. Each and every one in the Gossner Church pray that God may endow the 13-member Ecumenical Commission with His power and Wisdom that they may be found faithful in fulfilling their mission ahead of them, God bless them.

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