

C. C. Hein: Guiding Force of the ALC

by

David L. Hein

Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Library

11831 N. Seminary Drive. 65W

Mequon, Wisconsin

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Prof. Friedrich

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The American Lutheran Church is one of the largest Lutheran church bodies in our country to date. Through the merger of the Ohio, Iowa, and Buffalo synods, the ALC came into being fifty years ago. The history of this is filled with names of men who had a major influence on this merger, yet there is one name that stands out as having served as a guiding force from the very start of the merger well through its completion. And that is the name of Pastor Carl Christian Hein. This study, however, is not so much to take a one-by-one look at the accomplishments of Pastor Hein as it is a paper on who the man was. Much of the following was gleaned from conversations with a son and grandson of Pastor C. C. Hein.

In 1884, Carl Christian Hein came along with the rest of his family to the United States from Wiesbaden, Germany. Though only sixteen years old, his father soon saw to it that he attended Capitol University in Columbus, Ohio. His older brother Martin was becoming a pastor in the Missouri synod, and their father thought it best that the rest of his sons have a bit "more freedom" in their education. Capitol University was operated by the Ohio Synod, and, though regarded as a conservative center of education, still it was thought to fit the desire for a more open-minded education.

After graduating from the university in 1895, Hein attended the Ohio Synod seminary in Columbus. Later in life, he thought that his graduation and subsequent ordination in 1898 let out a man too young for the ministry. He was not quite twenty years

old when made pastor at the Lutheran church in Marion, Wisconsin. At first terrified at the task, he soon felt that this was indeed his calling. He easily identified himself with his flock, not only in Marion, but also in his other parishes. In 1891 he accepted a call to a mission in Detroit and soon found himself pushed into filling a vacancy for Salem Church which numbered about 1400 souls and had its own school. Somewhat overwhelming for a man with less than three years of experience and expecting to grow in a mission situation. Nevertheless, his enthusiasm and already-evident administrative qualities served to make his work well appreciated at Salem for eleven years.

Then in 1902, C. C. Hein moved back to Columbus, accepting a call to Trinity Lutheran congregation. It is here that he served as pastor until the business of the Ohio Synod became too great in 1925. But during this pastorate also, Hein showed concern and genuine warmth while carrying out the work he loved to do. Full of driving energy, Hein would get up at five every morning to get all he wanted at least partially done. A most meticulous man, each day had its allotted schedule so that a sermon's first draft was done already by 11:00 A.M. Monday, and a final, completely written-out copy was memorized by Saturday. Despite his having come from Germany not so many years before, there was never a hint of an accent in his delivery or in regular conversation.

One of life's greatest enjoyments to Pastor Hein was being able to take time out to read. Though he lost the sight

of one eye as a youth, he read continuously. Everything he could get ahold of to expand his horizons he would absorb and retain. It is obvious he didn't just read theological journals without recognizing that here was an outside world, since his son Carl Junior recalls how his father spent an entire weekend at the library taking in an entire three volume set on the history of England. The "Lutherean Standard" and later the "Kirchen-Blatt" took advantage of Hein's wealth of knowledge by printing many products of his pen. Called several times to become a professor, Pastor Hein felt his calling was to serve the Lord in the parish ministry only.

Not willing to let his talents be restricted to Columbus only, the Ohio Synod had Pastor Hein serve in several different administrative offices. During his ministry, he served as a district president in Joint Synod of Ohio (1912-1920), first vice-president of Ohio (1919-1924), general president of Ohio (1924-1930), vice president of the National Lutheran Council (1927-1932), and as president of both the American Lutheran Church (elected 1930) the National Lutheran Council (1933), offices which he held until the day he died. This work kept him on the move, and sometimes away from home for several months at a time. During one year, his duties had him travel more than sixty-thousand miles by train. He also attended the meetings of the Lutheran World Conference in Eisenach, Germany (the very first meeting; held in 1925), in Copenhagen (1928), and in Paris (1935). Yet, such travels afforded him opportunities to light up his pipe

or a cigar with some friends to discuss not only new and urgent business but also chat about old times. And this hectic schedule, which could exhaust many others, never seemed to affect the health or efficiency of this ever-enthusiastic worker. In fact, he continued the entire time to not only deliver papers but also seize every opportunity which was available to preach. In fact, Pastor Hein delivered 4399 different sermons during his lifetime.

This desire to preach arose from a true love and appreciation of the Word. And Hein's views on that Word were somewhat more conservative than some of the theologians of his day. Indeed, it probably seemed to many a personal vendetta when Hein, who said he greatly desired unity with the Iowa Synod, yet insisted that the word "inerrant" be properly placed to apply to the whole of Scripture and not just to its authority in any article of union.¹ Even when the final draft of the confessional article chosen in 1930 employed the wording: "the inspired Word of God and the only infallible authority" etc., Hein saw to the inclusion of an explanatory appendix which set forth the Scriptures as being inerrant. This was done in spite of a large amount of objections by such influential figures as Dr. Reu.²

But it is for Pastor Hein's dream of a united Lutheran church in America that he is best remembered. Despite his ra-

¹Meuser, Prof. Fred W. The Formation of the American Lutheran Church. Columbus: The Wartburg Press, 1958, pp. 182, 202.

²Ibid., pp. 222, 227.

ther conservative-sounding views on church fellowship,³
 Hein felt that unity should be based only on subjects covered
 in the Lutheran Confessions (to all of which he pledged himself)
 and on this assumption: that most laymen did not recognize many
 of the finer distinctions made by theologians, therefore, some
 of these were not vital in uniting the laity into one synodical
 body. It was such thinking that led him to state concerning
 the Synodical Conference's stand in the Election Controversy:
 "The controversy is artificial and useless because the laymen
 in the disputing synods believe exactly alike."⁴

A speech he made in 1917 to the Western District of the
 Ohio Synod made clear already the hopes Hein had for Lutherans
 throughout America. He said:

I cannot believe that the vision of one Lutheran Church
 of America, whose synods, in doctrine and practice, will
 accord one another mutual recognition, practice fellowship,
 and cooperate in certain spheres of activity, is nothing
 more than a castle in the air...Is it not high time for
 us to try to give a clear answer to such questions as these:
 What is our actual relation to the other synods of our land?
 Is our attitude right, and are there really no steps we
 could take toward unity?"⁵

Enthusiasts for unity saw to it that a copy of this speech was
 sent to every Lutheran pastor in America. This dream, though

³Ibid, p.125.

⁴Ibid, p.158.

⁵Ibid, p. 157.

toughened by realism, nevertheless led Pastor Hein to become "the leading spirit in the Iowa-Ohio merger and in its other synodical ventures."⁶ Recognition of his abilities and sincere desire is found proven by Hein's election to be the first president of the newly formed American Lutheran Church in 1930 and in his re-election a year before his death in 1936. And in Carl Christian Hein, they had a man willing to give of himself totally to the Lord.

⁶Ibid, p.171.

S O U R C E S :

Conversations held on March 1, 1980 with Mr. Carl C. Hein, Jr.
of Columbus, Ohio and Reverend Norman C. Hein of Austin, Texas.

The Formation of the American Lutheran Church by Prof. Fred
W. Meuser. Columbus: The Wartburg Press, 1958,