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The Money Barrier Between Sending and Receiving Churches

Harvie M. Conn

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The 1971 Green Lake Conference was convened to identify points of tension in church-mission relations and to develop guidelines to assist the mission boards in charting future paths. Before adjournment, fifteen areas of tension had to be isolated and discussed; seven were explicitly related to financial questions.[1]

Complicating the transition to national leadership was the reluctance of the home church to donate money for distribution by national leaders, deepening in some cases into a resentment on the part of the home church. On the "home" front the local church agonized over the missions' competition for financial resources.[2] On the field, there were the traditional problems of shifting from subsidy to indigenous responsibility, lack of trust toward nationals in distribution of funds, conflicts over funds for institutions versus funds for evangelism, the discrepancy between the living standards of missionaries and national workers.

From Green Lake's Affirmation came a consensus, confessing tendencies towards paternalism, authoritarianism, and lack of trust, a recognition of missions' slowness in building scriptural bridges of unity and fellowship. Mission societies were urged to evaluate their relations with home and overseas churches through fellowship and consultation, to foster reciprocal ministry on the basis of mutual love, acceptance and oneness in Christ.[3]

Has this affirmation been implemented since Green Lake '71? Arni Shareski, responding to that question before the Annual EFMA Missions Executives Retreat in 1975, saw Green Lake's "most significant benefit" as "the extent to which many delegates were

[1] Vergil Gerber, ed. *Missions in Creative Tension* (South Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1971), pp. 347–350.

[2] Gordan MacDonald, "Closing Gaps Between Missions and Home Churches." *Church Mission Tensions Today*. C. Peter Wagner, ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1972), pp. 53–72.

[3] Gerber, *op. cit.*, p. 383.

persuaded their own organizations needed overhauling."[4] In amplifying that, he noted that "the larger and p. 63 older organizations reported few changes," and that the "value of GL '71 to any group was fairly well determined by the extent to which the delegates were persuaded their mission needed restructuring."[5]

AREAS OF FINANCIAL TENSION

Richard Oestreicher of the Far Eastern Gospel Crusade lists as one of "four big challenges missions will face in the next decade." that of the challenge of increased economic pressure. Runaway international inflation, administrative costs, the donor's own pressures, slow growth in income are calling for "home" cooperation as never before, and honest self-analysis.[6]

None of this is encouraging to me. And it is not encouraging for the same reasons behind my initial disillusionment with Green Lake.[7] The "hidden curriculum" at Green Lake, which was to some degree recognized there, was that between "sending church," defined in terms of North American and "receiving church" defined in terms of an overseas national church.[8]

DOUBLE FUNDING STANDARD

Behind it lies the classic evangelical support for "self-support," one of the key platforms of the indigenous methodology formulated in the nineteenth century by Henry Venn and Rufus Anderson. It is my contention that behind this formulation is the hidden curriculum that assumes a double standard for funding, built on an invisible distinction between "sending church" and "receiving church." This is further complicated by the fact that the largest financial supporter for foreign missions has been the North American church—a church that for over 100 years has never been a substantially "receiving" church. As long as this distinction remains operative and this historical reality unquestioned, the methods of financing missions, now presumably to be imitated by third world missions, will work against the deepest desires of Green Lake, the forging of fellowship, mutual love, acceptance and oneness in Christ.

Increasingly, discussions are pressing us to recognize this p. 64 method of financing missions as determinative in the building of world church fellowship. Concern for financial viability is being raised by the third world church. The 1974 study by Herbert Zorn, supported by the Theological Education Fund of the WCC, raises questions in this same area from the third world.[9] A 1974 study of inherited missionary forms patterning the Christian ministry in India touches on questions of financing in its concern with what

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[4] Anni Shareski, "Missions in Creative Tension." *Reports of the Annual Mission Executives Retreat, Sept. 19–Oct. 2 1975* (Washington D.C.: Evangelical Foreign Missions Association, 1975), p. 29.

[5] *Ibid.*, p. 30.

[6] Wade Coggins and E. L. Frizen eds., *Evangelical Missions Tomorrow* (South Pasedena: William Carey Library 1977), p. 98.

[7] Harvie M. Conn, "Church-Mission Relationships." *Theological Perspectives on Church Growth* (Nutley, N. J.: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1976), pp. 106–108.

[8] Wagner, *op. cit.*, p. 133.

[9] Herbert Zorn, *Viability in Context*. Bromley, Kent: Theological Education Fund, 1974.

is called "a dependence upon paid church workers."[10] More directly related to the problem are the growing number of mission agencies operating in the United States, who define their "primary task" in terms of the "support of nationals." The eleventh edition of the *Mission Handbook* lists 93 agencies under such a classification.[11]

There are those who are now questioning in print the reluctance of the western churches to support national pastors.[12] But even studies such as these operate without questioning the presumption that financing for the expansion of world evangelism lies basically in the hands of those with the most money, in this case, Christians in the United States. He who pays the piper still plays the tune. Only now he is asked to pay the Indian, Nigerian or Argentinian piper as well as the North American songster.

The most serious questioning of this pattern has come in connection with the moratorium debates. Not without reason has the call for moratorium been directed also against missionary dollars as well as personnel. Behind the anger of some third world churchmen over the disparity that western economic advantages make between missionary and national is the deeper question reflected in the words of a leader of one African church. "What is the justification for such discrimination except that the missionary is paid by his church in the West and the African is paid by his congregation?"[13]
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Even mission agencies sensitive to the questions behind moratorium have trouble answering that question. And it is not simply because "most church members at home continue to think of mission in terms of missionaries …", true as that is.[14] It is also because they assume that support for missions must come from the "sending" church. So, even such agencies often are forced to examine their financial support of missionary and national institutions in the face of reducing "home" support and do it in a unilateral way. The sending piper continues to call the tune.

SOME SUGGESTIONS

Where shall we start? Some suggest the creation and cultivation of economic projects, helping into "being thousands of companies owned and operated by national believers."[15] That suggestion, part of mission history in the past,[16] is an exciting and valuable one.

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[10] James A. Bergquist and P.K. Manickam, *The Crisis of Dependency in Third World Ministries* (Madras: Christian Literature Society, 1974), pp. 55ff.

[11] Edward R. Dayton, ed., *11th Edition, Mission Handbook: North American Protestant Ministries Overseas* (Monrovia: MARC, 1976), p. 422. The classification, however, is vague since many of the boards listed under the category are also involved in sending North American missionaries and are also listed under other "primary task" categories.

[12] Kenneth G. Donald, "What's Wrong with Foreign Money for National Pastors?" *Evangelical Missions quarterly*, Vol. 13 No. 1 (January 1977), 19–25.

[13] Paul A. Hopkins, *What Next in Mission?* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1977), pp. 11–12.

[14] *Ibid.*, p. 13.

[15] Coggins and Frizen, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

[16] William Danker, *Profit for the Lord*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1971.

Still others call for repentance because of our style of life in America. On the mission "frontier" (assumed to be outside of North America), we are wisely reminded, "where the manner of life constitutes a bar to full fellowship, manner of life must be altered …"[18]

To all these, I would add an idea equally or perhaps more foundational than any of the above. It flows from the affirmation of the apostle Paul that he had the right to ask "for remuneration from those among whom he had sown spiritual things. (Thus, not from the church which had sent him out). He said also, 'the Lord ordained that they which preached the gospel should live of the gospel' (1 Cor. 9:14)."[19] Putting it another way, Is not the Pauline pattern one of support for the ministry (whether expatriate or national) from the church in which he labors? What's wrong with foreign (receiving church) money for foreign (sending church) missionaries? p. 66 Can we recover the Pauline concept of economic participation in the ministry as "fellowship in the gospel" (Phil. 1:5) by asking *only* for "foreign money for national pastors" and not also ask for "national money for foreign pastors"?

TWO BIBLICAL SUPPORTS

Firm ground for this principle can be drawn from two Pauline sources: the New Testament account of the collection project that Paul organized among his Gentile churches for the indigent Christian community in Jerusalem, and his own reflections on his right to apostolic remuneration.

That right of apostolic remuneration Paul grounded in several areas—the anology of wages paid those in wordly affairs (I Cor. 9:7), Old Testament legislation (9:8), and the command of Christ, directing that those who proclaim the gospel get their living from the gospel (9:14). At Corinth, however, he chose not to exercise that "right" (9:18), "robbing other churches" by taking wages from them to serve the Corinthians without charge (2 Cor. 11:7–8).

The principle he put aside at Corinth is not simply the right to remuneration. It is the right of remuneration from those among whom he was sowing spiritual things. His reference to the contributions of other churches to his ministry there as "pillaging" or "robbing" reinforces that implication. He had accepted the gifts of other brethren at a time when he was not actually ministering in their midst. His assumption was that "while these other churches could reasonably have been asked to maintain Paul when he was ministering to *them*, it was not incumbent upon them to pay his expenses when working at Corinth."[20]

This does not mean that Paul's custom, when preaching or teaching in a place, was not to accept any gifts at the hands of the local people. "The fact that Paul did not make use of his right in the gospel for various reasons is no reason for us to ignore the rule, unless very peculiar circumstances should necessitate exceptions. Our obligation is not simply to follow the example of Paul, but it is to hold to the principle he established."[21]

Next, regarding the collection taken of Gentile converts for the p. 67 benefit of Jewish believers in Jerusalem, it could conceivably be argued that the collection was of such a

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[18] Hopkins, *op. cit.*, p. 61.

[19] Bavinck, *op. cit.*, p. 97.

[20] R.V.G. Tasker, *The Second Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians. An introduction and Commentary* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publ. Comp., 1958), p. 151.

[21] Bavinck, *op. cit.*, p. 98.

unique character that we can hardly use it to establish a principle for church-mission relations. Even admitting the eschatological significance of the collection, as does Keith F. Nickle,[22] it might be argued that such a biblical-theological perspective was unique to the epoch of redemptive history prior to the closing of the canon, focusing, as we believe it does, on questions of the validity of the Pauline apostleship and the promised union of Jew and Gentile in one body of Christ.

Both these qualifications of usage must be admitted and should preserve us from making too strong applications from the collection to the more narrow question I deal with in this article. At the same time, these reservations should not lead us to an understanding of the collection as of such a unique character that it can yield no wider principles.

Paul's animated discussion of the enthusiastic response of the Macedonians produced one sentence (2 Cor. 8:4), heaped with theologically significant terms—grace, fellowship, ministry, saints. The collection combats any tension or suspicious relationship that might conceivably intrude into the fellowship of the one new man that Christ had constructed from Jew and Gentile.

So too, Paul's rich allusions to the sharing of the Philippian church in his own ministry flow from the bond of love it conveys (Phil. 4:1, 5–18). In fact, it was that same bond of love that often deterred Paul from making use of his right of remuneration, "that we may cause no hindrance to the gospel of Christ" (1 Cor. 9:12).

A final element needs to be mentioned here. "Because the collection was to testify in Jerusalem to the genuineness of the incorporation of the Gentiles into the people of God, it was essential for Paul that their participation in the collection be of their own free will. Only then would the gift exemplify their Christian love and concern for the Jerusalem Christians motivated by the love of Christ for them. Just as Paul had voluntarily agreed to initiate the project, so were they voluntarily to fulfill it."[23]

The value of the Macedonians' participation lay in their enthusiastic, spontaneous, sincere (2 Cor. 8:2) response (8:5). This was a direct result of and witness to their commitment to Christ. p. 68 The self-giving love of Christ was to be the controlling motivation for the response of the Corinthian Christians (2 Cor. 8:9).

One does not read in any of this a controlling factor of *sending* in contrast to *receiving* church. On an artificial level, if it did exist, it would be a case of the *receiving* church contributing to the *sending* church. But that, to my mind, is to impose an historical form on the deeper biblical-theological dimensions of the meaning of the collection. In the context of my proposal, however, the data place before us questions whose force seems difficult to escape.

QUESTIONS TO FACE

Has the accepted pattern of missionary support not made it impossible for North American churches to share in the fellowship of receiving as well as giving? Has the accepted pattern of missionary support not made it impossible for North American churches to taste the joyful expression of Christian charity from the world body of Christ? Have we not succeeded in impoverishing ourselves and our brothers in Christ by closing biblical channels for us all to express, through our gifts, the unity of the new man into which Christ has brought us all, the display of Christian love?

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[22] Keith F. Nickle, The Collection. Studies in Biblical Theology No. 48. Naperville; Alec R. Allenson. Inc., 1966.

[23] *Ibid.*, p. 125.

Putting it even more dramatically, has a cultural pattern made it impossible for brothers to love one another, to fellowship in the gospel? Could it be that, hidden behind missions' present methodology, still lurks an incipient paternalism that is not yet aware of the riches of "Macedonia's" gifts?

Ultimately, I have no illusions that, economically, a shift in policy, at this point may end financial crunch. Paul's comptroller would not have seen the gift of the Macedonians in his ledger account as very substantial giving. But, in terms of what it may mean for the relationships of the world church, the gift may be significant indeed. It might mean a singular concrete expression of the fellowship in love, the fostering of reciprocal ministry that Green Lake '71 urgently wanted. It might mean a new pressure on the old structures mission boards have so much difficulty in discarding, the mission scaffolding they keep saying is only temporary, but never seems to go down.

It might mean a new degree of self-examination as to the disparity between missionary life style and national life style. It would be increasingly hard to open salary checks from the little church across the street from the missionary's compound in the p. 69 living room of a house twice as big as the church building. It might mean a new inquiry into the meaning of the Pauline identification with the poor as a confirmation of apostolic ministry. Is the missionary's calling to that same apostolic message confirmed in that same way? The pressures of the initiative of free love in Christ freely shared impose hard questions and no easy answers.

(abridged)

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Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger

Ronald J. Sider

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This article is a synopsis of Ronald Sider's book, Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger*. David Watson in the foreword of the British edition says, "I profoundly believe that this book contains the most vital challenge which faces the Church of today. It is one of the most searching and disquieting books I have ever read".*

CHRISTIANS in the industrialized nations face an agonizing choice. By the lifestyles we live, the church buildings we construct and the politicians we elect, we demonstrate clearly that we are on the side of the rich. The Bible makes it painfully clear that God is on the side of the poor. We must choose. It is impossible to worship both God and mammon. Of course, the choice will be painful, but that should not surprise us. Long ago Jesus warned that it would be easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the Kingdom. Or, as C.S. Lewis put it:

All things (e.g. a camel's journey through
A needle's eye) are possible, it's true