

-- The Trumpet with the Certain Sound --

"An Analysis of the Lutheran Churches of the Reformation (LCR)

Viewed from its Historical and Doctrinal Roots"

by

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"An Analysis of the Lutheran Churches of the Reformation (LCR)  
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"If the trumpet gives an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle?" (1 Cor 14:8). That this passage was used to summarize the task of The Faithful Word, a journal of the State of the Church movement within the Missouri Synod and later the theological journal of the LCR itself, can be considered a sort of ironic prophecy. It was prophetic in the sense that the LCR hoped to issue that clear, "certain" sound to other conservative Lutherans as an oasis of orthodoxy in a desert of heretical theologies. It was ironic in the sense that the "certain" sound which the LCR issued proved almost self-destructive to its organization and divisive of the fellowship if had enjoyed with fellow conservative Lutherans in the old Synodical Conference, particularly the WELS. It will be the purpose of this paper to study the historical and doctrinal precedents which gave rise to the LCR and influenced its subsequent history, particularly its relationship with the Wisconsin Synod.

I

A study of the historical roots of the LCR is largely the story of three men: P.E. Kretzmann, W.H. McLaughlin and Cameron A. MacKenzie. Such a study will also begin with the Orthodox Lutheran Conference, really a predecessor of the LCR by almost 15 years. Paul E. Kretzmann, author of the famous Popular Commentary of the Bible and professor at Concordia Seminary at St. Louis (1924-46), was one of the members of the St. Louis Study Club which protested against Missouri's Common Confession (1950) with the ALC. This club arranged for a convention of like-minded orthodox members of LCMS and organized the Orthodox Lutheran Conference on September 25-26, 1951 at Okabena, Minnesota.<sup>1</sup> P.E. Kretzmann was elected vice-president of the

<sup>1</sup> "Convention History," The Orthodox Lutheran (Vol 1, No1). November, 1951. p. 3

conference. Wallace H. McLaughlin was elected president. McLaughlin was a former ULC pastor who joined the Missouri Synod and had served as one of its missionaries to China, chiefly as a professor at its seminary in Hankow. McLaughlin was ousted from his congregation in Pittsburgh when it voted to remain in the Missouri Synod after he had resigned from synod. Thus McLaughlin and Kretzmann became the leading spokesmen for the OLC and became the two professors of the Orthodox Lutheran Seminary which opened in Minneapolis in 1952.

Concerning the relationship of the Orthodox Lutheran Conference with the other members of the Synodical Conference, one of the essayists at the opening convention stated:

On these issues we find the Wisconsin and Norwegian Synods contending on our side for the truth and against error. These brethren have given us constant comfort and courage by their testimony against the Common Confession. We are of one mind with them, and therefore work with them.<sup>2</sup>

Although this presented a problem for the Wisconsin Synod, which at that time was still in fellowship with Missouri, nevertheless most Wisconsin men sympathized with the OLC as is evidenced by Professor Reim's remarks in the Theological Quarterly:

For while formal recognition of the new group must indeed be held in abeyance for the time being, yet we must recognize even now that the reasons for which this little group has made its grave decision and taken its difficult stand are the very ones on which we have placed ourselves on record... It must be clear, therefore, that we cannot disavow these brethren without disavowing our own innermost convictions.<sup>3</sup>

That the OLC wished also to continue in fellowship with Wisconsin was evidenced by one of the resolutions at their first convention in 1951:

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 11

<sup>3</sup> E. Reim, "The Orthodox Lutheran Conference," Theological Quarterly (Vol 49, 1952). Thiensville, Wisconsin. p. 59

3. That we consider this assent to be expressive of the continued unity of doctrine and practice between our Orthodox Lutheran Conference and the afore-mentioned Norwegian and Wisconsin Synods in the Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America.<sup>4</sup>

However, when the fellowship overture was not understood as such by Wisconsin and thus unheeded for two years, and when Wisconsin failed to break fellowship with the Missouri Synod at its 1953 convention, the OLC withdrew its fellowship offer.<sup>5</sup>

That the Orthodox Lutheran Conference clearly was a forerunner of the later LCR in its organizational setup is seen from its article on the polity of the conference:

The ORTHODOX LUTHERAN CONFERENCE is committed to a strictly congregational polity, so that the organization, in all its meetings and activities, is strictly a service body, having disciplinary jurisdiction only over its officers. With respect to the individual congregation's right of self-government it is only an advisory body. According to Scriptural precept and example every congregation is independent, sovereign, autonomous with respect to all its affairs.<sup>6</sup>

Partly as a result of the unclear fellowship situation with Wisconsin and partly as a result of the strictly congregational polity of the conference, the OLC split in 1956 over the question whether Wisconsin should be branded "heterodox" like Missouri. Thus between March and December, 1956 two opposing groups published The Orthodox Lutheran. One group was led by McLaughlin and Kretzmann in Minneapolis, the other by Bloedel in Oregon together with Mehlburg in Milwaukee. The second group eventually formed the

<sup>4</sup> From a letter to President Naumann from President McLaughlin dated October 24, 1953.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. "Fellowship Overture Withdrawn," The Orthodox Lutheran (Vol 2, No 14) December, 1953. Minneapolis, Minnesota. p. 231

<sup>6</sup> "Article VI -- The Polity of the Conference," Proceedings of the 2nd Annual Convention of the Orthodox Lutheran Conference. August 22-25, 1952. Minneapolis, Minnesota. pp. 82-83

Concordia Lutheran Conference.<sup>7</sup>

During the years between 1951 and 1961 the Orthodox Lutheran Conference kept in touch with the Wisconsin men on the issues, particularly fellowship. After the OLC Board of Directors had met with the Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary faculty, President McLaughlin sounded this note of optimism in a letter to President Brenner:

In this very frank and fraternal, though informal meeting, however, our discussion of the Church-Ministry difficulty, open and unreserved as it was, did not bring to light any departure from the full truth of God's Word on either side. It did show our agreement in repudiating the theoretically congregational but actually hierarchical polity now being practised by the Missouri Synod, and in rejecting any idea of a Synod as a 'super-church,' a rejection very emphatically and repeatedly voiced by members of the learned Faculty, and very heartily appreciated by the members of our Board.<sup>8</sup>

During these years McLaughlin and Kretzmann also wrote frequently on "the Church-Ministry difficulty" and the fellowship situation between Wisconsin and Missouri through their theological journals, The Orthodox Lutheran and The Orthodox Lutheran Theologian. In addition, by invitations to free conferences they sought to establish fellowship ties to like-minded conservative Lutherans. In a letter addressed to 15 congregations and their pastors who had left either the Missouri or Wisconsin Synods and were maintaining an independent status, the OLC's Committee on Church Fellowship wrote:

We feel confident that you are likewise maintaining true Biblical orthodoxy (unless you have adopted the Wauwatosa-John Meyer position on the Church-Ministry question which we would be very happy to discuss with you).<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Compare signers of "Our Declaration" (vs. Minneapolis group) in The Orthodox Lutheran (Vol V, pp 18,100) with Officers of the Concordia Lutheran Conference in The Concordia Lutheran (Vol 1, p. 18). Also in the same issue see the Statement of Purpose which says, "...the congregations which form our Conference comprise the true visible church on earth..."

<sup>8</sup> From a letter to President Brenner from President McLaughlin dated April 30, 1952.

<sup>9</sup> "A Fellowship Approach," The Orthodox Lutheran (Vol 8) p. 59 April, 1959

A footnote at the end of the letter explained that the name "Wauwatosa-John Meyer position" referred to the old church-ministry question which had remained unsettled between two opposing camps in the Synodical Conference. It added that this was not a prejudgment or accusation of anyone's position on the church-ministry question, but was rather "...a friendly invitation to addressees to discuss particularly this issue with us in order to determine whether they and we would need to iron out any difficulties in this area."<sup>10</sup>

That opportunity was provided when the Doctrinal Committee of the Wisconsin Synod published reports of the Overseas Committee of the Synodical Conference in the Northwestern Lutheran. At the end of 1961 President O.G. Schupmann wrote to President Naumann:

We have been studying... in particular the report on the Church-Ministry doctrines. There we find with great joy and approval, the most complete presentation on that controversial subject we have seen in your literature... What hinders our return to fellowship, and/or our affiliation with your Synod, or membership if advantageous?<sup>11</sup>

Thus after Wisconsin's Commission on Doctrinal Matters met with the remaining OLC men, the Northwestern Lutheran in May of 1962 contained the following announcement:

These pastors stated that with expected agreement also on the part of their congregations it is their intention to dissolve the Orthodox Lutheran Conference and to apply individually as pastors and congregations for membership in the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod.<sup>12</sup>

The pastors who joined the WELS were O.G. Schupmann, A.M. Schupmann, A.W. Schupmann and Harold Bittorf.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 60

<sup>11</sup> From a letter to President Naumann from President O.G. Schupmann dated December 5, 1961.

<sup>12</sup> Carl Lawrenz, Northwestern Lutheran (Vol 49, No 9). May 6, 1962. p. 142

By this time, however, both McLaughlin and Kretzmann had withdrawn from the OLC, apparently due to some personal offense.<sup>13</sup> In a letter to President Naumann in 1962, P.E. Kretzmann wrote from Minneapolis: "Yet we are getting along very nicely in our little dissident group."<sup>14</sup> Here McLaughlin and Kretzmann were united in a free conference of several congregations which published their own theological journal, The Conservative Lutheran Defender. Its statement of policy declared it to be

...the publication of a group of old-style Lutherans, who are banded together to defend our marvelous Lutheran heritage against all attacks from outside and all aberrations in teaching and practices within the churches bearing the Lutheran name.<sup>15</sup>

It soon became clear to this group that one of the doctrinal "aberrations" within the Lutheran Church was the Wisconsin position on church and ministry. The difference first arose when discussions were held with CLC men at a free conference on May 2-3, 1961. In his critique of the CLC "Theses on the Relation of Synod and Local Congregation to the Holy Christian Church" of the previous year, McLaughlin had written:

There is evidently no room in the synodical set-up of the Church of the Lutheran Confession for congregations which cherish their independence while realizing their interdependence in fellowship with other congregations of the same orthodox faith. Upon the maintenance of this principle we have insisted and shall certainly continue to insist in any association of churches of which our congregations would desire to be a part.<sup>16</sup>

Consequently McLaughlin reported on the free conference with the CLC men a few months later: "No express agreement was reached on any point of the CLC

<sup>13</sup> It is interesting to note here that W.H. McLaughlin initialed the article on the Orthodox Lutheran Conference in the Lutheran Cyclopedia which also relates its dissolution.

<sup>14</sup> From a letter to President Naumann from P.E. Kretzmann dated September 17, 1962.

<sup>15</sup> Conservative Lutheran Defender (Vol 3, No 2). February, 1962. p. 20

<sup>16</sup> Wallace H. McLaughlin, "Critique of the Church of the Lutheran Confession," p. 8



Theses on Church and Ministry, except the first one on the Church, dealing with the 'one holy Christian Church, the communion of saints'..."<sup>17</sup>

From this time on, both Kretzmann and McLaughlin wrote repeatedly and voluminously in the Defender on the subject of church and ministry. Commenting on Wisconsin's statement on church and ministry drawn up by its Commission on Doctrinal matters and published in the Northwestern Lutheran in 1962, Kretzmann pointed out that

...its present treatment of Church and Ministry is not encumbered by any attempt to reach agreement with the position of C.F.W. Walther and Franz Pieper, for which the representatives of Missouri were accustomed to contend in intersynodical dealing on the matter. Those responsible for this Conservative Lutheran Defender hold the settled conviction that the position of Walther and Pieper is thoroughly Scriptural, and hold that the divergences from this position in the Wisconsin Commission's statement are without Scriptural foundation.<sup>18</sup>

Kretzmann especially objected to Wisconsin's antithesis which held it to be untenable to say that the local congregation is specifically instituted by God in contrast to other groupings of believers:

What is here stated as Antithesis, and held to be untenable by Wisconsin's Commission on Doctrinal Matters, is, though we would hardly choose to express it in exactly these terms, in substance what we hold to be correct, and believe that we have proved to be Scriptural doctrine.<sup>19</sup>

Unable to agree with Wisconsin's view of congregation and synod, the free conference headed by McLaughlin and Kretzmann remained without any organizational affiliation until 1964. Then, at the organizational meeting of the LCR on April 28 and 29, two of the three congregations joined the new federation. McLaughlin reported that these congregations were happy to join "...a fellowship to which they can conscientiously and wholeheartedly adhere without forfeiting any of their Scriptural rights or any of their property

<sup>17</sup> Conservative Lutheran Defender (Vol 2, No 7). July, 1961. p. 65

<sup>18</sup> Conservative Lutheran Defender (Vol 3, No 6). June, 1962, p. 80

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 91

rights, thus remaining fully self-governing congregations under God."<sup>20</sup> Later the remaining congregation in Moose Lake, Minnesota also joined the LCR. After McLaughlin was received as a clergy member and Kretzmann as an associate clergy member, the Conservative Lutheran Defender ceased publication in June, 1965. P.E. Kretzmann passed away later the same year. McLaughlin later became professor of New Testament at the Minneapolis branch of the Martin Luther Institute of Sacred Studies, the LCR's new seminary. He later moved to Shepherd, Michigan to assume the office of dean at the seminary's permanent home, a position he held until his death in 1976.

The third and final segment of the historical roots of the LCR must necessarily focus on its immediate predecessor, the State of the Church Conference of the Missouri Synod. Its chairman, Rev. Cameron A. MacKenzie of St. Matthew's in Detroit, issued a clarion call to Missouri conservatives to attend a free conference for the following purposes:

1. To present facts relative to defections in our Missouri Synod.
2. To determine, under God, what can and must be done to preserve purity of doctrine throughout Synod.<sup>21</sup>

On May 15 and 16, 1961 over 400 pastors, teachers and laymen of the LCMS met in Milwaukee to discuss the issues disturbing Missouri. Conference essays were presented on inspiration and inerrancy, the doctrine of Scripture, and the Brief Statement. In December of 1961 the State of the Church Conference began publishing its own theological journal, The Faithful Word. Contributing editors of The Faithful Word who later became members of the LCR included Reinhold Goetjen, Kenneth Miller and Harold Romoser in addition to MacKenzie. However, the State of the Church Conference as well as other conservatives were dealt a setback at the 1962 LCMS Cleveland Convention

<sup>20</sup> Conservative Lutheran Defender (Vol 5, No 9). September, 1964. p. 142

<sup>21</sup> From a letter to Rev. Paul Kolander from Cameron MacKenzie dated April 10, 1961.

when the SOC was refused a booth at the convention and its members were not allowed to distribute The Faithful Word on the convention floor. In addition, the subsequent issue of The Faithful Word reported that "...the convention failed to take any definite action in almost every case where the retraction of specific false doctrine or practice had been requested."<sup>22</sup> Thus many of the leaders of the movement saw no other course of action but to leave Synod.

On June 10, 1963 MacKenzie's congregation in Detroit terminated its membership in the Missouri Synod. The Lutheran Churches of the Reformation was organized on April 28 and 29, 1964 at Emmaus Lutheran Church in Chicago, Illinois. MacKenzie was elected as Administrator of the federation and Romoser was elected Coadjutor. In contrast to the synod from which its congregations had withdrawn, the form of the new LCR was to be a federation of completely autonomous congregations, most notably indicated by its name, the Lutheran Churches of the Reformation. Its first publication reported: "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 congregation so resolves..."<sup>23</sup> The same issue proclaimed the purpose of the federation:

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.<sup>24</sup>

By its first convention a year after its inception, the LCR numbered 7 congregations with 3 more applying for membership and 10 independent congregations in fellowship.

<sup>22</sup> "Cleveland Convention Report," The Faithful Word (Vol 1, No 4). Fall, 1963. p. 27

<sup>23</sup> "Presenting the Lutheran Churches of the Reformation," The Faithful Word (Vol 2, No 1). 1965. p. 5

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 3

At the same time these congregations had withdrawn from the LCMS, the LCR congregations and their pastors individually adopted resolutions stating that they wished to continue in fellowship with the Wisconsin Synod. Doctrinal discussions concerning church and ministry which had begun with the LCR men before the break were continued. Administrator MacKenzie wrote to President Naumann, "It is our hope and confidence that these discussions will eventually result in common agreement in obedience to the Scriptures and Confessions without hindrance by synodical bias or personal prejudice."<sup>25</sup> Professors Carl Lawrenz and Gerald Hoenecke attended the 1965 LCR convention as representatives of Wisconsin's Commission on Doctrinal Matters. This convention closed with a resolution expressing readiness to enter into doctrinal discussions with representatives of both the Wisconsin Synod and the Concordia Lutheran Conference.

From 1965 to 1970 several LCR-WELS doctrinal discussions took place, particularly focusing on the subject of church and ministry. After two meetings with the WELS subcommittee of the Commission on Doctrinal Matters in 1966, the LCR's Commission on Doctrine and Practice reported to its convention: "Our own commission feels that there has been some agreement reached between the two groups at this last meeting, that a better understanding of the terminology has ensued."<sup>26</sup> After several more meetings with the Wisconsin subcommittee, the LCR Commission's report to its 1968 convention again sounded optimistic:

Your commission feels that there has been a definite advance made in respect to the terminology as used in defining such terms as 'local congregation,' 'grouping,' and 'public ministry,' 'pastors,' and similar items.

<sup>25</sup> From a personal letter to President Naumann from Cameron MacKenzie dated February 13, 1965.

<sup>26</sup> The Faithful Word (Vol 3, No 3). 1966. p. 11

Our last meeting with the subcommittee left your commission with the understanding that progress had been made in respect to the Office of the Ministry...<sup>27</sup>

However, the meetings in the spring and fall of 1968 soon revealed areas of disagreement. The LCR conferees maintained that Matthew 18:17 was a scriptural basis for a local congregation possessing authority to exercise the Keys publicly and no other group. The LCR men also charged that the Wisconsin Synod had changed its doctrinal position from its former position as taught by Dr. Adolph Hoenecke and in the Lutheran Confessions. Thus an impasse appeared to have been reached. In a report to the WELS Commission on Doctrinal Matters in May of 1969, the Commission subcommittee briefly summarized the LCR positions as follows:

- (1) the local congregation is of divine arrangement, the Synod by human ordinance;
- (2) the pastoral office in the congregation is of divine arrangement, Synodical offices are of human ordinance;
- (3) the exercise of church discipline which our Savior describes in Matthew 18 may only be carried out in a local congregation.<sup>28</sup>

The 1969 convention of the LCR submitted several statements from Synodical Conference proceedings and of former Missouri and Wisconsin theologians to the WELS convention. It felt that these statements supported its position that the congregation is the only divinely instituted form of the church and hoped, if the statements were accepted by the Wisconsin convention, to continue the discussions. However, the Commission on Doctrinal Matters reported to the August WELS convention that it failed to see scriptural proof for such a position or that the Synodical Conference had officially taught such a position. Consequently, after the WELS voiced its reply to the LCR, doctrinal discussions between the two groups never

<sup>27</sup> The Faithful Word (Vol 5, No 1). March, 1968. p. 18

<sup>28</sup> Report from the Commission subcommittee to the Commission on Doctrinal Matters dated May, 1969.

were resumed. In 1970 the Commission on Doctrine and Practice said in its report to the LCR convention:

...let us be reminded that the doctrinal position of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod is a doctrinal aberration, a departure from its original position which it once held in common with all orthodox Lutherans... While some Wisconsin men hold the correct Scriptural position, we must note that this aberration is officially taught in the classroom of the Wisconsin Seminary, that it prevails today only because most students simply reflect the views of their instructors.<sup>29</sup>

From then on relations between the two bodies deteriorated rapidly.

In 1971 an LCR pastor in Indiana published alleged differences between it and the WELS not only in the doctrines of church and ministry, but also on teachings concerning God's wrath, the law and justification.<sup>30</sup>

Soon after talks broke off with the WELS, the LCR was plagued by internal difficulties. On June 29, 1972 St. Matthew's Lutheran Church of Detroit withdrew from the LCR for what it viewed as intrusion into its internal affairs by the federation. The case involved a man who was excommunicated from the Detroit congregation and subsequently filed a petition with the LCR Council for what he felt was an unfair and therefore invalid excommunication. The following resolution adopted by the 9th annual LCR convention then effectively removed Rev. Cameron MacKenzie from the federation's clergy roster: "Resolved, that communicant membership in a congregation doctrinally affiliated with the federation shall be a prerequisite for inclusion in the federation's clergy roster."<sup>31</sup>

The following year four congregations were suspended from the federation because they practiced fellowship with St. Matthew's of Detroit.

<sup>29</sup> The Faithful Word (Vol 7, Nos 3&4). August-November, 1970. p. 10

<sup>30</sup> Cf. The Differences Between WELS and LCR by Pastor Kenneth K. Miller. Fort Wayne, Indiana. 1971.

<sup>31</sup> "Report and Recommendations of the Council," The Faithful Word (Vol 9, No 3). August, 1972. p. 24

In 1974 three other congregations were suspended from fellowship and another withdrew from fellowship with the LCR for similar reasons. In 1976 two other congregations and their pastors, including Harold Romoser, withdrew from membership. A third entered into a state of protest against alleged false doctrine in the LCR and eventually withdrew. A study of the subsequent history of the LCR will reveal that the federation never fully recovered from this internal strife. Today the LCR numbers 12 member congregations and two independent affiliates with 10 pastors on its clergy roster.

## II

As the student of church history ponders the phenomenon of the Lutheran Churches of the Reformation from its historical roots, a few questions immediately come to mind. Why did the LCR choose to form a federation of fiercely independent congregations instead of forming a synod as it had known in Missouri? Why did the LCR fail to achieve unanimity with Wisconsin on the church-ministry question, since both had been in apparent agreement while in fellowship in the Synodical Conference? Can the answer be found in any differences in their respective exegetical approaches to the church-ministry question or to doctrine in general? I believe the answers to these questions may be found by looking at the doctrinal roots of the LCR as well as the doctrinal problems which occasioned its inception.

It is obvious that the LCR was born as a result of the doctrinal strife in the Missouri Synod. And the peculiar polity of the federation, i.e. only the congregation has the public Ministry of the Keys and therefore only it has divine authority to excommunicate, can be viewed, in part, as a reaction to the synodical hierarchy which those congregations had experienced in the LCMS. If the old proverb "Once bitten, twice shy" has any application

in church history, the LCR is a prime example. After experiencing synodical officials who placed political expediency over God's Word and Christian charity, the congregations which eventually formed the LCR were hesitant to give any such centralized power to synodical organization again.

Traces of this attitude can certainly be seen in the old Orthodox Lutheran Conference, the historical predecessor of the LCR. The Orthodox Lutheran frequently related horror stories of what it termed "synodical dictatorship" in the LCMS over its member congregations.<sup>32</sup> Considering this background, the fact that the congregations which formed the OLC favored a strictly congregational polity, as has been observed before, should not be surprising.

The OLC also from time to time detected such a dictatorial synodical attitude invading the Wisconsin Synod. After attending the special 1954 convention of Wisconsin which voted to leave the fellowship matter with Missouri held in abeyance, P.E. Kretzmann observed that the Wisconsin Synod had deteriorated from "synoditis" into "synodolatry,"

...which means that a church body has reached the stage where its resolutions, or the recommendations of any of its committees, are practically forced upon its constituents, to the detriment of the Word of God.<sup>33</sup>

One pastor, whose congregation refused to leave the Wisconsin Synod with him because of alleged unionism with Missouri, related his "account of synodical hierarchical tyranny over a pastor and his congregations."<sup>34</sup>

Likewise P.E. Kretzmann, after he had withdrawn from the OLC and was editor of the Conservative Lutheran Defender in Minneapolis, wrote:

<sup>32</sup> Cf. The Orthodox Lutheran, Vol 1, No 2, p. 23 and No 3, pp. 29, 34-36

<sup>33</sup> P.E. Kretzmann, "Synodolatry," The Orthodox Lutheran (Vol 2, No 13). p. 224

<sup>34</sup> E.C. Hallstein, "Wisconsin Follows Missouri's Footsteps," The Orthodox Lutheran (Vol 3, No 2). pp. 24-25



From various parts of the country, especially in the Midwest, the complaint comes that synodical officials have demanded admission to meetings of church councils and voters' assemblies and that there have been cases of interference with the affairs of a congregation, even to the point of hindering rightful calls and installations.<sup>35</sup>

During this period both he and McLaughlin defended the view that the local congregation is the only divinely instituted form of the church and that the synod is a purely human arrangement.

At the same time, the men from the State of the Church Conference who were instrumental in forming the LCR had also felt the heavy hand of synod in their struggle for orthodoxy in Missouri. In his opening "State of the Church" address to the first State of the Church Conference, Cameron MacKenzie compared the right of a free conference to convene without synodical approval to the right of free citizens to petition their government:

Therefore, a free conference is the ecclesiastical equivalent of the 'right of the people peaceably to assemble' and if the need arise 'to petition the Government (synod) for a redress of grievances.' ...Since it is true of the citizenry, it is also true of all of us as Christians in relation to our own church organizations.<sup>36</sup>

In the second issue of The Faithful Word, Mac Kenzie pointed to the need for such a publication, because church leaders were more loyal to their organization than to God:

They compromise everything in order to preserve their organization and their positions! These make their gods out of the Organization Man and The Organization!

This is the crying sin of a host of leaders within visible Christendom, for these people practice the idolatry of the 'Church.' This is the Organization to which they owe all their love, all their devotion, all their services and from which they seek to obtain security, prestige, honor, and eternal glory!<sup>37</sup>

<sup>35</sup> P.E. Kretzmann, "Is Synod a Church, Specifically a Super-Church?" The Conservative Lutheran Defender (Vol 2, No 7). p. 63

<sup>36</sup> Cameron MacKenzie, "The State of the Church," The Faithful Word (Vol 1, No 1). p. 7

<sup>37</sup> Cameron MacKenzie, The Faithful Word (Vol 1, No 2). p. 5

That the formation of the LCR was in no small way influenced by its bad experience with synodical polity in the Missouri Synod, we can see from the introduction to the LCR's constitution:

In all organizational efforts of men there are inherent potentials of the organization becoming supreme and overriding, superior to doctrinal loyalty to the Word of God. Thus the organization becomes an end in itself rather than the advancement of the Kingdom of God. The most flagrant example on the contemporary scene is the deterioration of The Lutheran Church -- Missouri Synod, for here we witness men seemingly orthodox yet unable to resist the policies of their leaders who protect and even promote neo-orthodoxy; here men are first loyal to the organization, to its rules and procedures!<sup>38</sup>

Thus the simplest and -- for them -- the scriptural solution to prevent "the organization becoming supreme" was to have an organization with little or no power, a strictly autonomous congregational polity. That this was against the prevailing winds of Christendom in general and of Lutheranism in particular was without doubt. Thus Administrator MacKenzie reminded the first LCR Convention:

Without thought people will refer to our federation as a 'synod' and will view our operation in the same light as they view church synods. It is simply not an easy thing to rid one's self of the traditions and history of the medieval and post-reformation days.

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.<sup>39</sup>

While the course which the LCR struck in church history may be attributed in part to its reaction against synodical hierarchy in its dealings with the false doctrine in the LCMS, part must also be attributed to the failure to fully resolve the church-ministry question in the Synodical

<sup>38</sup> "Presenting the Lutheran Churches of the Reformation," The Faithful Word (Vol 2, No 1). 1965. p. 4

<sup>39</sup> Cameron MacKenzie, "Administrator's Opening Address," The Faithful Word (Vol 2, No 2). 1965. p. 7

Conference. It became obvious in doctrinal discussions with the LCR men that they held the view that the local congregation is the only divinely instituted form of the church, that only the local congregation possesses the public Ministry of the Keys, and that only the local congregation may be properly termed "Church," not synod. So while the LCR men proved to be followers of Franz Pieper, the Wisconsin men espoused the view of brother August.

However, this church-ministry view, which we may term the "Missouri position," was long held by many pastors and professors in Missouri long before the LCR came into existence. P.E. Kretzmann, founding-father of the Orthodox Lutheran Conference and later an associate clergy member of the LCR, espoused the same church-ministry view as Franz Pieper and undoubtedly taught the same as professor of exegesis at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis from 1924 to 1946. He wrote on the subject in their theological publication.<sup>40</sup> In a paper addressed to the Nebraska District in 1934 on the doctrine of the call, Kretzmann equated the office of the public ministry with the pastoral office and stated that the right of a synod to call was derived from the congregations which delegated to it such authority.<sup>41</sup> Similarly in a paper delivered to the second convention of the Orthodox Lutheran Conference, Kretzmann stated:

Thus, by God's will and order, the public administration of the gifts which Christ has given to the believers... is entrusted to the local congregation... To the local congregation the Lord has expressly committed church discipline in its specific sense.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>40</sup> Cf. "Reich Gottes, Kirche, Gemeinde, Synode," Concordia Theological Monthly (Vol II), December, 1931. pp. 886 ff. and "Apostelamt, Predigtamt, Pfarramt, Synodalamt," (Vol III), January, 1932. pp. 23 ff

<sup>41</sup> P.E. Kretzmann, "The Doctrine of the Call," a paper delivered to the Nebraska District of the Missouri Synod (August 20-24, 1934).

<sup>42</sup> P.E. Kretzmann, "Distinguendum Est!" Proceedings of the 2nd Annual Convention of the Orthodox Lutheran Conference (August 22-25, 1952). p. 27

And of the ministerial office he said, "It is clear that the parish ministry is a divine institution."<sup>43</sup>

Together with Kretzmann as an officer in the Orthodox Lutheran Conference, as a professor at the Orthodox Lutheran Seminary in Minneapolis, and as co-editor of the Conservative Lutheran Defender, Wallace H. McLaughlin held the same view on church and ministry. Together with Kretzmann he frequently wrote on the subject through their theological journal.<sup>44</sup> While the LCR men would later charge that the "Wisconsin aberration" on church and ministry was adopted by and large by students who studied under the three professors at Wauwatosa, at the same time Franz Pieper's influence at St. Louis should not be underestimated. P.E. Kretzmann had been a teaching colleague at St. Louis for a number of years. Likewise McLaughlin had studied under him after coming from the ULC. In a biography of Franz Pieper, McLaughlin wrote in glowing terms of his Christliche Dogmatik and his teaching skills which he observed at Concordia "...when the present writer had the privilege of sitting at his feet (1926-1928)..."<sup>45</sup> Both men later maintained that the LCR position was the orthodox position taught by Franz Pieper and Walther before him. And, as the Wisconsin subcommittee learned in its doctrinal discussions with the LCR, this so-called "Missouri position" on church-ministry was the view adopted by the later LCR theologians including Cameron MacKenzie, Harold Romoser, Kenneth Miller and Paul C. Neipp.

However, there were also Missourians with a different view. Voices were raised in opposition to the LCR position on church-ministry both within

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 29

<sup>44</sup> Cf. especially "Church and Ministry -- Points Currently under Study and Discussion," Conservative Lutheran Defender (Vol 4, Nos 6-9). 1963.

<sup>45</sup> W.H. McLaughlin, "Sketches from the History of the Lutheran Church in America: Franz Pieper," Conservative Lutheran Defender (Vol 1, No 7) April, 1960. p. 86

and without the LCR. In a letter to the administrator of the LCR in 1969, Pastor Mark Bartling wrote:

Since WELS still accepts and teaches officially the propositions of the Thiensville Theses, I believe that this is sufficient grounds for establishing and maintaining fellowship. This position, I know, is not acceptable to many within LCR. However, neither can I accept the present opinions within LCR that all ties with WELS must be broken, Romans 16:17,18 applied toward WELS, and WELS be placed in the same category as Missouri, ALC, and LCA.<sup>46</sup>

Thus on January 18, 1970 Bartling's congregation in Illinois withdrew from the LCR and applied for membership in the WELS.

Similarly Pastor A.T. Kretzmann, whose congregation in Crete, Illinois had broken with Missouri in 1963 and who had been an LCR clergy member in 1965, disagreed with the "Missouri theory" espoused by the LCR. In a paper delivered to his congregation in 1965 before he personally applied for membership in the Wisconsin Synod, Pastor Kretzmann agreed with the Wisconsin position on church-ministry. He also made the following observation on what he determined the WELS-LCR (Missouri) difference to be on the definition of "church":

Outside of what I consider a mere exegetical difference on this point, I hold that the "Wisconsin position" in theory and its position in practice agree, and that this can be fully supported by Scripture. This same "Wisconsin Position" in theory and practice is also the Scriptural "Missouri Position" in Practice, but unfortunately not in theory.<sup>47</sup>

Other ex-Missourians raised voices in opposition to the claim that only the local congregation is a divine institution and solely possesses the right to exercise discipline. The voice of the Federation for Authentic Lutheranism (FAL) claimed that the LCR's position on church-ministry was a later, further development of both Walther's and Pieper's. It said,

<sup>46</sup> From a personal letter to Harold W. Romoser from Pastor Mark Bartling

<sup>47</sup> Alfred T. Kretzmann, "Church and Ministry," a paper presented for study and consideration (November, 1965). Crete, Illinois. p. 8

The successors of Walther and his era introduced an additional element by deducing from Walther's statements the theses 1) that ONLY the local congregation can excommunicate, and 2) that the local congregation as such is divinely instituted, while other groupings are ONLY human arrangements... A further extension of the epigonic Missourian position has taken place recently. On its basis the claim has been set up and acted upon that, since the rule that ONLY a local congregation can excommunicate was instituted by Christ Himself, those who do not practice according to this rule must be denied church fellowship as heterodox believers.<sup>48</sup>

One might question why and how such "a further extension of the epigonic Missourian position" took place. I believe the answer, for the most part, lies in how both Wisconsin and the LCR approached the church-ministry doctrine and doctrine in general. The failure to fully resolve the church-ministry question in the Synodical Conference, which ultimately resulted in the formation of the LCR and its rift with WELS, is largely due to two differing views of exegesis and its place in theology in relation to dogmatics. This difference most notably surfaced in the church-ministry discussions. The final present positions of the LCR and the WELS can perhaps best be viewed as the result of how exegesis was taught in relation to dogmatics at Wauwatosa versus at St. Louis. The crux of the church-ministry problem between the LCR and WELS appeared, as we will see, to be a question of the historical/grammatical approach to the doctrine versus the a-historical/dogmatic approach.

Almost 100 years before in Wisconsin's early wrestling with the "Amtslehre" question, J.P. Koehler perceived a faulty methodology which approached the subject from preconceived dogmatic presuppositions. He remarked:

The handling of the latter subject as well as that of the Scriptures betrayed the want of understanding for historical development. And the exegetical and historical operations were not

<sup>48</sup> "Toward Agreement Among Authentic Lutherans on the Doctrine of Church and Ministry," Sola Scriptura (Vol 2, No 3). December, 1971. p. 20

calculated to discover the development of the teacher's calling so much, as to formulate a thesis that was in line with the current system of doctrine. That even for the latter purpose something in the nature of historical-exegetical research was prerequisite, entered no one's mind in the dispute.<sup>49</sup>

However, the LCR men, coming from the doctrinal battles over the Bible in the Missouri Synod, saw red when they heard the term "historical-exegetical." To them that term or the term "historical-grammatical" was too akin to "historical-critical." Thus in an essay delivered to the 1966 LCR convention, McLaughlin criticized "A Statement" of 44 pastors and professors of the Missouri Synod. Specifically he objected to the phrase, "We affirm our conviction that sound exegetical procedure is the basis for sound Lutheran theology." According to McLaughlin,

The true Scriptural theologian, on the contrary, holds the conviction that clear passages of Scripture, not exegetical procedure are the basis for sound theology. Exegetical procedure is a human activity. Scripture doctrine is a divine revelation.<sup>50</sup>

And with a subtle swipe at the Wisconsin Synod, McLaughlin at the same time differed with the view taught by the Wauwatosa faculty and its followers. Referring to a specific statement in Continuing in His Word on the subject of the "Wauwatosa Theology," he commented:

From a quite different direction from that of 'the forty-four' comes an expression of fear that preoccupation with dogmatics or 'systematic theology' involves a danger of 'bowing to precedent' etc., whereas 'the emphasis on a sound historical and grammatical interpretation of Scripture' will create and preserve 'the pattern of a balanced theology.' Again we insist that such statements tend to over-emphasize methodology. What the words say (and Scripture is self-interpreting!) is Scripture teaching, doctrine, the queen of theology.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>49</sup> J.P. Koehler, History of the Wisconsin Synod. St. Cloud: Sentinel Publishing Company, 1970. p. 231

<sup>50</sup> W.H. McLaughlin, "Doctrine, the Queen of Theology," The Faithful Word (Vol 3, No 3). 1966. p. 23

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

The difference in approach becomes clear when we compare what Koehler's (and Wisconsin's) historical-grammatical approach is:

A Passage is clear to me if I know what the words wish to say in their grammatical and historical sense and in the context of the passage. This is clear wording. For this it is not necessary that the logical and theoretical connection with other passages is clear to me as far as there is a system of thought.<sup>52</sup>

The thought expressed in this last sentence is substantially true of those who follow the "analogy of faith" as the rule for interpretation. It is also a thought expressed by some leading LCR spokesmen, indicative of their approach to biblical interpretation in general and to the doctrine of church-ministry in particular. They were suspicious that a preoccupation with exegesis overemphasized methodology and would inevitably lead to errors and corrupt doctrine, Wisconsin's view of church and ministry being a prime example. Consequently their biblical interpretation tended to avoid the historical-grammatical considerations of each passage in order to explain more obscure passages in terms of how they fit into the overall doctrinal structure. Their hermeneutic proceeded more along the hazy "analogy of faith" rule of interpretation. The term occurs in a paper which McLaughlin delivered to a pastoral conference in 1964. After disparaging an overemphasis on exegetical methodology, he said:

In adopting this approach I wish to stipulate, therefore, that the legitimate approach to these doctrines by way of the hermeneutical principles applied or transgressed in the statement of them, will not necessarily result in the discovery of 'mere exegetical differences only' in controverted positions nor preclude the charge of church-devisive false doctrine in cases where differences of interpretation have resulted in teachings incompatible with the analogy of faith.<sup>53</sup>

<sup>52</sup> J.P. Koehler, "Analogy of Faith," Faith-Life (Vol XXV). January, 1952 p. 13

<sup>53</sup> W.H. McLaughlin, "The Correct Principles of Biblical Interpretation, as they Apply to the Doctrines of Church and Ministry," an essay to LCR pastoral conference (September 29, 1964). p. 2



This point of determining correct teaching by the "analogy of faith" as a rule of interpretation was also made by Paul Koch in a letter to the Church of the Lutheran Confession:

I ...declare that the sophistry that urges that there may be legitimate differences of interpretation among brethren does not take into consideration that in these statements we have teachings that are incompatible with the analogy of faith.<sup>54</sup>

It was precisely this simplistic notion of a hermeneutical "key" to unlock all of Scripture against which Koehler had warned in the early 1900's. In the use of the "analogy of faith" as a rule of interpretation, he saw the way paved for the slighting of exegetical work in the preoccupation with doctrinal positions. Among other things, he feared it would cause exegesis to proceed atomistically and non-historically, with passages used largely as proofs for doctrinal theses. Leigh Jordahl observes:

Koehler ...entertained doubts about the entire analogy of faith tradition. He was convinced that in listening to Scripture one must scrupulously question any abstract principle which encourages a tendency to determine ahead of time what the Biblical material may or may not say, as though there is a simplistic hermeneutical key to unlock Scripture or to explain away those materials which are embarrassing to the theological system.<sup>55</sup>

Consequently one can see that the impasse at which the LCR and WELS doctrinal discussions on church-ministry was snagged was largely the result of two differing hermeneutical viewpoints toward Scripture in general. One may observe the antecedents of the LCR position in the writings of both P.E. Kretzmann and McLaughlin in the Orthodox Lutheran and the Conservative Lutheran Defender. That this position was commonly held by other LCR theologians may be gleaned from an overview of articles by various authors in The Faithful Word. In general, they disparaged the historical-grammatical

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., p. 3

<sup>55</sup> Leigh Jordahl, Introduction to History of the Wisconsin Synod. p. xx

approach of Wisconsin to doctrine as dangerous and erroneous. Rather than seeing exegesis as laying the proper foundation for dogmatics, the LCR men saw it as something which threatened clear doctrine and therefore opposed dogmatics. For example the LCR's Commission on Doctrine and Practice (composed of Cameron MacKenzie, Kenneth Miller and Harold Romoser) reported to its 1970 convention:

The Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod has ignored completely the Scriptural and therefore Lutheran principle that doctrine must be established solely by clear passages of Scripture and never by exegetical application. This exegetical approach to doctrine has spelled the doom of the Lutheran Church -- Missouri Synod and will prove to be as disastrous in Wisconsin if it is not given quietus.<sup>56</sup>

In a paper on church and ministry addressed to the same convention, Harold Romoser commented on what he thought gave rise to the "erroneous" Wisconsin church-ministry teaching: "First may be mentioned the developing insistence... that exegesis, 'interpretation,' the 'historical-exegetical approach' to Scripture is the prime method of establishing teaching in the Church."<sup>57</sup> He goes on to deride Wisconsin's hermeneutical approach to the Bible at length:

The technique, in one form or another, of arriving at the teachings of Scripture which these quotations laud, whether it be called 'historico-exegetical, historical-critical, exegetico-critical, consultation of the wider context, or the Ganzes der Schrift, (totality of Scripture)' method, vigorously applied, has been the road down which every radical sect, every unorthodox church body has travelled. Finally, out of it has risen the endlessly-repeated, inane resort, 'That's your interpretation,' with the conclusion, 'It's just a matter of exegesis, or interpretation; so it's non-divisive; we can afford to have diversity in these matters...'<sup>58</sup>

By contrast, the classic historical-grammatical approach to the question of church-ministry has been summarized quite well by Julian Anderson, former

<sup>56</sup> The Faithful Word (Vol 7, Nos 3&4). August-November, 1970. p. 10

<sup>57</sup> Harold Romoser, "The Church and the Ministry," Ibid., p. 59

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., pp. 60-61

ELS professor and presently a member of WELS. On this subject he says,

I am convinced that the whole question of church and ministry in our circles has been approached with almost a total lack of attention to the historical context, which is one of the cardinal principles of exegesis... If this point be recognized, then the confusion of the term ekklesia with the local congregation also disappears -- that is, a local congregation served by a single pastor, as we have it in general use. Thus, I would suggest the broad historical approach first, and then a proper exegesis of the key passages.<sup>59</sup>

Thus the underlying issues which resulted in the LCR-WELS discord on church and ministry had largely been prophesied by Koehler, who noted the same differences in hermeneutical approach when the St. Louis and Wauwatosa faculties met to discuss the doctrine in the 1920's. One side read into the terms "church" and "ministry" our present-day concepts of the local congregation and the pastorate. The other viewed the terms in their context and in the light of the historical development of each throughout the New Testament. Commenting on the failure of both sides to arrive at a common definition of the term "institution" as applied to the church and the office of the ministry in their concrete form, Koehler said:

That afforded a striking illustration of the difference in method of interpretation; on the one side, the linguistic-historical research to establish the meaning of the Scriptures and formulate that dogmatically; on the other side, the interpretation of the terms according to the preconceived dogmatic notions -- the same difference as before in connection with the 'analogy of faith.'<sup>60</sup>

Perhaps a few final conclusions and remaining questions are now in order. Historically, the Lutheran Churches of the Reformation can be considered the step-child of Kretzmann's and McLaughlin's Orthodox Lutheran Conference and their free conference in Minnesota. However, it is a direct

<sup>59</sup> Julian Anderson, quoted by Frederic Kosanke in "Principles of Sola Scripture with Special Emphasis on Church and Ministry," an essay to the Southeast District of the Southern Conference Fall Pastoral Meeting (January 13, 1970). pp. 5-6

<sup>60</sup> J.P. Koehler, op. cit., p. 238

descendant of the State of the Church Conference within the Missouri Synod headed by Cameron MacKenzie. The present doctrinal position of the LCR may be seen partly as a reaction to the synodical hierarchy which it had experienced in the LCMS. At the same time, however, its position on church and ministry is also the resultant failure to fully resolve that question to everyone's satisfaction in the old Synodical Conference. And the underlying cause of this difference, I believe, is a difference in a hermeneutical or exegetical approach to the doctrines of Scripture in general. The failure of the WELS-LCR doctrinal discussions to arrive at a common consensus on church-ministry is a result of the failure to solve the age-old question in the Synodical Conference, "Which is more important -- exegesis or dogmatics?" or "What is the relationship of exegesis to dogmatics?" A failure to understand the correct relationship will ultimately be revealed in an overemphasis in one area and faulty biblical hermeneutics in one or more areas.

Now that many of the LCR leaders who were engaged in the church-ministry discussions with WELS have either passed from this life or have left the LCR, a fair question might be: "Will the 'certain sound' of the LCR and the WELS become one in the future?" Before that happens, the question of exegesis and its place in theology will undoubtedly have to be settled first. Another legitimate question hits closer to home: "Will the recurring church-ministry debate continue to plague the WELS and/or the ELS in the future? Will it again prove to be divisive of fellowship between former brethren?" Only time will tell and only the Lord of the Church knows.

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