

Shall We Give Immediate and Full Autonomy to the Native Churches on All Our Alliance Fields?

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It would seem that we ought to do so without delay. In China all missionaries have suddenly been compelled to entrust everything into the hands of the native churches. Someone may say, "That was simply the result of the Nationalistic movement." However, the fact is that in practically every Missionary Society in China, which includes ours, the native Christians have expressed the desire that all missionary work be supervised entirely by the Chinese Christians. There are many who hold that the people in India, Africa and China and other lands are immature, and without sufficient intelligence to administer the affairs of their own church. How many missionaries on the field today are there, who ever organized or supervised a church before they came to the foreign field? If the facts were known we would be astonished at the small number of workers in our Society who ever had any practical experience in administering the affairs of a church before becoming a foreign missionary. A missionary in a foreign land usually has one great advantage over a native Christian and that is that he was born in a Christian land and in most cases the missionary has from a child grown up in a church and therefore knows probably what ought to be done in a church. Were not the Apostles but very humble and unlearned men, filled with the Holy Ghost and of whom it was said, "The High Priests and elders marveled at the boldness of Peter and John, perceiving that they were unlearned and ignorant men; and they took knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus." Is not the ability in the church of God, whether of a native or foreigner, necessarily a spiritual ability? It is hard for us who are white to place confidence in those whose opportunities have been so limited, and who are a simple, humble people, feeling that our larger opportunities, education and superior intelligence makes us by necessity the leaders of the work.

We know by what the Christians of China have said that they want autonomy and that most of them resent the arbitrary authority still maintained by the missionary. Is this the quickest way to establish an autonomous, self-propagating, self-supporting indigenous church?

Someone will say, "We will let the Annamese church have authority just as soon as it is self-supporting?" Have we a right to talk to the native Christians like that? We are foreigners in their country and we want the Gospel to become theirs. Is there not a better way to more quickly help churches which are wholly native, to take full authority and full responsibility? Could we not hand over the entire authority to them immediately and call them a subsidized Mission, which would work together with the foreign missionaries that are present on the field? Should not the Bible school of every field have immediate full administrative autonomy? Should not every publication work of every field have native leadership? Most every one will say the time has not yet arrived. When will there ever be a more opportune time than now?

Is it not true that the Annamese, or natives of any field, understand their own people much better than the foreigner? Is it possible to establish an indigenous church, when we keep the authority in our hands? When will we step aside and hand it over to them? When will we trust our native brethren and be willing to step aside and ask them to do everything? There will always be plenty of work for a foreign missionary if he wants to stay in a foreign land. He is needed as an evangelist, as a teacher and as an adviser, and just so long as he keeps in a place of spiritual victory he will always be in demand. This is not the time to talk of missionaries quitting and going home, or to step down from our work and say, "Let the natives do it," but it is a time when we should be willing not to be so small as to grasp control of everything and spend time on matters of detail, but be ready to give ourselves as we never have in our lives to prayer and the ministry of the Word, so that these young enthusiastic, spirit-filled leaders can assume the place that God has called them to take. Surely the time has come when there should be a native Chairman or President of the native church and there should never be any action or step taken in the work without fully advising with these native brethren. It is their church, they are the leaders, they are to take the Gospel to their own people, and we are

the helpers, with, thank God, a purse of God's money which we will willingly entrust in the hands of God's chosen leaders, not carelessly and without due investigation, but wherever God's money is needed to spread the Gospel there it will go. In French Indo China we have a church of over four thousand Christians and we ought to recognize only one source of authority and that is the voice of this Native Church, which will be God's instrument to evangelize this great land. May God give unto us all, in this great and wonderful task, added light that we may step up to God's plan for His one united Church.

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