

Concerning co-operation of Lutheran Missions in South Africa (1953)

From different corners we were invited to co-operate with Lutheran Missions and Churches in South Africa that emerged from the missionary endeavour. Also the MELF has been asked to declare its position concerning plans and proposals made for the co-operation. We declare the following:

1. At the beginning of our work we find the principles: "*A Lutheran Church can only pursue and support a Lutheran Mission, and a Lutheran Mission can only be pursued by a Lutheran Church.*" We add to these principles of our fathers a third: *The work of a Lutheran Mission must lead to the constitution of a Lutheran Church.* For us mission work has to be done in principle and practically as to be the responsibility of a Lutheran Church bound to the Lutheran Confessions.
2. Co-operation with Lutheran Missions can only be pursued where church fellowship, (pulpit and altar fellowship) exists between these Missions and the Churches behind these missions. The norm for every decision in these matters is the Lutheran doctrine according to the Word of Scripture concerning the genuine true real unity of the Christian Church. This unity exists "*Where the gospel is preached (and taught) harmoniously (with one accord) according to a pure understanding of the sacraments administered in conformity with the divine Word.*" (CA vii, § 1, p. 42). To achieve and to preserve the true unity of the Church is also in Missions to bind oneself for all ecclesiastical endeavours to the confessions of the Lutheran Church which was composed on the basis of God's Word". (Sol. decl. p. 524 § 3) Being bound to the doctrinal decisions of the confessions we accept the principles stated therein concerning church fellowship. (Tract § 42, Kolb p. 337; Trigl. p. 516) In German § 42 reads: Here the mandate of God is written, that everyone must be aware not to co-operate with those who teach wrong doctrine ... but divine authority commands us not to be allies and defenders of impiety and unjust cruelty (impiety is rendered in German as *unrechte Lehre* - heretic doctrine .-)
3. The Lutheran Missions in South Africa suffer under the great calamity that what is required and necessary for full church fellowship does not exist for co-operation *in sacris* among these missions and their supporting churches, be it that they themselves are not bound to the same principle, or that they practice church fellowship differently although they have

on paper the same confessional stand. In this situation there is only one way possible to establish church fellowship: doctrinal negotiations to confirm whether the same stand bound to Holy Scripture and its exposition in the Lutheran confessions exists, or whether the full unity can be reached where unity is missing. It has also to be examined whether existing connection to churches with contradicting unionistic connections can be given up to open the way to unity for churches that are separated. The intended co-operation is possible as a goal and fruit of such negotiations, not as a result in advancing the negotiations.

4. With this declaration we do not oppose the goal of ecclesiastic unity of all true Lutheran Mission Churches in South Africa, but bind us to the only way which can lead to this goal. Such negotiations are not only desirable, but necessary, and we are convinced negotiations will lead to good encounters between different Lutheran missions not only to learn from each other, but also be able to handle many aspects of ecclesiastical procedure and missionary endeavours in harmony.

Bleckmar, 8. 6. 1953

Mission Collegium and Board of MELF

sgn. Wilhelm Rothfuchs, Sup.

Friedrich Wilhelm Hopf, mission inspector

Itshe Lejuba, 4. 8. 1953

The conference of the missionaries of the MELF and the pastors of the FELSiSA

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