

A Presentation of the Lutheran Churches of the Reformation

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Gary Kraklow
Church History
Prof. Fredrich
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When one starts a paper on another church body, one has a tendency to begin with certain ideal goals; such as being able to clearly define the differences in doctrine between church bodies, and to try to harmonize these differences through an evangelical examination and application of Scripture. If this harmonization was indeed accomplished by the writing of this paper a great service would have been performed. However, if this goal was possible for this writer to achieve, then the parties presently in dispute would certainly have solved their own disagreements by now. Therefore this will not be a comprehensive doctrinal thesis on the LCR and its relations with the WELS, but will be a presentation about the LCR. That a certain amount of this presentation will center around doctrinal matters is taken for granted, but it will not be the central focus of this paper.

The official beginnings of the Lutheran Churches of the Reformation were in 1964, but for a proper presentation of the background of the LCR one should begin in 1961. It was in 1961 that an unofficial conference was formed within the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod. This unofficial conference went by the name: State of the Church Conference. This unofficial conference began in May of '61:

On May 15 and 16 well over 400 pastors, teachers, and laymen of the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod from more than thirty states, the Phillipines, and Japan met in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, in order to discuss some of the issues which are disturbing to the Lutheran Church.¹

They decided to put their resolutions in writing through issuance of The Faithful Word. "Although The Faithful Word is a new periodical, it is our

¹"Introduction," The Faithful Word, (from now on: TFW), Vol. I, No. 1, 1961, p. 4.

desire to identify it with the Scriptural position of Lehre und Wehre, the official theological journal of the Missouri Synod from 1854-1930."² The members of the State of the Church Conference were alarmed at the liberalism within the LC-MS and wanted to do something to save their beloved synod:

The Book of Documentation distributed at the State of the Church Conference in Milwaukee presents irrefutable documentary evidence that crass theological liberalism is now taught and tolerated in the Missouri Synod. The Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod and the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (Norwegian) have suspended fellowship with the Missouri Synod because of the situation. Some changes in synodical membership have already occurred because of it. It remains to be seen whether this movement is the beginning of the realignment within Lutheranism which many have predicted for some time. Some have urged that all old Missourians should now join other synods. However, Missouri missions, educational and charitable institutions, and churches were founded and supported by those who believed and taught without reservation that every word of Scripture is God's revealed and inerrant Word which is to be faithfully followed in doctrine and practice. The participants in the State of the Church Conference in Milwaukee gave indication of their unwillingness to forfeit them without a spirited struggle.³

The "spirited struggle" took place at Cleveland, Ohio, at the synod convention of LC-MS. When one reads the "Cleveland Convention Report" contained in Vol. I, No. 4 of TFW, one cannot but feel for those who fought the conservative battle against the liberal leaders of the Missouri Synod. One likes to be fair in one's evaluation of an event, especially when one was not present and has not heard both sides, but with all due respect the Cleveland convention was a lamentable kangaroo court. As one man summarized,

Unfortunately it is true that just before other denominations were about to be completely taken over by a liberal element all sorts of conservative resolutions were adopted reaffirming the historic position of that denomination. Conservatives failed to realize that such resolutions meant little or nothing to the liberals. As long as the church failed to take definite disciplinary action against those who advanced the liberal views of the higher-critics, the liberals registered little protest against conservative resolutions. As our report indicates, the convention failed to take any definite action in almost every case where the retraction of specific false doctrine or practice had been requested.⁴

²Ibid., p. 4.

³Ibid., p. 5.

⁴"Cleveland Convention Report," TFW, Vol. I, No. 4, 1963, p. 27.

The liberals controlled the key positions and maintained them against all who tried to bring their beloved synod back to its orthodox teachings. We hear no more about the State of the Church movement from TFW, until TFW becomes the voice of the LCR.

The next edition of TFW begins: "Presenting The Lutheran Churches of the Reformation." They claim:

The formation of the Lutheran Churches of the Reformation is a sequel to the State of the Church movement. That movement documented the historical truth of the frequent need for reform, for return to the Scriptures, on the part of church bodies; that "big" bodies cannot long endure prosperity. In short, the Lutheran Churches of the Reformation is an attempt to provide service to a group of congregations for the avowed purpose of promoting doctrinal unity, theological and pedagogical training, within the framework of congregational independence.⁵

We don't know what the State of the Church Conference would say to the LCR claim of being their sequel; for just by numbers alone, we note that the nine congregations and seven pastors which began the LCR could not have constituted the whole or even the majority of the conference. That the members of the LCR were members of the conference there is no doubt, but here a part should not be considered the whole.

The LCR was created by congregation resolutions, the organizational meeting of which, was held in Chicago, Illinois, at Emmaus Lutheran Church, April 28 - 29, 1964. The LCR stresses the fact that they are a federation, not a synod. In his opening address to the first annual convention of the LCR, Administrator Rev. MacKenzie stated in no uncertain terms:

Let us get it straight! In no sense are we a synod in the contemporary sense: we are not involved in the life and environment of our individual congregations we are not concerned with what each congregation does to enhance, promote, develop its fellowship within its own confines.⁶

It is interesting to note the exact wording of their presentation of their

⁵"Presenting the Lutheran Churches of the Reformation," TFW, Vol. 2, No. 1, 1964, p. 3.

⁶Rev. Cameron MacKenzie, "Administrator's Report," TFW, Vol. 2, No. 2, 1965, p. 7.

federation, because of the switch in emphasis as the years proceed:

The structural form is not that of a synod but a federation. The central organization holds no property rights in respect to the individual congregations; no resolution is binding upon a congregation unless that organization so resolves; this is a service organization to assist pastors, teachers, congregations in developing a sense of fellowship, consistency in purity of doctrine and practice. It is an attempt in a day of utter confusion to witness to the overwhelming truth of the infallible Scriptures.⁷

As far as confessional standards are concerned, the LCR holds to the Holy Scriptures as "the very Word of God, His infallible revelation given by inspiration of the Holy Spirit."⁸ They also hold the the Book of Concord of 1580 and "A Brief Statement" of 1932. Doctrinally speaking the LCR beginning was quite sound. As far as the confessional standards they adopted, they practiced what they preached. They were and are dead set against the liberal teachings and practices of the LC-MS. They have some interesting ways of expressing their points with emphasis; i.e., an article by Pastor Faulstick:

If Dr. Martin Luther were alive today and living in America, he would not be the president of any of the major Lutheran bodies; but rather he would be the administrator of the free federation of Lutheran Churches, known as, THE LUTHERAN CHURCHES OF THE REFORMATION...alas, the American Lutheran Church, the Lutheran Church in America, and the Missouri Synod, instead of following the faith of Luther would muzzle and ignore him in favor of the deep voiced, "say nothing" preaching, popularized by Dr. Oswald Hoffman, still breathless from his plane trips to the Vatican and the World Council of Churches headquarters.⁹

Faulstick then reaffirms Luther's teachings concerning the revelation of God in Holy Scripture, the literal factuality of the Bible, the need to separate oneself from heresy, to avoid unity at the expense of the truth, the pope as the Anti-Christ, and the emphasis on justification by faith alone.

The one doctrine that causes the LCR problems, on the one hand, in their relations with the WELS, and on the other hand, in squaring doctrine with practice, is their teachings on the Church and Ministry. Let us look first then at the relations between the LCR and the WELS, and secondly the problems

⁷"Presenting the Lutheran Churches of the Reformation," op. cit., p. 4.

⁸Ibid., p. 5.

⁹Rev. Faulstick, "If Martin Luther, the Great Reformer, were Alive Today," TFW, Vol. 4, No. 3, 1967, p. 4.

the LCR itself had when it tried to put its own teachings into practice.

The first meeting between the WELS and the LCR took place in 1966, with Schmidt, Ziegler, and Hoenecke representing the WELS and MacKenzie, Romoser, and Miller representing the LCR. After the WELS commission examined the constitution and by-laws of the LCR agreement was reached on the Confessional Standards. The Brief Statement was then discussed paragraph by paragraph. The discussion revolved around the concept of the local congregation and the ministry. To detail this discussion in all its phases would not be an efficient use of time and space; and, as stated at the beginning of this paper, would not accomplish the purpose of this paper. Therefore we shall simply state the positions of each.

According to the LCR an exegesis of ekkleesia as it is used in the New Testament warranted the interpretation that the local congregation and only the local congregation is divinely instituted by God, and all other forms of visible gatherings of Christians are human institutions, and as such, have no authority in regard to the divinely instituted local congregation. As far as the WELS position is concerned the LCR states that the WELS does not take its doctrine from clear passages of Scripture but uses logical deduction "from the etymology and meaning of ekkleesia."¹⁰ It also says Wisconsin is taking a neo-Wisconsin position, not following its earlier views as expounded by Hoenecke, the Synodical Conference and an SC essay of 1908. They also point out the Wisconsin and Missouri differences, showing that the two bodies hardly ever agreed on the teaching of Church and Ministry, yet we remained in fellowship. The doctrine of Church and Ministry ^{make up} the majority of the articles in TFW as their own special bibliography illustrates:

Articles on Church and Ministry In Earlier Issues of This Journal.

II (1965), 2, p. 30 A. L. Graebner, "The Church"
 III (1966), 1, p. 5 A. L. Graebner, "The Ministry"

¹⁰Neil Hilton, "Church and Ministry," TFW, Vol. 6, No. 2, 1969, p. 28.

- III (1966), 2, p. 7 A. Hoenecke, "The Teaching Ministry"
 V (1968), 3, p. 17 X N. N. Hilton, "Church and Ministry" --I
 VI (1969), 1, p. 3 X E. W. Koehler, "Notes on Church and Ministry"
 VI (1969), 2, p. 23 N. N. Hilton, "Church and Ministry" --II
 VII (1970), 1, p. 23 H. W. R. "Basic Documents in the Church and Ministry
 Discussions" --I
 VII (1970), 2, p. 10 H. W. R. "Basic Documents" --II
 F. Pieper "Church Government" --I
 VII (1970), 3-4, p. 30 H. W. Romoser, "Church and Ministry"
 VIII (1971), 1, p. 3 F. Pieper, "Church Government" --II
 VIII (1971), 2, p. 3 F. Pieper, "Our Position in Doctrine and Practise"
 (esp. 18ff)

See Also

- III (1966), 3, p. 23 W. H. McLaughlin, "Doctrine, the Queen of Theology"
 IV (1967), 1, p. 4 K. K. Miller, "The Principles of Hermeneutics"
 VIII (1971), 4, p. 3 W. C. Kitzerow, "The Apology"
 III (1966), 2, p. 28 "Correction"¹¹

That Wisconsin and Missouri did not always see eye to eye on the teaching and practice of Church and Ministry is common knowledge. Even FAL was aware of the situation prior to joining in fellowship with the WELS:

Most everyone knows that some controversy on this matter has always existed between the Wisconsin and Missouri Synods, though the fathers never considered that divisive of church fellowship or a hindrance to the formation and continuance of the now deceased Synodical Conference.¹²

In fact there were times in the histories of the Wisconsin and Missouri Synods when Missouri taught the supremacy of the local congregation over the synod, yet lived as though the synod was over the local congregation. In the same way, Wisconsin taught synod over the local congregation and practiced the rugged individualism of the local congregation. To present the WELS teaching of Church and Ministry it is easiest to quote a few paragraphs from the "Doctrinal Statements of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, 1970:"

A. The Church is the communion of saints, the entire number of those whom the Holy Spirit has brought to faith in Christ as their Savior and whom through this gracious gift of a common faith He has most intimately joined together to form one "congregation" (A.C. VII, VIII), one body, one blessed fellowship.

4. The specific forms in which believers group themselves together

¹¹"Articles on Church and Ministry in Earlier Issues of This Journal," TFW, Vol. 9, No. 2, 1972, p. 22.

¹²"Toward Agreement Among Authentic Lutherans on the Doctrine of the Church and Ministry," Sola Scriptura, Vol. II, No. 3, 1971, p. 14.

for the fellowship and work of the Church, the specific forms in which they arrange for the use of the means of grace in public worship, the specific forms in which they establish the public ministry, have not been prescribed by the Lord to His New Testament Church.

c. In essence the various groupings...all lie on the same plane.

Antithesis: We hold it to be untenable to say that the local congregation is specifically instituted by God in contrast to other groupings of believers in Jesus' name; that the public ministry of the keys has been given exclusively to the local congregations.

A. Christ instituted one office in His Church, the ministry of the Gospel.

6. There is, however, no direct word of institution for any particular form of the public ministry.

Antithesis: We hold it to be untenable to say that the pastorate of the local congregation (Pfarramt) as a specific form of the public ministry is specifically instituted by the Lord in contrast to other forms of public ministry.¹³

In teaching the LCR and WELS are not in agreement concerning the doctrine of Church and Ministry; in fact, for the most part, they are diametrically opposed. It is interesting to notice then, the methods used by the LCR in order for their federation to function, are similar to the means employed by the WELS. The LCR, in effect, practices what the WELS preaches.

At the outset of the LCR they were able to act according to their teachings, that the local congregation was the and the only divine institution, and the federation was a nice human means to express love in fellowship. But as they tried to do the things that needed more cooperation among the separate congregations, like supply money for a seminary and to support mission congregations, the federation came to possess more power and began to advise (tell) the congregations what they needed to do.

In fact, it was the issue of money that started the federation, over the supposedly autonomous local congregations, to begin to advise in a coercive way (the exact practice that they had declared themselves to be against).

¹³"Theses on the Church and Ministry," Doctrinal Statements of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, 1970, p. 4-11.

It was subtle at first:

We may not overlook the fact that, as far as we have been able to ascertain, some congregations have contributed nothing for the Gospel work outside of their own midst. Can this be justified? Does not one in such a congregation perceive a need to share the Gospel beyond the congregational boundaries?¹⁴

As time went on, the advice was a little more judgmental(?):

It may be well to mention that some member LCR congregations have given nothing to either the seminary or operational fund of the LCR. This is between them and the Almighty! We will not sit in judgment.¹⁵

Some ideals concerning their control over doctrine were re-shaped by the practical aspect of what they were trying to accomplish. They had not wanted a seminary apart from a local congregation at the outset because a member of the faculty would not be doctrinally responsible to any local congregation. This they found was not very practical, and yet they knew it was against their previous desires:

Another additional thought we must consider is that a resident professor will be a man who is not a pastor of a congregation; nor will students be engaged in the theological life of the parish, nor have the opportunity to utilize one's training in the activities of the parish! This is a departure from what we first proposed and offered as a possible way to prevent untimely erosion of doctrine, to forestall an ecclesiastical hierarchy of professors not answerable to a congregation. Nevertheless, it is for you to recommend to our congregations what their action ought to be.¹⁶

The LCR itself noted the changes within its own way of looking at things. When the LCR began in 1964, the term "synod" was a revolting idea. In 1973, we note a paragraph of the administrator in his address to the LCR convention:

Recent years have sometimes brought to ear the vigorous statement, "We aren't a synod; we don't want to be a synod." That has a fine ringing, substantial sound; but a moment's consideration of what "synod" means by lexicographical definition and common usage exposes the fact that, to put it mildly, that slogan offers a minimum of meaning. A synod is "a coming together for mutual consultation and work; an

¹⁴"Report of the Commission on Missions," TFW, Vol. 6, No. 2, 1969, p. 11.

¹⁵"Report of the Finance Commission," TFW, Vol. 8, No. 3, 1971, p. 18.

¹⁶"Report of the Commission on Education," TFW, Vol. 6, No. 2, 1969, p. 15.

ecclesiastical council, stated or special, local or general; any deliberative assembly." We are such a synod. The Missouri Synod in the days of its glorious orthodoxy was a blessed synod. What we need always do is to distinguish between good synods and bad synods, not attempt to create novel and peculiar definitions ala Humpty Dumpty's "When I use a word, it means just what I choose it to mean--neither more nor less."¹⁷

In some areas of doctrine and practice, the question of whether or not a change took place, is not quite as clear, since the original wording can be looked upon in two different ways. If confronted with a supposed change, they can simply say that their present practice is indeed in keeping with the original teaching. Such is the case of the federation being able to apply church discipline to its member congregations. The question was asked of the LCR: "Does the LCR, as a free federation, have any way of maintaining its doctrines and principles of practice in its member congregations?"¹⁸ In reply they refer to their constitution, where the third purpose of the LCR is "to aid and counsel congregations, pastors, and teachers associated or affiliated with this organization and to exercise supervision over doctrine and practice of such pastors and teachers."¹⁹ In addition, in Article XI of the constitution, entitled, "Relation to Member Congregations," they say, "In its relation to member congregations this organization shall be advisory only and without coercive power."²⁰ We also see how these teachings are to be practiced:

If by "federation" some suppose that the LCR has no right delegated to it by the Constitution to receive complaints of abuses in doctrine and practice, and to offer to discuss these charges with the member-congregation involved, then what do the fine-sounding sentences about "supervision of doctrine and practice" in our Constitution mean? In a school how can the supervising teacher supervise the teaching if he may not enter the classroom nor discuss alleged incompetency with the teacher? As Dr. Walther told the Iowa District in 1879, and I suggest you examine his logic carefully, as I trust you have done with mine, "Thus it is also in a church. As soon as an association to deal with ecclesiastical affairs comes into being, a system of operation

¹⁷"Report of the Administrator," TFW, Vol. 10, No. 3-4, 1973, p. 10.

¹⁸Wallace McLaughlin, "What is LCR? A Brief Digest in Questions and Answers," TFW, Vol. 10, No. 2, 1973, p. 15.

¹⁹"Constitution," TFW, Vol. 2, No. 1, 1964, p. 5.

²⁰Ibid., p. 7.

must be established. So, one who joins a synod knows in advance: I am now becoming a member of an organization which will, and is charged to, deal with church affairs; I am joining an organization which functions according to definite regulations; for without working rules it would not be possible for it to exist." Note well these last two clauses.²¹

These changes and discrepancies have caused problems within the LCR. This can be easily seen from its membership lists and by its present condition.

The turnover within the LCR has been tremendous--especially when one considers the size of the LCR. The largest the LCR ever became was in 1973, when it included 25 member congregations, 12 independent congregations in fellowship with the LCR, and a grand total of 28 on the clergy roster. From 1964 until the present, over 40 congregations have joined and left the LCR. In 1964, there were 9 congregations and 7 pastors. As of 1979, there were 12 member congregations, 1 independent in fellowship, and a total of 9 pastors. Of the original 9 congregations, 3 are still in the LCR: Emmaus in Chicago; Good Shepherd in Minneapolis; and St. Paul's in Moose Lake, served by the Minneapolis congregation. Of the original pastors, two are still serving the LCR: Erick Erickson, and Reimar Frick. While some, two or three of the pastors did retire, most of the original leaders quit or were asked to leave.

The present condition of the LCR is marked by and is the result of inner turmoil. This too is noted and lamented by those within the LCR:

As many know, another LCR convention is upon us and with what we know here in Minnesota, it is questionable as to what the prospects for a productive, constructive session are. Clearly, it is high time that a halt is called to these internecine arguments; for, it seems many are so active and intent upon making their point that they have lost sight of the fact that the most certain loser is the LCR. Rather, it would be better that everyone attending this next convention make themselves intent upon heeding the words of Peter heard not too many Sundays ago: (I Pt 2:11-10).²²

²¹Carl Rusch, "Scriptural Church Polity," TFW, Vol. 10, No. 3-4, 1973, p. 33.

²²G. Smith, "Viewpoint," TFW, Vol. 14, No. 2, 1977, p. 4.

The Administrator of the LCR, Pastor Paul Koch, in his address to the convention, phrased the situation with a bit more candor:

It seems that the history of the LCR has been , but for (very) brief periods, anything but "calm, quiet, and peaceful." And even during those brief periods, the stage was being set for the next storm, the noise, and the warfare.

We could stop to survey the battlefield and count the casualties. But when all is said and done, we must finally look at ourselves and try to see what makes the LCR tend to self-destruct. For that is exactly the direction we are headed--unless the trend is reversed, and reversed immediately. One is even tempted to ask if we have not already passed the point of no return.

These are not words of pessimism. These are words of realism. A church body cannot continue to function as a divided house indefinitely. And the LCR is divided. As I see it, the LCR is divided in terms both of truth and love, the two indispensable areas of Christian belief and practice....

No one loves the truth more than I. In an age when truth is cheap and love is shallow, it is difficult to stand firmly for the practice of either. I emphasize the word practice because if we are not willing to practice that for which we claim to stand, then we cannot but continue to be a divided house which can do nothing but crumble into dust. To borrow a question from a fellow lover of the truth, I wish to ask the same: "When will LCR stand for Love, Cooperation and Respect?" I do not mean (and he did not mean) love, cooperation and respect at the expense of truth, but on the basis of truth.²³

His last sentence says a lot about his and their problem. They are too concerned about orthodoxy. To desire the true doctrines of Holy Scripture is a goal to be instilled in all men. But to have this fear that every time one opens ones mouth or puts something down on paper, everyone else is going to search it and imagine it to contain false doctrine, is a terrible, dévisive thing indeed. It calls to mind Jesus' use of parables when the Pharisees were around.

²³"Administrator's Report," TFW, Vol. 14, No. 4, 1977, p. 7.

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WISCONSIN EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN SYNOD
1500 W. WISCONSIN AVENUE
MILWAUKEE, WISCONSIN 53233