

ENCOURAGEMENT AND ADMONITION:
A HISTORY OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN
THE WISCONSIN EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN SYNOD
AND LUTHERANS IN AUSTRALIA.

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Historical background of Lutheranism in Australia

It has been stated that the first confessional Lutheran clergy in Australia were Clamor Wilhelm Schürmann and Christian Gottlob Teichelmann.¹ These men conducted the first Lutheran church service in South Australia on November 4, 1838. Initially they came to Australia to serve the Aborigines, being sent by the Dresden Mission Society. They later became part of that Lutheran synod which recognized fellowship with the Missouri Synod.

However, others feel that the first Lutheran service took place three weeks later on November 25.² On that date Pastor August Ludwig Christian Kavel conducted an impressive thanksgiving service for approximately 200 souls who had arrived with him from Germany a few days earlier. Although the service was held in a partly constructed shed, it must have been a joyous occasion.

This first group of German migrants arrived at Port Adelaide in South Australia just prior to the arrival of the Saxon Lutherans at New Orleans in the United States. Mainly Silesians, they had left their homeland basically for confessional reasons when the Prussian Union Church tried to bring together Lutherans and Reformed. In their religious motivation they were similar to the Saxons who settled in Missouri, and the Silesians under Grabau who settled in Buffalo and Wisconsin. The Silesians who came to South Australia had thought earlier of migrating to the United States. But due to the generosity of an Englishman by the name of George Fife Angus, the president of the South Australian Company, who advanced them money, they went to Australia. They settled near Adelaide, in the villages of Klemzig, Glen Osmond and Hahndorf.

Glen Osmond was the site of the first Lutheran convention in May, 1839.

Conventions were held annually for a time to deal with the problems facing the pioneer settlers. The number of Lutherans swelled in 1841 with the arrival of a group led by Pastor Gotthard Daniel Fritzsche.

It was not long before theological differences and perhaps personality clashes brought division among the Lutherans in South Australia. In 1846, following a stormy convention at Bethany (near Tanunda in South Australia), Kavel and Fritzsche parted ways. The schism occurred over differences of opinion regarding Kavel's "Apostolic" constitution which he had presented at the 1839 convention. There were also differences over Kavel's "Protestations" against certain passages in the Lutheran Confessions which seemed to contradict the democratic spirit of his constitution. Another problem was the exegesis of certain eschatological passages. It has been said that the only Lutheran church in the world that ever split over the question of millennialism was the Australian church.³

Kavel's group became known as the Immanuel Synod in 1874. After 1875 this group found much in common with the Iowa Synod, particularly through common ties with the Neuendettelsau Missionary Society in Bavaria. The Immanuel Synod merged with other synods in 1921 to form the United Evangelical Lutheran Church in Australia (hereafter UELCA). A close relationship developed between the UELCA and the American Lutheran Church.

Fritzsche's group went through various name changes during its history, and eventually became known as the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Australia. Through most of its life this synod recognized fellowship with the Missouri Synod, and many of its pastors were trained at St. Louis.

Intensive union negotiations between the UELCA and the ELCA began in 1941. These negotiations reached a climax in June of 1949 when the pastors of both synods met in a joint conference in Adelaide, South Australia.

Another such meeting took place in September for the pastors in the New South Wales District. At these conferences the pastors approved the "theses of agreement" adopted by the Inter-Synodical Committees. These meetings were noted by the Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly (WLQ), in its section "News Without Comment", the first sign of the interest of the Wisconsin Synod in these negotiations shown by this journal.⁴

Negotiations continued between the UELCA and the ELCA for the next fifteen years. In Toowoomba on March 15, 1965, and in Horsham on October 22, 1965, the ELCA and the UELCA respectively declared pulpit and altar fellowship with each other on the basis of a "Document of Union" and the "Theses of Agreement". Actual organic union of the synods into the Lutheran Church of Australia took place at Tanunda, South Australia, from October 29 to November 2, 1966. The reunion was purposely staged close to the place where the two streams of Lutheranism in Australia had gone their separate ways in 1846.

Wisconsin Synod reaction to the Australian Lutheran union negotiations

The ELCA was generally regarded as the more conservative synod in Australia and was in fellowship with the Missouri Synod, and thus with the Synodical Conference. While there was very little direct contact between the Wisconsin Synod and the ELCA, the proposed merger with the more liberal UELCA aroused the concern of Wisconsin Synod leaders.

In 1950 Professor Edmund Reim of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary expressed his concern over a report regarding the union negotiations and meetings:

"There is however one inconsistency in the report. We note that the question of joint prayer was among the articles subsequently adopted by the conference and still to be submitted to the conventions of the two churches. It was obviously one of the issues on which these bodies had been at variance before. At the same time we note that this same conference was opened with a short devotional service. It seems to us

that this anticipation of a desired outcome may indicate an impatience with the necessarily slow processes of carefully removing the existing differences, an impatience which - if impatience it was - would raise serious misgivings as to the soundness of the entire agreement. We earnestly hope that the state of affairs which we have pictured as possible does not exist in fact."⁵

Two years later the doctrine of the inspiration of Scripture was reported as being the only point on which agreement had not been reached. Professor Paul Peters noted in the WLQ that in regard to this doctrine there was only one question still confronting the two synods: "It is the question how in view of the inerrancy of the Scriptures the human and the divine side of the Scriptures come to their own. There can be no doubt in our minds that the final thesis of these two churches on the doctrine of the inspiration will deserve our full consideration and thorough study."⁶

In the same issue of the WLQ Professor Reim takes issue with the theological views of Dr. Hermann Sasse, who had gone from Germany to join the faculty of the UELCA Immanuel Seminary in North Adelaide. The WLQ had been publishing translations of Dr. Sasse's "Letters to Lutheran Pastors", but had omitted Letters XLV and XLVI which dealt with the issues of inspiration and the inerrancy of Scripture. Professor Reim explained:

"According to the author, the Scriptures in their entirety are inspired of the Holy Ghost who, however, incorporated the divine Word into the "servant's form" of human speech and human authorship, allowing not only for the peculiarities of style and diction which characterize the various writers, up to the point of obvious lapses in grammar, but leaving room also for factual errors in such things as do not pertain to the faith.....Therefore the absolute inerrancy of the Bible is not recognized as a doctrine of Scripture, but at best as merely a theological opinion."⁷

In this article Professor Reim also explained why Letter XX on the Confession and Theology of the Missouri Synod had not been printed in the WLQ. While this letter basically praised the Missouri Synod, Sasse also

condemned what he termed the "un-Lutheran fundamentalism" of Missouri. Professor Reim comments: "With this startling opinion we find ourselves constrained to disagree. Not only will it provide additional impetus to the liberal movement which has already wrought such havoc in our sister synod, but it constitutes a most unfortunate condemnation of the conservative cause, one which we cannot bring ourselves to believe as having been intended by the author, but one which is there nevertheless."⁸

A few years earlier Professor Reim had wondered about Dr. Sasse joining the UELCA, but had put the best construction on his move. In 1950 he wrote: "Since the UELCA stands in fellowship with the American Lutheran Church rather than with our Synodical Conference, we are conscious that this step brings Dr. Sasse into another area of our divided Lutheran Church than ours. We also know, however, that this Australian body stands in direct line of descent from the schools of Breslau, Hermannsburg, and Neudettelsau, which represented the conservative Lutheranism for which Dr. Sasse has been contending so valiantly. Hence we find his present stand entirely consistent with his previous course of action."⁹ In later years President Naumann would find reason to admonish Dr. Sasse for his increasingly more liberal views.

In the April 1952 issue of the WLQ the Australian "Theses on Scripture and Inspiration" are printed in full.¹⁰ In the July issue Professor John Meyer evaluated the theses. He had these encouraging words: "It warms one's heart to read in them confessions like the following: "Holy Scripture is, without limitation, God's Word. Everything which Scripture says is God's Word. On the other hand nothing can be proclaimed as Word of God which is not taught in Scripture"."¹¹ However, Professor Meyer also has reason

to criticize the theses. He writes: "It is our intention to point to some naevi and to plead for correction. We are now not thinking of mere externals, as, a loosely used connective, a misplaced comma, and the like, but of things which affect the sense of the document." ¹²

He continues: "It makes one stop and hesitate, when one reads in Th. 6 with reference to inspiration that "God...gave to men...His Word of revelation." Nothing more is said, but one can hardly avoid the impression as though inspiration and revelation were co-extensive, that the boundaries of both coincide.....The expression quoted above, although it does not say it in just so many words, may, by implication, easily lead to the idea as though such things which the writers knew from human sources are to be excluded from the act of inspiration because they are not strictly God's "Word of revelation.""¹³

Professor Meyer also criticizes the statement: "The Word of God is not identical...with Scripture." His concern is justified by the reference to the oral Word following the written word. He asks: "Do they (the theses) mean the word of God as it is being proclaimed by the Church?" ¹⁴ And: "What does it mean to place the subsequent spoken Word, as spoken by the Church, on the same level with the written Word of the Bible? One is reminded of Brunner with his stress on the viva vox ecclesiae." ¹⁵ Meyer is also concerned by the reference to what human reason might call a deficiency in Holy Scripture. He says: "What then are deficiencies? The term itself is broad enough to include errors in the argumentation (violations of logic) or even in the presentation of facts, and the like." ¹⁶ The evaluation of the Australian theses closes with the encouragement: "Let the beauty of the confession contained in Theses 2 and 3 shine forth in unmarred splendor." ¹⁷

The next issue to call for comment by the Wisconsin Synod was the matter of the membership of the UELCA in the Lutheran World Federation (LWF). This was causing problems in the Australian union negotiations because of the clear opposition of the ELCA to LWF membership. At the 1957 LWF Assembly in Minneapolis both the ELCA and the UELCA presented a memorial entitled: "Intersynodical." This memorial proposed the deletion of the confessional paragraph in the LWF constitution, and also commented on the doctrinal basis of the LWF. The Australians were proposing that the LWF become a free association of Lutheran churches. They wanted to avoid the appearance that the LWF had the characteristics of a church. In its evaluation of this proposal the Wisconsin Synod Union Committee concluded: "It is our firm conviction that a Lutheran Church cannot hold membership in the Federation, even if all said proposals were adopted by the LWF, without violating Scripture principles and our Lutheran Confessions."¹⁸

The ELCA continued to wrestle with the problem of the UELCA's LWF membership and its fellowship and work in New Guinea with other groups with which the ELCA could never be in fellowship. In 1959 Professor Peters wrote about the Albury convention of the ELCA.¹⁹ He quotes from a letter from Australia which states that of the 300 delegates at least 99% voted that altar and pulpit fellowship with the UELCA can not be established as long as the points of difference in regard to the Lutheran World Federation and the New Guinea Mission are not removed. Peters concludes: "This, indeed, makes the issue between these two Lutheran churches a very clear and decisive one. No one is left in doubt as to the points at issue and as to what alone can bring this issue to a God-pleasing settlement."²⁰

The ELCA continued to take a firm stand against unionistic practices, and the Wisconsin Synod gave its approval. In 1960 the ELCA declined an invitation to send delegates to the first National Conference of Australian Churches held in Melbourne. The UELCA decided to accept the invitation. Referring to "our brethren of the ELCA" Peters states: "We are in full accord with the decision of the Executive Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Australia not to accept the invitation."²¹

However, the ELCA did decide to send observers to this conference. Professor Peters wondered how far these observers would be able to bear testimony to Lutheran doctrine and practice at this conference representing the World Council of Churches. His concern was well justified. Nine years later, after the Australian union had taken place, one of the observers, Dr. Henry P. Hamann, criticized the fellowship principles of the ELS (and thus also of the WELS). He wrote:

"The isolated position of the ELS - and this is said by way of fraternal warning - is not the witness to the Christian world that the ELS desires it to be. I am reminded of the lesson I learned at the big conference of Australian churches held in Melbourne early in 1960. I was an observer for the then Evangelical Church of Australia and I had up till then been convinced that the mere attitude of non-co-operation with other churches was a witness to them. I found I was quite mistaken. Most of the laymen and clergy I spoke to had not even heard of our church, let alone of the theological grounds for our position of aloofness. That strict position was the complete negation of witness. Nothing happened."²²

Concluding his review of the history of the ELS titled A City Set on a Hill by Theodore Aaberg, Hamann comments: "And so I have my serious doubts about the title of this book as a picture of the ELS. A more fitting title would be "The Lamp under a Bushel"."²³

Over the years the exchange of letters and information between the ELCA and the Wisconsin Synod gradually increased, particularly as the

proposed merger with the UELCA became a foregone conclusion. President Naumann entered into frequent correspondence with Pastor F.W. Noack, the President of the Queensland District of the ELCA. Pastor Noack attended several conventions of the Wisconsin Synod, as did several other leaders of the ELCA over the years, and President Naumann was very sympathetic with Pastor Noack's conservative stand and opposition to the Australian union. For example, on March 23, 1961 President Naumann wrote to Pastor Noack: "I wish we had closer ties with your Synod and that our people had greater knowledge of your fight for truth in doctrine and practice." On December 14, 1962 President Naumann wrote: "How I wish we could again sit down at table together for a week or two and discuss the many things we have on our hearts."

President Naumann and Professor Carl Lawrenz of the Wisconsin Synod's Commission on Doctrinal Matters had attended the Melbourne convention of the ELCA, March 22-29, 1962. It was the first and only time that such high officials of the Wisconsin Synod would travel to Australia. On May 4, 1962 Pastor Noack wrote to President Naumann: "It was a joy for us to have you with us at our Convention. Your testimonies warmed our hearts. It was of value to us also to have the opportunity of discussing with you personally various matters in connection with your work." The minutes of the May 15, 1962, meeting of the Wisconsin Synod's Commission on Doctrinal Matters contain a brief report by Professor Lawrenz on the Australian visit. At this time the breakup of the Synodical Conference was of concern to the Australian pastors, and Professor Lawrenz reported: "Our two representatives were well received and given a good opportunity at a special Pastoral Conference session to present our Synod's position, as well as a history of developments leading up to our Synod's suspension resolutions of 1961."

The 1965 convention of the ELCA was a crucial one in the history of Australian Lutheranism. This convention was held March 12-19. at Toowoomba in Queensland. On March 15 the ELCA declared altar and pulpit fellowship with the UELCA. President Naumann was becoming increasingly concerned that the ELCA was compromising its confessional position. In his formal greetings to this convention he wrote: "Your brethren in the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod greet you in the name of our exalted Savior and Redeemer, the Captain of our salvation." He also warned: "We live in the age in which attacks upon the verbal inspiration, the factual inerrancy, and the undiminished authority of the Holy Scriptures are increasing in number, in vehemence, and in seductive skill."

In a cover letter, dated February 22, 1965, to Dr. Cl. E. Hoopmann, the President of the ELCA, President Naumann explained the sending of two letters: "I am also enclosing a second communication. It would, in our estimation, be presumptuous to include such an evaluation of your Document of Union in a letter of greeting." Here we see the tact and care exercised by President Naumann in dealing with a situation in which admonition was required.

The Wisconsin Synod's evaluation of the Document of Union, prepared by the Commission on Doctrinal Matters, was sent by President Naumann and dated February 24, 1965. He wrote: "We ask you respectfully to weigh our expressed concerns in the fear of God, realizing what an indispensable Power and Light His Holy Word is for us for this life and for that which is to come. Of this Word we dare not surrender or even compromise one statement, lest we lose the certainty of our salvation."

The ELCA had given three reasons for not declaring fellowship with the UELCA even after the "Theses of Agreement" of 1956 had been adopted. These

were the UELCA's membership in the LWF, the involvement of the UELCA in unionistic practices in New Guinea, and doubt as to whether the UELCA was living by the principles agreed upon in the "Theses of Agreement." In his letter of February 24, 1965 President Naumann wrote: "As deeply concerned brethren we beg you to give heed to our fears that the "Document of Union" indicates that your former scruples are still valid." He then goes into details of the weakness of the Australian document in the three areas.

Other fears are also expressed: "We are deeply concerned about what appears to us a weakening of your former position on church fellowship." President Naumann also wrote: "May we express one other concern? Already in the past we found several of the statements pertaining to the inerrancy of Scripture in the "Theses of Agreement" disturbing because they do not assert the factual correctness of every statement of Scripture. Our concerns are heightened because these very statements are being quoted in defense of attempts to narrow the concept of inerrancy." He concluded: "Brethren, we plead with you not to surrender your "confessional character" by abandoning your previously held Scriptural objections to the union which is now proposed."

It must have been disconcerting for President Naumann to hear that the conservatives were convinced to vote for the union. In a letter dated March 17, 1965, Pastor F.G. Kleinig told President Naumann that Dr. Hamann had assured the ELCA pastors that the matters over which they were concerned were completely covered by the 'intended sense' of the Document of Union. Regarding the Wisconsin Synod letter, Pastor Kleinig wrote: "This correspondence was received, and after that not a word was heard about it any more. Your concerns were not even discussed."

The ELCA gave its official reply through its Overseas Committee in a letter written on April 12, 1965. Pastors Hoopmann and Blaess wrote: "We wish to thank you for having expressed your concerns in such a brotherly manner. Your official communication was placed before our pastoral conference and convention at Toowoomba and your concerns, as well as those of some of our own brethren, received earnest consideration." They then tell how the delegates arose to adopt the Document of Union "with scarcely an exception", and how no one rose to vote against it. This letter then deals with the specific concerns of the Wisconsin Synod. It states: "We fear, however, that you do not fully appreciate the fact that the principles of Holy Writ, which were our concern in the past, will be our concern also in the future. We have no intention of abandoning these principles, but wish to apply them. It seems to us that you are not fully conversant with the actual situation in Australia and New Guinea at the present time nor with the progress that has been made in our more recent faculty and intersynodical negotiations." The letter concludes: "If the doctrinal basis contained in the Document of Union is adhered to faithfully a new Church should come into being standing four-square upon the Word of God and the Confessions of our dearly beloved Lutheran Church."

The actual union of the two Australian synods took place at Tanunda, South Australia, from October 29 to November 2, 1966, and the Lutheran Church of Australia (hereafter LCA) came into being. In his official greetings to the new church President Naumann wrote on October 18, 1966:

"Because of our cherished fellowship with one of your constituent bodies, your union into one church takes on no small significance for us of the Wisconsin Ev. Lutheran Synod.

We have taken note of the fact that subsequent to the formation of the Lutheran Church of Australia you will be determining the fellowship relations of your new church body with other Lutheran church bodies. Should the Lutheran Church of Australia for that

purpose be minded to initiate discussions with our Wisconsin Ev. Lutheran Synod, we want you to know that we would welcome such an opportunity. For it is our hope that the fellowship which we enjoyed with the Ev. Lutheran Church of Australia might likewise become possible with the Lutheran Church of Australia.

May the Lord of the Church so guide our two church bodies that doctrinal discussions not only materialize but also attain the goal to which we look forward - a blessed fellowship resulting from a faithful adherence to God's saving Word and bearing witness of such faithfulness."

The reaction of the ELCA to the breakup of the Synodical Conference

The description of this era would not be complete without at least a brief look at the breakup of the Synodical Conference. The ELCA was in fellowship with the Missouri Synod, and the prospect of the breakup of the Synodical Conference was a matter of deep concern to the leaders of the ELCA. Already in 1956 President Hoopmann wrote to President Naumann in a letter dated July 4:

"We have read with deep regret of the differences threatening a rupture between your large and influential bodies. Such a rupture would be a real calamity not only for your respective Synods but also for the Lutheran Church throughout the world.

We believe the Church is passing through a crisis and it is imperative that those who have stood shoulder to shoulder for many years confessing the truth and rejecting error should continue to do so. If differences have arisen, as they have, these should be removed on the basis of God's Holy Word and the Confessions of the Church, if at all possible, and, as soon as possible.....

We have therefore passed a resolution at our recent Convention.....asking your Synod as well as the Missouri Synod, to suspend any final action or the passing of decisive resolutions before a Conclave or Conference....has taken place.

We trust that you will be able to give due consideration to our humble request, made in the fear of God and in the interests of true unity."

The Conference the Australians had in mind would involve theologians from confessional Lutheran churches from around the world. Such a conference

was held at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, July 20-30, 1960, the ELCA being represented by Pastor F.J.H. Blaess. The forty-sixth Convention of the Lutheran Synodical Conference was held in Milwaukee, August 2-5, 1960. The four synods of the Synodical Conference presented their doctrinal views on church fellowship, the issue which was threatening the breakup of the Synodical Conference because of the unionistic practices of the Missouri Synod. The representatives from other countries were asked to form an "Overseas Committee" to evaluate the different statements on fellowship. Dr. Hamann of the ELCA was the chairman of this committee, and some of the material in this committee's "Fellowship in Its Necessary Context of the Doctrine of the Church" was based on the Australian "Theses of Agreement."²⁴ However, the Wisconsin Synod did not expect much progress to result from this statement, and since the Missouri Synod was continuing with its unionistic practices, the Wisconsin Synod proceeded to break fellowship with the Missouri Synod.

At the 1962 Convention of the ELCA in Melbourne, at which President Naumann and Professor Lawrenz were present, it was resolved to send letters to both the Wisconsin Synod and the Missouri Synod regarding the breakup of the Synodical Conference. The letter to the Missouri Synod expressed concern about the growing liberalism in both doctrine and practice in that synod. ²⁵

The letter to the Wisconsin Synod contained the following:

"It has filled our hearts with great sorrow to hear that you have felt constrained to suspend fellowship with the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod....

We have been disappointed. The break has come. The possibility of reuniting those who were together in the Synodical Conference has become very difficult. We are particularly perturbed to read in your official declaration that you suspended fellowship with the Missouri Synod on the basis of Romans 16:17,18....We fear that the Missouri Synod will hear

in this resolution with its reference to false teachers and the prodigal son no evangelical summons to return to her sister-synod, but a legalistic judgment which will be no encouragement to return.

...We also believe that your "unit concept" and your interpretation and application of Romans 16:17,18, which we cannot accept, have also helped to bring about the present schism."²⁶

A gradual shift towards the Missouri position on fellowship, and joint prayer in particular, became evident in the ELCA, and subsequently in the LCA. In a 1968 article on fellowship Dr. Hamann wrote regarding the Wisconsin Synod position: "The whole tendency of the present essay indicates that this rigid position cannot be regarded as satisfactory, in spite of the evident concern for the truth of the Gospel which underlies it."²⁷

Relations between the Wisconsin Synod and the LCA since union

During the early years of the union several attempts were made to try and initiate doctrinal meetings with Australian officials, particularly President Lohe, but with ^{little} / success. The financial problems of the Australian church were a factor, although the Wisconsin Synod did offer funds to help with travel expenses. However, President Lohe wrote to President Naumann on April 16, 1970: "In view of the theological chaos existing in the world, which is also affecting Lutheran churches in all countries, we feel it is the will of God to fellowship with those who stand soundly on the Scriptures and the Confessions as we do. The disturbing element is that conservatives are simply being brushed aside and overwhelmed."

Already in 1967 the Vice-President of the LCA, Dr. H.D. Koehne was authorized by the Commission on Theology to approach the Wisconsin Synod and ask for reactions to both the "Theses of Agreement" and the "Document of Union". It seemed that the LCA was really willing to listen to the

concerns of the Wisconsin Synod. Dr. Koehne wrote, on July 28, 1967: "Let me assure you that we will give earnest and God-fearing consideration to the reply which you will feel constrained to send on to us." Apparently he was anticipating some criticism, and his concern was justified. On January 23, 1968 Professor Lawrenz sent the response of the Wisconsin Synod's Commission on Doctrinal Matters. It was an extensive eleven-page document, dealing with everything from the innerancy of the Scriptures, the doctrine of the church and ministry and fellowship, to eschatological matters and the doctrine of election. Perhaps the comments showed a little too clearly the points of difference with the LCA, for apart from the few attempts of President Lohe to meet with President Naumann, there was little contact for a number of years.

Apparently there was a brief meeting between these two men on July 1, 1970. However, a resolution of the Wisconsin Synod's 1971 convention notes that "no attempts were made at that time to enter upon a detailed discussion of the doctrinal statements which have formed the confessional basis of the Lutheran Church of Australia." Aware of the growing problems and disagreements within the LCA the convention resolved: "a) That we ask the Holy Spirit to guide the Lutheran Church of Australia in its internal discussions;" and "b) That we urge the Commission on Doctrinal Matters to continue to show a loving concern for the development of a strong confessional Lutheran Church in Australia."²⁸

During this time the growing liberalism of men at the seminary in Adelaide was becoming more evident.²⁹ Dr. Sasse wrote to President Naumann on October 6, 1970: "I am not quite happy with your new confession ["This We Believe"]. We must all try to solve such exegetical problems as presented by Gen. 1-3 in such a way that we do not contradict the established facts

of the universe (I do not speak of theories and hypotheses, but of facts). Otherwise we excommunicate the younger generation of our congregations." President Naumann responded on Ascension Day, 1971: "You could do the cause of authentic Lutheranism a great service, Dr. Sasse, by dropping these reservations over against verbal inspiration and the absolute inerrancy of the Holy Bible. We believe, teach, and confess that the entire Bible is God's revealed Truth." However, it is interesting to note that in a letter to the editors of "Sola Scripture" Dr. Sasse laments the doctrinal decline in the ALC and the Lutheran Church in America. And he comments: "If I admire one seminary it is Mequon with its excellent tradition in the Biblical Languages." He had sent a copy of that letter, written on January 25, 1970, to President Naumann, perhaps to assure him of his orthodoxy.

In 1974 LCA President Grope had a brief meeting with President Naumann, Professor Lawrenz and several other members of the CICR. A resolution of the 1975 convention of the Wisconsin Synod notes that the LCA was still concerned with internal matters, and was not ready to enter formal doctrinal discussions with the Wisconsin Synod at that time.³⁰

However, on March 5, 1980, the LCA Vice-President, Dr. E.W. Wiebusch wrote to President Mischke: "Over the years our ties with the Wisconsin Evangelical Synod seemed to have lost something of that closeness which marked the period prior to the union of the Churches in Australia. I felt this very keenly....I believe it is high time that we again endeavor to knit these ties which linked us in the past a little more closely." With his letter he sent copies of the "Doctrinal Statements and Theological Opinions" accepted by the LCA's Commission on Theology, and asked for the reaction of the Wisconsin Synod.

On April 20, 1980 professor Lawrenz sent the response of the Commission on Inter-Church Relations. He lists a total of eight specific doctrinal assertions with which the CICR disagreed:"1. A non-scriptural distinction between joint prayer and prayer fellowship. 2. A restriction of church fellowship to a joint use of the means of grace. 3. Consensus on the doctrinal content of the Book of Concord as the only requirement for Lutheran unity. 4. The identification of the local congregation as the only divinely instituted form of the church. 5. The identification of the pastorate of the local congregation as the only divinely instituted form of the public ministry. 6. A seemingly undue emphasis upon the "servant form of the written Word of God." 7. The refusal to insist upon a literal six-day creation, allowing room for some form of evolution, and 8. An unclarity in certain eschatological statements, leaving possible room for certain millennial teachings."

Future relations between the Wisconsin Synod and the LCA

In view of these serious doctrinal differences it seems highly unlikely that there will ever be fellowship between the Wisconsin Synod and the LCA. As Professor Lawrenz told me: "As long as there is not a full confession of the inerrancy of the Scriptures, there is no hope of fellowship."³¹ The best that the Wisconsin Synod can hope to do is to continue to evaluate the statements of the LCA when asked to do so, and to encourage those who remain conservative in the LCA to give a clear and loud confession. There are a few congregations that are not in fellowship with the LCA, such as the Faith Lutheran Parish in Maryborough, Queensland. In 1981 this parish did call a Wisconsin Synod pastor, P.L. Sullivan, but he had to decline the call because of the illness of his daughter. There is also Grace congregation in

Elizabeth, South Australia, which is served on a visiting basis by Pastor Dudley from Oregon, who is in fellowship with the Wisconsin Synod. Perhaps the best course of action for the Wisconsin Synod in the years to come would be to encourage and support these small confessional congregations in Australia.

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