THE DISSOLUTION OF THE FEDERATION FOR AUTHENTIC LUTHERANISM: A COMPENDIUM

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As the title implies, this paper will deal in summary fashion with the reasons for FAL's short-lived existence. The information for this paper was highly dependent upon the response to a questionaire type letter which was sent to all former FAL pastors. Seventy-two per cent of all pastors contacted acknowledged the letters and gave their replies (a rather good percentage considering the questionaire was sent out during the Lenten season!). Other information was gleaned from FAL's official publication, Sola Scriptura, from several tracts and papers, and from various WELS men who were acquainted with the FAL situation.

Since the paper is indeed factual, yet also subjective (many personal opinions) in its presentation of this certain phase of church history, it may seem to lack the makings of a good church history paper, namely, objectivity. Or as one pastor said, "History is best recorded 'from a distance.'" And he went on to give the valid warning, "I finally have some concern that even a paper like this could lead to some possible misunderstandings. I don't care to open any doors which offer the remotest possibility of a repeat performance."

Therefore, it is my hope that even if this paper fails to be objective that it at least gives indication as to where problems may have originated. I in no way intend to sit in judgment over the reasons for the dissolution of FAL, for already I have learned valuable things, doctrinal and practical, for my own personal ministry, from the men involved. I also would hope that this paper might in some small way "inspire" a person who was directly involved in FAL's dissolution to write on the same subject.

This paper will follow somewhat of an outline. It was much debated as to how to approach the subject: Emphasis on history of FAL? Then the paper would soon turn into a book. Emphasis on subjective and personal opinions? Then the paper would soon lose its continuity and fast become history in a vacuum. What to do? Combine both! Therefore, this outline: I. Sketchy history of FAL from the viewpoint of its origin on through to its final dissolution, II. Reasons for its dissolution based on questionaire, III. My observations and comments.

(Note: Unless it is otherwise noted, all quotes and information in this paper are taken from the pastors' replies.)

I. FAL held its Constituting Convention on November 1-2, 1971. It was formed out of a concern to remain faithful to Christ's saving Gospel and a compassion for troubled souls. There are

> Lutheran congregations and individuals today who for conscience reasons are withdrawing from synodical membership in heterodox Lutheran bodies (impure, unfaithful to Scripture) and declaring themselves independent. The FAL wishes to aid those who are contemplating such a step. (Tract on FAL)

While the LCMS had those in her midst who privately opposed certain false teachings, yet many who were in positions of leadership failed to do so, thus compromising the truth of God's Word. Therefore, concerned pastors and their congregations who recognized the impossibility of harmony with disharmony, God's truth with the Devil's lies (II Cor. 6:14-18) followed the admonition of St. Paul in Rm. 16:17-18 by declaring themselves to be in "status confessionis." But this was only to be an "intermediate stage" so to speak, a time to make their doctrinal stand very clear to the mother body LCMS. Having done so and having drawn more like-minded Christians into their ranks by the persuasiveness of God's Word alone, this small group became the Federation for Authentic Lutheranism, a completely separate body or synod outside of LCMS. Something else to bear in mind in the formation of the FAL was that it really was composed of two conservative Missouri groups: 1)the Conference for Authentic Lutheranism on the West Coast and 2) the Free Association for Authentic Lutheranism in the Midwest.

The 1972-1973 conventions, held at Watertown, Wisconsin and Vero Beach, Florida respectively, began to see problems cropping up. Although still doctrinally sound, FAL spent many hours debating over the validity

and usability of their newly drafted constitution. This constitution, which called for a governmental system based on a Board of Directors rather than on a president with his boards was in a sense a break away from LCMS. Perhaps it was feared that FAL might go the way of LCMS if power were again centered in a president. Whatever the reason, the Board of Directors failed. It was then at the Vero Beach convention that a new constitution, providing a more traditional type of government, was drafted. "This would have worked out well," one pastor comments, "had it not been that such a drastic measure naturally carries with it human repercussions. It caused considerable difficulty among the pastors of FAL." One can very well see that this would be the case. We are all humans with human feelings. There were some personality clashes. Some friendships began to fray. On the convention floors some regionalism and partialities became evident as some men from the original CAL (West Coast) and FAL (Midwest) groups of FAL gravitated to their "separate corners." This later played a part "in the determination of priorities in the areas of missions, publications, and stewardship. It was like a married couple still labeling possessions brought into marriage as 'his' or 'hers' when it should have been 'ours'." Another pastor makes the observation: "Just as many of us experienced fears and suspicions in Missouri about the future and one another, this very same thing occurred in the FAL."

In the latter part of 1973, FAL had to call for a special meeting in Chicago to discuss budgetary adjustments. God had greatly blessed FAL with a flourishing foreign mission in Antigua, West Indies, but home needs also demanded more time and monies. It was at this meeting then, where priorities were re-examined. It began to look like FAL had more responsibilites than could be handled. 1974 revealed a problem of another nature--doctrinal. Boiled down, the problem centered on a clear understanding of the doctrine of church fellowship, particularly "status confessionis." Since this subject will be taken up more fully in section II of this paper, let it suffice for now to say that its definition concerned itself more along the lines of "selective fellowship" than "marking and avoiding." It was especially the CAL group which had problems understanding this distinction. In February at Denver, Colorado, this problem and others were aired, essays were presented, apologies issued, and it was felt that problems were resolved. However, at later meetings in Indianapolis, Indiana and Los Angeles, California, it was demonstrated that problems really weren't cleared up and the future of FAL was fast becoming a question mark. Observing this in Indiana and Los Angeles, a special meeting was called in 1975 at Hillsboro, Oregon. Two things loomed large in the minds of all: 1)examining and carefully defining

"status confessionis" for the six congregations which were falsely practicing it before granting them a "peaceful release" from FAL and 2)proposing a merger with WELS. It was a sad thing to see that none of the six congregations involved showed up for this conference. It was then decided to call another conference which WELS would host. Concerning the merger with WELS it was decided, pending approval of two thirds of the FAL congregations voting in referendum by the end of June, 1975, that each congregation still retain the right of joining WELS, ELS, or remaining independent. As of last summer, August, 1975, this was carried out.

The above is indeed a very sketchy history of FAL which has numerous holes in it. For that reason it was presented in perhaps a very "cold and cruel" way--the plain facts without much to say about the personalities involved. Before going further in this paper it would be good to repeat that I am not sitting in judgment over FAL. Nor do I want to appear to be "unevangelical" and heartless to anyone in FAL's past situations and problems. Rather, I respect the men who had the conviction of faith to stand up and be counted, to leave "mother, father, children, brethren" and continue to follow Christ (Lk. 14:26). Lest this paper and its intentions be misunderstood, I again want to make that clear.

One more thing to note before leaving this section and going to the next: the dissolution of FAL was by

no means disgraceful or shameful. This is evident from a note written in the June 1975 issue of "Letter to the Churches":

> God has used FAL in a strange but wonderful way. He caused us to begin the blossoming work in Antigua. He enabled us to help refugees from the Missouri Synod, establish congregations and/or churches in Naples, Florida, Kokomo, Indiana, Bell Gardens, California, Vallejo, California, Hillsboro, Oregon, and Sutherlin, Oregon. All this God did with FAL from Nov. 1 of 1971-1975. Surely God blessed FAL and it was a blessing for all of us to have been of service to Him at this time.

II.

Still in search for the "whys" and "wherefores" of FAL's short existence and dissolution, let us turn our attention to more pointed questions. 1.Did FAL dissolve because a)they failed to meet their goal of being a "refuge-city" for ex-Missouri pastors and their congregations? b)they had financial problems? c)they had administration difficulties? d)other problems?

a)A qualified "no." Throughout FAL's history it always made itself available as a refuge city to those seeking shelter from heterodoxy. They all could have gone to WELS or ELS immediately, but they wanted the refuge possibility to be there. Why then a "qualified no"? Humanly speaking, the difficulty of leaving family and friends behind. Also there was sort of an "idolatry" of LCMS (or loyalty, if you will). This was brought about by pressure from within LCMS right after FAL organized. "If any talked of leaving the ship," they were labeled "deserters." The leaders (in Missouri) suddenly became very concerned about

the problems in Missouri and promised victory. This accounted for the turn of events at LCMS's New Orlean's convention--Missouri officials gave false hopes with false conservative promises and compromises. Being impatient with those still holding Missouri's false doctrinal stands to the point of even breaking off all communication with them also helped to close the gate a little further to the refuge city. In one pastor's words:

> We had over 200 in attendance at our constituting convention in Libertyville, the greater majority of whom were pastors sympathetic to our cause and convinced of Missouri's growing heterodoxy. But because they had not educated and prepared their congregations sufficiently for a break or because some felt that Missouri's problems could be solved by men rather than by Word, they lingered and slowly became asphyxiated by tolerance and more tolerance. Originally we had very firm indications that 50 to 60 congregations would join us initially. But the problems lay not in the failure of FAL to provide a place of refuge; rather in the lack of conviction and committment from the outside... You see, we did have reason at one time of being optimistic about a new church body, solid and confessional. But when the rubber hit the road, few even screeched.

b)"Any synod or church which is worth its salt and trying to do its job of preaching the Gospel to every creature will find that there isn't enough money to do all that it wants to do." No, financial problems were not really a threat to FAL's existence. In fact, during FAL's infancy, the Lord blessed FAL's congregations with abundant material wealth. This blessing was funneled into other blessings: Antigua; a Lutheran publishing house which printed a monthly journal, Sola Scriptura, along with various mission

tracts; there were even serious thoughts of foreign radio missions, and the beginnings of FAL's own seminary. But FAL soon had to "tone down" its expenditures. Antigua began taking more and more monies, traveling and conference expenses grew (executive meetings alone would cost $2000-$3000 for 3 days!)--this is why the budget was reorganized in February, 1974, in Chicago. It was at this time that Sola Scriptura was discontinued. Someone figured that if FAL was to continue at its present rate (prior to Chicago) that the same structure would be needed to administer twenty congregations as would normally be needed to administer five hundred congregations. However, FAL was in the black when it dissolved.

c)Yes! many answered in reply to this question.

Too many brands in the fire?!:

> It soon became evident that a handful of gifted laymen and approximately 25 very busy parish pastors were unable to administer, coordinate the corporate efforts of congregations from California to Florida and from Illinois and Indiana to Antiqua and El Salvador. This task along with the task of witnessing to LCMS, producing a journal, and colloquizing those seeking membership was simply beyond our ability.

Too many chiefs and not enough Indians?!:

> Some brethren in leadership positions, separated from their brethren and colleagues by hundreds and thousands of miles, began to act too much on their own initiative. Large sums of money were invested in mission enterprises without the advice, counsel, and consent of the larger group to which such authority had been granted by the FAL Constitution.
>
> Yes, geographical separation was definitely a problem for FAL. Communications were hampered, when decisions were made it was difficult to get a consulting opinion from a "neighboring" FAL pastor. And also, something which is often overlooked, the pastor and

> his family missed the social gatherings and picnics with fellow FAL pastors and their families. While this may be an insignificant point, yet such gatherings are often a time of "letting your hair down" for comforting and producing a Gospel zeal in the hearts of those who are perhaps disappointed and frustrated with the work of the ministry. But even beyond this, the real administrational and organizational problems didn't come into the picture until after the change in church government and the subsequent "hurt feelings" of the switch-over.

d)This point follows closely upon the above.

> Because of the bad experience with Missouri and its governmental system in which authority was centered in a president and in high ranking boards, the originators of FAL decided to try a new type of church government; namely, a Board of Directors type. (A costly mistake.) Very few in FAL had any real administrative experience and as a result there was little inclination to delegate authority or responsibility. The result was that the Board of Directors became the undoing of FAL as a unified body.

While this opinion was not in the majority according to the letters received, the more I study FAL's history and her problems, the more this particular problem was in the background. And yet, even this could have, humanly speaking, been overcome and conquered.

2. What part does the doctrine of fellowship play in leaving one synod and going to another or in going independent?

> This was our main consideration in leaving Missouri. When fellowship with the ALC was voted in at Denver in 1969--an action we officially protested--and when it was not dissolved when seen to be contra God's Word (Milwaukee 1971) plus the increasing schism in doctrine and practise within the Missouri Synod itself, that decided on our course of action.

Certainly one will miss the <u>social</u> fellowship, but Scripture clearly sets down what <u>true</u> fellowship principles are (Rm.16:17-18; I Cor. 1:10) and if such

principles are not to be found in a certain synod or body, then separation is called for until unity with like-minded confessing Christians can be found. If not, how is one to carry out church discipline--members under church discipline would join "sister congregations" where they would not be dealt with. The question may seem to be almost redundant after reading the above replies, but it is one that must be emphasized again and again. We're living in an age where doctrinal concerns are being replaced by social concerns. I believe that the problem lies in the fact that robbing a bank is thought to be much worse than profaning the name of God. In other words, that sins commited against God (I Table of the Law) are not as bad as sins committed against one's neighbor (II Table of the Law). But that's not the way God speaks. Nor is it the way we should speak! Nor is it the way FAL spoke. They literally practiced what they preached. God's Word was not just doctrines or pieces of paper, but a way of life, living for and in Christ-crucified.

3. Why have some former FAL pastors chosen to remain independent (CAL) of, and yet, in fellowship with WELS a)will be more accesible and/or receptive to ex-Missourians? b)fear of a large body because of "bad experiences with LCMS?

a-b)This is a somewhat related question which really doesn't have much to do with answering the main question, namely, why did FAL dissolve so soon. It does, however,

touch on some very important considerations which come into play. One pastor wrote, "I don't believe that you can fully come to grips with this question unless you have lived through it." (cf. My earlier comment about hoping that this paper would serve as a springboard of inspiration to a former FAL pastor to write further on the subject of FAL's dissolution. It's difficult to place yourself in someone else's shoes!) One can surely sympathize with what the pastors and their congregations had to go through in leaving the mother body, LCMS. That was difficult in itself, but no sooner were they through one traumatic situation when another popped up: FAL's dissolution. Now what? Join another synod (WELS or ELS)? Some did, but they were ready for it. It was the right time to merge. Others weren't ready. They were cautious, "gun-shy" as one pastor put it. Certainly they can't be blamed for that. Besides, for those who wished to stand independent for the time being, it was the best thing to do. In a manner of speaking "it demanded that the congregation stand on its own feet with only the Savior to guide and support her." Also by being independent, they still held out hope as being a stepping-stone, a refuge city. However, such a hope, in the majority opinion of the men polled, is a false one. On the flip side of the coin it is my opinion that independent status only serves as a temporary state, else that congregation deprives itself of being strength-

ened and encouraged by other like members of the "body of Christ" and, in a sense, also put a limitation on her Great Command to "go...and teach all nations (Mt. 28:19-20)." When it comes down to this, then it is actually wrong for a congregation to remain independent, provided that situations and amount of education are considered.

4. When leaving an unorthodox body (synod), what fellowship (if any) remains between you and the members of that unorthodox body, who, in reality, have the same confession as you, but, have not as yet left that unorthodox body (selective fellowship)?

The answer to this question hastened the dissolution of FAL. The misunderstanding of the phrase "status confessionis" was confused with and thought to be (by some) "selective fellowship." As was noted in section I of this paper, there was a lack of understanding about "status confessionis." Yet even after things were explained and the air was cleared, there remained behind fractured human feelings, torn by not only this problem, but also the "normal church problems" that a pastor faces every day. Something had to give. But let's examine the events leading up to this point. First, what is"status confessionis"? In referring to this term previously, I have pointed to Rm. 16:17&18 -- "mark and avoid." Many other passages can be addressed, but for the sake of brevity let us deduce from this passage that "status confessionis" has to do with

separation from an unorthodox body. Articles VII and VIII of the Apology of the Augsburg Confession and Article X of the Formula of Concord confirm this Scriptural teaching. Yet "status confessionis" is a special kind of separation. It really is a temporary state of admonition and protest of unorthodox teachings and practices from within an unorthodox body (synod). However, once lengthy and perinent admonitions of those in "status confessionis" go unheeded (falling on deaf ears), then it is time to take it a step further--to separate completely (in doctrine and practice) from that unorthodox body. Thus far there seemed to be no misunderstanding. But back to the question: what about those who are still members of the LCMS and confess the same thing as us (FAL), can we hold altar, prayer, and pulpit fellowship with them? Some answered "Yes." In a paper entitled "In Statu Confessionis" (adopted by CAL at North Hollywood, 1/19/75) there were certain segments which gave rise to doubt and really promoted selective fellowship. (cf. Pp. 1-2, point 5, p. 13, p. 16, section III, p. 18, point IV). When CAL representatives met with WELS to discuss this paper, the above points were dropped and the following statement was made:

> Inasmuch as our document, "In Statu Confessionis," has been charged with emotional overtones and has been greatly misunderstood by some, we herewith suggest that for the purpose of this meeting and the goals we wish to achieve under the Word, that this document be set aside until we establish a set of guidelines by which we can uniformly practice

> church fellowship and to whom it is to be extended, including the matters of formal and informal confession. We, furthermore, ask that the guidelines which are adopted be guidelines which truly reflect the actual practice which exists in our churches.

When these things were pointed out the "selective fellowship" problem was seen for what it really was--"something that didn't testify to the error, but rather quietly covered it up and falsely appeased consciences."

III.

Much has been said. But have we answered the question: Why did FAL have such a short-lived history? In my own human and, therefore, imperfect observation, I saw in all of this two human reasons: 1)a kind of disorder. There always seemed to be two spirits within FAL, going right back to its origin, CAL and FAL, each pulling its own way. There was doctrinal unity (with the exception of the "status confessionis" problem), but the trying situations, the pressures from LCMS, and pressures from within FAL often produced a "social disunity." The second reason 2)centers around the "status confessionis" question. Not so much the question itself as the results and ramifications of the question. In a paper entitled "The Doctrine of the Church and Status Confessionis" the problem was traced back to "the Booklet Evangelical Directives for the Lutheran Church in an essay entitled "Confessional Declaration" which deals with "status confessionis" and which is in fact the source of the position taken on "status confessionis" by former members of FAL." Reading further in

the paper the author says concerning Evangelical Directives for the Lutheran Church:

> If examined carefully, it is evident that the author admits that the misuse of Status Confessionis is wrong and even sinful. This is because when misused, Status Confessionis brings into the doctrine of the church a dimension that is not Scriptural resulting in a confusing of the Invisible and Visible Church. It then opens the door to Selective Fellowship and Unionism. The tragic part is that though the author warns against misuse, he advocates that which is misuse, namely reaching across denominational and organizational lines and establishing Altar and Pulpit Fellowship through Status Confessionis.

I however, would trace the "status confessionis" misunderstanding back further yet. I feel that it can be traced back to the LCMS's false doctrine of what synod is and consists in. They together with Francis Pieper (Christian Dogmatics, III, Pp. 419-23) see synod as being a human arrangement, but deny that it is also a divine institution. Walther in his Pastorale and also in Brosamen (p. 391): Erste Predigt zur Eroeffnung der Synode states "Eine Synode soll ja ein teil der Kirches Gottes auf Erden sein." Walther, in other words, has the correct understanding of synod being both a human arrangement and a divine institution. (Francis Pieper misquotes Walther in this respect--cf. above references.) If synod was looked upon as being both of these , then there may have been more reluctance to cross denominational and organizational lines. There might have been more of an awareness that since synod and church are one and the same thing caution and care ought to be exercised in practicing fellowship. I think identifications and clarifications

would have been more easily made if this were kept in mind.

In conclusion, a very simple and yet thorough answer can be given to the entire question of the dissolution of FAL. It is the answer that "FAL dissolved because God willed it to be so." We know it is God who promotes and spreads His kingdom through us. Our affairs are in His hands. He directs us in all our endeavors. Surely the hand of God was apparent in FAL's history and surely God used FAL to His glory. Maybe if someone else undertakes the task of writing on another aspect of FAL's history some day, he'll find more reasons than the ones enumerated in this paper which led up to FAL's dissolution. But one fact remains certain: God moves in mysterious ways His wonders to perform--that no matter how things may seem to go wrong for us, yet we still know that "all things work together <u>for good</u> to them that love God," Rm. 8:28. FAL's dissolution--God saw to it that its short existence did work out for the eternal good of those involved.