

R. Mayer - Personal Copy

R. MAYER'S RESPONSE TO M. GRIEGER'S
PRESENTATION AT NOBBY 10-1-83.

COVERING NOTE.

Dear Brethren,

I am happy to supply the enclosed material which is basically the text of my address at Nobby, 10-2-83. It includes the one small section near the end just prior to the question, "Can a divorced Pastor continue in the Ministry?" which I had deleted owing to lack of time. Otherwise it is almost word for word.

What I must emphasise, however, is that this material is my response to Pastor Grieger's address at Nobby, and not to his written material as it has now been circulated. This written material was not available to me when I had to prepare my response.

Now that I have read his material I realise that some of his statements with which I have had to take issue read somewhat differently from what was stated verbally. I make this point because if I am to be challenged on the basis that I have misrepresented Pastor Grieger's position on any point, I insist that this must be established on the basis of his spoken words, not his written material, since the spoken words are all that I had before me.

In otherwords, if there is any significant variance between his verbal presentation and his written one, that is a matter for him to clarify as to what his position is, not for me to do so. Likewise I have to answer for what I said, and if I put things badly, or used ill-chosen words I am happy to stand corrected, and present my point more clearly where necessary, so as to avoid unnecessary arguments and further misunderstanding.

R.J. Mayer, 24-2-83.

A HISTORY OF THE UNITED STATES
OF AMERICA

CHAPTER I

The first part of the history of the United States is the story of the discovery of the continent by Christopher Columbus in 1492. He sailed from Spain in search of a westward route to the Indies, and after a long and perilous voyage, he landed in the Bahamas. His discovery opened the way for European exploration and settlement of the New World.

The second part of the history is the story of the early years of the colonies. The first permanent English colony was founded in 1607 at Jamestown, Virginia. Other colonies were established in New England, the Middle Colonies, and the South. The colonies grew in population and in their sense of independence from England.

The third part of the history is the story of the American Revolution. The colonies' desire for self-government led to a series of conflicts with England, culminating in the Revolutionary War (1775-1783). The war resulted in the colonies' independence and the formation of the United States of America in 1776.

The fourth part of the history is the story of the early years of the United States. The new nation faced many challenges, including the struggle to define its government and the issue of slavery. The Constitution was adopted in 1787, and the first President, George Washington, was inaugurated in 1789. The United States emerged as a major power in the world.

THE END

A RESPONSE TO M. GRIEGER'S CONCERNS RE

THE STATE OF THE L.C.A.

R. Mayer,
18-2-83.

Dear Brethren,

Firstly, may I express my sincere thanks for the opportunity to speak. I cannot demand that you believe what I say. You are free to make your own judgments about that. I only ask that you hear me carefully and honestly, even as I endeavour to speak openly and honestly.

To save time for the main issues, let me make a few points very briefly -

1. What I express is my own judgment. Time has not permitted the possibility of checking out with others the accuracy of what I say. I trust, however, that you can believe that I speak with conviction.
2. I in no way question the sincerity and conviction of Pastor Grieger. Therefore where I disagree with him, it is not a rejection of him as a person, but simply a questioning of some of the details he presented and the conclusions he formed.
3. I cannot possibly answer all the points that were made, largely because of limited time, but partly also because I have no way of checking out some of the historical details presented.
4. There are not two clearly defined positions in the Church as you could have been led to believe last time and I want to warn you against taking up a "Mayer" : position or a "Grieger" : position attitude. Speaking for the Pastors of the Old District there are no doubt many who would disagree with both of us on many of the points presented.
5. We all long for simple answers, and if Pastor Grieger has found them, I envy him. All I can say is that some of the issues he raises have been before the Church ever since the first Apostolic Convention in Jerusalem and will confront the Church till the end of time.

THE ISSUES.

Before coming to the main point, viz. the authority of Scripture, I must reply to at least some of the misleading statements that have been made.

1. The Financial Problems.

To say this is the result of doctrinal uncertainty in the Church is a highly subjective judgment and without foundation. In fact 1982 saw the highest proportionate increase in giving that we have ever experienced. If anything, then, that should prove just the opposite to what was presented. Besides, anyone who knows the S.D.A. Church knows that tithing is a membership requirement! Lutheran giving throughout the world is little different

from our own, whether ultra-conservative or more liberal.

2. The Body-Soul Debate.

I am not taking up the subject as an issue. That would need a separate evening - or whole day. All I raise here is what is, to me at least, a rather sad case of mis-representation involving a person.

Dr. Hebart's paper to General Pastors' Conference in 1981 was referred to and he is reported as saying that at death nothing remains - the breath of life leaves a person, and he crumbles to dust - in other words, no different from the animal. This, it is claimed, is Dr. Hebart's position.

Yes, Dr. Hebart stated this in his paper, near the end of his section on the Old Testament, but not as his position! There he is outlining much of the hopelessness of the Old Testament picture, particularly the Book of Ecclesiastes - and I quote, page 4, 3rd last paragraph: "Nowhere is the hopeless O.T. pessimism so well expressed as in the Book of Ecclesiastes with its theme: vanity, all is vanity. The thrust of the whole book is, there is no survival (3:19f8; 9:5.10)... there is only one thing certain : death, ... all is vanity (12:8). In this regard man has no advantage over the animal world : both share the gift of Ruach and both lose it, and both go to one and the same place .."

Now to claim that as Dr. Hebart's position, and ignore the paragraph immediately following, and I quote: "One has to reach this depth of O.T. helplessness to understand the totally opposite, new message of the New Testament gospel and the immense revolutionary turn of events grounded in the resurrection of Jesus .. and expressed with unshakeable authority in those words: "I am the resurrection and the life..." (John 11:25f) Or the final paragraph of his paper, and I quote: "So then beyond death we are with Christ in communion with God who is for us; or we are without Christ, out of communion with God who is against us ..."

is not only misleading - but it is wrong - and quite unworthy of sound scholarship (I believe I could have been excused for using much stronger terms!)

Then to add that Pastor Mayer agrees with Dr. Hebart's position as so wrongly presented, is equally unfair. If any reference to what I have said or written is to be made, why not do so in terms of what I have clearly said and taught, and I quote from my letter to the Pastors alluded to last month, "Thus we emphasise the great positive viz. that in Christ we already have new life, and this new life is not terminated by death. Therefore we can confidently proclaim that our loved ones are with Christ."

3. Pastors' Conference.

An even more serious matter is not only the condemning of Pastors' Conference, but the implied if not open judgment against the Pastors of the Church as to their doctrinal

integrity. I know how last month's speaker feels, and I know that he considers his judgment perfectly justified.

All I can say is that the vast majority of the Pastors would just as sincerely disagree, and in fact totally reject the judgment against them and what was presented to you last time is far from the complete picture.

For example the details about Pastor Zweck. It is true that he was upset by the presentation by Dr. Renner on the Source Hypothesis and, together with others, demanded the right to respond. (By the way, Dr. Renner did not promote the theory (as requested by Conference) but simply explained what it was, but did add that within strict limitations it was a useful tool - as the Genesis Statement adopted by the Church at Horsahm in 1972 allows).

It is not true to say that the right to respond was, I quote, "repeatedly denied". The fact is that Pastor Zweck was asked to present a paper on the subject to the full assembly at the very next Conference! Unfortunately at very short notice just prior to Conference (that was in 1974) he stated that he had not been able to prepare his paper owing to the pressure of education studies.

We again gave him opportunity in 1975, but this time as an elective, and he accepted and fulfilled this assignment. In 1978 he again gave a paper, this time on the very subject now in question, viz. "The Theology of The Word", To claim, therefore, that Pastor Zweck attended no more conferences is quite untrue. He left for England at the end of 1978.

Now to say that Conference has again refused to give a fair hearing, this time to the subject of The Theology of The Word, is in my opinion not a fair judgment. I have not had time to check out the whole history, but I believe I am right in saying that more papers have been given on this subject than on any other. In recent years, at least, we had Pastor Koch and Dr. Hebart in 1982. Pastor Koch already in 1981 (and most Queensland Pastors were in attendance) Dr. Hamann in 1980, and Pastor Zweck in 1978, not to mention a number of others I note in my file from earlier years.

To come to the 1982 Conference and the now notorious Hebart lectures, I cannot know exactly what was in the mind of each man present when the Conference voted against hearing the so-called "other side", but I have noted the following reasons as expressed by different ones: and I quote some of the comments expressed -

- 1). "The "other side" had already been heard twice in the Koch presentation."
- 2). "Enough papers on the subject have been heard."
- 3). "The issue of inerrancy and the authority of the Word has already been dealt with and the Church's position clearly set down in the Theses of Agreement and Horsham Statement. That is where we stand and what we teach, and if some disagree, let them argue it out elsewhere and not take any more time of the whole Conference."

4). "To deal adequately with all the questions raised by Dr. Hebart's presentation would take up the whole of future Conferences and subjects we want dealt with continue to be deferred, therefore we voted in favour of special seminars."

Now I am accused of a great "cover up" of the lectures - "prevent it getting into the hands of laymen - one wonders why" were the words used last month.

As I said, I can understand Pastor Grieger's feelings about the Hebart lectures, but I cannot accept the harshness of his judgment against the Pastors Conference, particularly the doubts about the pastors themselves. I don't know what you were left with after last month's meeting, but if you accepted what was said, you must now have serious doubts about almost every Pastor of the Church - and the implications of that are frightening! After all, who now can be trusted?

There are other concerns the speaker raised in which I believe he was equally misleading or formed very doubtful conclusions. e.g. I do not know of any Lutheran Pastor who condones couples living in sin. However, I don't want to spend all evening disputing these points made last time. Therefore, let me now move on to the main issues.

THE INERRANCY AND AUTHORITY OF SCRIPTURE!

Brethren, you asked me to present the matter clearly and simply. I'll try, but it would be arrogance in the extreme if I claimed to be able to answer simply what has engaged the best minds of the church for nearly 2,000 years!

I. Inerrancy.

To try to sum up Pastor Grieger's position in a few words, all problems in the Church are the result of two clearly differing views of Scripture, identified as Position A and Position B. Position A holds that there are absolutely no errors or contradictions in the Bible; Position B holds that there are errors and contradictions in the Bible. Only those who hold Position A can present with certainty the truth of God; those who hold Position B can present only a theology of doubt, and no one can say with certainty, "It is written!"

My Answer.

Firstly, I do not believe that Position B as outlined by the previous speaker exists in the Church, and I totally reject the conclusions about the theology of doubt. No Pastor of the L.C.A., to my knowledge, teaches that the Scriptures err, or lie or mislead us in any way, no matter how you were warned last time about some not meaning what they say.

I cannot check back on what was said in 1966. I have heard of three instances in which Pastors allegedly stated that there were errors in the Scriptures. I have gone to each man, two from the Queensland District, and have been given the categorical assurance that this is not what was said, and certainly not what was meant. In each case statements were obviously misunderstood, and in the case of the Queensland men not very clearly presented, so I don't blame people for misunderstanding them. Again, in each case, however, a genuine attempt was made to clear the misunderstanding and give clear expression to the full acceptance to the truth of the whole of Scripture.

I likewise ask you, brethren, in all honesty - you have heard hundreds of sermons and devotions and shared in Bible Studies, yet has any Pastor ever said of any word, or verse, or section that this is in error - that it is not true and that you cannot trust it? In every Sunday that we have faced our people we have read the lessons and preached from a text absolutely convinced that this is the truth of God!

Yet, you are told that the Church has nothing left to proclaim but a theology of doubt because it holds Position B. Believe this or not as you will, but I reject it utterly, and for myself, at least, I will say with St. Paul when he was condemned by some of the so-wise Corinthians, "But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human court. He who judges me is the Lord!" (1 Cor. 4).

But now, let's have an open and honest look at inerrancy. What does the word mean? The claim was made that unless we uphold that the Scriptures are totally without error or contradiction we have no certainty left to hold to. In other words, to use a statement made many years ago, "If the Bible is wrong in anything, it can be trusted in nothing!"

This is claimed as Position A, and the whole truth and truthfulness of God is made to depend on it. Does this really mean that if there are words or statements that do not agree - and cannot be made to agree - then the whole truth of the Word - and thus of God Himself - is in question? If so, then our faith either survives or is shattered by the strength of the term inerrant, and I believe this to be a very fragile position indeed!

I will use two simple examples from Scripture itself - and I do so not to be smart, nor to deceive, nor to hurt anyone, but simply to test your understanding of inerrancy in terms of the Scriptures themselves. So, let's take a deep breath as we plunge into a stream that has swept away many a seeking person and I urge you for God's sake hang on until we get to the other side!

Example 1.

Jesus Baptism is recorded three times : Matt 3; Mark 1; Luke 3. Matt. records the voice of God speaking to the

crowd and saying (v17) "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased."

Mark and Luke record the same voice speaking to Jesus Himself and saying, "You are my beloved Son, with you I am well pleased."

What did God actually say? Clearly the words do not agree. Either Matt. got it wrong or Mark and Luke were wrong. But which is the correct word. We simply don't know!

And now comes the really serious problem for Position A and the logical system it attempts to adopt: since we cannot know exactly what God said, can we be sure of what God said at all? Maybe both are wrong - so if we can't be sure of what words God spoke there, can we be sure - these people would have to answer - of any of the words that God has given us? And what of the same Holy Spirit who inspired all three writers? Surely He knew what words God spoke! Why didn't He make sure the writers got it right? So... What do you mean by inerrancy?

Example 2.

Again I select a very simple example from the many that could be given: the Raising of the Daughter of Jairus.. Again three records, Matt. 9, Mark 5, Luke 8.

Matt. records: "... a ruler .. knelt before Him saying, "My daughter has just died ..."

Mark records: "... one of the rulers .. Jairus by name .. My little daughter is at the point of death ..." (Literally "in the last moments")

Luke records: "... a man named Jairus .. and she was dying.."

Now, had the girl died before Jairus spoke to Jesus, or not. One writer says she had passed away (and make no mention of the servants coming later to say that she was now dead), while two state she was dying, and in each case servants come later to say that she had passed away and Jairus should trouble the master no further (because it was too late).

Three accounts, all inspired by the Holy Spirit, yet clearly there is disagreement. How do we face it? We can't just bypass the problem. It is the Word of God - the problem is there - in the written Word.

I'm afraid there is no perfect answer, but there are a number of ways of looking at it.

To begin with, let's forget the liberal approach which says that the Bible is the word of man and there's no real way of knowing the truth except that somehow it points to God. No! We are L.C.A. Lutherans and we hold absolutely that God's Word is truth as it claimed to be!

So how do we answer this problem?

- 1). One answer is to say, "No! God's Word is perfect! Therefore any discrepancy in the text only appears so to our human understanding, but it is not really so!"

This position is allowed for in the Horsham statement on "The Theses of Agreement and Inerrancy", par 2. Referring to the Theses of Agreement VIII, par. 10 viz. that inerrancy cannot be seen with human eyes, nor can it be proved to human reason; it is an article of faith, .. it goes on to say, "This understanding of inerrancy implies that, although error may appear to be present in the Scriptures, it is not really so."

Now that sounds very safe, and it supposedly protects the integrity of God. After all, God cannot err. That would never do!

But what are we left with? All we know of God is what is expressed in the simple words of the Bible, yet some of those simple words are clearly at variance with each other. So now comes the problem: if we have to avoid the difficulty of discrepancy by saying that the clear and simple words of variance are not really so, but only seem so to our limited human reason, must we then likewise say that the clear and simple words of salvation may not really be so, but only seem so? In other words, if we insist that the clear words of salvation are really so, and I believe exactly what they say, what right have we to insist that the equally clear words of variance are not really so!

- 2). Another attempt at solving the problem is to say that only the original writings are inspired. It is the copyists that made errors or deliberately changed words in transcribing the original text. This position likewise is allowed for in the Theses of Agreement, and I quote Art. VIII par 10, "the term 'inerrancy' has no reference to the variant readings found in the existing textual sources because of copyists' errors or deliberate alterations!"

Again, however, I find this rather unsatisfactory for three reasons:

- (a). The original inspired writings have not been found and may never be found, therefore the real possibility exists that we may never know what the originally inspired Scriptures really say.
- (b). To admit the possibility of copyists errors or alterations, for those who hold this position, and Pastor Grieger is certainly in that category, means that the Scriptures as we have them now may in fact contain errors. To believe the inerrancy of an original text that may never be found is to place your faith in something that does not exist.

What is the original truth? What is the original inerrant word? For our time, at least, we do not know!

- (c). Thirdly, I find it rather incogruous to insist that the Holy Spirit should have been so careful to give the original words perfectly, but then allow all sorts of mistakes to creep into the copies, especially when He knew that the originals would soon be lost. It doesn't quite add up to the promise of our Lord, "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My words shall not pass away!"
But maybe Jesus never said those exact words! They could be copyists' errors or alterations ... who knows???

- 3). There is a third position, and that is in all honesty before God and each other to accept the Word as it is! It is all that we have and all that we can know of God!

And if it pleased the Holy Spirit to give us the record as it is, it is not for us to say, "No! You can't do it that way!"

But if we simply accept the clear words of variation as they are then we can also with full confidence accept the clear words of life and salvation as they are!

And the whole wonderful point is this: the variations, (imprecisions, discrepancies) call them what you like, have absolutely no bearing on the message that God proclaims to us! At Jesus' Baptism, whether God actually said "This is" or "You are", there is absolute agreement about the fact that Jesus is here acclaimed and presented as God's own true Son by God Himself!

And the daughter of Jairus, whether she died before the father left the house or later makes no difference to the message that the Word clearly presents, viz. that the girl died and the Lord of Life raised her from the dead!

The precise words do not agree, but the Word is absolutely clear because we accept the words as the Holy Spirit gave them. Thus the Word does not err. It is truth! This is all that Dr. Hamann is saying in his lectures, and I will not have him declared guilty of treason and mutiny against the Church, as was stated last time, because this position also is allowed for in the Theses of Agreement, and I quote Art. VIII par. 10, "... neither does it (Inerrancy) imply absolute verbal accuracy in quotations and parallel accounts, such absolute uniformity evidently not having been part of God's design."

To come back to the main issue as last month's speaker saw it, Position A clearly bases the truth of the Word on Expl. 1 and 2 claiming that this is the only way of preserving the truth. Expl. 3 it seems to me from what I heard, would be rejected. While I do not reject 1 and 2 I believe that no. 3 is the safest and best foundation for certainty because it accepts the Bible, as we have it now, as it is!

Further the important thing is that the Theses of Agreement accept all 3! This is the position of the L.C.A. and it is not for any man to declare his brother condemned for holding one or all of these views on inerrancy. The other important thing is that we all hold and confess that the Word of God is true, no matter which explanation for inerrancy we use. Therefore I affirm my original belief that there are not two irreconcilable positions in the Church. If there are divisions amongst us, it is not because of the differing views of inerrancy!

To sum up, we do all accept that the whole of the Bible is God-given and it is in its entirety God's true, infallible, authoritative Word.

II. So we turn to the Authority of Scripture, and here the matter becomes more serious.

I have not had time to study Pastor Grieger's written material, (and I am thankful to the brother who sent me a copy.) Accordingly I must confine myself to what was said last month.

The speaker categorically stated that the authority of Scripture depends solely on the fact that God is the author. I quote from his address: "I defy anyone to show from the Theses of Agreement that it is the Christ content that gives authority to the Scriptures. Authority always rests on the fact that God has written it".

Maybe I misunderstand what he meant, but if the words mean what they clearly say then I believe Pastor Grieger does not understand the Theses of Agreement because he has done precisely what the Theses says we must not do, viz. he has placed the Formal Principle over the Material! Let me explain these terms. By Formal Principle we mean that God is the author of the Scriptures in that the Holy Spirit inspired the writers even to the very words they wrote. By Material Principle we mean the message of the Scripture, and that message, clearly and simply in Jesus Christ.

If you want this identified in the Thesis, the Formal Principle is confessed -

1. in Art. I:1 and again in VIII:2. "We believe that the Holy Scripture of the Old and New Testament are the infallible Word of God, written by inspiration of God ..."
"We teach that the Holy Scripture is the Word of God in writing."
2. The Material Principle is spelled out in Art. I:5 and again in VIII:2 and 4.
"... the Scriptures are the Word of Christ, and they testify of Him." "As the written Word, the Bible is inseparably bound up with the Word Incarnate and the oral Word. Its proper and essential content is the Eternal Son of God, the Word who was made man in the person of Jesus Christ."

3. Art. I.5 then says emphatically that these two principles are not to be set up against each other, and I quote, "We believe the formal and material principles must not be brought into opposition to each other... . Loyalty to Christ requires loyalty to His Word and loyalty to the Scriptures requires loyalty to Christ... . We dare not stress the material principle at the expense of the formal, or vice versa."

Now I was positive that last month's speaker understood this and agreed with it, as e.g. at Gatton last November where we spent more than 1½ hours on two simple sentences viz. the Scriptures have authority because God is the author, and the Scriptures have authority because their content is Jesus Christ. At the end of that time I was delighted to find, as it seemed to me and the other pastors present, that there was complete agreement.

Why then emphasise to the assembly at Nobby in January that, and again I quote, "Authority always rests on the fact that God has written it."

Now, no one is denying that God is the author, but the Thesis of Agreement based clearly on Scripture, affirm equally the authority given by its content, viz. the message of Christ, which is God's eternal "yes" to us, viz. the Gospel. To place this content into a secondary position, as seemed to be the case last month, would mean to take up a very doubtful position indeed. In fact I claim it would be un-Lutheran and un-Scriptural.

I know it sounds neat and logical to begin with God; and because God is true, so His Word the Bible is true; And because the Bible is true we can be sure that the message of Christ is true and thus be certain of our salvation.

Any you may say, "Well! What's wrong with that? It sounds good to me?"

Let me ask a simple question, "How do you know that the Bible is really God's Word?" Just to say, "I believe it" will not do, because then it is your faith that determines the truth.

"But the Bible says it is God's Word!" So does the Koran, and the Hindu Scriptures, and the Book of Mormon. In fact, the Mohammedans claim that the Koran was pre-written in Heaven, and so it must be the perfect book. The Mormons go even one better and say their book is written on gold plates which God sent down for Joseph Smith to transcribe - so that must be the most perfect book!

We reject all these claims! Rather we examine the content and it is in the Bible that we meet a person, Jesus Christ! and if He really is the risen and ever-living Lord, then the record which speaks of Him is the genuine one. So we know the Bible is given by God because of its content, Jesus Christ revealed in the Gospel.

But we do not set one above or below the other, and the L.C.A. affirms that the truth and therefore authority of Scripture rests both on the fact that God is the author and because it reveals Jesus Christ. This is a very vital teaching of the Theses of Agreement (Art. I:5) If last month's speaker denies this, as his words seemed to indicate, then he is not upholding the Thesis of Agreement.

If on the other hand, I have misunderstood his emphasis and he accepts this, then I shall be most happy indeed to know that there is, after all, no disagreement as to the basis for the Authority of the Word!

But then I have to say, "So what's the fuss all about? Why say, as was said, that there is a great gulf between us?"

To sum up, then thus far, I totally affirm the whole of Scripture as true, infallible and authoritative. It is totally the Word of God! I even dare to claim in all honesty that I believe I have presented a sounder basis, both for inerrancy and authority than was given last time. While this claim would no doubt be challenged, I believe it cannot be denied that I have presented only what the Theses of Agreement affirm.

III. But, and again I want to be perfectly open, there is a problem between us. And, as I see it, it is not a problem of inerrancy, nor is it a problem of basic authority of Scripture.

The problem is this. We use the same basic evidence - Scripture alone - and confess the same authority and truthfulness, but, in certain situations, WE INTERPRET AND APPLY IT IN DIFFERENT WAYS. That's where the problem lies - not whether God's Word is true or not, but how to apply it in each given situation!

Now please don't get the idea that there are major differences in everything. There is no dispute as to the major articles of faith as set down in the Lutheran Confessions as in the Book of Concord, and some have said that surely this is enough to bind us together as Lutherans.

However, the L.C.A. has gone further and added the Thesis of Agreement and then the Horsham Statements on Genesis and Inspiration and again we said, "Surely that's enough!"

Now we find that disagreements have developed in new areas such as Women's Vote and L.W.F., plus such areas as the application of the Law to the moral problems of our day.

I see the problem as one of interpretation of Scripture and how to apply the authoritative Word to the problems of our time.

Now I cannot possibly, in this concluding section of my address, deal with all the areas of concern. All I can do is open up the subject and try to give a few examples from the Scriptures themselves.

Just one important observation at the outset, however. I think that many of you have been led to believe that there are two different positions: those who accept the clear Scriptures as they are and those who don't! I say again: it is not so! When it comes to applying Scripture in many cases there may be a number of different positions.

So to examples.

LWF. Some of us are almost horrified at the thought of joining - others of us are equally convinced we ought to be there! So we turn to the authority of the Word, as the Theses of Agreement direct us; Art.1:4(a) "... where differences in teaching and practice exist or arise .. these differences are to be removed by willingly submitting to the authority of the Word."

Unfortunately, however, LWF did not exist in the day of Jesus or the Apostles, so they could not directly tell us what to do. So we look for passages that seem to refer to such a situation.

And now comes the problem! One group looks for the passages that command us to come apart - to separate - to withdraw. You older brethren remember those passages well from the pre-union days; Rom.16:17 "Watch out for those who cause divisions and upset people's faith and go against the teachings you have received. Keep away from them!"

and Gal. 5:9 "It takes only a little yeast to make the whole batch of dough rise."

1 Tim. 5:22: " Do not be a partaker of other men's sins. Keep yourself pure."

and so on.

And so they say, there you are! Scripture clearly teaches us to have nothing to do with those who do not uphold the clear truth as we do! In other words, truth can be preserved only by standing apart!

But others look at the same Scripture and see there a totally different approach.

Beginning with Christ Himself, they remind us as to how He rebuked His Disciples for rejecting the man, who was performing miracles in Jesus' name, on the grounds that he was not one of Jesus' selected followers;

And how Jesus got Himself condemned by the purists because He did not keep Himself pure by staying away from the outcasts and sinners (Luke 15)

And worse still, though He condemned the Pharisees for their hypocrisy, yet it seemed Jesus still joined them in God's House for worship and prayer. Even after the N.T. church had been established, the Disciples still joined in that same worship (Acts 3).

And what of St. Paul in the many instances that he pleads for tolerance and forbearance, and not to stand in judgement over the weaker brother but help to strengthen him (e.g. Romans 14:1 and 15:1, plus many others such as I Cor.) and dare I even suggest our Lord's words: "Let him who is without sin ..."

Eph. 4: "I beg you to maintain unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." So the clear message of Scripture is, Don't isolate! Get involved and strengthen the weaker brethren! By love serve one another! All solid Scripture!

So we differ, each side basing its argument on Scripture!

What do the Theses of Agreement say about this? Disagreement is not a cause for division! Art. 1,4(d) "Differences in exegesis that do not affect doctrine are not church divisive." (e) (Even in things that affect doctrine) "(where) no unanimity has been reached on the clarity of the passage(s) in question ... divergent views arising from such differences of interpretation are not divisive of Church fellowship ..." And I add the warning. Beware lest we make the Scriptures say what we think they ought to say!

Women's Vote.

St. Paul says, "I permit no woman to have authority over a man!" There's no dispute about that, and the Resolution adopted at Indooroopilly in 1981 clearly upholds that.

He further said, "Let the women keep silent in the Church!" (I Cor. 14) Surely that's clear also, isn't it?

No! Here there is disagreement, and Bible scholars come up with a number of different ways of interpreting the passages. We have to agree that it cannot mean that woman is not allowed to make any sound in Church. So what does "silent" mean? It can't be taken absolutely literally!

But, it is argued, at least we know that it means a woman is not allowed to speak individually or authoritatively in the Church. But then, in the same letter to the Corinthians (I Cor. 11) St. Paul does acknowledge that women can

and do pray and prophecy - proclaim God's Word! Its there - in God's Word - and we cannot ignore it! So what does "keep silent" mean?

You see, it is not as clear as it seemed - and there are differences of opinion! and the Theses say disagreement and differences of interpretation are not a cause for division!

And again I warn, Beware lest we make the Scriptures say what we think they ought to say!

IV. Application of Law and Gospel - and I make this my last main point! All Scripture has authority, but how far do we go in making it binding for the Church today? And how rigidly do we apply it? Clearly much of the Old Testament is no longer binding. We do not apply all the rules of Leviticus to the Church of today, and we do not regard the view of life and death in Ecclesiastes as our view today - even though it is clear Scripture and authoritative Word!!

How do we decide what parts of Scripture are binding and what are not? Does each one make up his own mind and then argue that he is right?

The Lutheran answer is in two main parts:

1). If the clear teaching of Christ and the Apostles declare it, then that is what we teach. In other words, the New Testament supersedes the Old. But where the New Testament upholds teachings from the Old, then that remains binding for us.

That's why we say that all the rules and regulations that God gave the Israelites were for them only, but the Ten Commandments stand because Christ and the Apostles upheld them. So we absolutely uphold the laws on marriage, killing, stealing, etc.

Yet not the Sabbath? Why? You will not find anywhere in the New Testament that the Sabbath has been abolished. Sure, Jesus said there were certain emergencies under which the rule about doing no work was to be put aside, but emergencies don't make a new rule. He upheld the Sabbath, He worshipped on the Sabbath and so did the Disciples.

Why then can we say that we can change it without breaking a clear command of God?

That's where the second part of the Lutheran answer comes in - a marvellously simple answer, yet one that causes endless bother - and which last month's presentation seemingly went very close to rejecting. It is an answer that bewilders and sometimes frightens us!

And that answer is:

- 2). How does our teaching and practice relate to Jesus Christ and the Gospel? In other words, in how far do we apply even the New Testament as a book of rules, and in how far do we exercise our freedom in Christ?

That's the whole point about the Sabbath! While there's no clear command directing us to abandon the Sabbath in favour of another day, it is the Christ content of the Scripture that gives us the right and freedom to do so. This is the principle St. Paul expresses in Col. 2 viz. that it is Christ who establishes what is most important for our lives now! That's why we can say the Sabbath belongs to the old, Christ is the centre of the new, so we celebrate His Resurrection as our day of worship.

But there is a valid warning. I can understand Pastor Grieger's concerns about Gospel Reductionism. Where there are people (and Pastors?) who would claim that because Jesus loves you and forgives you, you can do what you like (e.g. "shack up" if you like, cheat and steal if you want to, blaspheme Christ's name - it's all O.K.! Jesus loves you!) - if that is a position some take, I reject it utterly! It is an abuse of the Gospel based on a total misunderstanding of what the Gospel really means!

But, in rejecting this, did last month's presentation go too far the other way - and I would earnestly say to Pastor Grieger, "Don't throw out the baby with the bath water!"

Just because the Gospel may be abused by some, don't - for God's sake don't downgrade the Gospel!

Whether the speaker meant to do that or not I don't know! I find it very hard to believe that he did, but I can only go by the words that he used in last month's presentation.

I quote from the tape, "that everything must somehow be related to the Gospel". He rejected this!

"That the gospel is the judge of everything". He rejected this!

"The Bible and its authority is seen as relevant to us because it presents the Gospel - not because of the Words of God". He rejected this!

And I quote again, "The final form of this nonsense is that nothing can have any value unless it is somehow connected with Christ and the Gospel!"

Clearly, as I had to mention earlier, it seems that the Words of God (the written record) are placed above the Gospel (and its heart and content Jesus Christ). If that is so, then we really do have a serious rift between us.

I pray God it is not so, and I shall rejoice to know it is not so! But I want to make it clear that the L.C.A.'s position is precisely this that you cannot understand the "words of God" unless you see them in the light of Christ and the Gospel!

Listen to the Theses of Agreement, Art. I:5 "... The Scriptures are the Word of Christ.." Art VIII:2 "The written Word, the Bible is inseparably bound up with the Word Incarnate. Its purpose and essential content is the eternal Son of God, the Word who was made man in the person of Jesus Christ". Art. VIII:4 "We confess that in the entire Holy Scriptures both Old and New Testament, even where it is not immediately apparent, God the Father through God the Holy Ghost proclaims the Son, Jesus Christ, as Saviour and Lord."

Art. VIII:5. "We believe... that justification (THE GOSPEL!) by grace through faith in Christ, the chief topic of the Christian doctrine.. is of special service for the clear, correct understanding of the entire ~~New Holy~~ Scriptures, and alone shows the way to the unspeakable treasure and right knowledge of Christ, and alone opens the door to the entire Bible." (and that's quoting the Arts. to the Augs. Confess. Art IV).

Brethren, this is precisely what it means to be Lutheran, viz. to see the Gospel as the heart and content of the entire Scripture. The inerrancy of Scripture is confessed by many - Calvinists, Fundamental Baptists, plus S.D.A's, J.W.'s and a host of other sects - but none of these understand the Gospel as the heart of the entire Scripture.

That's where the Reformation began! It was not the inerrant Word that Luther rediscovered. In fact it was the very Word that drove him to despair - e.g. in his study of the Psalms where he came again and again across the words 'The righteousness of God', he read it as the righteousness that God demands of us - and he knew he stood lost and condemned.

But the Spirit of God led him to the Gospel, viz. that God's righteousness is what He gives to us - a gift of grace in Christ - and so the whole of the Scriptures came gloriously alive as he understood the Gospel - Christ alone - FOR US!

Thus our whole understanding and application of the Word does relate to Christ and His Gospel. Thus, as Lutherans, we can rightly say we are the Church of the Word because we are the Church of the Gospel.

And in applying that Word, we always have to test it in the light of the Gospel. That does not mean we set up the Gospel against the Word! That cannot be! But where there is lack of clarity in a particular passage, or genuine and honest difference in understanding, it is Lutheran to appeal to the Gospel and quite un-Lutheran to interpret any passage contrary to the Gospel.

Is there is rift between us?

If Pastor Grieger sees the Gospel as under the Word of God, or as only part of the whole Word of God, then, yes, there is a serious disagreement between us.

The disagreement is not in the written doctrines, but in basic, overall doctrine. viz. that Art. II and IV of the Augsb. Conf. - Christ and Justification by grace through faith are the heart and sum total of the whole of Scripture.

Where this difference shows up is in our interpretation and application of Scripture to the problems before us.

I've already dealt with this in terms of L.W.F. and Women's Vote. I'll simply add: The Lutheran church has never had a doctrine as to whether women may vote or not. Many congregations have had women voting for more than 100 years, and they have never tried to assert authority over the men.

The former UELCA did hold membership in L.W.F. yet never compromised its confessional position on altar and pulpit fellowship.

To me, then, it is a question that can be open to disagreement without the matter becoming divisive.

But that's where some people in the Church get worried. Wherever there is disagreement they are led to believe that only one side can be right, and if one is right, the other must be wrong! That's how the logic goes.

Likewise there is the fond belief that for every problem there is an answer - and only one right answer! And all other possible answers are wrong - esp. if you can find Scripture passages to prove it!

So I come back to my original point that the fundamental difference between us is not inerrancy or authority, but how we apply Scripture to our problems, viz. as Law or Gospel!

I give a simple but very real example: Can a divorced Pastor continue in the Ministry?

There are sincere people who say, "No! Scripture forbids it!"

Where? In Mark 10 Jesus clearly forbids divorce, and in I Tim. 3, St. Paul clearly says that a bishop must manage his own household well, otherwise how can he care for God's Church? It's clear and simple Scripture, so out with him! You cannot go against Scripture!

But there are others who rise up and say: "But wait! where does the Gospel come in?" Didn't St. Paul also say, "I am the chief of sinners (the worst - even committed murder!) yet I received mercy!" (I Tim.1). And in I Cor.15 "I am not worthy to be called an Apostle - but by the grace of God I am what I am!" And Peter who deliberately denied his Lord, yet was reinstated!

Clear and simple Scripture? Yes! So, can a divorced Pastor continue in the Ministry? What is Scripture's answer? Some say safest is LAW! - others take risk of GOSPEL!

Again the Theses of Agreement give us direction: Art. 1:4(e), where it speaks of divergent views not being divisive, it adds as one of the provisos, sub-clause (iii). (providing that) "such divergent views in no wise impair, infringe upon, or violate the central doctrine of Holy Scripture, justification by grace through faith in Jesus Christ."

CONCLUSION.

Is this the end of the road, as was projected last month? I'll give you my honest opinion:

- If you believe that Pastor Grieger presented the true picture viz. that the Seminary teaches only a theology of doubt; that the Qld Pastor's Conference has voted itself into theological oblivion; that there is nothing in our theology to prevent us plunging to the bottom;
- And if you stand with him in his pre-union position and will not deviate one inch from it because it is the only truth, and all the rest of us stand condemned;
- And if you cannot accept any disagreement on some of the Scripture passages in question, or bear with your weaker brother in his understanding, and by love serve one another; then, yes, it is the end of the road! Because if you demand that position to be the only one, then I cannot walk with you! Your path is too narrow for me!

But, whatever you and I do, it is not the end of the road for the Lutheran Church! The Living Lord; the infallible Word and the Lutheran Confessions guarantee that

So where do we go from here? Simply back to the Scriptures and place ourselves into the hands of the Lord of the Scriptures, Jesus Christ. As our life is not perfect, so our understanding is not perfect, and it could just be that in many areas Mayer and Grieger could both be wrong! After all, we live not by our own perfection, but by GRACE ALONE!

R.J. Mayer,
18-2-83.