

President's Personal Letter, P8405, 28th May 1984

Dear Fellow Servants in Christ,

I know it does not inspire some of you to hear once again of the theological controversy. Let me assure you, however, that the dispute continues and there are those who seek to intensify it, and, no matter how small this segment may be, the unity of the Church is at stake. That means we are *all* involved.

My purpose here, then, is to keep you informed and again to seek to analyse the situation confronting us. If I seem to be bringing in new dimensions, it is not because I am changing tactics for the sake of trying to win an argument. My genuine concern is for both the unity of the L.C.A. and the confessional position on which it was established, and it is for this alone that I contend.

What I present here is totally in support what Dr. Hamann presented in answer to questions at Toowoomba last Wednesday, except that I expand a little while still hopefully in line with Bro. Henry's analysis.

Background

While L.W.F., Women's Suffrage and Body-Soul Debate have been significant factors in the current controversy, the main issue has been the authority of the Word, and the principals in this, as I see it, are the papers of Dr Hamann, 'Between Fundamentalism and Philosophy', President Koch, 'Inspiration and Authority of Scripture', and Dr. S. Hebart, 'Theology of the Word'.

Whether directly related or purely coincidental, it is clear that President Koch's material reads as a reaction to Dr. Hamann's, particularly where the latter 'tilts' at what he poses as 'fundamentalism'. Whether this was intended or not, it is true to say that Dr. Hebart's presentation was a reaction to President Koch's.

Current Situation

The first presentation is no longer an issue, but the Koch-Hebart material is frequently referred to as proving that there are now two different theologies in the L.C.A.

To thos[e] vigorously promoting this 'two Theologies' position, the logic runs very simply like this:

- The basic issue is the inspiration and authority of Scripture.
- In 1966 the L.C.A. came into existence on one clearly confessed position as outlined in the Theses of Agreement.
- Since the one position has now become two, the second has crept in since then (or was deliberately concealed in the hope that it could infiltrate unawares).
- (page 2) Two positions cannot both be right, and since President Koch clearly upholds the position of the Church at the time of union, Dr. Hebart's position is the false and dangerous one. QED

I have consistently held, and still do, that there is only one basic position:

- That the Scriptures are in their totality the inspired, authoritative Word of God.
- That the Scriptures in their totality are given by God Who is their author.
- That the Scriptures in their totality proclaim Christ who is THE WORD.

Putting it in the most basic terms, what each of the above writers has done is emphasise *one aspect* of the Church's confession:

- The one emphasising the authority of Scripture as resting in its Divine authorship.
- The other emphasising the authority of Scripture as resting in its Christocentric content.

Yet each has not denied the truth of the other! Theirs are simply emphases of the one position!

If, however, this is not accepted, and it is still the conviction of some that the above present irreconcilable differences, then, in all honesty, you have to acknowledge not two but THREE positions! And here I come to Dr. Hamann's clear explanation on Wednesday night. At the time of Union 'two' theological streams converged:

- The ELCA had placed its theological basis for authority on the fact that God is the author of every word of the Scriptures (Formal Principle).
- The UELCA had placed its theological basis for authority on the fact of the Christocentric content of Scripture (Material Principle).

However, after years of discussion, it was realised – even if rather reluctantly at times – that the ELCA did *not* deny the Christocentric content, *nor* did the UELCA deny the Divine authorship.

It was further realised therefore, that there was *no* basic difference, but rather that the correct Lutheran (and Biblical) position was to emphasise *BOTH*.

This BOTH AND authority of the Formal and Material Principle is the foundation on which the L.C.A. was formed and now stands, and I am grateful to Dr. Hamann for explaining this so well. This is the position of the Lutheran Confessions which incident[al]ly is emphasised by the CTCT of the Missouri Synod and likewise so well highlighted by the recently circulated essay by Bro. Glen Zweck in England.

(page 3) Referring back to 1966, were the ELCA and UELCA *both* wrong so that the L.C.A. (the *third* position) became the right one? Or were both giving a different emphasis to the *same* position which the L.C.A. has balanced so admirably (the *one* position)?

I believe the question has become very crucial to the present controversy!

Addendum

Please understand that I have had to be very concise in the above and have confined myself to basic points only.

Please understand, too, that none of the papers referred to above are official documents of the Church. While I appreciate the points they try to make, I can also appreciate the reactions of concern. There is always the need to guard against going too far when promoting a particular emphasis and the current task of the CTICR is to define the *limits* of the L.C.A.'s *one position*.