

A History of WELS' Relations with
the Lutheran Confessional Church

by

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A word of thanks is also in order for the help given by the current contact man with the LCC, Pastor Martin Janke, who was always ready to help put the pieces of the puzzle together so that I could get a look at the whole picture.

J.R.J.

Last September the Lutheran Confessional Church (Sweden, Norway, and Finland) observed the 10th anniversary of its formation, and in August of 1985 it will be ten years ago that the WELS formally declared fellowship with the LCC. As one looks back on the decade of our WELS' relations with the Scandinavian Lutherans one might get the impression that the road to Sweden only goes one way, and that the tiny 400 member LCC is very much dependent on the WELS for help, but that it has very little to offer the 400,000 member Wisconsin Synod. The actual situation is quite different. Civilian Chaplain E.C. Renz in an article in the Nov. 3, 1974, Northwestern Lutheran gives a more accurate analysis of LCC/WELS relations. He writes that after Pastors Seth Erlandsson and Sten Johansson of the LCC attended services in Gau-Bischofsheim, Germany, they wrote in the guest book, "Really a most wonderful day for us! Blessed be our fellowship in Christ! We hope we will see you again soon. We need your company." Chaplain Renz's response was: "Likewise." And to this we can all heartily subscribe. History bears out that we in the WELS have benefited from the company of our confessional brothers in Scandinavia as much as they have benefited from our company.

I. History of the LCC

A. Apostasy in the State Church

The formation of the LCC is best understood when it is viewed against the dark background of apostasy in the Swedish state church. Although statistics say that over 95% of Sweden's population is Lutheran, it is a sad fact that biblical Christianity has been gone from the State Church for many years. In

1686 the Book of Concord was accepted as a symbolical writing in the Church of Sweden, however, by 1893 a "loose and diffuse" obligation to the Book of Concord was accepted, which came to be called the "evangelical view." This "evangelical" subscription to the Confessions was a rejection of the old "legalistic, juridical slavery to the letter" of the confessions, it abandoned the "old narrow confessionalism," and paved the way for new possibilities as the result of ongoing discussions between Lutheran and Reformed church families.¹

The end result of such an evangelical subscription to the Confessions was a Swedish church in theological chaos. In it the historical critical method of biblical interpretation was held, Gospel reductionism was taught, and theological liberalism more and more began to dominate biblical studies at all levels. Already in the beginning of the twentieth century this theological liberalism took hold in the universities, thus generations of preachers and teachers have been and still are being trained in Sweden which consider it self-evident that the Bible is full of mistakes and errors. It is possible in the Church of Sweden to be a Baptist, a Pentecostalist, or even an atheist, and still hold full membership, with all rights and privileges unrestricted should one choose to use them.²

Certainly one of the foremost concerns of Bible believers in Sweden was the education of their children. Before 1980 religion was a required subject in the Swedish state-run schools. In these religion classes the children were taught that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob worshiped the sun, moon, and stars, and that Jehovah, or Yahweh, was originally a god worshiped by the Kenites,

who believed that Yahweh was a local god who lived on Mt. Sinai. They were taught that the five books of Moses were not written by Moses, but actually were written much later during the Babylonian Captivity. The idea of a life after death and the belief in angels, in a devil, and in hell, they were taught, were adopted from the Persian religion.³ With this unhappy situation occurring in the educational system, the outlook for any future revival of the State Church began to look increasingly dim. Ecumenicity and social involvement had replaced the deity of Christ, his virgin birth, his vicarious suffering and death and his glorious resurrection as the main message of the church. Thus the burning question that had to be faced by those who remained faithful to the Bible was, what will happen to our children and our descendants when they grow up, and are taken in hand by an ever more liberal state-directed church and school?

B. Protests against Apostasy

Over the years a few voices were raised against the apostasy of the Church of Sweden. Among these voices were those of David Hedegard and Axel B. Svensson who edited magazines called For Biblical Faith and New Watchman. Theirs came to be very lonely voices, but their battles against biblical criticism and denial were not in vain. Through these Bible-believing men and their magazines many people in Sweden learned to know and treasure God's Word, interest in good Christian literature was kept alive and the great value of thorough study of Scripture was powerfully emphasized.

Biblical study and the Lutheran heritage was also kept alive in Sweden by the old Lutheran revival movements. These

strongly pietistic movements kept faith in the Bible as God's inspired and inerrant Word alive and kept justification through faith alone in a central position, and thus rationalism and unbelief found a certain amount of opposition in Sweden. But just because these were pietistic movements, these revival groups were never able to actually break with the apostate church. Too often, led by pietistic indifference to doctrine, these revival movements made common cause with the liberals and joined them with good conscience.

There were other revival movements, for instance, the Bible-believing Friends, the Church Renewal, and Churchly Gathering, but these were all carried on inside the structure of the State Church, and were never able to restore the State Church to a confessional church which was faithful to the Bible. For the most part those who believed the Bible were put on the defensive by the flood of modern critical theology, because up until the founding of Biblicum in 1968, there was no biblical research center which could in a serious way take up the battle against modern liberalism.⁴

C. Biblicum

A significant step in the theological development in Sweden was taken when the Biblicum Institute was formed on Oct. 8, 1968, in Uppsala. The initiative for founding Biblicum was taken personally by Dean (Pastor of a cathedral congregation) G.A. Danell of Vaexjoe, and Dr. David Hedegard; an outstanding conservative Bible scholar, who translated the New Testament into Swedish. Five other men, Ingvar Hector, Ingemar Franck, Dr. Seth Erlandsson, Per Jonsson and Lars Engquist, formed the first

board of Biblicum. No organization supported this initiative - it was not an arm of the Swedish State Church, nor is it controlled by the more recently formed Lutheran Confessional Church. It was and is an independent institute to be used by all faithful Christians and Christian societies in Scandinavia to carry on biblical research and education with the presupposition "that the Bible is truly God's Word and not just the word of man."⁵

The founding of Biblicum must be viewed against the background of liberalism and unbelief within the church of Sweden and the decay found in the theological faculties of the state universities. Biblical scholarship and biblical faith were on the way to extinction in Sweden's schools, society, and universities. Dr. Hedegard and Dean Danell had been pointing this out for some time, and their cooperation to found Biblicum gave great hope to many conservative Lutherans.

A declaration by the Bishop's Bible Commission of the State Church in 1970 demonstrated clearly the great differences that existed between the theologically liberal State Church and the Biblicum Institute. That declaration, The Meaning and Use of the Bible, taught that the Bible contained mistakes. Biblicum answered in 1971 with the book, It Is Written, which upheld the inspiration and inerrancy of the Bible. The Bishops rejected Biblicum's book, and recommended their own. This was no surprise, but it did show clearly that none of the bishops in the Church of Sweden held the conviction that the Bible is the inspired and inerrant Word of God.⁶ Now the cards were on the table - the question was what position would Biblicum take against the leaders of their church who had been clearly shown to be false teachers?

That a Lutheran Confessional Church was necessary was becoming quite evident to the leaders of Biblicum, its friends and supporters.

Unfortunately the free church issue led to a disagreement among the board members of Biblicum, and the result was that three members left the Institute in 1973. Prior to this schism, Dr. Seth Erlandsson had been called as director and researcher beginning in the summer of 1970. Dr. Erlandsson is an outstanding OT scholar, who received his doctor of theology degree in May of 1970 from the University of Uppsala. Together with Dr. Hedegard, Dr. Erlandsson worked to build up a theological library and to develop and distribute theological literature throughout Scandinavia. After Dr. Hedegard's death in October of 1971, — Dr. Erlandsson was chosen to be director and president of Biblicum. In March of 1972, a building near the University of Uppsala Library was dedicated by the president of the Biblicum Institute as the "Bible Research Institute Biblicum."

From the beginning Biblicum was greeted with warm support from many sides, and through its research and lectures gained great respect. In sharp contrast to the State Church theologians who departed from God's Word, Biblicum's "Golden Rule" was that it would teach only God's Word and all of God's Word. For this reason Biblicum became a rallying point for conservatives of all kinds. Through Biblicum members Hedegard and Jonsson, reports were brought into Sweden of Confessional Lutheran churches in other lands. The doctrinal difficulties which beset the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod after 1930 were well known in Sweden, as were the churches which had severed fellowship with Missouri. In order to gather more information on these confessionally faithful churches in other lands, Biblicum sent

Dean Danell to the German Lutheran seminary in Oberursel and he encouraged that contact be made with other faithful confessional churches. In 1972, Biblicum invited Prof. Robert Preus of the LC-MS to Uppsala, and later in 1972 Dr. Siegbert Becker of our Wisconsin Synod was invited to lecture at the Institute. Through these contacts those at Biblicum gained a better understanding of confessional Lutheranism and the ground was prepared for a Lutheran Confessional Church.

As Biblicum began to speak out more and more clearly on some of the Bible's less popular teachings, such as church fellowship, support for the institute began to dwindle. Up to this point the sentiment among those in the State Church who disagreed with its teaching had been to "stay with the sick mother" church and to form Mission Societies which met separately but within the structure of the Church of Sweden. This line of argumentation confuses the visible Church of Sweden with the invisible Church of Christ which is our true spiritual mother as St. Paul writes in Gal. 4:26. This true Church of Christ is identified by the proclamation of the Gospel and the correct administration of the sacraments, and cannot be identified with any visible church - particularly one which has lost the true marks of the Church as Sweden's state church had. Furthermore, the true Church of Christ can never become "sick" for it has been cleansed by Christ to be "without spot or wrinkle, or any such thing, but it should be holy and without blemish" (Eph. 5:26). He who would stay with his spiritual mother ought, therefore, to look for a church which has the true marks, God's pure Word and the sacraments without corruption.⁷

So ingrained was this thinking that when the time came to

put the clear biblical principles of church fellowship into action, some who had supported the theory of a separate Lutheran Confessional Church declined to put that theory into practice. The best known and most unhappy instance of this occurred within the membership of the board of Biblicum. Dean Danell had in the early years of his association with Biblicum stated that the battle for biblical faith must not be empty rhetoric, but a confession must be followed by action. In fact in November 1971, Danell published in the New Watchman an article by Herman Sasse in which Sasse writes: "One cannot establish a confessional church if one does not confess in action." And again he (Sasse) warns against saying that the right time to confess with action has not yet come.⁸ And yet, when in 1972 the question of separation from the State Church was seriously proposed Danell changed his attitude. The result was a schism at Biblicum. Three board members, Danell, Hector and Frank, who in October of 1972 had put their blessing on a formal separation, left Biblicum in February 1973 because of disagreement on the church question. After the walk-out, Danell and Pastor Tom Hardt of St. Martin's Lutheran Church in Stockholm (the Evangelical Lutheran Free Church in Sweden) directed a number of accusations against the remaining members of the board. These unkind and untrue charges are answered factually in a 1974 publication, Biblicum's Battle For Biblical Faith.

Shortly after the schism at Biblicum, Ingemar Furberg, a Doctor of Theology, was chosen as a member of the board. Biblicum continues to support and train Bible-believing Lutheran researchers who produce up-to-date textbooks for study courses which are basic for the Christian faith. The Institute remains

an independent research center and its board members renew, orally and in writing, each year their commitment to Holy Scripture and to the Lutheran Confessions.

D. The Evangelical Lutheran Mission

The final step which preceded the formation of the LCC was the Evangelical Lutheran Mission, which was founded in Uppsala in September, 1972. ELM began by sponsoring lectures based on the WELS' brief statement of doctrinal position "This We Believe." In September of 1973, ELM issued an appeal in the form of a circular letter which was circulated widely in Sweden. The appeal was addressed to "all who are seriously troubled by the situation in Swedish Christendom." Besides stating the basic principles of ELM in regard to Scripture, Salvation and the Church, the Appeal called for "Faithful Christians to confess the Christian faith in word and deed. . . and to avoid and flee from false teachers, both their preaching and their communion services."⁹ The original twelve points of the Appeal were signed by about twenty people and over the next few months about one hundred more signatures were added.

It was through ELM that the Wisconsin Synod entered into close contact with Confessional Lutheranism in Sweden. The first financial support from WELS was given to support ELM's work - this support consisted of non-budgetary gifts gathered from various individuals and organizations in the Wisconsin Synod. The financial help enabled ELM to begin a cassette ministry and it helped fund Pastor Per Jonsson's new magazine "Lutherskt Saendebrev" (Lutheran Letter). With the founding of the LCC, ELM's purpose was fulfilled, and its activity was concluded at the end of 1974.

E. The Lutheran Confessional Church

The Lutheran Confessional Church, established in September, 1974, can really trace its origin back to Sunday, October 18, 1970. On that day a small group of people met in a rented hall in Uppsala for a worship service. At that service Dr. David Hedegard preached, and Pastor Seth Erlandsson conducted the liturgy. The order of service without communion of the Swedish State Church was followed. Those services continued for the ~~better~~ part of a year, until Dr. Hedegard was called to his eternal home in October, 1971. At that time those who gathered together were still members of the state church. 1972 saw the formation of ELM and the circulation of the Appeal.

On September 2, 1973, a decisive step was taken towards forming the LCC. On that day the little Lutheran congregation in Uppsala broke completely with the Swedish Church and declared itself to be St. Matthew's Ev. Lutheran Congregation. Before 1951 such a step would have been illegal, and even in 1973 separation from "Israel" aroused much negative sentiment. The main argument against separation was that it was preferable to stay in the State Church until the pillar of cloud lifted and God himself showed that the time was right for an exodus. Only the conviction that the Bible's teaching on church fellowship demanded a complete break with the false teachers in the state church led those few members of St. Matthew's to leave the "sick mother.". Although St. Matthew's Ev. Lutheran Congregation numbered only nine communicant members in the fall of 1973, Sept. 2, was a day of joy and fellowship around the Word and Sacraments - and it was a start.

Shortly after the founding of St. Matthew's, at the in-

invitation of the Wisconsin Synod, in October of 1973 Seth Erlandsson, Per Jonsson and Lars Enquist visited the USA. One important result of this visit was the declaration of fellowship between St. Matthew's of Uppsala and the WELS. This action followed a series of discussions in which Dr. Erlandsson had presented the views of his congregation to the WELS' doctrinal commission. On the basis of the newly declared fellowship, Dr. Erlandsson was invited to present a number of lectures during his visit. Pastors Jonsson and Engquist, although in doctrinal agreement with the Wisconsin Synod, could not yet enter into church fellowship with WELS because they were not united in practice - they had not yet at that time left their state church positions.

The ground for yet another confessional Lutheran congregation was prepared in the fall of 1973 when Pastor Per Jonsson of Landskrona, upon returning from a visit to the Wisconsin Synod, sent in his letter of resignation from the ministry of the State Church. His resignation was set for June 1, 1974, so that he might finish instructing his confirmation class and explain to his congregation the biblical principles of church fellowship which made his resignation necessary. On June 6, a meeting was held in Pastor Jonsson's home in Landskrona to establish a new congregation. At this meeting the principles of church and communion fellowship were discussed and it was decided that the new congregation would maintain the same close communion practice as St. Matthew's in Uppsala. Thereafter the congregation was organized and named "Our Savior's Lutheran Congregation." At its founding it numbered only five persons - Pastor Jonsson's family and one other member - but the fact that Our Savior's of Landskrona and St. Matthew's of Uppsala

now stood united was a cause for great joy.

Less than two months later, on July 20, 1974, a third congregation was formed in Yxenhult, also in southern Sweden. Dr. Erlandsson was invited with his family to vacation near Yxenhult in July by supporters of *Biblicum* in that area. His working vacation was spent lecturing and preaching on the pressing issue of church fellowship. As a result of the discussions, St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Congregation was established, with a total of eighteen members. Pastor Jonsson of *Landskrona* served the congregation as interim pastor, until October of 1974 when brothers Arne and Alvar Svensson left the state church and took over responsibility for the congregation.

The Lutheran Confessional Church in Sweden was formally organized with three charter congregations in September, 1974. The constituting convention was held in Uppsala, at which time a "grunddokument" was discussed and accepted by 45 people. The organizational statement stated in seven points the LCCS' doctrinal basis and its reasons for separating from the state church. Following an initial business meeting, a worship service with communion was held, and a confessional church in Sweden was born.¹⁰

In the ten years since the LCCS' first convention in 1974, the Lord has prospered the work of our brothers and sisters in Sweden. Those three original congregations have grown to eleven, and in addition nearly twenty preaching stations are being served, throughout Sweden, Norway and Finland. When the LCCS expanded beyond the borders of Sweden the words "in Sweden" were deleted from the church's official name. As one looks back over the ten years of fellowship between the LCC and the

CONGREGATIONS - ⊙
PREACHING POSTS - +

Lutheran Confessional Church

SWEDEN

Atlantic
Ocean

NORWAY

FINLAND

+ Brennes
⊙ Avaldsnes
⊙ Stavanger
+ Sandnes

+ Raufoss

L. Siljan

Oslo
⊙ Knapstad

L. Vänern

Uppsala ⊙

L. Vättern

Stockholm

Tammerfors

+ Lahti
+ Herrala
+ Kymnlinna
+ Börgå

+ Aland

Gulf of Finland

North Sea

⊙ Göteborg

Norrköping

Munkaljungby
+ Landskrona

⊙ Ljungby

+ Yxenhult

Gotland

Oland

Baltic Sea

U.S.S.R.

+ Namsos

+ Svanabyrn

L. Froso

+ Balsjö
Tvåralund +
Umeå +

Räneå ⊙

⊙ Piteå

⊙ Skellefteå

Gulf of Bothnia

Helsinki

WELS, it becomes clear that in that decade *each* church body has benefited from the other's company.

II. Benefits of fellowship with WELS for LCC

In view of the chaotic situation that existed in the Swedish State Church for nearly one hundred years, it would be easy to get the impression that until the WELS appeared on the scene there had been no trace of orthodoxy in Sweden. The truth is that orthodoxy had not disappeared from Sweden; it was only buried beneath the liberalism of the huge State Church, hidden in small mission societies and struggling to survive within the confines of its apostate mother. What Bible-believing Lutherans needed most was guidance in forming a free Lutheran Confessional Church. Within the structure of the State Church fine orthodox theologians like David Hedegard were all but ignored and the schools and universities were educating students in indifference towards religion, if not in outright denial of Biblical truth. In this context, the future of orthodoxy surely looked dim, and one can see all the more clearly the Lord's hand at work in the way He provided the needed guidance for the faithful few in Sweden.

In Dr. Becker, the confessional Lutherans found the perfect man to guide them in their exodus from the State Church. Having left the LC-MS when it had strayed from the pure doctrine of God's Word, Dr. Becker was able to give sound advice to those who found themselves in a similar situation in Sweden. The account of Dr. Becker's first association with confessionalism in Sweden is an interesting piece of history.

Early in 1968, Kjerstin Jonsson, wife of Pastor Per Jonsson, came across an article by Dr. Becker in Christian News called,

"Truth and Modern Lutheranism." Since the article seemed to be worth translating for circulation in Sweden, Mrs. Jonsson wrote to Dr. Becker to get his permission to duplicate the article. In the next months, more articles were translated by Mrs. Jonsson until the board of Biblicum formally invited Dr. Becker to come over and lecture at the Institute. The irony of this whole story is that one of the LCC's most vicious opponents and a man who has continuously attacked Dr. Becker and the Wisconsin Synod in regard to the doctrine of the Lord's Supper, Pastor Tom Hardt of St. Martin's Church in Uppsala, is responsible for supplying Mrs. Jonsson with a gift subscription to Christian News.¹¹

What Dr. Becker found when he first visited Biblicum with his wife in 1972, was a group of believers who wanted to be faithful to the biblical teachings of fellowship, but who weren't sure how to put the Bible doctrine into practice. The board of Biblicum had clearly expressed the correct teaching in regard to Unionism. Per Jonsson had written: "It is becoming ever clearer that adherence to the Church of Sweden is adherence to the harlot of Rev. 18. Therefore also this work of truth applies: Go out from among her, my people. . . "¹² And Dr. Hedegard, already in 1956, after citing Mt. 7:15, Rom. 16:17, and II John 10f., wrote, "Faith in the truth of God's Word manifests itself in obedience to its directives."¹³ And yet it was felt that the time was not yet right for confession by action. Very few Swedish Lutherans had ever considered actually leaving the Church of Sweden. It was taken for granted that a citizen in Sweden would belong to "the people's church."

The fact that such great apostasy existed within the State Church was not enough to prompt confession by action.

So it was a powerful lesson that Dr. and Mrs. Becker gave on their first visit to Sweden in 1972. Dr. Becker wrote in the December 3, 1972 Northwestern Lutheran, "We were especially pleased to sense the welcome that these people gave to the message that we tried to share with them. So far as we could tell, our non-participation in their worship was not resented by them. We received the very definite impression that they respect our position on church fellowship." That Dr. Becker's impressions were correct is borne out by comments made later by people who saw the Beckers' confessing by action. In a 1976 publication, the board of Biblicum wrote: "A factor which contributed to more and more study concerning the Bible's teaching on church fellowship, was Dr. Siegbert W. Becker's visit to Sweden in 1972. His lectures did not deal with the doctrine of the church. But the fact that he could not practice church fellowship with the members of the Biblicum Foundation was a powerful witness that resulted in much soul-searching. Did we really represent the Bible's and the Confession's teaching's about the church? If not, we were bound to do so according to our constitution."¹⁴

Besides teaching the faithful Lutherans in Sweden by his example what the Bible says about church fellowship, Dr. Becker and others in the WELS, for example Prof. Carl Lawrenz, Pastor Edgar Hoenecke, and Pres. Oscar Naumann, helped the brothers in Sweden by providing moral support at a very difficult time. While it might have been easy to become impatient with the men in Sweden who knew what the proper course

of action was, but hesitated to make the break, Dr. Becker continued to support those who were pondering separation with patient encouragement. For some it would perhaps be difficult to understand how difficult it is to leave the security of a familiar organization and start over in a new church, but Dr. Becker had once been faced with that same decision and his letters reveal his hard earned insights.

Pastor Lars Engquist of Råneå in northern Sweden had a particularly difficult time in separating from the State Church. As Pastor of a 5,000 member State Church congregation in Ranea, Pastor Engquist wanted to be sure that by leaving the State Church he would not be demonstrating a lack of love and concern for the souls entrusted to his care. He felt he could not simply abandon his congregation to the wolves in the State Church without patiently instructing his members first. The situation became more difficult when Pastor Engquist was indicted on charges that he had been negligent of his duty as a pastor in the state church. Two charges were filed in the state court: 1) In 1972 Pastor Engquist had refused to take up collections to support anti-Scriptural activities such as the recruitment of women pastors and support of violent guerilla organizations, and 2) In a sermon in 1974 Pastor Engquist had publicly condemned the false doctrine of the State Church. While his case was in the courts, a process which lasted more than a year, Pastor Engquist did not feel it was wise to leave his congregation. It was not until the summer of 1976, after he had been found guilty and fined for his "crimes" that Pastor Engquist completely separated from the State Church. ¹⁵

During those long months some of the other members of the LCC would have liked to put more pressure on Pastor Engquist to hasten his exodus, but through it all Dr. Becker urged everyone to be patient. It was a difficult struggle that Pastor Engquist had with his conscience, one with which Dr. Becker was very familiar. The appreciation that Pastor Engquist expresses for Dr. Becker's patient guidance pretty well sums up the feelings that all the brothers and sisters in Sweden had for Dr. Becker. He writes, "We very likely appear to you to be very wobbly and undecided, and we do not understand how you can still work for us when we have not stepped out of the state church. . . May God give us the same kind of patience and concern and wearilessness that you had with us." ¹⁶

Instruction, moral support and encouragement are not all the WELS had to offer the confessionally faithful in Sweden. Since the State Church pastors are paid out of tax money, when those pastors left their posts they stood to lose sizeable incomes. Since the tiny congregations they would be serving could hardly afford to support full-time workers, most of the pastors who left the Church of Sweden were forced to take other part-time jobs. Even part-time work is not enough to enable a man to support his family especially considering that the price of many commodities in Sweden is twice what we are used to paying in the U.S. With these needs in view, the Wisconsin Synod set up the "Sweden Conference and Aid Fund." This fund depends on private gifts and contributions, since it is not a budgetary item, and helps to support several of the called workers at Biblicum and in the LCC. At the present time the

amount of subsidy given to the LCC is about \$1,100 per month. Obviously the Pastors in Sweden operate on pretty tight budgets, but in ten years of correspondence there is not even a hint of a complaint.

Other support that has come to the LCC via the WELS consists of books and literature that is difficult to acquire in Sweden. Old issues of Lehre und Wehre, Luther's Works and Piéper's Dogmatics are just a few of the publications that have reached Sweden through our Synod. In addition we have shared with the LCC the different evangelism methods that our Synod has developed to assist that church with its outreach program. Ten years later it is still a slow and difficult battle to survive and grow in the hostile theological climate in Sweden. And yet, the Lord's work is being done with great enthusiasm and joy. The continued support and encouragement of the WELS are important to the Lutherans in Sweden so that their ministry can expand and be supported. It is not, however, just a one-way street. The company of the LCC has been of great benefit to the WELS as well.

III. Benefits of fellowship with LCC for WELS

A refrain that appears quite regularly in Northwestern Lutheran articles which update the progress in Sweden is, "What an example for us." Indeed, if there were no other benefit for the WELS from its relations with the LCC than the remarkable and inspirational story of the LCC's history, that would be enough to return whatever favors the WELS has done in Sweden. In our country where the concept of a state church is difficult to grasp, we may not really appreciate how difficult it is to break with such a long standing tradition. And yet, what an example our Scandinavian friends have given

us of what it means to boldly confess the truth and then to put that confession into action although it might mean leaving a comfortable job, losing some friends and even breaking family relations. What an example it is for us in the Wisconsin Synod to see that the average yearly contribution of a member of the LCC to the support of his church is \$350.00, compared to \$250.00 for his U.S. counterpart.¹⁷ It is remarkable to see how even though there are crying needs on their own doorstep, the members of the LCC have regularly supported our WELS world missions in Africa and Japan. Almost every one who has attended lectures held in Sweden is struck by the enthusiasm that the young people of the LCC show in studying doctrine and listening to discussions that might not seem very interesting to people of that age group. Again, what an example for us!

At times the true stories that reach us from Sweden sound much like folk-tales. Consider the newspaper account which describes the plight of Lars Engquist and fifty of his members. Having been barred from preaching in his State Church chapel for his "misconduct" in office, the Pastor and his flock showed up for church at the usual time anyway - to find the door locked. A newspaper reporter wrote at the time: "Cast out! Literally cast out of the Church of Sweden. Lars Engquist and fifty of his congregation members held a service out of doors yesterday. Tallro Chapel stood behind the backs of the outcasts locked, quiet and warm. Outside in the raw cold Lars Engquist held his simple service in the cemetery. A boy held a simple wooden cross, women wept. 'I have good news for you, before I send you home again. The congregation owns the

keys to a very wonderful place of worship. The keys of the kingdom of heaven - this no one can lock us out of,' said Lars Engquist in his short sermon. . . 'It is terrible, so terrible.' A woman hid her tears behind her hymnal. . . . The fifty members of St. Peter's Ev. Lutheran congregation in Råneå prayed together, 'I a poor miserable sinner,' and then sang, 'God's pure children.' . . . 'But I must urge you to keep on your caps,' said the Pastor. 'It is cold.' But he himself held his fur cap under his arm during the half-hour long service." 18

And more stories could be told of love for God's Word and the struggle for purity in doctrine and practice, but the benefits of LCC-WELS relations go beyond the anecdotal. History demonstrates that the WELS has come to greater clarity of its own doctrine and practice as a result of its association with Scandinavian Lutheranism. Specifically, we have clarified our doctrine of the Lord's Supper and a confusing fellowship practice has been cleared up.

Difficulties with false teachers concerning the doctrine of the Lord's Supper date back to the very beginning of Biblicum and the founding of the LCC. Pastor Tom Hardt of St. Martin's Congregation in Stockholm, which is a free congregation not in fellowship with any other church, has taught as doctrine that one must be able to identify the moment in the celebration of the Lord's Supper in which the bread and wine are united with the body and blood of Christ. He identifies the moment as taking place when the words of institution are spoken over the elements. On this basis he can speak of the sacrament in the following words: "Every servant of the Word. . .

can step forward to the altar in order to carry away from there their God in the consecrated sacrament. . . ." Again, "No one doubts that Jesus steps down in this most holy sacrament, just as soon as His Word declares, 'This is my body.'" And again, "The pastor. . . approaches the guests at the Supper with God in his hands." ¹⁹

From the beginning the members of Biblicum taught, in agreement with the old Synodical Conference position, that the important thing in the Lord's Supper is not to define the moment in any way, but to believe that the body and blood of Christ are truly present in the sacrament. Clearly it is possible that the sacramental presence begins when the words of institution are read over the elements, but it is also true that Jesus did not only say, "This is my body," but he said, "Take, eat, this is my body." Against Hardt's teaching that a mathematical moment must be fixed, Dr. Erlandsson and Pastor Engquist maintained that neither Scripture nor the confessions attempt to fix the moment. To insist, as Hardt does, that a church which does not teach that the real presence begins with the recitation of the words of institution is a false church is to go beyond the Bible's own teaching, and thus contrary to Dt. 4:2.

The unfortunate up-shot of this controversy is that one of the men who was working as Dr. Erlandsson's assistant at Biblicum was taken in by Hardt's attacks on Biblicum and left the LCC in 1976. Not long after this unhappy turn of events, the controversy reached the WELS. Apparently Pastor Hardt's doctrine found some sympathy within the ranks of the WELS'

sister synod, the ELS. Suddenly it looked as if this controversy could result in trouble between the WELS and ELS. However, cool heads prevailed on both sides, the issue was studied on the basis of the Bible's teaching and an agreement was reached.

Granted, the salutary effects of this unfortunate Sweden-based controversy reached the Wisconsin Synod in a round-about way, and yet it was an issue that needed clarification. It is possible that if someone were to read in the Senior Dogmatics notes used at WLS that the "sacramental union has place only in the moment of eating" (p.90), he may be led to understand that the Wisconsin Synod teaches receptionism. This is certainly a tenable point of view, but such a personal "theologoumena" must not be made into a doctrine of the church over which one must sever fellowship if someone else holds another point of view. The fact is that Scripture does not speak of the how and when of the real presence, but rather teaches with full certainty what is received and what is distributed in the Lord's Supper. It could only benefit the pastors and laity of the WELS to have Dr. Erlandsson's article "The Biblical and Lutheran Doctrine of the Lord's Supper" appear in the 1977 WLQ. And the same may be said of Ingemar Furberg's analysis of Pastor Hardt's view in the same volume of the Quarterly.

The second specific way in which the Wisconsin Synod has benefited from its LCC company is in the matter of fellowship practices with several free Lutheran churches in Europe - especially the Ev. Lutheran Church - Synod of France and

Belgium. When the WELS terminated its fellowship with the LC-MS in 1961, its fellowship with other churches which were also in fellowship with the LC-MS was not affected. Properly it was decided to work out an agreement with each of these churches on an individual basis. The result was that our Synod found itself in several triangular fellowship relationships which were termed "ambiguous."

This confusing status quo continued for a number of years due, no doubt, to the fact that negotiations by correspondence are difficult to carry on, and also to the difficulties posed by the distances each church would have to send its representatives to meet for "in person" negotiations. In 1970 it was reported in BoRaM that the Lutheran Church of France and Belgium had entered into protesting fellowship with the LC-MS. This action was noted and provisions were made to bring about a resolution in this matter.²⁰

At approximately this same time WELS contacts with the faithful in Sweden were being strengthened, and the LCCS was formed. Keeping in mind how large a part the Wisconsin Synod played in teaching the Swedish Lutherans about the full ramifications of the Bible's doctrine of church fellowship, it is no wonder that in a 1975 letter to Dr. Becker the LCCS' Seth Erlandsson is startled to learn that the WELS maintains a triangular fellowship with the Church of France and Belgium. He writes that he learned after lecturing in Copenhagen that both the Saxon Ev. Lutheran Church and the French-Belgian Church consider themselves to be in fellowship with the WELS. "Is it true?" he writes. "We think something must be unclear here and ought to be clarified." And he suggests that the

Wisconsin Synod forgot in the years following the break in 1961 that the "WELS cannot be in fellowship with churches, which in spite of admonition, continue to practice unionism with the LC-MS."²¹

Even granting that it takes time to work "these things" out, as contact man for the CICR with Sweden, Dr. Becker must have been in a rather uncomfortable position. So perhaps it is not just coincidence that in 1979 Dr. Becker, then a member of the CICR, can write to Dr. Erlandsson and assure him that the CICR is concentrating on clarifying all unclear lines of fellowship. This plan was put into resolution form in the 1979 BoRaM where the CICR is encouraged to "resolve the ambiguous relationship between the WELS and the ELC of France and Belgium"(p.126). Two years later the Synod in convention resolved that it could no longer bear the burden with the French and Belgian Church, and terminated the confusing triangular fellowship that had existed.²² Of course, this whole sequence of events may have been simple coincidence, certainly the wheels were rolling before Dr. Erlandsson asked Dr. Becker to put his fears to rest, but it is beyond question that our fellowship practice was "ambiguous" to those in the LCC - and clarification was badly needed.

The LCC now provides the WELS with a vital link to other confessional churches which exist behind the Iron Curtain. It has been difficult in the past to get letters and packages into East Germany, to the members of the Lutheran Free Church in that country, with which the Wisconsin Synod is attempting to strengthen ties. Since communication and travel between Sweden and the DDR is substantially easier than between the

US and the DDR, the LCC has provided a valuable channel through which the WELS can also encourage and strengthen the confessional Lutherans in East Germany. In this way also, the Wisconsin Synod has benefited from the LCC's company.

Conclusion

It is almost 10 years ago that the WELS, in its 125th anniversary convention resolved to declare full fellowship with the Lutheran Confessional Church. In the decade since Pres. Oscar Naumann extended to Dr. Seth Erlandsson the hand of fellowship as a symbolic expression of the unity which exists between the WELS and the LCC, each church body has been blessed by the other's company. The brothers and sisters in Scandinavia are quick to acknowledge the encouragement and support that the Wisconsin Synod has offered over the years as they continue to battle for biblical faith in a hostile society. And for us in the WELS, what a joy and what an example it is for us to see the devotion and dedication to the Word of God that the brave confessors in the LCC demonstrate. May the Lord of the Church enable the faithful in Scandinavia to stand firm against the heavy pressure that seeks to turn them away from the orthodox course on which they have embarked, and may he open our hearts to stand by them in their courageous struggle.

Footnotes

1. Dr. Seth Erlandsson, No Other Gospel, "The Formula of Concord in the History of Swedish Lutheranism" (Northwestern Publishing House, Milwaukee, Wis. 1980) pp. 67-101.
2. Northwestern Lutheran, December 3, 1972. p. 401.
3. Northwestern Lutheran, May 11, 1980. p. 155.
4. Sten Johansson, First Annual Report--LBKS (LCC) 1975. pp. 2,3.
5. Seth Erlandsson and Sten Johansson, Biblicum's Battle For Biblical Faith, 1974. p. 7.
6. Sten Johansson, pp. 4,5.
7. Seth Erlandsson and Sten Johansson, p. 66.
8. Ibid., p.25.
9. Seth Erlandsson and Sten Johansson, Appeal, circulated in Sweden in 1974.
10. Sten Johansson, pp. 8-13.
11. Kjerstin Jonsson, History of a Mouse (or two)--or--A True and False Writing of History.
12. Seth Erlandsson and Sten Johansson, Biblicum's Battle For Biblical Faith, p. 23.
13. Ibid., p. 23.
14. The Board of Biblicum, A Statement, 1976, p. 4.
15. Northwestern Lutheran, March 21, 1976. p. 86.
16. Letter from Lars Engquist dated 10/29/75.
17. Dr. Becker and Pastor T. Sauer, Report to the Interim Committee on the Visit to Sweden. 1980. p. 4. WELS statistic is from the Statistical Report of the WELS, 1980. p. 4.
18. Translation of a Swedish newspaper article by Dr. Becker.
19. Excerpts from Sermons by Tom Hardt, translated by Dr. Becker, 10/73.
20. Report to Nine Districts--1970. p.74.
21. Letter from Seth Erlandsson dated 11/13/75.
22. Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly, Vol. 78, No. 4, 1981. pp. 322,323.

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