

Functional Cooperative Autonomy* versus *Voluntary Cooperative autonomy

The leaders of the Restoration Christian Church (RCC) organization are following a policy they call Functional Cooperative Autonomy. (See their website [rccgh.org] under the heading *Vision/Mission*.) They claim that there is very little difference between their approach to church government and what we might call voluntary cooperative autonomy. Some who support the new constitution and by-laws feel that the local congregations under this new arrangement still have autonomy. I disagree with their view.

First, I would like us to notice that we are looking at a difference in terminology when we look at "*Functional Cooperative Autonomy*" and "*Voluntary Cooperative Autonomy*". We are only comparing the words *Functional* and *Voluntary* since the other two words are the same. The question is, are these words similar, or are they in contrast as opposites. Below are some definitions of both words from the Merriam-Webster Dictionary:

Function:

- 1 : OCCUPATION
- 2 : special purpose
- 3 : the particular purpose for which a person or thing is specially fitted or used or for which a thing exists *the function of a hammer*; also : the natural or proper action of a bodily part in a living thing *the function of the heart*
- 4 : a formal ceremony or social affair
- 5 : a mathematical relationship that assigns to each element of a set one and only one element of the same or another set
- 6 : a variable (as a quality, trait, or measurement) that depends on and varies with another *height is a function of age in children*

Voluntary:

- 1 : done, made, or given freely and without compulsion *a voluntary sacrifice*
 - 2 : done on purpose : INTENTIONAL *voluntary manslaughter*
 - 3 : of, relating to, or regulated by the will *voluntary behavior*
 - 4 : having power of free choice
 - 5 : provided or supported by voluntary action *a voluntary organization*
- Synonyms: deliberate, willful, willing, witting

As I view the meaning of these two words I feel that they have very little in common. I do not see them as being similar, but to be opposites as they are compared to each other.

The word *function* implies that a particular structure is necessary in order for something to work. It implies that something is formal and structured. It implies a direct and necessary relationship between members or participants. In other words, in order for it to be functional, there must be a structure or rules that are binding just as in definition 5 were it is applied to mathematics. When a function is applied to a letter in mathematics,

we might say that letter **a.** equals 3.14. This means the letter **a.** must always equal 3.14 in order for the mathematical equation to work. It is not a voluntary matter. **a.** must always equal 3.14. There is no choice.

I believe that the word *voluntary* is just the opposite. It implies freedom. It allows choice. No one is forced to do anything. No one is penalized if they refuse to do something. A person's free will is always involved in the relationship. The freedom to choose applies to every choice in the relationship.

If one chooses to give up their freedom and allows someone or some organization to decide for them, then it is no longer voluntary. One may voluntarily submit yourself to the decision making of an organization, but in doing so, you give up your freedom and your voluntary status. It is no longer voluntary and it is no longer autonomy.

When we talk about voluntary cooperative autonomy, we are not talking about a group of churches having autonomy, but each and every individual congregation having its own autonomy.

It is my understanding that when the members of the Fellowship of Christian Churches promulgated this new constitution and by-laws they voluntarily gave up their freedom to choose and thus gave up their autonomy. They submitted and gave up their will and their freedom to the leaders of the organization. Thus cooperation became not only functional, but obligatory and no longer voluntary. I believe it is impossible to have Functional Cooperative Autonomy as described in the RCC constitution and by-laws. I believe the functional part of the stipulations destroy and remove the autonomy (voluntary) part in each of the three examples I present in this document.

I challenge all of us to look at specific stipulations within the constitution and by-laws of the RCC to see if they truly allow for the autonomy of individual congregations or if they remove and destroy the autonomy of individual congregations. These examples are taken from the official printed copy of the documents. These examples do not involve typing mistakes or formatting problems which do exist in this copy. These examples do involve clear wording and clear meanings for each stipulation that I quote from the documents.

Before you view these, please note the following quote from the previous constitution of the organization when it was called the Fellowship of Christian Churches. The doctrinal statement within the previous constitution insured the autonomy of the individual congregations. Please compare this statement to the statements I will discuss in the new constitution and by-laws.

from the previous constitution of the Fellowship of Christian Churches:

DOCTRINAL STATEMENTS:, b. The Local Church: *"We believe that Gods primary (intended) organization of believers after the family unit in the present age is local assemblies of believers, . . .; That these assemblies (or churches) , though they should*

endeavor to cooperate with other Christian Assemblies, are to function under the lordship of Christ, free from external controls of any religious organization beyond the early oversight by the church founders and the influence of its own mature leaders;."

Notice that this is talking about individual local assemblies (congregations) and not about groups of congregations. I believe that the new constitution and by-laws of the Restoration Christian Church reverses the above quoted passage which insured the autonomy of individual congregations. I believe that the new RCC constitution and by-laws removes the autonomy of individual congregations.

concerning the constitution and by-laws of the Restoration Christian Church:

EXAMPLE ONE:

Article 10, point a. on page 13 says:

a. All freehold, leasehold, immovable properties and assets of the Organization whether acquired by the local churches, the District, regional or National offices, shall be vested and be registered in the name of the Restoration Christian Church, Ghana.

This clearly says that *all* land and all assets of the *local churches* . . . *shall be vested and registered in the name of the organization.* It clearly says assets and properties "*acquired by the local churches.*" There is no clarification which states that this is only congregations which are planted by the organization. The article says ***all***. The word *vested* is a legal term which means *1: to place or give into the possession or discretion of some person or authority; 2: to grant or endow with a particular authority, right, or property; 3: to become legally vested.* This means that the organization has authority, legal ownership and control over the property and the assets of every local congregation that is a member of the RCC.

A similar statement is made in **Section 11, number 7., page 70 under the topic of adopting churches into the organization.** It says: *Assets become Universal property of the RCC.*

My question concerning the above is, how can a congregation have free choice when the organization legally owns, has authority over and controls their property and their assets?

EXAMPLE TWO:

Article 12, on page 15 says:

ARTICLE 12 – GOVERNMENT OF THE CHURCH OR CORPORATE STRUCTURE

Christian Church shall have the Following:

- a. The Executives*
- b. The National Council.*

- c. General Council
- d. The Regional Council.
- e. The District or Area Council
- f. Pastoral Area
- g. The Local Church
- h. The Para Church Organization representatives

The Local Church, point g., is listed as part of the corporate structure of the organization. The word **corporate** means 1: INCORPORATED; also : belonging to an incorporated body; 2: combined into one body. The word **structure** means 1: the action of building: CONSTRUCTION; 2: something built (as a house or a dam); also: something made up of interdependent parts in a definite pattern of organization; 3: arrangement or relationship of elements (as particles, parts, or organs) in a substance, body, or system. This can only mean one thing. Individual local congregations are part of the corporate structure and are subject to the authority of the organization. In fact, the order in which these elements of the corporate structure are listed represents the strength of authority within the organization with the highest authority at the top and the lowest authority at the bottom of the list.

My question concerning the above is, how can an individual local congregation have free choice when it is subject to this corporate structure?

EXAMPLE THREE:

Article 3, OBJECTIVES AND PURPOSES of the organization, point 15., page 5 says:

15. To approve all scriptural teachings, methods and conduct and to disapprove of unscriptural methods and conduct.

The RCC constitution and by-laws are full of detailed stipulations on how the individual local congregation must be organized and operated. The RCC constitution and by-laws are also full of stipulations on what the local congregation must believe and practice. There is a "Commission on Doctrinal Purity" that will "ensure strict adherence to the Statement of Fundamental Truths and approval of spiritual teachings of the Organization, and to prevent deviations from them."(Section 8, pages 66 and 67). There are stipulations on how individual congregations and individual members are to be disciplined if they do not go along with these many rules and regulations of the organization. It seems to me that the organization is setting itself up as the final judge of what is acceptable practice and doctrine. When it does this, it is taking that choice away from every individual congregation which is a part of the organization.

My question concerning the above is, how can an individual local congregation have free choice when it is subject to this large volume of detailed rules and regulations and the discipline that will be given to those who do not go along with them?

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS:

Both the words autonomy and voluntary have the idea of independence, free will and freedom of choice. I could point out many other parts of the RCC constitution and by-laws that clearly take away the autonomy, independence and free will of the local congregation. However, these three examples are enough to explain my view that Functional Cooperative Autonomy, as explained in the RCC constitution and by-laws, destroys and removes autonomy from the local congregations.

For His glory,
Bob Sheffler