

WHAT CAUSED THE FEDERATION FOR

AUTHENTIC LUTHERANISM TO BREAK-UP

for Prof. Fredricks
Senior Church History

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WHAT CAUSED THE "FEDERATION FOR AUTHENTIC LUTHERANISM" TO BREAK UP

The purpose of this paper is to show that the reasons for the dissolution of the F.A.L. were multifaceted, and no single event or reason led to the break-up of this church body. The purpose of this paper is not to second guess or play the role of the "Monday morning Quarter Back". Nor is it the intent of this author to pass judgement on the F.A.L. or any of its members of Pastors. Certainly God used this small body for doing work in His kingdom. The individual members and Pastors were also strengthened, having had to take a confessional stand against such a large church body as the L.C.M.S., a stand that often meant loss of Church property and severed ties with relatives. The reason this paper is being written is that what has been written in the past does not square with the evidence to be found. I do not condemn this earlier work for it is good, but the conclusions may be more subjective than the evidence allows. Perhaps the advice of Prof. Fredricks should be heeded, "that history is best written 25 years after it has happened." Perhaps my approach will also tend to be subjective but will rely more heavily upon documents than on responses on a

questionnaire when emotions were still rather high, and even the responses were subjective. The more one looks through the evidence the more facets he finds that led to the end of FAL. The study of this subject has benefitted me greatly in doctrinal and practical matters.

The origin and formation of the FAL is fairly well-known, but since it may be one of the factors in its demise, a brief sketch of its formation will be included at the beginning. There were actually eight facets involved: 1) lack of leadership experience, 2) geography, 3) what seemed to be a reversal in doctrinal errors of the LCMS following the New Orleans Convention in 1973, 4) a failure to attract larger numbers of congregations from the LCMS, 5) an overly-complex constitution, 6) finances, 7) misunderstandings in respect to "in statu confessiones", 8) and finally, a loss of love and cooperation among the brethren themselves.

In respect to the history of the FAL, the church body was made up of former congregations of the Missouri Synod who could no longer tolerate the false doctrine and unionistic fellowship of their Synod. Knowing there were many others in the LCMS who remained faithful to the scriptures and could no longer go along with the

false doctrine and practice of the LCMS they declared themselves to be in a state of confessional protest, "in statu confessionis", on the basis of Rom. 16:17-18, and II Cor. 6:14-18.

On Nov. 1-2, 1971 this group of individuals held their constituting convention in Libertyville, Ill.

There were over 200 like-minded people in attendance (mostly Pastors) who indicated they could no longer tolerate the false doctrine in the Missouri Synod. It looked as though there would be at least 50-60 congregations that would become the charter membership of the Federation for Authentic Lutheranism. However, due to lack of proper preparation, many congregations were not ready to separate. For some, the lack of commitment may have been partially material, namely the loss of their church property to the LCMS. Thus the constituting convention only yielded 6 charter congregations.

These congregations were comprised of two groups and two geographical regions. The Conference for Authentic Lutheranism in California (CAL) and the Free Association for Authentic Lutheranism in the Midwest (Wisconsin and Illinois). This geographical spread was

one of the facets in the demise of the FAL for it hampered communications and the close personal fellowship that must exist in any church body. It also made pastoral conferences and conventions difficult and costly due to the amount of travel involved. Thus the midwest and west coast were not as closely united as would be desired. Had the opening convention attracted more congregations, this geographical gap could have been bridged.

It was never the intention of the FAL to become a major Lutheran body, but merely an island of refuge for those congregations and Pastors who could no longer in good conscience remain in the Missouri synod. Thus congregations contemplating such a move could band together with those of a common identity, namely Ex-Missourians and not be merely absorbed into another major synod.

But why did the FAL fail to attract other congregations from the LCMS? As was mentioned earlier, many congregations were still unaware of the heterodoxy running rampant in the LCMS and some Pastors had a lot of homework to do in this area. Also for younger congregations who had their property financed

through the Missouri Synod became reluctant and hoped that the need for such a move would pass when President Preus's promises to "clean house" would come true. But the single most factor in this failure was the 1973 Convention of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod at New Orleans. At that convention it appeared the Conservatives were in control and there was much talk about dealing with the liberal element of the Synod. President Preus's promises to take care of the liberals who held to heterodox teachings; looked to be a near reality. Thus many Pastors and congregations became complacent, waiting for the "house-cleaning" in Missouri to take place. Only time will tell if a complete return to orthodoxy will ever take place. following the convention I remember talk within the FAL that a time would soon come when they could re-join the LCMS.

Another factor that led to the demise of the FAL was, for lack of a better term, a lack of leadership experience. Note, I did not say a lack of leadership, but lack of experience in the area of leadership. I recall one Pastor stating, "Not a one of us was a District President or major officer in the LCMS. We had to learn as we went on, how to proceed in many areas

such as colloquy and world missions."

Perhaps this became most evident in the complex constitution that was chosen to govern the small body. Because they still had a bad taste in their mouths from their days in the LCMS which had a powerful Presidential office with his boards, the FAL decided to go with a Board of Directors instead of a President. This would avoid having the power rest with one man. However for such a small body, this elaborate form of government was too complex to work efficiently. When the constitution was drafted, a much larger membership was anticipated (perhaps 100+ congregations). Therefore some adjustments seemed to be in order. Although with a little patience and co-operation things could have run smoothly with the original constitution.

Prior to the 1973 FAL Convention at Vero Beach, Florida, the Chairman of the Mission Board and the Chairman of the Board of Colloquy and Church Discipline had voiced opinions that this form of church government would be the undoing of FAL. They came to the convention with proposed changes to the constitution that would grant their boards autonomy so they would not be accountable to the Board of Directors. It should be noted that on Dec. 4, 1972 the Board of

Directors voted to enlarge the Board of Directors to include the chairmen of these boards. This should have alleviated the problem, but they still insisted they must not be shackled by the Board of Directors. At the Vero Beach Convention a revised constitution was adopted that should have brought harmony. The Chairmen of the Mission Board and the Board of Colloquy and Church Discipline admitted that both had worked outside the old constitution of the FAL. However, merely changing the constitution only took care of problems on the surface. Many Pastors walked away from the Vero Beach convention with wounds that would not easily be healed.

Another facet that added to the break up of the FAL had to do with finances. Some might even say that is absurd. True, the FAL congregations were richly blessed financially and were able to do much work in spreading the Gospel at home and abroad. It was said, "How can so few do so much?" They had a flourishing mission in Antiqua, West Indies; they had also started several home missions; and were supporting another missionary in Central America and training and supporting two more who were being trained by the ELS in Mankato, MN. However, all this activity costs dollars and more dollars.

special Pastoral Convocation held in May of 1974 at Denver to deal with internal problems, and later at the Fourth Annual convention, "Status confessionis" became an issue charged with emotions for charges of false doctrine lerked in the clouds. The matter was discussed at length with no one objecting to the principle. The question now was, "Has "status confessionis" become a disguise for selective fellowship?" It should be remembered that "status confessionis" is how these congregations recognized each other as being in common fellowship before leaving the LCMS. Could a Pastor now have altar and prayer fellowship with people in the LCMS who were in a state of confessional protest (status confessionis) against the Missouri Synod? Some said "yes", others, "no". (A copy of a status confessionis" agreement will be included as Appendix I). One can see all that is left of an LCMS membership in such a state is an empty signature on the role book of an LCMS congregation. But also, a very notable protest. This matter became such an issue at the North Hollywood convention in 1974 that is appeared there was a family squabble going on, on the convention floor. The WELS men

left after the first day because they felt uneasy as guests to a family fight. The stage was being set for the dissolution of FAL: finances, misunderstanding on fellowship, bad geography and now fighting amongst one another on how another man conducts his ministry. But a statement on how to apply "status confessionis" as present to fellowship came much too late for the Federation. But it didn't need to be that way for in Oct. 21-22, 1974 the Evangelical Lutheran Confessional Forum made the following statement, "The state of confession was discussed with its possible application to individuals and congregations still members of the Missouri Synod. There was complete agreement by representatives of all three synods that FAL's understanding and practice, as stated at the FAL constituting Convention of 1971, is the correct one."

A later statement by the Doctrinal Committees of WELS and the ELS also bare this out. A statement prepared by Theodore Aaberg Sr., entitled, "A Reply of The WELS Commission on Inter-Church Relations and the ELS Board of Theology and Church Relations, based on their synod's public confession on the Doctrine of

Church Fellowship to a question regarding church fellowship raised by Pastors from the Conference of Authentic Lutherans"

Do we hold that the exercise of church fellowship, especially prayer and altar fellowship, can be decided in every instance solely on the basis of formal church membership that is, on whether or not the person belongs to a congregation or synod in affiliation with us? NO. Ordinarily, this is the basis on which such a question is decided since church fellowship is exercised on the basis of one's confession to the pure Marks of the Church, and ordinarily we express our confession by our church membership. There may be cases in the exercise of church fellowship where a person's informal confession of faith must also be considered. This is especially true regarding the weak. But whether one is guided by a person's formal or informal confession of faith, in either instance, it must be in principle a confession to the full truth of God's Word. In addition special care must be exercised so as not to cause offense to others or to interfere with another man's ministry. Further, we are not to judge too harshly concerning the manner in which a brother Pastor after much agonizing, handles such difficult cases."

Had this statement existed at the time of the 1974 Convention perhaps harmony would have resulted on the fellowship matter. From the study of the minutes of that convention, motions were made of a similar nature but no final agreement could be reached.

Thus as a result the men outside the CAL maintained membership is the only standard for fellowship.

All the above mentioned facets led to the final facet in the FAL dissolution, that is, a loss of love and co-operation among the bretheren of FAL itself. At that 1974 Convention motions were made that steps be taken to dissolve the FAL and merge it with either the ELS or the WELS. Pastors had expressed themselves that they did not wish to continue within the FAL because of the lack of harmony. Chairman Voss seems to concur in this conclusion in his opening remarks at the 1974 Convention. "While all of these and countless other weaknesses and faults could be offered as reasons for dissolution, we would submit that the real issue is a growing lack of desire to work together." This attitude surfaced already in 1973. Unfortunately, we did not come to grips with our internal problem (primarily among our Pastors) at Vero Beach. There we attempted to improve the situation structurally and much external good was accomplished. But the deeper and real problem did not go away. We attempted again to have peace by participating in a much-needed and long-over due Pastoral Convocation at Denver in May. And not it seemed to some, at least, we had resolved

our differences and desired to go on as brothers, setting our faces in the direction we had begun." However, the convention proved the differences had not been settled at Denver. The "Status Confessionis" issue dominated much time and energy at the convention and many men simply no longer wished to go on with this continual strife. Shortly after the convention six congregations withdrew from the FAL. They were the California congregations of CAL and the Okauchee congregation in Wisconsin. These six had asked for peaceful releases and continued fellowship for their reasons for withdrawal were not due to doctrinal differences but merely a desire to step away from the tension and problems within the FAL. Peaceful releases were denied and it was resolved re-establishment of fellowship would have to be taken up with the Doctrinal Committee.

The stage now being completely set with six congregations gone, dissolution was inevitable. However some preliminary work had to be done. First of all the constitution had to be revised. It read that it would take three meetings thirty days apart to dissolve the Federation. Therefore a special meeting was called

in April, 1975 at Hillsboro, Oregon, and ammended the constitution to read that the FAL may be dissolved after 2/3 of the voting members present have cast their votes in favor of dissolution, and the matter has been submitted to referendum of the voting congregations with at least 2/3 of the congregations voting in referendum, casting their votes for dissolution. This passed unanimously. The next step was to see which sister synod would be receptive to absorbing the FAL. The Federation was in the black financially so this was not a problem. The logical choice was the WELS since they had the resources and the manpower to take over the responsibilities of a foreign mission and the vacancies that existed. It was further resolved at the Hillsboro convention that the FAL be dissolved by means of a merger with the WELS in accordance with ARTicle XIV, section 3, of the constitution, as ammended and be it further resolved that no member congregation shall be hindered by the FAL from seeking membership in either of our sister synods, or from becoming independent.

A final resolution was passed that such merger would take place after 2/3 of the congregations approved the merger. Such voting to be concluded by June 30, 1975

in time for the WELS convention to approve the merger. The assets and liabilities of the FAL to become the assets and liabilities of the WELS. Only eight congregations' approval was needed to effect the merger. The WELS in convention approved the merger.

Also at the Hillsboro meeting in April 1975 the convention voted down the recommendation of the FAL Council to terminate fellowship with the CAL. Professor Lawrenz believes this was a unanimous vote thus the Council also voted against their own recommendation.

Therefore, it is the conclusion of this writer that the break up of the FAL was a multi-faceted event that happened over a period of several years. The underlying problem being a growing lack of desire to work together because of all the other problems mentioned earlier. This paper in no way claims to be the final authority on the matter of FAL's dissolution, but does express what the evidence presents. The former work done on this subject seems to stand on the wrong side of the status confessionis matter as resolved by the statements of the CICR and the ELS Board for Theology and Church Relations as quoted earlier. Doctrinal differences were not a factor in the dissolu-

tion nor the reason for the CAL congregations for removing themselves from FAL. This point is brought out in the minutes of the CICR, Nov.18, 1975, which states that page 112 of the 1975 BORAM should be changed and the synod should be informed through the President's News Letter that "statis confessionis" was not the issue in the withdrawal. No single facet resulted in the dissolution.

The FAL in its short life remained faithful to the confession that started the body. The men and congregations involved were blessed by a renewed zeal for confessional Lutheranism during this time. The work of the kingdom was also expanded under this small body. It is the hope of this writer that the events that led to the FAL's demise not be repeated in the future. It is also the hope of this writer that some years down the road others will write on the matter who were involved in those trying years.

Included in this paper are 2 Appendices: 1) the "statis confessionis" agreement; 2) a document put together by the CAL pastors on the failure of FAL As A Viable Church Body. Though it ignores the other facets, it is the only statement that comes from within FAL.

[Handwritten notes and signatures are present at the bottom of the page, including the name "John" and various illegible scribbles.]

APPENDIX I

A STATUS CONFSSIONIS DECLARATION

- For Members of the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod

Whereas the LCMS in convention at Milwaukee, Wis. July 9-16, 1971 resolved to continue rather than terminate its unscriptural fellowship with the American Lutheran Church (See Res. 3:21)

Whereas the LCMS in the same convention endorsed continuance of its false ecumenical trends, vis. refusal to withdraw from the Lutheran Council U.S.A. (See Res. 3:18), approval of using mission personnel from other denominations ("Seconding" Res. 1:09), request for review and evaluation of joining L.W.F. (Res. 3:06), N.C.C. and W.C.C. (Res. 3:07), and encouraging closer ties with the Lutheran Church in America (Res. 3:14)

Whereas the LCMS in the same convention declined to tighten its control over the teaching of its pastors and professors (See Res. 2:21) and declined to take any disciplinary action against those pastors, professors and teachers who are advocating tolerance of differing theological opinions with respect to the doctrine of the Scriptures, Inerrancy, Inspiration, the Church and the Lord's Supper.

Whereas the LCMS in the same convention has refused to correct the errors inherent in its "Mission Affirmations" and has given them further synodical standing through the adoption of the "Social Ministry Affirmations: which obliterate the Great Commission of our Lord (St. Matthew 28:19-20) by defining the salvation of mankind as "the restoration of all people to that kind of life, both here and hereafter for which they were created."

Whereas the LCMS in the same convention has by the above actions revealed that it will continue to condone and practice unionism (Cfr. Brief Statement Article 28), contrary to the clear admonition of Holy Scripture in Romans 16:17, and further that it has now become a heterodox church body (Cfr. Brief Statement. Article 29) by accepting circumstances which tolerate the public teaching of error.

Whereas public correction and repentance is necessary for orthodoxy to return, our continued membership in a heterodox body would be a denial of our scriptural position and confessional commitment

the undersigned declare(s) that with these official resolutions the LCMS has broken the unity of faith and the fellowship of the church as it is enjoined upon us and required by the Holy Scriptures (I Cor. 1:10), the Lutheran Confessions (Formula of Concord, T.D.C.S. Tri. 850) and the LCMS Constitution (Art. III, Object No. 1 of Synod) - and has thereby become a heterodox and unionistic body.

the undersigned herewith declare(s) themselves (him - or herself)
to be in the confessional state (in statu confessionis)

APPENDIX 1 (con't.)

the undersigned understand(s) that the confessional state which they hereby enter obligates them for the sake of the Savior and His truth

1. to hold themselves (him - or herself) apart from these actions of the LC-MS and publicly testify against the errors in doctrine and practice which they involve.
2. to withhold financial support from the LC-MS and redirect it to causes confessing and practicing authentic Lutheranism.
3. to limit the practice of altar fellowship (commune) and pulpit fellowship (pulpit exchange) to those who have publicly adopted this Declaration.
4. to resolve the question of membership in the LC-MS since continuing membership in a heterodox body would be a denial of our Scriptural position and confessional commitment.
5. to inform the officers and constituents of the LC-MS of this declaration.

Signature: _____

Pastor

_____ Teacher

_____ Layman

_____ Congregation

Address: _____

APPENDIX II

THE FAILURE OF FAL AS A VIABLE CHURCH BODY

If there is one word to describe the failure of FAL to continue as a separate church body - it would be the word, AUTONOMY!

The first evidence of a power struggle for autonomy was seen at the 2nd Annual Convention of FAL, 1972. The Chairman of the FAL Mission Committee pleaded with the delegates to give his committee "Board Status" to enable them to work more effectively especially overseas. The convention responded by granting board status to the Mission Committee. (1) From that time on, the Mission Board openly and persistently demanded autonomy from the Board of Directors in direct opposition to the FAL constitution which stated that all boards and committees were accountable to the Board of Directors. (2)

The cry of autonomy then spread quickly to the Board of Colloquy and Church Discipline (BCCD). This second and last major board made it continually clear that it did not want any supervision from the Board of Directors.

In an attempt to encourage these two boards to work together with the Board of Directors as a team, the Board of Directors voted on December 4, 1972, to enlarge the Board of Directors by adding the Chairmen of the Mission Board and BCCD. (3) Unfortunately, this did not alleviate the autonomy problem.

On May 7, 1973, during a regular Board of Directors' meeting, the Chairman of the Board of Missions was confronted with serious charges which dealt principally with his refusal to accept the clear administrative guidelines of FAL's constitution - again the autonomy problem. (4) He resigned from his office in the midst of the charges brought against him.

On June 5, 1973, several members of the Board of Directors were to appear before the Watertown congregation to answer questions about their pastor's resignation as Chairman of the Board of Missions. During that meeting, Rev. Kauffeld was quoted as saying that unless the constitution and the administrative structure of FAL were changed, FAL would finally fall of its own weight. (5) Also, Mr. Flynn, a member of the Mission Board remarked during the meeting that the Board of Missions would be completely "hamstrung" with such guidelines, that it would not be "autonomous"! (5)

In the June 20-23, 1973 minutes of the FAL BCCD, we find the following:

"In the event a public sin has been committed, the BCCD finds no Scriptural warrant or reason for dismissing steps 1 and 2 of Matthew 18..."

"The early part of the afternoon was spent in reading the constitution of FAL with the purpose of determining bounds for the BCCD and Bd. of Directors. It was the unanimous opinion of the Board members that the constitution of FAL was in need of revision" (6)

From the June 22-24, 1973 minutes of the Board of Directors, we read from the report of the Watertown Fact Finding Committee concerning their meeting of June 5, 1973, with several members of the Board of Directors concerning their pastor's resignation from the Mission Board:

"That FAL rework its constitution as quickly as possible to correct areas of question"

"That St. John's Ev. Lutheran Congregation of Watertown, Wisconsin release its funds to FAL and that such release extend through the date of the FAL Convention in October. If, at that time, there is no sizeable increase in membership in FAL from the Missouri Synod, that this congregation affiliate itself with some other synod and lend its support to such Synod". (7)

In the minutes of the Board of Directors of August 20-21, 1973, the Chairman of the BCCD admitted that his own congregation had worked out some proposed constitutional revisions. He stated further that the Watertown congregation had done likewise and they had agreed upon a composite of these proposed revisions. The Chairman of the BCCD, Mr. Zander, went on to say:

"that he feels that unless the Vero Beach Convention adopts revisions which clarify the conflicts which exist in responsibility in the present Constitution of FAL, that this will be the last year of FAL's existence. Mr. Zander added that he feels, in his own mind, that this is the greatest problem facing our church at this time." (8)

It was at the August 20-21, 1973, meeting of the Board of Directors that the Board of Directors was told by the BCCD that it would not change their statement on public offense which in effect always demanded steps 1 and 2 of Matthew 18. (8) That statement was to appear in the workbook of the FAL Vero Beach Convention. Mr. Zander also expressed the view that it is impossible for the BCCD to be responsible both to the Board of Directors and the church body. (8)

A proposed constitution was sent out by the FAL Constitution Chairman prior to the Vero Beach Convention, October 1973, to all congregations of FAL. All checks and balances in the original constitution would have been removed. The Board of Directors' system would have been replaced by an organization with three boards at its head, all having equal authority and answerable to the FAL Convention. This constitution was sent out with no identity as to its authors and with secrecy. (9)

Because of horrendous internal problems within FAL, the 3rd Annual FAL Convention of FAL, held at Vero Beach, Florida, October 16-18, 1973, adopted a new constitution which was to promote internal unity. At that convention the Chairman of the BCCD and the former Chairman of the Mission Board admitted publicly that they had worked outside of the old constitution of FAL.

A FAL Pastoral Convocation was called for May 1974, and was held in Denver, Colorado. It was called for the express purpose of dealing with continued acknowledged internal problems.

"Status Confessionis" was discussed at length with no one objecting to the principle.

Two pastors, not presently members of CAL however, openly admitted their congregations were involved in selective fellowship with LC-MS members who visit their area on a seasonal basis. This was a carry-over from the days when they were still within the LC-MS.

The Fourth Annual Convention was held in North Hollywood, California on November 5-7, 1974.

The Watertown Congregation passed a resolution on September 9, 1974, to be submitted to that convention which was sent to all congregations of FAL prior to that convention.

"BE IT RESOLVED, that FAL in convention assembled, consider merging with WELS and or ELS now or after the Missouri Synod Convention in Los Angeles." (10)

Chairman Voss, in his opening address of the North Hollywood Convention, stated the following:

"While all of these and countless other weaknesses and faults could be offered as reasons for dissolution, we would submit that the real issue is a growing lack of desire to work together. This attitude surfaced already in 1973. Unfortunately, we did not come to grips with our internal problem (primarily among our pastors) at Vero Beach. There we attempted to improve the situation structurally and much external good was accomplished. But the deeper and real problem did not go away. We attempted again to have peace by participating in a much-needed and long-overdue Pastoral Convocation at Denver in May. And now, it seemed to some at least, we had resolved our differences and desired to go on as brothers, setting our faces in the direction we had begun." (11)

At this North Hollywood Convention in 1974, the very first reference was made to an alleged doctrinal problem in FAL and this stemmed from the "Status Confessionis" statement. At that convention, "Status Confessionis" was equated with selective fellowship.

This was ironic because in a written report in the convention workbook by FAL men who were present at the October 21-22, 1974 Evangelical Lutheran Confessional Forum, we note the following:

"The 'State of Confession' was discussed with its possible application to individuals and congregations still members of the LC-MS. There was complete agreement by representatives of all three synods that FAL's understanding and practice as stated at the FAL Constituting Convention of 1971 is the correct one." (12)

At the same convention the following resolution was passed:

"It has been moved that any pastor and/or congregation who feels that he and/or it cannot abide by the rules of FAL (71) or is dissatisfied with the operating policies of the FAL should remove himself and/or itself from FAL in order to allow those remaining to get on with the Lord's work in unity."

Also,

"Rev. Heiderich moved in connection with the previous motion regarding pastors and/or congregations leaving FAL, that if and when these requests are presented, we grant them a peaceful release."

Conclusion: The six congregations which left FAL prior to FAL's merger with the WELS did so not because of doctrinal reasons, but for purely administrative ones. The enormity of the inner problems of FAL came to the light at the North Hollywood convention where very little convention business was conducted because of the endless wranglings on the floor. In fact, a number of the Wisconsin Synod brethren left after the first day because they felt so uncomfortable viewing what appeared to them to be a family quarrel.

Therefore, the six congregations and their pastors after being tried by fire in leaving the LC-MS were weary of the continuing fruitless organizational struggle within FAL. Thus, they requested peaceful releases from FAL, according to the North Hollywood Convention resolution because they were dissatisfied with the operating policies of FAL. All six congregations assured those remaining in FAL that while they were no longer a part of the organizational structure of FAL, nevertheless, they still cherished their fellowship with them as brethren.