

The Observer: A Watchman on the Walls of Zion

The role of the church newsletter in combating false doctrine and promoting the truths of God's Word as documented in The Observer of St. John's, Watertown from November 1968-September 1971.

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A Senior Church History paper has already been written on the departure of St. John's, Watertown from the LC-MS. We, however, want to focus on the layman's perspective of the events leading up to and culminating in St. John's decision to leave the Missouri Synod. To do this, we will use only one primary source--the church newsletter. It is through St. John's newsletter, The Observer, that the person in the pew received information about the controversy in the years 1968-1971. Therefore, we desire to see what impact this newsletter had on affecting the history of St. John's congregation. We also want to determine how the church newsletter can be used in congregations to edify and educate God's people for God-pleasing actions in His Kingdom.

In November of 1968, we find an interesting note in The Observer:

We permit Pastor Kauffeld to attend the A.L.C. Convention in Omaha, Nebraska, from October 16-23. Funds to be taken from the workshop allocation subject to reimbursement from any other circuit congregations or other sources. An amendment to send Mr. Richter to this convention was lost.

No doubt most of the members were already aware of the concern over the idea of an A.L.C.-Mo. Synod fellowship. In the summer of this same year the congregation was informed of the fellowship question which would be hashed out in the '69 Convention of the LC-MS at Denver.

The congregation's permission for Pastor Kauffeld to attend the A.L.C. Convention was generous. But it showed much more than generosity. This action revealed the deep concern and awareness of St. John's leaders concerning doctrine and practice in the Church.

This brief paragraph in The Observer must have elicited a range of reactions among the laypeople of St. John's. These reactions no doubt ran the gamut from disinterest to keen excitement. Futures articles in the newsletter would make at least one major change in those reactions. Those in the "disinterested" camp would soon shrink to nearly nil. At this point in time, after-church pleasantries about the Packers, the gall bladder operation or the cold spell probably retained their place of prominence in conversations. Before long weightier conversations would be heard after church. And sometimes only the sounds of clanging coat hangers and shuffling feet.

During the winter of '68-'69 and the summer months which followed, The Observer itself was silent on the subject. Our next entry in the newsletter is in the September 1969 issue. It is obvious that there had not been a dearth of discussion behind the scenes in congregational boards and committees. In an article entitled "A Matter of Concern" we find  $9\frac{1}{2}$  pages of issues confronting St. John's as members of the LC-MS. Because the article includes quotations from our confessions; historical background of those confession; references to the Synod's constitution; sections of the Brief Statement; a minority report from the Denver Convention; and extensive quotations from A.L.C. spokesmen, the author of the newsletter article felt the need for a heartfelt preface to the article. This was not your average "what's happening at church" newsletter article.

We quote the opening paragraphs in toto:

One thing that must be kept in mind in these perplexing days is that the problem in our Synod between

those who want to keep the Missouri Synod as the Missouri Synod has always been, staunch confessors of the Bible as being the Word of God, faithfully Biblical in doctrine, and Biblically aggressive in mission outreach. The forces that are advocating change are seeking a new approach to Scripture and doctrine in which man determines ultimately for himself what is God's Word and what is not. In the new approach man looks upon the Bible as God's Word and Holy Scripture, only in the sense of its truths and message, not in its facts and words. Scripture is said to be wholly human (partaking of all attributes of man) and wholly divine (God's infallible message, not necessarily His Words, however). Thus man is free to accept or to reject any portion of Scripture as he sees fit. He becomes the judge of the Word.

Even in this preface to the article we find more doctrinal education than many church newsletters have in an entire year. This preface clearly sets forth the two opposing parties--those who accept God's Word as truth in every part and those who accept as truth only what they see as truth. The battle lines are drawn.

In the next paragraph of the article, "A Matter of Concern", the author attempts to allay the fears of the casual reader. He writes, "Though it may be a little lengthy, it would be good if we all would see where the true Missouri Synod has always stood of which we have been and are a part." The writer wisely encourages his readers to continue reading by suggesting that they would benefit as Christians from the article. He also bases his article on historical facts which show the "true Missouri Synod" to those who claim membership in that synod.

It is good for us to summarize the body of this article because it is the key vehicle of education in The Observer articles during this period of strife. Like no other piece,

this article sets the biblical and confessional foundation for those who face a major choice in the near future.

The body of "A Matter of Concern" begins with the scriptural support for God-pleasing fellowship by quoting Romans 16:17. "Now I beseech you, bretheren, mark them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them." Establishing the key scripture is important so that the author can't be accused of appealing to tradition rather than to God's Word. The readers must be convinced that their course of action resides in pleasing God not in pleasing men.

The author then proceeds to quote from the Confessions. He does this, recognizing that the members of St. John's had also pledged to uphold the Lutheran Confessions.

He first cites the introduction to the Formula of Concord which clearly sets forth our Lutheran teaching that the Scriptures are the norma normans of our doctrine and practice. Every other writing "must not be regarded as equal to the Holy Scriptures, but all of them together be subjected to them . . . ." Once again we see the author's concern with the crux of the peoples' impending decision--do the doctrines of the Synod agree with God's Word or don't they? The pastor then urges his flock to be "Bereans" i.e., to search and secure from the "only rule and norm of faith and practice."

After further reference to the FC introduction, the writer quotes from article XII of the Formula. What careful reader could miss the import of these words as quoted, "From this our explanation, friends and enemies, and therefore everyone, may clearly infer that we have intention of yielding aught

of the eternal, immutable truth of God for the sake of temporal peace, tranquility, and unity (which moreover, is not in our power to do)."

St. John's members agreed with this confession and for the most part had "no intention of yielding aught" of God's true teachings. The author of the article wisely points out that the Synod also agrees with this confession. He establishes this fact by quoting from the Synod's constitution, article II which the author states, "Synod, and every member of Synod, accepts without reservation." The writer is not using hyperbole nor is he speaking sarcastically. Adherence to the constitution in spirit and practice would promote truthful, biblical teaching. Like Luther in his early struggle, St. John's sought reform and repentance--not separation.

Article II of the Synod's constitution clearly states that the Scriptures are "the only rule and norm of faith and practice." It also confesses that "all the Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church are a true and unadulterated statement and exposition of the Word of God." These are statements which the Synod as a body agreed upon. The author of the newsletter article then quotes Article VI of the constitution which addresses conditions for acquiring and holding membership in the Synod. A member must not only accept Article II but must also renounce "unionism and syncretism of every description." The vote to join in fellowship with the A.L.C. violated this article of the constitution. St. John's members who were opposed to this fellowship were acting in line with their Synod's constitution.

The article closes its positive statements concerning the doctrine of the LC-MS by using excerpts from the Synod's Brief Statement and from the Minority Report at Denver. In the former, the writer cites the Brief Statement's discussion on the Scriptures. This is an excellent statement on the inerrancy, infallibility and primacy of the Scriptures in matters of doctrine and practice. The statement also rejects all errorists and their errors concerning the Scriptures. In the Minority Report we hear the voice of those who urge no fellowship with the A.L.C. because of "a wide divergence between The American Lutheran Church constitutional statements and the teachings and preaching practices in the areas of Scripture, ecumenical principles and lodge . . . ."

After setting forth the LC-MS doctrines and the Minority Report, the author of "A Matter of Concern" allows the A.L.C. to speak for itself. Their Convention Statement on the Word looks good on paper. However, the writer quotes a professor of the A.L.C. who betrays an attitude which is out of sync with his Church's official stand. This professor cautions people not to make the Bible a "paper pope." He warns against "confining the active, dynamic Word to the printed page and imprisoning it between two covers--paper and cloth back." He urges his listeners not to "stamp the Bible with a supernaturalism that we ought not." All of these pious sounding statements amount to one thing--the tearing down of the Word.

In closing, the article briefly mentions three other troubling problems regarding the A.L.C.: the lodge, fellowship with the L.C.A. ("the most liberal of all United States Lutheran bodies") and Membership in the L.W.F. and W.C.C.

Each of these three problems, writes the author, "flow from this (above mentioned) attitude toward Scripture." He concludes with these words: "Sad to say, not one of these matters has been resolved between the Missouri Synod and the American Lutheran Church." We're happy to say that such educational newsletter articles helped the members of St. John's resolve to uphold God's Word.

At the close of the article "A Matter of Concern", the author writes, "We suggest you bring this folder to the Special Meeting for discussion and notes." Not only would the members have an opportunity to learn a great deal, they would also be able to discuss these matters. The meeting was scheduled amid the usual September activities such as dartball, S.S teachers meetings and the Walther League. The date for the meeting was September 14, 1969.

Although we were not at this meeting, we do have valuable information concerning what went on that Sunday afternoon. Once again The Observer gives us this information. Under the heading "Ask the Pastor" we read the question, "Pastor, would you comment on the September 14<sup>th</sup> special meeting?" In answering the question, Pastor Kauffeld thanks those who attended the meeting. He also adds how "wonderful" it would have been with 1,000 or more present.

"The matter is of vital importance," he writes, "and must be faced by all." Pastor Kauffeld then clears up a voting matter that proved confusing in the meeting. He pointed out that it was both necessary and proper to vote on Resolution 3-15 which declared fellowship between the Missouri

Synod and the A.L.C. In fact he writes, "if a congregation did not vote against the resolution, it would thereby be placing itself in Fellowship."

Pastor Kauffeld urged "positive and definite action" to show Dr. Preus that he had good support. Yet, he cautions, "there still exists a great need for the use of sanctified common sense." St. John's pastor urged unity among all "true sons of Missouri." The pastor was not pushing for the congregation to withdraw from the Synod. On the contrary, he writes further in this same issue, "The worst thing that could happen at present, is for loyal sons and congregations of Missouri to leave the Synod."

Then, as if with prophetic vision, he writes:

If and when the day comes when there must be an organizational cleavage, let those who do not support the confession of Missouri leave and set up the kind of church they desire. Missouri might be much smaller but she will be the more fervent in her love and zeal to the Savior and His saving word.

Unfortunatly, before the AELC split, the "loyal sons of Missouri" felt the need to leave and form their own church (FAL). This church, however, was not built according to their own whims. They built it squarely on the Bible and the Lutheran Confessions..

At this time St. John's steered a steady and evangelical course through some emotionally charged issues. "At present," he concluded, "all we should and need to do for ourselves, our children, our Synod and Dr. Preus is to vote against 3-15 and to notify Dr. Preus of our action."

The December '69 Issue of The Observer shows that the congregation carried out this action. There we find a

resolution which rejects any fellowship with the A.L.C. both on the local level and synod-wide. The congregation "declined to honor" Resolution 3-15. Furthermore, the members urged synodical officials to "recognize the theological differences and problems of practice between the LC-MS and the A.L.C." This resolution was moved and seconded. The Church Council offered a minority report in opposition to the resolution. This report moved to table the resolution. The body defeated this motion. The vote on the resolution was by ballot. The result was 119 "yes", 27 "no".

At the close of the meeting an additional motion was made and seconded. This motion shows the concern and conviction of the members of St. John's:

In an effort to help preserve the Synod and its Doctrine, we give our wholehearted support to our pastors as they convey this decision to Synodical, District and Circuit leaders, and as they may find it necessary to publicly announce our chosen course of action.

The voting reflected this "whole-hearted support" as 111 voted "yes" and 27 "no". There were three blank ballots.

To the person in the pew who could not or did not attend the meeting, The Observer gave them a ringside replay. We find no back door dealings in the matters at hand. Rather, we find a concerted effort to educate and inform every member of St. John's. No one would be able to complain that he was without knowledge. On the other hand, many would rejoice that their pastor kept them abreast step-by-step toward their God pleasing goal. The pastor did not attempt to coerce his members into a decision that was not their own. He used the church newsletter for a sanctified purpose which led to

sanctified results.

Once again we have a gap in The Observer during the early months of the new decade. But in May of 1970 we read with interest the results of the work carried on in the previous months. The resolutions included in this issue promote a renewed effort to re-establish doctrinal discipline within the LC-MS. The first resolution urges that synodical members be informed of such disciplinary actions. The second resolution states in part:

. . . that any person or congregation which after repeated admonition will not unequivocally and without reservation honor and uphold the doctrinal position of the Synod be expelled from the Synod by a resolution of the Council of Presidents or by resolution of the Synod.

The members of St. John's also resolved to declare Resolution 3-15 of the Denver Convention "null and void" on the grounds that it violated the Synod's constitution regarding the establishment of church fellowship. In this matter they were carrying out their action of Sept. 14, 1969 to its logical conclusion. In addition, they resolved that the South Wisconsin District urge the LC-MS at their Milwaukee Convention to "once again reaffirm and uphold the Brief Statement."

The following month The Observer made available for its readers the entire text of "A Call to Openess and Trust." This statement was disseminated by a "large segment of Synod including leading pastors and professors." This group was not made up of the "ultra-liberals" but they were liberals none the less. The writer in The Observer prefaces his article with these words, ". . . the Synodical Convention at Milwaukee in 1971 will be of the utmost importance to us all, for it will

determine the future of the liberal and conservative elements and thus of the Missouri Synod itself." He then includes a denunciation of "A Call to Openess and Trust" by newly elected president Preus. The Observer article then commences with the text of the liberal document.

Up to this point, The Observer had not hinted at the possibility of St. John's leaving the LC-MS. But in October, 1970 we read the initial suggestion of the possibility. After again pointing out the two camps which had formed in the Missouri Synod, the author writes:

We need to understand anew today that what makes us a church is not a Synod, but our individual and congregational allegiance to, and the use of, the Pure Word of God and the Sacraments. We need also to understand anew today that an earthly organization such as a Synod, can go contrary to Scripture, and that when it does, we must protest and insist on remaining faithful to Scripture rather than to a Synod. Our final allegiance must always be to God and His Word, not to a human organization. May God help us to remember this as we prepare for Milwaukee next July.

As the march to Milwaukee continued, The Observer served as the herald. The November 1970 issue included an excellent teaching device. This article was put in for a specialized purpose--to point out the points of departure between those who held to the "conservative" theology and those who held to the "liberal" theology. This was carried out in an interesting manner, as The Observer explains:

The author uses a simple picture to illustrate the point, that of two trains, train #1 with theology #1 (Biblical and Mo. Synod conservative theology), and train #2 with theology #2 (Liberal theology--the other theology in the Mo. Synod), each beginning from a different home base and thus naturally proceeding in different directions. People may board these trains or be on them at different places but the destination is

inevitable. He shows how this happens today by listing side by side the points of the two theologies. Please read it with care and then think and pray that St. John's never boards train #2 at any stage of its journey.

We then find three standard page of type with 35 points of departure between the two trains (~~See Appendix A~~). The article concludes with these words of guidance:

More points along the two tracks might be listed, but these are sufficient to show the differing directions the two theological trains are traveling. In reality there is nothing much new in this presentation. The two trains have been traveling around in the world for a long time. Sometimes they were labeled "Revelation" and "Reason". What is relatively new is that they are now both found running within the boundaries of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. Obviously, no one can travel on both trains at the same time. He must choose one or the other. It is the hope and prayer of the essayist, Rev. Willard Koch of Pipestone, Minnesota, that this presentation will help the reader to clarify his thinking and to make a clear and knowledgeable decision. Nothing else will do if the church is to stand for something and carry out its mission and make an impact on the world. When church members themselves grope for direction or stand in bewildered confusion, how can they point the way to others? God give us true direction and complete certainty of it. To Him alone be all glory.

On November 15, St. John's hosted an open forum with Dr. Preus, the president of the LC-MS. The Observer reports that Dr. Preus began by speaking about the theological situation in the world today. He traced briefly the rise of the social-Gospel movement in Europe and its deadly spread to our nation. The Observer summarizes the result of such thinking: "Real Protestantism has all but been destroyed." Dr. Preus also spoke about the damage which has been caused in the Lutheran church. Many, he said, look upon the Confessions as being outdated and therefore not applicable. Others have attacked the inerrancy of the Bible. The Synod president then advised

against fellowship with the A.L.C. primarily on the grounds that they adopted women ordination. The article closes with this exhortation, "As one thinks of what Dr. Fraus said to us, let us each pray harder, worship more sincerely and follow the Word more faithfully." (December issue).

The new year opened with change in the air. In the February issue of the newsletter we find information on "The Resolution on Doctrinal position for St. John's Staff." Because of the struggle which the congregation had been undergoing in relation to the Synod, they wanted to make certain that their own house was in order as they approached Milwaukee. The Resolution on Doctrinal Position for St. John's Staff put down in black on white the conditions for serving as a called worker at St. John's. The congregation reiterated its position of belief as outlined in its constitution. They then resolved as follows:

Resolved, that St. John's congregation require all of its servants in the Preaching and Teaching ministry to adhere to the confessional standards both privately and publicly and to preach and to teach according to the theology as outlined in Article III of our Constitution.

From this statement, the members of St. John's could know that their ministry staff was united in faith and confession as they went to the Synod Convention. This assurance of unanimity must have encouraged The Observer reader to take a personal stand in line with their ministers' God-pleasing confession. At least this article was another strengthening factor in the upcoming decision to sever fellowship with the LC-MS.

Already in March of 1971, St. John's adopted some specific

resolutions for the Milwaukee Convention. The Observer reported these to its readers to show the firm resolve of St. John's in matters of doctrine. They intended to let their light shine at the '71 Convention. The resolutions in the March issue of The Observer call for a reaffirmation of the Brief Statement of 1932; the disavowal of the practice of woman suffrage; and the suspension through proper channels of congregations which did not uphold or practice the LC-MS doctrinal position. These resolutions also requested that the constituency of the LC-MS be regularly informed of such discipline since "the results of such discipline should be as public as the original offence or error." These doctrinal resolutions cemented the recommendations of the congregation as reported in the May, 1970 issue of The Observer (cf. above). The memorials close with a resolution that the LC-MS terminate its membership in L.C.U.S.A. and suspend altar and pulpit fellowship with the A.L.C. "until such a time as the LC-MS and the A.L.C. are in full agreement in doctrine and practice."

In May of 1971 the congregation reported its efforts to pull in the reins of the "Mission Life" educational program. This LC-MS curriculum was being actively promoted for use in the Sunday schools of the Synods congregations. The materials, however, contained statements of doctrinal ambiguity as well as "much heresy in the upper levels." This effort then went contrary to the Constitution of the Missouri Synod, Art. VI, p.4 (May '71 Observer). In view of this, St. John's resolved to recommend that the entire program, "Mission Life", be submitted to the C.T.C.R. for "careful scrutiny." They further

resolved that those sections which "were objectionable" be rewritten and made available to pastors and congregations for study before the Convention. They finally resolved that the re-worked "Mission Life" program be submitted to Synod at New Orleans, "for acceptance or rejection before they are used in Synod."

The June 1971 Observer contained a lengthy article which quoted the closing arguments of Dr. Preus. He made these comments to a pastoral conference in Laramie, Wyoming on April 13-14. Dr. Preus urged the Synod not to get involved with the A.L.C. until they had their own house in order. He targeted the number one problem of the LC-MS as indifference to doctrine and practice. Few, he said, have stood up to say anything against the terrible deterioration of doctrine in the LC-MS. "Think of it," he implored, "no shock, no protest, no reaction, just massive indifference!"

Thank the Lord that the members of St. John's could not be included among that group. This was due in large measure to an excellent tool--the church newsletter. Any member of St. John's who faithfully read The Observer could not remain ambivalent. For better or worse he or she had to take a stand.

It is interesting that The Observer carried no more words concerning the Convention in Milwaukee in its July and August issues. The Convention was held July 9-16. St. John's was joined by a number of other congregations who had prepared similar resolutions concerning L.C.U.S.A., "Mission Life", A.L.C. fellowship and doctrinal discipline. Despite the fact that Dr. Preus was at the helm, these resolutions were piously

trampled on.

Back home at St. John's we might have expected The Observer to be filled with convention news. After all, for over two years the newsletter had been packed with materials to educate its readers on the points of discussion at the Milwaukee convention. Why now did The Observer remain silent?

The Observer kept silent because it had faithfully done its work. On the night of August 30, 1971 that work bore fruit. By a two to one vote St. John's voted to terminate its fellowship with the Missouri Synod. After years of struggle they had made their stand. No small credit goes to those who saw the vital function of the church newsletter in educating the members about the matter at hand. After pages and pages of pertinent information, The Observer notes the end of the struggle with one bittersweet sentence in the September issue: "St. John's Congregation voted on August 30, 1971 to sever relations with the Missouri Synod."

As future shepherds in God's church we can learn a great deal from this account to aid us in our work. The church newsletter can be more than just a tabloid of church events and activities. We can use it to educate our people on matters of doctrine and practice. This has been documented in the above paragraphs. The fact that long standing members of the LC-MS would leave their mother church was due to the fact that they had the facts available. Guided by the Holy Spirit they used these facts to make a God-pleasing decision. This serves as an excellent example for those of us who will face the issue of the new hymnal and/or the KJV/NIV question. We need to

edify through education and keep our clubs in the closet. We need to present the facts clearly and let God's people make their choice. The church newsletter can aid us in doing just that.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Due to the nature of the paper and its purpose, I used only one primary source:

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History of St. John's-125 years, a Senior Church History paper, no writer or date given.

The 1971 Convention Workbook and the 1971 Convention Proceedings of the LC-MS, published by Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis.