

Nationalism and Canadian Lutheranism

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Four years ago I spent a summer working in Glacier-Waterton International Peace Park, a park jointly operated by the USA and Canada. It was here that I first ran into Canadian nationalism, or at least a mild form of it. Prior to that time, like many Americans, I had a rather hazy notion that Canada was to the USA something like Minnesota is to Wisconsin, not very different in the final analysis. However, I discovered that Canadians resent this feeling that they are a sort of backward province of the US, the northern most of "the states." These Canadian student co-workers were a bit put off by the fact that few of us Americans had even the foggiest notion of what Dominion Day was; to these Canadians this was symptomatic of our general ignorance of Canada. While they were expected to know not only the history of their own nation, but also ours, most of us had never considered that they might have a national history, a national identity of their own. Their resentment was justified. But this along with a few other evidences of an undercurrent of "nationalism" and even rivalry between Canadians and Americans (e.g., in the "battle of the sexes") were generally atypical way back in the summer of '68.

US-Canadian relations were quite cordial.

Since that time these rather vague impressions of a Canadian nationalism have been reinforced. It is reported that Canadians resent US "paternalism," and that they want to be treated as peers, not inferiors. This Canadian inferiority complex has given rise to nationalistic organizations. The best known is probably the French Liberation Front (FLQ), which aims to "free" Quebec. But this group is involved in an intra-Canadian struggle,

and so creates internal conflict rather than unity in Canada. The nationalistic groups whose tendencies run toward anti-Americanism are the ones we will have to consider. This fear of an American take-over of Canada (if not politically, then in every other respect ~~anyway~~) is expressed, for example, in the "Waffle" contingent of the New Democrat (socialist) Party, which "is pledged to a recovery of Canada's independence through the nationalization of American industrial assets...

Progressive-minded party members of both the Establishment parties have also been advocating a strong nationalistic position. ...Extra-Parliamentary groups, notably the Committee for an Independent Canada, have been formed as a protest lobby to provoke more government action against the further Americanization of Canada. This is not the know-nothing reaction of professional malcontents but a sober middle-class movement, with growing support from members of all political parties, income groups, and professions across the country." 2)

The Committee for an Independent Canada includes this in their Statement of Purpose:

Our land won't be ours much longer if we allow it to be sold to foreign owners. Not if we allow another culture to dominate our information media. Not if we allow ourselves to be dragged along in the wake of another country's foreign policy. 3)

Most Canadians seem to be fed up with Canada being " a puppet, a satellite of the U.S." 4)

What will be the effects of this recent surge of nationalism on the Canadian religious world, specifically our fellow Lutherans? Most likely Canadian Lutherans will be pushed to accelerate their drive for autonomy from the "mother churches" back in the U.S. Dovetailed with this will be greater desire for co-operation between the various Lutheran organizations and then desire for merger and union. Or so it would seem from the history of the last 30 years and from the current trends.

Autonomy is a natural step. In fact the overall trend in world-wide mission endeavors today is toward the establishment of indigenous churches, as is evidenced by the policies of our own WELS. Should Canada be different

just because ~~there~~ are closer ties culturally, or just because Canadian missions are administered by the "home missions" departments of U.S. churches? The cultural differences between Canadians and Americans are probably as great as any similarities. Wouldn't Canadian born and trained pastors be better equipped to minister to Canadians? If Canadians are so fearful of American economic control of industry and resources, why would they settle for American control of their religious affairs? Canadians fear the "Americanization of Canadian Schools" ⁽⁵⁾ because of the huge influx of American professors. ^{Why not fear the influence of American born and/or} educated clergy, especially considering the far reaching influence of a pastor as educator of his parish?

There are many advantages that Canadians could find in removing their churches from American control. Nor dare we condemn them ^{all}. For no doubt ^{there may be} many blessings ^{that} would result from an indigenous Lutheran church. So it happened in 1967 that the Canadian Lutheran churches affiliated with the ALC were granted autonomy, removed themselves from the ALC, and became the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Canada (ELCC). ^{The ELCC did, however, receive financial backing from the ALC for at least five years.} Presently the ELCC is the "only autonomous Lutheran body" in Canada. But both the Lutheran Church in America-Canada Section and the Lutheran Church-Canada are working toward autonomy. The Lutheran Church-Canada is "merely a federation of the Canadian Districts (of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod), a provisional body organized primarily for the purpose of laying the groundwork for the eventual formation of a self-governing Canadian church body." ⁷⁾ The LCA-Canada Section is a similar set-up.

The desire for autonomy by Missouri Lutherans in Canada can be traced back to 1879 when the ⁽⁸⁾ Canada District was first founded. But it has been in the last thirty years that ideas have started being transformed into actions. It was only after much study that in 1958 this federation of

districts was formed; it received its charter from the Canadian Parliament in 1959. Ten years later the Missouri Synod passed this resolution (4-13):

RESOLVED, That The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod have with grants authority to Lutheran Church-Canada together with the officials of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod for the implementation of autonomy of Lutheran Church*Canada in accord with the constitution of each body. 9)

Though the stage has been set and all is prepared, the LC-C still has not taken the final step in independence, but as of this writing is still part <of the LC-MS. Financial reasons might be a not^{an} unlikely guess for this <delay. What good does it do to call a church body autonomous and let it be self-governing, if it is not self-supporting and self-propagating, - hence not truly indigenous or autonomous. And so for the present the LC-C, like the LCA-OS, is marking time.

With increased independence from "mother church" in the States, these Canadian bodies seem to feel that it is imperative that they learn to co-operate and depend on each other - their fellow Canadians - more and more. This quest for co-operation and unity is, like the quest for autonomy, nothing new to Canadian Lutheranism,¹⁰⁾ but it is receiving a new impetus with the increasing nationalism of the Canadians.

The need for co-operation is said to be greater in Canada because of the very nature of the country and the work. Canada is a huge country, the third largest in the world. Yet it has a population of only about one-tenth the size of the United States'. Much of this population is concentrated in a narrow strip of land running along the St. Lawrence Seaway and the eastern Great Lakes (here the major cities of Montreal, Ottawa, Quebec, Toronto are located). The rest of the population is scattered over the vast country. The argument is that it is poor stewardship of Lutheranism's already limited resources to work in competition with one another in such small and far-flung gatherings of people. To effectively reach out to those who need the Gospel co-operation is essential, we are told. Missionwork is difficult enough in Canada¹¹⁾ without adding the con-

fusing element of intra-Lutheran rivalry and "sheep stealing!" But besides the unique geographic and demographic problems, which seem to be particularly encouraging for unionism, the forces of world-wide ecumenism also play an important role. In other words, the peculiarities of the Canadian situation only reinforce ~~that~~ trend toward unionism which would afflict these Canadians anyway.

The present state of fellowship among Canadian Lutherans shows how close the bonds still are between the mother churches in the U.S. and their daughters in Canada. The children have exactly the same ties their progenitors do.

The American Lutheran Church-related ELCC and the Missouri Synod-related LC-C have declared altar and pulpit fellowship with each other; the ELCC is also in fellowship with the LCA-CS. 12)

(And "WELS-related" churches are not in fellowship with any of the "big three.")

But Canadian Lutherans also ~~hope for~~ better things as they begin to assert themselves as adults, who are independent of parental control. The Joint Commission on Inter-Lutheran Relationships (JCILR) is the Canadian organization set up to clear the path for fellowship among all Lutherans in Canada. The reports from the 1971 meeting of the JCILR~~x~~ on the one hand make it sound ~~as if~~ the biggest obstacle for declaring fellowship between the LC-C and the LCA-CS is the U.S. ties, especially ~~those~~ of the LC-C. "The desire seems to be for fellowship in Canada between these two churches, even if fellowship is not possible in the U.S.A." 13) and the implication is that as soon as the LC-C can clear the red tape with mother LC-MS, all will be rosy. On the other hand, the reports also indicate that, whether Canadians like to admit it or not, there are doctrinal obstacles that must be overcome, too. "Some areas appear to have consensus; others very obviously have not. The prime issue seems to center

around the Holy Scriptures." 14) And so, "more effort will be put into helping individual pastors and laymen achieve a theological consensus sufficient for declaring altar ^{and pulpit} fellowship between the LCA-CS and the LC-C." 15)

Canadian Lutherans are also exploring the possibilities of fellowship with non-Lutherans. This is one of the functions of the Lutheran Council in Canada (LCIC), which grew out of Lutheran efforts to co-operate during World War II (Canadian Lutheran Commission for War Service) and in the post-war decades (Canadian Lutheran Council, 1952-1966). The LCIC's Division of Theological studies has announced that in May of this year the first in a series of semi-annual dialogues between Lutherans and Reformed (the Presbyterians and the United Church of Canada) will be held. 16) "Lutherans already have had dialogue with the Roman Catholic church both on a national and local level. Another national consultation is planned for 1972. . . . Immediate aims of dialogue include; . . . identification of areas where cooperative action is feasible." 17)

Then what does the future hold for Canadian Lutheranism? Autonomy seems to be almost a certainty for both the LC-C and the LCA-CS, just as soon as they are able to undertake that responsibility. And since the nationalistic desire for an autonomous, indigenous church is enmeshed with the desire for a united national church, fellowship of LC-C and LCA-CS is also a probability. Perhaps the optimism of an ecumenically-inclined editorialist for the Christian Century a few years ago will be vindicated. He was one of those who hoped that Canadian Lutherans, and Canadians in general, would show U.S. churches the way down the primrose path to unionism. But only time can tell whether Canadians or Americans will "win" this ecumenical race.

How will the drive for autonomy and union among the "big three" affect the work of our WELS churches in Canada? Our WELS mission is much too small at present to entertain any notions of going it alone,

of becoming an indigenous church. It is not impossible to imagine that the U.S. ties of our missions may be detrimental. The only alternative to releasing our Canadian holdings to the members of the LCIC is to attempt to build up a strong enough Canada-WELS before Canadian nationalism really becomes a rampant anti-Americanism. Our present Canadian mission is safe enough with its "status-quo" policy only if Canadian mistrust of U.S. intentions begins to recede, or at least stagnates.

One might hope that the liberal trends and unionistic tendencies of the members of the LCIC^(e) would send floods of concerned Christians to seek us out. With one notable exception (the Ottawa congregation) this has not been the case, according to Exec. Secretary Berg. The Lutherans of the Canadian Great Plains who sought the services of WELS are apparently more concerned with language ~~than~~ doctrine. All in all, the impression one receives from the WELS GBHM is one of disappointment over our work in Canada. From our human viewpoint the work seems slow and difficult. There is little of the flashiness, the spectacular^{ly} highly visible results we have experienced in some mission fields. Yet it would be a mistake to write off Canada; it would be evidence of weak faith on our part. The Lord of the Harvest may even now be setting the stage for us in Canada, and the trends of the larger, liberal Lutheran bodies in Canada are no doubt part of His masterplan.

N O T E S

1) The following quotation shows not only that Canadian students know more about the U.S. than ours do about Canada, but ~~also shows~~ that the fears of Canadians that their universities have been Americanized are not without justification:

A Laurentian University professor, for instance, was recently shocked to discover that of 260 term papers written for that university's introductory sociology course (taught entirely by Americans) nearly all focused exclusively on American problems and frequently used such terms as "my," "ours," and "us" when referring to the United States. This is not unique; studies have shown that young Canadians often know more about the United States than about their own country, and they occasionally blur the distinction between the two.

From "The Americanization of Canadian Schools," Saturday Review, Aug. 21, 1971, p.56.

2) Saturday Review, March 13, 1971, p.16.

3) U.S. News & World Report, July 19, 1971, p.67.

4) Ibid.

5) Sat. Rev. (Aug. 21, 1971), loc.cit.

6) "Dr. Karl Holmfeld Dies at 69," LCUSA News Bureau (72-4), Jan. 20, 1972, p.11.

7) A. Schwermann, The Beginnings of Lutheran Church-Canada (1969), preface.

8) Ibid., pp.6,7 (note).

9) Proceedings of the LC-MS: Denver, 1969, p. 104.

10) "Throughout the history of the Lutheran Church in Canada there have been attempts at a possible union." E.R.W.Schulz, "Tragedy and Triumph in Canadian Lutheranism," the Concordian Historical Institute Quarterly (vol.38), July, 1965, p. 71.

11) From an interview with Pastor R. Oswald, based on information he had gathered from Pastor G. Gartman of the WELS mission in Sault St. Marie. Apparently most of the prospects have absolutely no religious background.

12) "Joint Talks to Go On," the Lutheran Witness Reporter, Dec.12, 1971, p.5.

13) Report of the JCILR Annual Meeting (Winnipeg, Nov.,1971), as quoted in the Lutheran Witness Reporter, loc.cit.

14). Ibid.

15) Lutheran Witness Reporter, loc.cit.

16) "Canadian Lutherans Plan for Inter-Church Talks," LCUSA News Bureau (72-9), Feb. 3, 1972, p.8.

17) Ibid.

18) namely, the LC-C, the LCA-CS, and the ELCC

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