

WHY ANOTHER LUTHERAN CONFESSION?

THE HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION

to

THE WORD SHALL STAND

At the time when Our Evangelical Lutheran Confession was being written, officials of the Lutheran Church of Australia were very vocal in admonishing pastors and laymen that they must not take any sort of unilateral action in trying to solve the problems of the church. If they were not happy with the direction of the church in any matter, they should raise it in the pastoral conference for discussion and resolution, and not seek to influence the church by any unilateral action. The context in which these admonitions were given by the Queensland District President, H.P.V. Renner, indicated that they were specifically directed to conservative men who were concerned about recent trends in the church, and wanted to do something to correct them. While such admonitions sounded very fair and reasonable generally, there were reasons why, at that particular time, and after a certain history, those admonitions sounded to some as cynical irony, if not cruel hypocrisy. This short historical introduction will indicate why that was so.

It had always been taken for granted that the pastoral conference was the proper place to discuss, and hopefully to resolve, doctrinal

concerns among brethren in the ministry, and conservative men were offended when brethren would act unilaterally, going against what they had believed to be the accepted doctrinal or theological position of the church. Some had tried for years, unsuccessfully, to work through the pastoral conference and other official channels of the church, as the presidents demanded, only to discover that this was not the procedure of others, especially influential people, in the Lutheran Church of Australia. Experience showed again and again that this procedure of working through the pastoral conferences was often required only of conservative pastors who sought to maintain or restore the traditional, theological position of the church. Those introducing changes into the theology of the church usually worked in quite a different way and were apparently not hindered by officials of synod. In nearly every case where theological positions in the church have changed over the years, this has been accomplished, not first of all by bringing the proposed changes to the pastoral conferences for discussion and adoption, but rather by some form of unilateral action and a process of infiltration.

Only after the new theology was sufficiently entrenched and established, was it brought before the pastoral conferences for discussion, usually by those who were opposed to it. In other words, the church has operated with double standards, which have disadvantaged the conservatives. While new theological positions could be introduced into the church through unilateral action and a process of infiltration, those opposed to such

new positions were required to operate through the pastoral conferences, where their efforts were often resented and resisted. Anyone familiar with the history of theological change within the Lutheran Church of Australia cannot deny the fact that this change was often initiated by unilateral action and followed by a process of infiltration rather than by discussion and resolution in the pastoral conferences of the church.

THE THEOLOGY OF THE WORD

This was certainly the case in the matter of the theology of the Word -especially the inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture. Those contending for the position that there are errors and contradictions in Scripture, certainly did not first bring this matter before the pastoral conferences of the church for debate and decision. Before it was ever suspected that any Lutheran pastors in Australia would entertain the view that the Bible might contain errors, this view was being floated in the seminaries of the church. (Prior to 1966 there were two Lutheran churches in Australia, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Australia, and the United Evangelical Lutheran Church of Australia. These two churches then amalgamated to form the Lutheran Church of Australia.)

It was actually the *Declaration and Plea*, adopted by the Queensland District of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of

Australia in May 1966, that forced this matter to the surface. This document specifically rejected the position that "inerrancy", as applied to the Scriptures, "might mean something other than total absence of any errors or contradictions whatsoever; or that inerrancy could be limited to the 'theological content' or the 'divine side' of Scripture." (cf. Synodical Report of Special Convention, Toowoomba May 6-7 1966, p.36). This was considered to be quite unacceptable to the theologians in the seminaries of the two churches at that time.

Four Queensland pastors (President F.W. Noack, M. Grieger, V. Grieger and K. Marquart) were requested to attend a special meeting at Concordia Seminary, Adelaide, on July 20-21 1966. At this meeting, attended also by members of the faculties of both Lutheran seminaries in Australia, and officials of both Lutheran churches, the Queensland pastors

were told quite frankly that there were numerous errors - some said hundreds - as well as contradictions in the Scriptures, and that the Holy Spirit made use of these human weaknesses in giving us his Word. At one point, one of the presidents attempted to isolate and blame Dr. H. Hamann for this new theology and departure from the position of the church. But Pastor V. Grieger pointed out that this was not fair, for all the members of the seminary faculties present had concurred in rejecting the inerrancy of Scripture. This was demonstrated when he asked them individually, before all, whether they believed that the Scriptures contained errors. Examples of such errors were also given, notably the two asses in Matthew 21:1-7 compared with the accounts of Mark and Luke, and the alleged exaggeration of the 600,000 Israelites who came out of Egypt.

The Queensland pastors, who still believed in the inerrancy of Scripture, were said to have a weak faith, because, if it could be shown that there was even only one real error in Scripture, their faith would be undermined. They were therefore admonished to give up their belief in the inerrancy of Scripture, and accept the new position that the Bible is full of errors and contradictions, as held by the seminary professors.

Even the presidents of the church, at that time, were apparently taken by surprise to hear these things coming from the official teachers of the church. Pastors V. and M. Grieger insisted that these

matters should not be dealt with unilaterally. They must be brought before the pastoral conferences of the church. But the fact was that, in spite of the Theses of Agreement, this new theology, of errors and contradictions in the Word of God, was introduced into the church by unilateral action through the seminaries.

A pastoral conference was held shortly after this at Concordia College, Toowoomba. Two representatives from the seminaries were to be present at this conference to put forward the position of the faculties on the matter of the inerrancy of Scripture. They were Dr. H. Sasse and Dr. H. Hamann, junior (hereafter referred to simply as Dr. H. Hamann in distinction from his father Dr. H. Hamann senior), who had prepared a paper for the conference setting forth their views on Scripture. When pastors arrived at the conference they were informed that Dr. H. Hamann was forbidden by the president to present his paper to the pastors or allow it to come into their hands, because it was contrary to an agreement that he had made with the president concerning this matter. Nonetheless, the denial of the inerrancy of Scripture was clearly exposed by questions to both Dr. H. Sasse and Dr. H. Hamann (cf. Minutes of Past. Conf. 15-17 August 1966).

Shortly after this, on September 18th 1966, another meeting with Queensland pastors (President F.W. Noack, M. Grieger, D. Hoopmann, K. Marquart and C.

Priebbenow) was held at Concordia Seminary, Highgate, to discuss further the issues concerning the inerrancy of Scripture. At this meeting a statement was adopted: "Since God indeed cannot lie or lead astray, no Christian should say that the Bible endorses errors or mistaken human notions. It is, in fact, God's inerrant and non-deceiving Word..." Pastor K. Marquart refused to vote on the adoption of this statement because he did not want to pretend that such a statement settled anything. He would wait, among other things, for the faculty opinion on the *Declaration and Plea* (cf. Minutes of this meeting by F.J.H. Blaess).

At a meeting with the Church Council and Queensland pastors on the following day, 19th September 1966, it was resolved that "No teaching or theological work shall be regarded as in harmony with the Theses of Agreement if it conflicts with this statement", namely the statement adopted on the previous evening (cf. Minutes of the meeting of 19th September 1966 held at Flinders St. Adelaide).

In 1968 the Albury Convention of the newly formed Lutheran Church of Australia, adopted a statement which declared that "the Theses of Agreement use the term 'inerrancy' in its normal sense of freedom from all error and contradiction, 'factual' as well as 'theological'..." (cf. Convention Report, Albury 1968 p.260). This statement proved uncomfortably narrow to some who were not ready

to give up the position for which they had contended, and so it was not surprising that the Commission on Theology and Inter-Church Relations received a request from several quarters to reconsider the Albury statement on inspiration and inerrancy (cf. Convention Report, Indooroopilly 1970 p.224).

In 1972 the Horsham General Convention of the church reaffirmed the inerrancy of Scripture declaring, among other things, that "although error may appear to be present in the Scriptures it is not really so." (cf. Convention Report, Horsham 1972 p.360). The same statement declared that it is contrary to sound doctrine: "1. to speak of 'errors' in the Holy Scripture; 2. to hold that what according to clear biblical statements 'actually is or actually happened' may be regarded as what actually is not or actually did not happen."

For several years there was no further open conflict on the inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture, and officials were quick to give the assurance of "complete doctrinal agreement". In private conversations, however, certain young pastors did not hesitate to speak of errors and contradictions in the Bible. Even officials sometimes made derogatory remarks about the inerrancy of Scripture which seemed to betray that they were chafing under the church's position as an imposed yoke, and were not free to express their real beliefs.

Another case of unilateral action against the church's position on inerrancy occurred in 1979 when

Dr. H. Hamann, then vice-principal of Luther Seminary, gave a series of lectures at Valparaso University, U.S.A., in which he chastised what he called the Fundamentalist view that the Scriptures are inerrant because they are God's Word, since God cannot err. (It will be noted that this was virtually a repudiation of the statement to which he also agreed in September 1966, as quoted above). He also asserted that errors in the Scriptures, in peripheral matters, in no way affect the authority of God's Word. While these lectures contained much that was good, such unilateral attacks upon the declared position of the church were offensive and were finally withdrawn.

In 1981 the conflict on Scripture broadened to include the nature of biblical authority. Dr. C.I. Koch, vice-president of the church, produced the paper *Inspiration, Inerrancy, and Authority of Scripture*, which faced the many questions then in debate, and attempted to answer them on the basis of Scripture, the confessions, and the adopted statements of the church. This paper, which presented the conservative point of view, was presented to the general pastoral conference at Toowoomba in September 1981.

In April of the following year, 1982, Dr. C.I. Koch gave a short presentation to the Queensland pastoral conference, defending the total inerrancy of Scripture. The conference responded by inviting Dr. F. Hebart to make a presentation on this

matter to the next meeting. As it turned out, however, his father, Dr. S. Hebart, president of Luther Seminary for many years, presented a series of three lectures on the theology of the Word to the conference at Coolum in June 1982.

In the course of these lectures many new theological views were expounded that were in glaring contrast to the traditional view of the church concerning the Word of God. "Inspiration" was given quite a different meaning, and "inerrancy" was defined, not as freedom from all error or contradiction, but as a "oneness of thrust to the Gospel".

Dr. S. Hebart was a senior lecturer at the seminary, lecturing in Systematic Theology, and there, at Coolum, he revealed that the whole theology of the Word had undergone a major change at our seminary. He was supported by a number of officials, including the president of the District, and numerous pastors who finally clapped and cheered his presentation. In fact the vast majority of pastors at the conference were so much in agreement with Dr. S. Hebart's theology of the Word, and so delighted with his presentation, that they at once passed a resolution requesting the Board of Publications to make these lectures available in printed form. These views of Dr. S. Hebart were presented to the conference not in the form of questions or exploratory statements for discussion and resolution, but as the considered position of a mature theologian of

the church, in fact a leading teacher of the theological seminary of the church, representing the theology that is taken for granted there. He even claimed that his views, were in harmony with the Theses of Agreement. The three lectures clearly revealed that the new theological position on the Word of God was being infiltrated into the church, via the seminary, unilaterally.

This major exposure of the new theology of the Word at Coolum was received by some with great relief. One prominent pastor approached Pastors M. and V. Grieger during a lunch break at this Coolum conference and told them that he was greatly relieved now that this whole matter had come out into the open. For years they had to keep it very quiet, lest it come under attack and be exposed before it had sufficiently infiltrated the church. He himself supported this new theological position on the Word of God, but he was not happy that it had to be so shielded from exposure. He referred to this as a *conspiracy of silence*, and considered it to be basically dishonest.

Some time after this exposure, this same pastor of the Queensland District suggested that Pastors M. and V. Grieger go with him to the church office to confront President R.J. Mayer and complain of this procedure, by which theological issues were deliberately being kept out of pastoral conference discussions, so that the new theology might go unchallenged as it infiltrated the

church (the *conspiracy of silence*). The president alleged that he was not aware of any such *conspiracy of silence*.

At this same meeting in the church office, at the suggestion of the above-mentioned pastor, the president acknowledged that the pastoral conference might no longer be an adequate forum for theological debate and the resolution of theological issues in the church. He undertook to endeavour to create other more suitable forums for this purpose - forums which would include interested laymen of the church. The possibility of using the Lutheran Men organization was considered. No such forums were set up.

This whole matter was made public by the president in his circular letter to pastors, in which he personally attacked pastors M. and V. Grieger, alleging that they claimed to have "discovered" a *conspiracy of silence* in the church, and daring them to expose it (cf. President's Personal Letter L.C.A.Q.D. 2/11/82/wm.). He knew full well that they made no such claim, and that it was not they alone who had spoken to him in the privacy of his office. This unjust public attack made necessary a public reply which was sent out in november 1982.

Though the whole matter of the theology of the Word was a matter of open discussion in the church already before the Coolum conference, that conference not only failed to discuss the matter adequately, but even refused to

allow a fair presentation defending the traditional position of the church on the Word of God. The pastor referred to above, claimed that, because of the *conspiracy of silence*, the majority of pastors were not free to vote according to their conscience on this matter. They had to vote as they were expected, to prevent further exposure of the new theology of the Word. He himself would have voted for adequate time to discuss the matter, had he been allowed to vote according to his conscience.

In view of this procedure and the attitude of the pastoral conference, it was hopeless to expect any fair presentation, let alone responsible discussion and decision on these theological matters in that forum. It seemed, therefore, that at least some responsible laymen ought to be informed of what was happening in the church.

Some time after this the Queensland District Church Council arranged for a seminar on the Word of God to be held at Toowoomba on 26-27th October 1982. Attendance of pastors at this seminar was to be optional. At very short notice Pastor M. Grieger was asked to prepare material for presentation to this seminar. He prepared 27 pages of detailed criticism of Dr. S. Hebart's lectures (a little over half of this was read), as well as positive and negative statements defining the issues raised in Dr. S. Hebart's lectures. This critique highlighted the fact that Dr. S. Hebart's lectures were, in many points, in direct

conflict with the Theses of Agreement and the declared theological position of the church. It was understood that this seminar was to attempt to define the issues in controversy and prepare the ground for continued in-depth study and discussion on these matters. No more such meetings were called.

Pastor M. Grieger was invited to give a presentation on these matters to a group of interested laymen at Nobby 19th January 1983. This quickly brought down the wrath of church officials. It was seen as unilateral action (sic) and interference in other pastors' parishes (It is not certain that the word "divisive" was used yet). This had to be stopped. The material presented at Nobby was then written up and documented in the booklet *Which way L.C.A.?* published in Feb. 1983.

On November 2-4th 1982 Dr. H. Hamann presented a series of five papers to the South Australian pastoral conference at Tatchilla. The fifth of these rejected the inerrancy of the Scriptures in its traditional sense. It allowed for errors in the Scriptures in matters not touching the central thing talked about. Dr. H. Hamann referred to these errors as "peripheral inexactitudes" or "leves errores" (slight errors). He also proposed that while the term "inerrancy" should not be cut out of the official documents of the church (the Constitution, the *Theses of Agreement*, and the *Document of Union*) it should simply be neglected in future preaching and teaching in the

church, because "it is a nuisance and causes endless trouble" (cf. Lecture 5: *The Scriptures and the Theses of Agreement*, by Dr. H. Hamann Nov. 1982 p.7).

Pastor C. Priebbenow took up a discussion of the inerrancy of Scripture within the faculty of Luther Seminary, and the majority of the faculty very clearly rejected the traditional view of Scripture. Pastor C. Priebbenow reported these discussions to a number of pastors in the church. In the meantime Lutherans Alert had been formed, an organisation of Lutherans concerned about liberal trends in their church, and the South Australian District church officials organised a series of meetings to discuss concerns. One meeting on Scripture was held at Hahndorf. Fears of division in the church led to a series of meetings that produced the *Consensus Statement*. Dr. C.I. Koch spoke forthrightly in favour of the traditional view of Scripture.

A few concerned laymen invited conservative pastors to meet with them in their homes to discuss these matters. This too was considered very divisive, unilateral action and called forth the wrath of church officials. Of course it was very difficult in a free country absolutely to forbid and control private speech between Australian citizens. Even the right of people to meet together for discussion could hardly be denied. And so such meetings were suffered, but officially frowned upon. At least this provoked the Queensland

district president (R.J. Mayer) to take the matter a little more seriously and to realise that concerned laymen had to be allowed to take an interest in what was happening in the church. And so a couple of forums were arranged at which the theology of the Word, especially the inerrancy of Scripture, might be discussed also with interested laymen. The president called these meetings and appointed the speakers.

Because of the seriousness of this matter and the clear involvement of the seminary of the church, the matter was taken up by various officials and committees. The Queensland pastoral conference was not involved in the discussions any more.

Throughout this controversy, presidents and officials of the church repeatedly assured pastors and laymen that there was full doctrinal unity in the Lutheran Church of Australia. Again and again they asserted that when conservative men pointed to false teachings in the Lutheran Church of Australia, these were simply misunderstandings or misrepresentations of what was being said. These assurances were especially loud and persistent after Dr. S.P. Hebart's lectures on "The Word of God" given at Coolum, and Dr. H. Hamann's lectures presented at Tatachilla. The assurance was given by the Queensland district president (R.J. Mayer) that he had personally spoken to the theologians of the seminary and found them to be completely sound.

Conservative pastors knew that such assurances were quite hollow and false, and would not accept the official assertions that it was all a matter of misunderstanding. In the face of increasingly widespread discontent, however, it became apparent that church officials needed a little more substance for their verbal reassurances, and so, it appears, that a special committee was to examine the matter.

When Dr. H. Hamann, principal of Luther Seminary, attended the Queensland District convention (9-11th March 1984) however, he reported that a special committee, commissioned to examine the papers concerned, had isolated ten points of teaching in the papers that were contrary to the official position of the church in the *Theses of Agreement*.

When it was learned that Dr. H. Hamann would again be in Toowoomba on the 23rd May 1984 to address a forum on doctrinal concerns within the Lutheran Church of Australia, a group of concerned pastors and laymen responded to the request of the convener of the forum, Pastor P. Wiebusch, to commit their concerns and questions to writing and to forward their document to Dr. H. Hamann in advance, so he could responsibly and authoritatively address the issues of concern.

The paper entitled *A Frank Presentation of Concerns* was sent to Dr. H. Hamann in plenty of time, and in his presentation at the forum in Toowoomba, which was

recorded on tape, he did address the issue of the ten points of false doctrine, even though there were many points that he did not touch on. In his reply to this issue of deep concern, Dr. H. Hamann read from the written questions mentioning his having reported the matter to the Queensland district synod, and the committee's isolation of ten points of teaching in the papers contrary to the official position of the church. But when he was to reply to the specific queries: "what are the points of false doctrine that were isolated?" and "when shall they be spelled out to the whole church?" he requested that the tape recording being made of his presentation must be cut at that point. Apparently there was to be no permanent record of anything on these ten points of false doctrine found in the Lutheran Church of Australia, for obviously this would openly document the official deception in all the hollow assurances that had been given to the church, that its theologians were perfectly sound. In this way, it seemed, all the tracks were to be effectively covered. While assurance was given that these matters would be officially reported on later, and while mention of the ten positions on inspiration was made on a couple of other occasions elsewhere, yet no official statement was ever released to concerned pastors on this matter and it did not surface publicly again. Finally this matter was to be buried in the *Consensus Statement*.

Dr. H. Hamann was asked, at Toowoomba, whether it was

reasonable to expect that there should be a public retraction and apologies to the church from those who had taught contrary to the church's doctrinal position, and also whether, in the light of the ten points of false teaching, retractions and apologies could be expected from the presidents and officers of the church for their empty assurances that there were no false teachings in the church but that it was all a matter of misunderstanding. He chose not to answer this question.

This matter has been mentioned in some detail here because it illustrates the cover-up and face-saving that so frustrated conservative men in their efforts to correct their church. They expected open, frank, and honest dealing from the officers of their church, naively imagining that if anyone had been teaching false doctrine, they would now openly and frankly retract, and that appropriate apologies and new declarations of position would be required of them. But in these expectations they were consistently disappointed so that their confidence in the officers of their church was completely eroded. Official assurances that all was well still continued, further undermining confidence in the leadership of the church.

Fear of division led to urgent discussions among leaders of the church in Adelaide, and finally a statement was drawn up for presentation to and adoption by the next general convention of the church in Croydon, Victoria (August

24-30, 1984). Conservative pastors in Queensland received this so-called *Consensus Statement* just as they were about to leave for the convention, and were informed that they could either accept it or reject it, but dare not try to amend it in any way. Obviously its precise wording was considered most crucial for some.

This *Consensus Statement* was accepted by the church in convention with great rejoicing as a true "settlement" of the Word of God dispute. There was supposed to be complete agreement, and both sides to the dispute were said to have cheerfully endorsed the statement. And yet there were no admissions that anyone had ever been wrong, let alone any retractions of false statements. The church was assured that the *Consensus Statement* completely eliminated the view that the Scriptures could contain any errors or contradictions. The rejoicing that went up could not but sound rather hollow to some. In fact, during those very days in Melbourne, a prominent pastor gave a devotion in which he clearly indicated that there could be real contradictions or discrepancies between the Gospel accounts. Attention was drawn to this inconsistency at the time, and it was recognized, but nothing further was done.

Despite this official agreement, there were a number of occasions when pastors indicated that they didn't really hold to the absolute inerrancy of Scripture, no matter what the church had said.

Some apparently were wearing it like a pinching boot. It had by then become such a sensitive matter that anyone who attempted to raise questions on the theology of the Word at pastoral conferences in Queensland risked the anger and resentment of the vast majority of the brethren.

The admonition of the president, and officials of the church, that all theological matters of concern must be brought to the pastoral conference for discussion and resolution and were not to be raised anywhere else, had not been observed in the past - certainly not by those who tried to introduce a more liberal view of Scripture into

THE IMMORTALITY OF THE SOUL

The controversy on the immortality of the soul arose in the church not by some pastors or theologians raising questions about it at pastoral conferences, but when a young pastor in Queensland made a statement to a women's rally in 1979 to the effect that the soul of a person dies with the body, and so remains till the resurrection, when it is resurrected together with the body.

This caused great consternation at the time, because it was a clear denial of the traditional understanding of the immortality of the soul. In response to a specific request, Dr. S. Hebart, apparently on behalf of the faculty of Luther Seminary, Adelaide, sent a reply stating that "The idea of the immortality of the soul and its ...

the church - and was almost impossible to observe in the climate of opinion that developed among the pastors.

What was the case in the theology of the Word issue, was true in almost every other new theological direction in the church also. The process of trying to change the church has simply not been, first of all, to bring matters to pastoral conferences for debate and decision. It has almost invariably been a matter of unilateral action, followed by a process of silent infiltration, until those who objected to the process brought the matter to pastoral conference.

separate survival beyond death is not biblical and rather represents Greek thought... the Bible always sees man as a totality." (cf. President's Personal Letter 4th Dec. 1979 p.2, par.6).

Dr. S. Hebart rejected dichotomy (the view that man consists of body and soul, and that the soul may live on when separated from the body) and stated that man is to be seen only as a totality. This he called the "holistic" view of man. This view was further propounded in an undated paper (probably about August 1980) by Dr. S. Hebart which, according to President Mayer, "was discussed in the Commission on Theology and Inter-Church Relations and adopted as an adequate presentation of the church's theological position." (cf.

L.C.A Qld. District Newsletter, R.J. Mayer 29th September 1980 p.2).

Pastor M. Grieger then wrote to the Commission on Theology and Inter-Church Relations requesting to be told very clearly whether he and pastors who continue to hold and teach dichotomy, that man consists essentially of body and soul, and that the soul is the immaterial part of man which is severed from the body at death, and survives the death of the body, are now teaching contrary to the position of the church. He asked whether Dr. H. Hamann sr., who taught and wrote of this as the position of the church, is to be considered as a false teacher. To this urgent letter, as well as to others to the commission on theology, he received no reply.

The Queensland District President, R.J. Mayer, generally full of assurances of complete doctrinal agreement, then entered into the controversy himself. While he clearly came out in favour of the "holistic" view of man, he gave the pastoral directive, "It would appear unfortunate that some pastors have virtually made a doctrine of the immortality of the soul. At the same time it is unnecessary and indeed out of place to be dogmatic about the fact that the soul dies with the body." (cf. The State of the Soul After Death. Basic text of statement to Darling Downs Zone Conference p.4).

In September 1981 Dr. S. Hebart presented a ten page paper: "The State of the Soul After Death", to the General Pastoral Conference

in Toowoomba. In this paper he propounded the view that the combination of dust and the living breath of God makes man a living being (nephesh). When man dies these two separate. God takes back his breath. Man's matter turns back into dust. There is nothing else to survive death. So man is essentially the same as the animal or any other living being. The breath of God that animates man's body is not his soul. It does not, in fact, belong to man at all. It belongs to God and goes back to God (cf. Reflections on Dr. S. Hebart's Paper "The State of the Soul After Death" by Rev. D. Hoopmann, May 1982 and Dr. S. Hebart's paper referred to).

After considerable opposition the pastoral conference at Toowoomba resolved to make available to pastors the article by Dr. H. Hamann sr., *Has Man a Soul?* published in the *Australian Theological Review* Vol. XXIX p.101ff. This article takes a position contrary to that of Dr. S. Hebart and shows that the Scriptures clearly teach that man has a soul.

The matter was raised again at the Queensland District pastoral conference at Maroochydore in April 1982. There Pastor D. Hoopmann presented a critique of Dr. S. Hebart's paper, and Pastor P. Lohe presented a critique of Dr. H. Hamann senior's article, *Has Man a Soul?* Considerable division of opinion among the pastors was evident. And yet not too long after this a statement was adopted and published in the *Lutheran* which

seemed to come out conclusively in favour of the traditional view of the immortality of the soul and dichotomy. Without any admissions of error or anyone conceding that they were convinced by Scripture to change their view, it was not surprising that the uneasy silence which followed on this matter, was occasionally broken by assertions denying the immortality of the soul or claiming that man does not have a

THE INTERPRETATION OF GENESIS 1-3

Everybody knows that the question of the mythical or symbolical interpretation of Genesis 1-3 was not first of all raised at pastoral conferences for debate and decision either. It was introduced in the usual manner through the unilateral action of those who, because of their reading or academic concerns, had come to believe that it was necessary for the church in our time to lay aside the literal interpretation of these chapters of Scripture. Dr. H. Sasse used to put it very clearly when he said, repeatedly, "My concern is that the church should not again make the mistake as with Galileo." He was concerned that the "assured results" of modern science had shown that the world was not created in the time and manner literally described in Genesis, and therefore the church would make itself look foolish if it insisted upon a literal interpretation of those chapters. Already before the union of the two Lutheran churches in Australia, it was announced that the faculties of both

soul which can live apart from his body. The history of this controversy in the church bears abundant testimony that theological changes were not always accomplished through pastoral conference discussions and decisions, but rather by unilateral action and a process of infiltration often unknown to the church generally.

seminaries were meeting to discuss the interpretation of the first three chapters of Genesis. Pastors and lay people were left guessing what this might imply and what would be the outcome of these meetings.

However about that time theological students were graduating who insisted that the creation account of Genesis could not be taken literally, and who vigorously defended the theory of evolution, including the evolution of man from more primitive forms of life. They insisted also that such views were supported by their former teachers in the seminary. If we are to believe their reports it would seem that some professors at the seminary did not first bring their theological concerns to the pastoral conferences for debate and decision before airing them in the classroom. A lecture by one seminary professor, which was given in an Adelaide congregation, and the tapes of which were subsequently circulated, clearly

denied a literal understanding of Genesis 1-3.

In 1972 the church adopted a statement on Genesis 1-3 which rejected evolutionism and much evolutionary thought. However many conservatives in the church felt that the statement did not go nearly far enough, and would allow for the development of further errors in this area. Their fears would seem to have been justified when Dr. F. Hebart (lecturer at Luther Seminary), published an article entitled *Creation, Creationism and Science* in which he propounded the view that creation deals essentially not with origins but with relationships (*Lutheran Theological*

Journal May-August 1981 p.36). With this logical fallacy (the false antithesis) he was led on to the further false conclusions that faith has no interest in origins, and that an

evolutionary view of origins, as a scientific hypothesis, is neither supported nor denied by biblical accounts of creation. (cf. *Lutheran Theological Journal* May-August 1981 p.42). A few conservative pastors were offended at this article and made some protests but no official action was taken to reject these errors or to dissociate the church from them.

THE POSITION OF WOMEN IN THE CHURCH

Even the matter of women delegates to synod - which would seem to have constitutional implications - was pre-empted by unilateral action. At least in one District women were actually elected as delegates to convention before the matter had been brought to pastoral conference for debate, and before it was formally decided by synod.

The question of whether women may read Scripture lessons and take a leading role in the worship service of the congregation was a particularly notorious example of officially approved unilateral action and infiltration in Queensland. Long before the practice had been discussed even at the General Pastoral Conference at Box Hill, in August 1984, where no

decision was made, women were being invited to read the lessons in the worship service and were doing so with obvious official connivance.

Even though the Box Hill conference asked that the matter be taken up for further study by the District pastoral conferences, the Queensland Pastoral Conference did not take the matter up. Despite a number of appeals to the programme committee and to the president, that this matter be raised for responsible debate, this was not done.

Finally after written complaints to the church council, appealing to it to take appropriate action to have this matter debated in the pastoral conference, Pastor V. Grieger, apparently upon the direction of the Church Council, was

called in to the church office to meet the president (Pastor H.P.V. Renner), vice-president, and secretary concerning this matter. His appeal to have at least one other like-minded pastor present was resolutely refused. (Some observers pointed out that the president may not have wanted a second conservative witness present at this meeting.) Pastor V. Grieger made it very clear to this meeting, as he had already done to the Church Council, that he considered it completely unfair that the practice of women's reading lessons in public worship should simply be introduced into the church unilaterally by a process of silent infiltration with the connivance of officials, rather than being brought before the pastoral conference for responsible debate. And yet all three executive officials at that meeting categorically refused to ask pastors and parishes to refrain from this practice or refrain from introducing this practice while the matter was being debated. And so it was concerned pastors who demanded of the president and of the officials that these matters be brought before the pastoral conference for honest debate and decision, and not be introduced into the church by unilateral action, and it was they, the officials of the church, who saw to it that this was not done. The infiltration process had to be allowed to go on. Thus President H.P.V. Renner himself (the same man who insisted that pastors bring their concerns to the pastoral conference for discussion and resolution), together with his executive officers, refused to follow

the practice according to which he later insisted concerned pastors must act. It seemed as if there were double standards in operation. Those who wished to change the direction and practice of the church were free to use unilateral action and infiltration, while those who were opposed to this, and wanted to retain the historic practice of the church, had to operate only through the pastoral conferences and other official channels.

At last, some years after the General Pastoral Conference at Box Hill, and after a great deal of agitation, not a meeting of the Queensland Pastoral Conference (the body to which pastors were supposed to go with their concerns for discussion and resolution), was called to consider this matter, but a convocation of interested pastors, who met at Marburg on the 9th of September 1987. The president saw to it that two presentations were given, one opposing the practice of women's reading lessons and the other favouring it. No time was thus left for any in-depth discussion or evaluation of the arguments. While it was universally agreed that there needed to be more meetings to take up the matter and evaluate the arguments, no such meetings were held.

Since Pastor V. Grieger presented the paper at Marburg opposing women's reading lessons, he was allowed to attend several meetings of a "theological commission" (appointed by the president in Queensland) that was to take up this matter. He

understood that this "theological commission" would be addressing the issues raised in the presentation at Marburg which everyone realised needed further discussion. However, at no stage were any of the specific arguments, which he had raised against the practice of women reading lessons, taken up for discussion, much less evaluated, by that commission. The commission was always addressing other material, so that remarks had to be directed to that. Finally it was felt that enough time had been spent on that subject, and the commission moved on to other matters. The arguments from Scripture raised in the presentation to the Marburg convocation were never addressed. The basic questions of the true meaning of sexuality and its implications for worship were never

THE PRACTICE OF CLOSE COMMUNION

The matter of close communion was certainly not first brought to the pastoral conference for debate and resolution by those who had abandoned the accepted practice of the church. Numerous pastors simply took unilateral action and ignored the position of the church on this matter. Only after repeated complaints, and inaction by those entrusted with the doctrinal supervision of the church, did the matter come before the Queensland District Pastoral Conference (1989) for discussion in. And then it was revealed that a large majority no longer accepted the stated position of the church on this

even referred to in all of this. The best opportunity given to present the traditional position in those meetings was in the reading of a brief minority report, after the matter was closed.

It was obvious that, if this was supposed to be a sample of the way that theological concerns of brethren were dealt with through the official channels of the church, then those channels were virtually useless to anyone except those who happily followed the theological direction of the leadership of the church. It was nothing but a useless humbug that involved the torture of patience, the destruction of trust and confidence, and the manipulation of every procedure, to give the appearance of fair, open debate without that ever happening.

matter. Some pastors openly declared that they considered the practice of close communion, as accepted by the church, as well as the church's teaching on altar fellowship, to be unacceptable. It appeared that they had no intention of practising it. Some openly stated that they themselves had had communion in other churches. Though no one claimed responsibility for engineering this widespread collapse of the practice of close communion, it was obviously a cause for rejoicing by those who were constantly urging that the church should get out of the "ghetto of isolationism" and join the

popular ecumenical stream. It was certainly a testimony to the effectiveness of unilateral action and the process of infiltration. By avoiding the humbug of theological debate in the pastoral conference,

CHANGE BY UNILATERAL ACTION AND INFILTRATION

In all of these areas, as well as others, like the J.E.D.P. source theory, charismatic practices, and contemporary worship, the theological changes that occurred within the Lutheran Church of Australia were accomplished, not by open challenges to the position of the church on the floor of pastoral conferences, opening the matter for debate and decision, but by unilateral action and a process of silent infiltration. Having seen this process at work for some years, Pastor M. Grieger was instrumental in amending a certain proposition to the Parramatta Convention in 1978 so that it read, in part:

Be it RESOLVED that the Church

1. continue to pray for Lutheran Unity in Australia and request congregations to include such prayers in their worship services,

2. obligate pastors and congregations firmly to resist in an evangelical manner every false doctrine and practice whereby such Lutheran Unity is endangered, insisting when any change from the historical practices of the church is contemplated that first clear and precise argumentation for the historic practice of the church shall

"progressive" pastors were able to get on with the matter of introducing their new positions and effectively infiltrating the church.

be given. (Convention Report, 1978, p.37).

When such debate, and argumentation for the historic practice of the church was not being given, but in fact being deliberately hindered and frustrated in certain issues, he wrote to the General President, reminding him of his obligation to see to it that the resolution of the church was carried out. The president simply replied that if the said resolution was to be used to hinder progress in the church it would have to be rescinded. In this way he seemed to betray how little he and the officials of the church really cared for open debate and fair presentation in defence of the historic practices of the church, when that would hinder what they regarded as progress.

From all of this, which is only a brief sample, it is apparent that double standards have operated in the church. Those who wished to change the church in a direction that had the sympathy and good wishes of the administration did not need to be afraid to engage in unilateral action and pursue a policy of infiltration. They could count on the silent connivance and protection of those in power as long as that

could be done without too much exposure. On the other hand, those who were concerned about such trends and changes in the church's theology or practice were not allowed to use such methods, but were required to bring their complaints to the pastoral conferences for debate and resolution. A simple Christian could be forgiven for suspecting that it was hoped that, by that time, the infiltration process would have ensured that the majority of pastors would not listen to their objections anyway. What was acceptable procedure for one party, was forbidden to the other. Thus after the Seminary Faculty had appointed Pastor C. Priebbenow as Dean of Studies at Luther Seminary for 1989, the General President (L. Steicke) called him to his office to express concern that he might use his position to promote the conservative cause in the church.

Not only were conservatives prevented from using the same means, so frequently used by others, to promote their cause in the church, but many devices were used to prevent them from exposing the new theology in the church. Thus, for several years the Faculty had been placing considerable emphasis on "solidarity", particularly after Pastor C. Priebbenow had addressed a "meeting on doctrinal concerns" at Hahndorf on 5th June 1983 on differing attitudes to Scripture within the Lutheran Church of Australia, and on 22nd June 1983, had reported to some fellow-pastors

the frank responses of Faculty-members to an open letter, dated 28th April 1983. Pastor C. Priebbenow was unwilling to refrain from criticism of colleagues in the name of Seminary solidarity. So also in the parishes, if any pastor dared to mention his concerns for the historic practice of the church to laymen, he was accused of trying to interfere in another pastor's parish. One would have thought that the introduction of a new theology, or a new practice into the church, should certainly be brought to the pastoral conference for debate and decision. A theological position or practice which had long been accepted and practised in the church, however, should surely be allowed to be promoted and defended at any level. What happened in the Lutheran Church of Australia was often the very reverse of this. New positions were introduced unilaterally with official connivance, while those who objected to these practices were called upon not to speak to others or act unilaterally, but to bring their concerns to pastoral conference for debate.

For years Vice-President C.I. Koch had impressed upon conservatives that they must always be very careful to work through the official channels of the church. But after years of inside experience, only about three weeks before his death, he said that he had come to see that this is quite hopeless and impossible. The official channels, as presently constituted, would not work for conservatives.

A PREDICAMENT

Conservative pastors, who were concerned about the direction of the church, were faced with a very difficult predicament. They asked themselves such questions as: "Did the Lord limit himself to working through the official channels of the church - the Jewish Sanhedrin, the high priest and elders of the people?" and "Did Luther restrict himself to working through the official channels of the church - the pope and his

hierarchy?". Everybody knows that if Jesus had done this the Christian church would never have been established, and if Luther had done this the church would not have been reformed. They saw clearly that there was good and ample precedent for bypassing official channels which hindered the proper presentation of the truth of God, however well meaning. It seemed to them that anyone capable of learning from experience, must realise that to continue on the treadmill of the "official channels" was useless and irresponsible. Some offered them the friendly advice, "If you are not happy with the present direction of the church why don't you get out?" This seemed to suggest that such people wanted to be relieved of the responsibilities of brotherly fellowship so that they could proceed along their trendy path at a better pace without embarrassment.

However, Pastors M. Grieger, V. Grieger and C. Priebbenow believed that such an option was not responsible. Surely

the bonds of brotherly fellowship required them to confess their faith, and what they firmly believed to be the truth of God, to their brethren as long as that was possible. They therefore resolved that, since their witness to the truth of God was consistently being frustrated in pastoral conferences, and other official channels of the church, so that it had virtually become impossible, there was little left for them to do but to confess their faith publicly before the church. They decided that this would best be done in writing, setting out the main points of disagreement with the theological trends in the church, both in positive and in negative statements, after the model of the *Formula of Concord*. This they resolved to do during the days of the general convention of the church at Immanuel College, Novar Gardens, in October 1987. They believed that this was a responsible decision that could not be condemned by any fair-minded person with Christian principles, nor could it be ignored by anyone who claims to be a Christian brother.

In the past, almost invariably, serious doctrinal discussions arose after someone had said or written something which was offensive. The unfortunate consequence of this was that a concern for personalities and personal loyalties almost always overshadowed these discussions. Every reaction to, or criticism of, such false statements was seen by some as a personal attack upon the

author of such views, even though that was not intended; and if the author was generally respected as almost "sacrosanct" in the church, such criticism was apparently seen by some as intolerable arrogance. Furthermore, the fact that discussions usually arose in criticism of views expressed by others, seemed to give ground for the oft-repeated charge that those who opposed such views were being purely "negative"; as if that were something evil in itself.

The writing of this confession was intended, therefore, to eliminate both of these offensive circumstances, and enable a less emotionally charged discussion of the real issues. It cannot possibly be branded as "purely negative" (it is probably the most positive approach to doctrinal discussions ever attempted in the Lutheran Church of Australia); and it sets out the purely theological issues to be faced independently of any personalities, as far as that is possible.

Some have suggested that the writing of this confession was linked with an organisation calling itself *Chapter One Lutherans*, that was organised by laymen to resist liberal departures from the Lutheran practice and theology of the church. This is simply false. Most of this confession of faith was written already in 1988, long before anyone had ever heard of an organization calling itself "*Chapter One Lutherans*". In fact it was intended to be complete already then. Only pressure of work prevented it. And so, while some final pages of that

document were indeed written after the formation of Chapter One Lutherans, they were not in any way written at the behest of that organization, as some have assumed. The purpose of the authors in their confession of faith was simply to set forth clearly and precisely the beliefs of conservative pastors, in the main areas of controversy - beliefs that they have always held, and to which they considered themselves bound by their ordination oath.

The authors of this confession of faith were well aware that the writing of such a confession by a few pastors would probably be dubbed "unilateral action", but they were left with virtually no other responsible option. They were tired of being drawn into petty squabbles about matters of procedure when that was a hindrance to a proper confession and defence of the truth of God's Word. They therefore hope that no one will be petty enough, or irresponsible enough, callously to ignore their true concerns and try to catapult them into further arguments about procedure. They could not but see it as a deliberate attempt to frustrate their witness if some would be more concerned about procedure than about the theological matters that concerned them. Such a concentration upon procedure, rather than a focus upon the theological issues, would be simply a practical continuation of the *conspiracy of silence*.

Despite the fact that it was obvious to them, as well as to many

others, that their church had simply gone away from them, by departing from the traditional practice and belief of their fathers in many matters, and despite the fact that many were suggesting that they should "shut up" or get out, by this confession they want it to be known that they will not allow themselves to be silenced or to cease from proclaiming what they know to be the truth of God. With the apostles Peter and John they would say to

those who want to silence them: "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:19-20). For us it is a small thing to fail to comply with man-made, procedural requirements when the Word and truth of God is at stake. for "we ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29).

* * * * *

The Word shall stand despite all foes -
No thanks they for it merit -
For God is with us and bestows
His gifts and Holy Spirit
And take they our life,
Goods, fame, child, and wife:
Though these all be gone,
Yet have our foes not won;
The kingdom ours remaineth

Martin Luther (1483-1546)