

Senior Church History

Thesis:

Lutherans Alert-National through its publication
exposed the apostacy planned for the American Lutheran Church.

Presented to Professor Edward C. Fredrich

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Many present-day Lutheran pastors are not teaching and preaching what their ancestors were taught. Depending on who hears the statement a number of reactions may be noted: Complete lack of awareness; Shallow acknowledgment; Disheartened disorientation; or angry antagonism.

Things have changed in Lutheranism sad to say. The basic reason for this is that true Lutheranism is in a minority. There aren't that many true Lutherans who hold these words with the same force Martin Luther did, "The Word they still shall let remain." Though the same words of Luther may be cited, understanding of them varies greatly. For some, as in the Wisconsin Synod, God's Word means the sixty-six books inerrant and inspired by God. For other so-called Lutherans God's Word is contained in parts of those sixty-six books, but by no means is every word from God.

From this basic difference flow many differences more noticeable. Because the well is bad so are the teachings. As a result a Lutheran may hear that Jesus really didn't rise from the dead; The account of the creation in Genesis can't be taken at face value; Jesus obviously was not born of a virgin; Finally what becomes of sin, wrath, punishment, forgiveness, eternal life and heaven. Any and every teaching of the Bible can be changed if the words themselves don't mean what they say.

This change in the understanding of the meaning of the Word of God has come in The American Lutheran Church which was formed in October of 1960. A small group of that church's membership recognized the change and worked together against it.

LUTHERANS ALERT NATIONAL

On October 9, 1964 an American Lutheran Church (ALC) pastor (Probably Dr. E. A. Sagebiel of Seguin, Texas) wrote to Pastor David V. Sieberg and other pastors in the ALC. He wrote,

I have again been shocked by the brazen attempt to spread (this time among our laymen) the hypothetical, would-be theology that has been brought into The American Lutheran Church. The latest attempt can be found in THE BIBLE: BOOK OF FAITH... A group of pastors hope to meet at Seguin on November 9, 1964. If you are interested in joining us, perhaps you would like to get a copy of THE BIBLE: BOOK OF FAITH, acquaint yourself with its contents, and meet with us at Seguin on the above date.¹

Antecedent to that November meeting of ten ALC pastors were other letters and conversations. Individual and scattered expressions made around the church body were the subject matter. There had been questionable expressions regarding the inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture, and hints at the unreliability of the accounts of Christ's resurrection for some time already. At first the reports were little more than rumors. But in 1962 a Youth Department Manual, Called To Be Human made such statements in print. So it was that when The Bible: Book Of Faith came out in 1964 making further false statements, things really got moving for these men.

More meetings were held and letters sent inviting assistance in documenting a protest to The ALC. A paper was written on the basis of these comments and sent to the President of the Southern District of The ALC. The paper entitled "The Rationalism Trend in The ALC" was evaluated by the Executive Committee of that district and sent to the Church President.

By continued correspondence, however, the word got out that clergymen of The ALC were getting together to fight the problem in The ALC. One member of this group referred to Paul's admonition to the elders in Ephesus (Acts 20:31) "Therefore be alert..." (RSV) Thus the name Lutherans Alert. The name carries the admonition itself-Lutherans be Alert!²

This all led to a meeting on July 12-15, 1965 in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. There a body of concerned men formed an association called Lutherans Alert-National. Thirteen pastors and one layman attended the session.³

In January of 1966 Volume 1, Number 1 of Lutheran Alert-National was

published. Its opening article by President R. H. Redal (a pastor from Tacoma, Washington) states its purpose which it has carried out over the past fourteen years:

To BE ALERT is one of the key admonitions of the Scripture. It is not the will of this magazine to be schismatic or negative. Our aim is simply to remind all of us to BE ALERT to the presence of false doctrine and questionable teachings that can so easily and so subtly gain entrance into the Churches of our land. We feel that the lay people of our congregations (and even some of the pastors) are not well enough informed concerning the inroads that neo-orthodoxy, liberalism and rationalism are making within our Church body. We intend to inform them.⁴

In April of that first year of publication the magazine printed some statements regarding the beginnings which led to the present problem in The ALC. A contributing editor David Moke harked back to his own Seminary training. He noted that already in the middle 1950's the Word of God was taught in the new sense.⁵ R. L. Larson stated in that same issue, "Certain leaders in the American Lutheran Church have admitted that we are going through a period of transition in theology in our church."⁶ The Associate Editor of The Lutheran Standard Rev. Lewis Holm was interviewed by the President of LAN at which time he made a very revealing statement, "I think that LUTHERANS ALERT-National has correctly diagnosed a Theological trend away from the most wholesome type of emphasis on Scripture."⁷

Lutherans Alert-National had begun its work.

THE CHARGE OF DR. E. A. SAGEBIEL

The paper Confession Of Faith Altered In The ALC though written primarily by Dr. Sagebiel was presented to the LAN Convention in 1976 by Pastor Sieberg. This was printed in October of that year in the magazine of LAN. The following is a condensation of that paper.

The confessional position of The ALC regarding Scripture is clear on paper. Dr. Sagebiel quotes from the 1973 Edition of the Handbook of The ALC

chapter 3.

3:10 The American Lutheran Church accepts all the canonical books of the Old and New Testaments as a whole and in all their parts as the divinely inspired, revealed and inerrant Word of God, and submits to this as the only infallible authority in all matters of faith and life.⁸

But in June, 1962 evidence emerged that this very sound statement was not the real situation in The ALC. The fact was that many already then did not believe the constitution's statement of Scripture.

The setting for the outcropping of this evidence was at the Church Worker's Institute (CWI) in Seguin, Texas which was Dr. Sagebiel's home. This institute was to be a training program for the teachers and leaders in the congregations of the Southern District of The ALC. Normally these courses at the CWI were well chosen, of equal importance, and fully accepted as excellent. The agenda of 1962 differed from the rule. One course was given special emphasis by Dr. A. C. Streng, Dean of the Institute, as presenting some theological treatment on prophecy. This was to be taught by Dr. Wm. Streng, theological professor of Wartburg Seminary, Dubuque, Iowa. Dean Streng stressed that this course would be of such importance and far-reaching significance that everyone attending ought to take it. So that this might be possible a double schedule was set up. Parents of college-age children were to consider this course a must.

Dr. Sagebiel makes some interesting observations about that CWI. He termed the institute a doctrinal "trial balloon" because of the situation. The time of the year meant very few other scheduled meetings outside of the District Convention for people. The nature of a CWI enables a leader to have a close working relationship with the small classes. Seguin is a long ways from the center of activity of The ALC. Finally the gathering of Church officials to serve as instructors was quite impressive.

The facts are the Dr. Wm. Streng in the lecture course presented the historical-critical method (HCM) of interpreting the Scriptures. Among his statements were the following: "The first eleven chapters of Genesis are a myth;...The Psalms have very little truly edifying material;...O.T. passages which are declared by our Church as prophecies of Christ, are actually speaking of contemporary people."⁹

Advocates of the HCM limit themselves to natural forces in interpreting the Bible. They emphasize the human element. As a result miracles and spiritual sources are out. The sayings of Jesus are simply reflections of what people thought as they remembered Christ. As you can see much that true Lutheranism holds dear is declared a lie.

The fact that this CWI was part of a plan came out indirectly during the course of the institute. Dr. Sagebiel relates that not one of the officials of the District nor of the ALC Departments said a word in opposition. Only Sagebiel himself spoke up after two days of silence, thereafter protesting again and again. To this criticism the President of the District, Dr. Vernon Mohr asked, "...How much further will this criticism go?' The lecturer replied, 'This I am unable to answer. I only know how far my assignment goes.'¹⁰

By calling his work an "assignment" Dr. Wm. Streng spoke devastating truth. One of the Department heads of The ALC spoke privately to Sagebiel on the first day he protested. He said,

Sagebiel, there is something you ought to know:...

1. The official family of the Church has resolved the CHANGE THE CONFESSIONAL POSITION OF THE CHURCH.
2. They are resolved not to divulge this to the membership. They remember the confusion among members of other Protestant denominations when such changes were made. This they seek to avoid.
3. However, they are resolved to immediately prepare the teaching material for all departments in the Sunday and other parish schools, parish organizations, colleges and Seminaries, to indoctrinate the entire constituency.

This news was shocking and revealing. Now the silence of the officials at the institute made sense. Sagebiel concludes then that the official family of the Church moved in on these two brothers to be the key men in this effort.

Dr. Sagebiel did subsequently meet with key men in the Church to discuss the problem. He went immediately to the District President. Though initially disturbed his attitude changed after a July, 1962 meeting of Church officials. Later also in January, 1964 Sagebiel reported to the Southern District Theological Conference. Upon reporting Dr. Streng's projections of the HCM at the CWI of 1962, the Church President and three Doctors of Theology said virtually nothing.

The main medium for indoctrinating the constituency of The ALC showed the same tendency. Dr. Sagebiel points out two publications. Called To Be Human was one book intended for the youth. It openly teaches evolution as man's origin. The other is The Bible: Book of Faith. Regarding the latter book Sagebiel cites LCA Convention action GC 64.27.127, page 337. This convention of 1964 adopted the following Resolution submitted without comment by the Convention Committee:

WHEREAS, 'THE BIBLE, BOOK OF FAITH' presents a theory of formation and interpretation of the Scriptures, and
 WHEREAS, not only in hermeneutics, but also in other areas of doctrine our CONFESSIONS allow for more than one theory or point of view (?-Cf The ALC Handbook p. 63, Par. 8.14), and
 WHEREAS, some of the clergy and people hold to points of view other than those current in our institutions of learning, and
 WHEREAS, we must recognize that any well-prepared educational material must be written and taught from a unified viewpoint, therefore be it
 RESOLVED, that we commend the Board of Parish Education for enabling the Church to be informed by its learned teachers in all areas of its life; and be it further
 RESOLVED, that we exhort the Board of Parish Education to be continually aware of points of view held by large segments of the Church and seek where possible to allow for the expression of these points of view.¹²

Dr. Sagebiel writes of the significance of this resolution, "By this action the very heart and soul of the Church was changed."¹³

EVIDENCE OF THE FACT

In the February, 1980 issue of LAN this convention action of 1964 is discussed. The convention resolution makes a reference to The ALC Handbook in the second 'Whereas.' Regarding that reference the editor notes, "Herein lies the Big Betrayal!" In defense of this accusation he quotes the reference.

Article 8:14 of the American Lutheran Church Constitution:

The powers of the General Convention shall be limited only by the provisions of the Articles of Incorporation, this Constitution and its By-laws, and its own resolutions. Questions involving doctrine, however, shall not be ultimately determined by vote of the General Convention, but on the basis of the Word of God and the Confessions of this Church.¹⁴

The constitution does not say that in areas of doctrine there is room for more than one point of view.

In that same issue of the LAN the book in controversy is quoted and judged.

THE BIBLE: BOOK OF FAITH: By ten Theological Professors of The American Lutheran Church; Prepared by the Board of Parish Education and the Board of Publication of the ALC; Augsburg Publishing House, 1964: "This book...brings us help from scholars whom the church has called to lead its theological thought and to prepare its future pastors."p.5.

"This book of essays is intended primarily for use in a course of study by the church school teachers and adult leaders in the congregation." p.5.

LUTHERANS ALERT: "This book was defended and recommended for the further instruction the the Church in a resolution passed by the Church in its Columbus, Ohio Convention, Oct. 1964."

Certainly a work undertaken with such thorough preparation merits a great deal of attention, and a work written by ten theological professors of the seminaries of The American Lutheran Church could be expected to be good. For the most part, it is good-very good. It shows insight, astuteness, and intimate knowledge of the subject. However, there is the other side, too; the part that isn't

good, but which shows a new element in ALC publications—the acceptance of certain 'findings' of higher criticism and a corresponding lowering of the doctrine of inspiration."

"What was once regarded by the seminary as heresy (as little as 15 years ago) is now presented to the Sunday School teachers of the Church as truth!"

CHAPTER 4. By John Milton, Professor of Old Testament, Luther Theological Seminary, St. Paul, Minn.: "Genesis 1-11, significant as these chapters are in themselves, are merely the introduction to the central theme of the Bible, which begins in Genesis 12 with the story of Abraham. Here we are on firm historical ground." p.54.

LUTHERANS ALERT: "...the historical reality of Genesis 1-11 is all but eliminated."

"The central theme of the Bible is surely SALVATION, and that most certainly begins with the account of the creation of the man, who with the woman God also made—fell from their sinless state and so needed a Savior. And that account most assuredly begins in Genesis 1."

CHAPTER 8. By Philip Quanbeck, Associate Professor of Religion, Augsburg College, Minneapolis, Minn.: "In 2 Peter the writer refers to the letters of Paul in such a way as to suggest that he and others regarded them as 'Scripture.'... It seems undoubted that Paul expected that his letters would be read by the churches to which he wrote. However, it would seem that it would take longer than the lifetime of Peter for the letters of Paul to come to be regarded as 'Scripture.' For this reason it is wondered whether 2 Peter was written by Peter or by someone living after Peter had died." p.127

LUTHERANS ALERT: "The only standard that is used in the above quotation is human reason. Is 'it would seem' enough evidence to doubt the authorship of Simon Peter?"

CHAPTER 9. By William Weiblen, Associate Professor, Systematic Theology, Wartburg Theological Seminary, Dubuque, Iowa: "In other words, the Scriptures are not our authority because they are inspired, but because the Holy Spirit continues to inspire through the Scriptures so that we are led to acknowledge the authority of God." p.142.

"The Word of God dare not simply be equated with the words of the Bible." p.143.

"We do not have faith in Jesus Christ because we believe in the Bible, but we trust in the Bible because the Holy Spirit has brought us to faith in Jesus Christ through the Bible." p.143.

"The infallibility of the Scriptures is the infallibility of Jesus Christ and not infallibility of the written text." p.148.

LUTHERANS ALERT: "It is from the written record that we learn

of the Lord Jesus-this is the basic means the Holy Spirit uses to give us the essential information of the whole plan of salvation! Then-since the writings are true as a result of being verbally inspired-they lead us to faith in our Savior!"¹⁵

Fourteen years earlier in the June-July, 1966 issue of LAN Dr. Sagebiel exposed the convention resolution with reference to The Bible: Book of Faith. He writes at the head of the article, "BY ADOPTING NEW STANDARDS, ACCORDING TO WHICH A CHURCH GIVES EXPRESSION TO ITS FAITH, IT VOIDS AND SUPPLANTS IN WHOLE OR IN PART ITS FORMER STANDARDS."¹⁶

Other evidence has appeared in The Lutheran Standard which though is not conclusive is significant nonetheless. Knowing that The ALC was in the process of implementing its plan to indoctrinate the Church some of its statements take on greater meaning. Consider the fact that The Lutheran Standard is the main publication of The ALC. Note how the two books Called to be Human and The Bible: Book of Faith are spoken of.

In a preview of the 1964 convention the readers of The Lutheran Standard came across this statement,

The Church Council, which the 1962 convention asked to review the printed material of the Youth Department, reports that it agrees that "with a proper definition of terms and explanation of the purpose and intent of the material, when taken as a whole, the theme manual (Called to Be Human) is not unscriptural and does not deny the confessions of The American Lutheran Church." Two Church Council members asked that their names be recorded as abstaining on this resolution.¹⁷

President Schlotz in the October 20, 1964 issue is quoted in his address to the convention as saying,

The Board of Parish Education has sponsored the publication of a book authored by 10 of our theological professors and titled The Bible: Book of Faith. Many will thank God for this book; a few will object. Before you accept objections that may be made, read the entire book and reflect.¹⁸

Finally The Lutheran Standard in a report about the past convention made an effort to prove that the title of an article was true, "The Positive

Convention-Columbus 1964". Thus in two references to The Bible: Book of Faith objections were played down.

When the convention was discussing the new publication, The Bible: Book of Faith, produced by the Department of Parish Education, Pastor Robert Spenn, of Flanagan, Ill., said that he disagreed with some of the views expressed in this book but that he had taught it in one of the pastoral conferences in the Illinois District and that he was happy the book had been published since it made a real contribution to a most important subject. In short, his attitude, though frankly critical, was refreshingly positive.¹⁹

Some questions were raised from the floor regarding the doctrinal point of view in certain chapters in the teacher-training book, The Bible-Book of Faith. Most speakers, however, expressed great satisfaction with the book. The convention adopted a resolution commending the board for publishing the book and exhorting it to be aware of and seek to allow for expression of other "points of view held by large segments of the church."²⁰

Lutherans Alert-National in an article entitled "The 'Greening' of the ALC" put the situation reigning in the early 1960's quite well, "Thus the 'greening,' of The ALC (that is, transforming it to the liberal image) was underway...to be accomplished by pulling the wool over the eyes of unwitting church members, to be financed all the way by their tithes and offerings."²¹

Did the leadership of The ALC plan the apostacy purposefully? Even without the words of the unnamed Department head spoken to Dr. Sagebiel in 1962 a change had occurred in significant publications. We're led to the conclusion-Yes! God have mercy on the men who are trying to lead the Lord's sheep away. May He turn them to faith so that they not be damned for this Satanic action.

- 1 "Lutherans Alert-Texas Style" Lutherans Alert-National (January 1966) p.6
- 2 op. cit. pp.6-7
- 3 "The Rape of a Confessional Church" Lutherans Alert-National (February, 1980) p.10
- 4 "You are Invited" Lutherans Alert-National (January 1966) p.2
- 5 "Definitions...The Word of God" Lutherans Alert-National (April 1966) p.11
- 6 "An Analysis of the Current Theological Revolution" Lutherans Alert-National (April, 1966) p.30
- 7 "Items of Interest" Lutherans Alert-National (April, 1966) p.18
- 8 "Confession Of Faith Altered In The ALC" Lutherans Alert-National (October, 1976) p.5
- 9 op. cit. p.6
- 10 op. cit. p.7
- 11 op. cit. p.7
- 12 op. cit. p.8
- 13 op. cit. p.9
- 14 "The Rape of a Confessional Church" Lutherans Alert-National (February, 1980) p. 7
- 15 op. cit. pp.13-14
- 16 "Official Confessional Standards and The American Lutheran Church" Lutherans Alert-National (June-July, 1966) p.8
- 17 "Highlights of the Convention" The Lutheran Standard (October, 6, 1964) p.18
- 18 "The President Reports" The Lutheran Standard (October 20, 1964) p.6
- 19 "The Positive Convention Columbus, 1964" The Lutheran Standard (November 17, 1964) p.8
- 20 op. cit. p.14
- 21 "The 'Greening' of The ALC" Lutherans Alert-National (December 1976) p.15

- "Confession of Faith Altered In The ALC" Lutherans Alert National. Tacoma, Washington: (October, 1976) pp.5-10.
- "The 'Greening' of The ALC" Lutherans Alert-National. Tacoma, Washington: (December, 1976) p.15.
- "Highlights of the Convention" The Lutheran Standard. Minneapolis, Minnesota: Augsburg Publishing House. (October 6, 1964) pp.18-24.
- "Items of Interest" Lutherans Alert-National. Tacoma, Washington: (April, 1966) p.18.
- Larson, R. L. "An Analysis of the Current Theological Revolution..." Lutherans Alert-National. Tacoma, Washington: (April, 1966) pp.3-6.
- Moke, David. "Definitions...The Word of God." Lutherans Alert-National. Tacoma, Washington: (April, 1966) p.11.
- "Official Confessional Standards and The American Lutheran Church" Lutherans Alert-National. Tacoma, Washington: (June-July, 1966) pp.8-10.
- "The Positive Convention Columbus, 1964" The Lutheran Standard. Minneapolis, Minnesota: Augsburg Publishing House. (November 17, 1964) pp.8-19.
- "The President Reports" The Lutheran Standard. Minneapolis, Minnesota: Augsburg Publishing House. (October 20, 1964) pp.4-6.
- Sieberg, David. "Lutherans Alert-Texas Style" Lutherans Alert-National. Tacoma, Washington: (January, 1966) pp.6-8.
- "The Rape of a Confessional Church" Lutherans Alert-National. Tacoma, Washington: (February, 1980) pp.2-20
- "You Are Invited" Lutherans Alert-National. Tacoma, Washington: (January, 1966) p.2.