

## A HISTORY OF THE CLC

It is important when studying history, that we can relate to people, places, and to events that have occurred. It is very important, however, that we realize that history is not controlled by men, but by an always-present, all-powerful God who directs the hearts of men to accomplish His purposes. Many times throughout history we may question just what God's purposes were. We must remember that God's thoughts are so much above ours and that His purposes work for the good of those who believe on His name. We can see that God has allowed His will to be done through many individuals in the past. One such man was Martin Luther. It could be said that God used Luther to bring about change, to reform, to once again bring forth the glory of the Gospel in a time when people were told that the way to salvation was through good works. As always, the Lord guides His Church around obstacles that often are set in the path. We must keep in mind that the intellect and talents of men are used by God, and that all glory and praise for guidance and direction be given to Him, for we are all sinful and come short of the glory of God.

Satan is constantly working in the minds of men trying to find ways to distort and destroy the most precious gift we have--the Holy Word of God. Keeping the Word of God pure, without allowing man's reasoning or thoughts to be added, is a great burden that is placed on the hearts of every believing child of God. It is, as a result of God's command written in Paul's letter to the Corinthians:

"Now I beseech you brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgement." ICor. 1:10

There was a time in the recent history of the Lutheran church, when several confessional church bodies known as synods, were in agreement with one another in regard to scriptural teachings and the Lutheran confessions. The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran

Synod, the Slovak Lutheran Synod, and the Evangelical Lutheran Synod, were of varied geographic locations and ethnic backgrounds, but were drawn together to form what was known as the Synodical Conference. In doing so, Christian fellowship was enjoyed between the synods. This was indeed a blessing from God.

If we would study this time in history, the 1940's through the present, we would find the thoughts of men turning from the saving Word of God and the assurance of a heavenly home, to thoughts of saving the world and making it a better place to live in. We would also see that socialism or having the individual subject his needs and beliefs to the "group", society, community, or state, was also at work in the world. Thus he compromised his thoughts, beliefs and faith for the so-called "good of the group".

By the 1950's, doctrinal differences concerning church fellowship and church and ministry were evident to some of the members of the synodical conference. To resolve the differences, a joint union committee of the synodical conference was set up in 1956 to attempt to settle the differences. Whether it was the establishment of this committee or the differences which were evident from the doctrinal positions taken, the consciences of some believing children of God were troubled. They were troubled by the fact that Scripture seemed very clear on the matter of causing divisions and offenses. For the Lord gives us direction when He says in Rom. 16:17, 18:

"Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good works and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple." Rom. 16:17, 18

And also in II John 10:11:

"If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed; for he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds." II John 10:11

It was clear to some members in each synod that according to God's Word, to admonish a weak brother was a separate matter from those who taught

a position that was unscriptural. The failure of the Wisconsin Synod and the Evangelical Lutheran Synod to mark and avoid the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod was enough to bring together concerned pastors and lay people who shared a common faith, common work, and common problems. Immanuel Lutheran Church, Mankato, Minnesota, formally withdrew from the Wisconsin Synod early in 1956. Along with Immanuel, a Japan mission also broke synodical ties. Meetings of concerned brethren continued. At one such meeting at Lyons, Nebraska, in October of 1957, the men who attended mutually agreed that a statement be drawn up concerning the doctrine of church fellowship. In October and November of 1957, about a half dozen pastors and congregations formally withdrew from the Wisconsin Synod.

Another conference was held at Immanuel Lutheran Church at Mankato, MN, December 4-5, 1957. The purpose of the conference was to strengthen their confessional stand and to begin working toward organization. It was agreed that organization, when it came, would be based upon a confessional statement which would state their beliefs in regard to the doctrines in the controversy. Doctrine was of major importance, organization was not. Many churches seen today place organization and procedures well over doctrinal purity and scriptural practice.

Other matters of importance were the formation of a mission committee of four members to function on the domestic field but also to see to the needs of the Japan mission. Another paper concerning "The Church" was initiated since conflicting statements had been present in the synodical conferences in years past.

A series of meetings was also held at Trinity Lutheran Church, Spokane, Washington, on November 18-19, 1957 and at Gethsemane Lutheran Church, Opportunity, Washington, on January 23-24, 1958. Again the focus of attention was not on organization, but on the study of the Word of God in regard to church fellowship.

On May 6, 7, and 8, 1958, twenty-one pastors, teachers, and laymen gathered again around the Word of God at Redeemer Lutheran Church, Cheyenne, Wyoming. The following was recorded in the first Lutheran Spokesman of June, 1958:

"What brought these men together? They came from varied and far-flung sections of the country: the Northwest, and the Southwest; from Wisconsin to Colorado. It was not geographical factors which brought them together. They came from different synods, from different ethnic groups, nor did they all share the same status: some had severed their relations with their former synods and some had membership in synods of the Synodical Conference. But each one had been alone, solitary in the deepest sense of that word, out of harmony with the position and practice of the various bodies of the Synodical Conference. They knew that this meeting was of God, for it was dedicated to the task of keeping God's word in its purity. Yes, love for God's truth drew all to Cheyenne and was the common denominator of this group. By the Word the Father was setting the solitary into families."  
The Lutheran Spokesman, June, 1958, p. 4.

Much time was spent on working out a confession concerning the entire issue of church fellowship. A working draft had been submitted by Pastor W. Schaller, Jr., prior to the conference. Though revisions in certain areas were needed, a motion passed to make this available to others as their doctrinal confession concerning church fellowship.

The conference essay presented by Pastor Edmund Reim was "Things to Guard Against in Our Approach Toward Realignment". The essay was well received and a summary was published in The Lutheran Spokesman.

The conference appointed Pastors Gordon Radtke and M.J. Witt to a committee which should raise funds necessary to bring Missionary F. Tiefel of Japan to the August convention in Spokane, WA. The conference also initiated the publication of The Lutheran Spokesman. Pastors W. Schaller, Jr., and N. R. Carlson were chosen as co-editors. This instrument of circulating God's Word would provide needed direction to those who were conscience-bound. For in its early pages as well as today, we find words of inspiration to remind us of the temptations Satan places at our feet.

Meetings were again held on July 30-August 4, 1958, at Trinity Lutheran Church, Spokane, WA. Concern for doctrinal matters was again given

major priority with the Church Fellowship document and an essay on Church and Ministry being presented.

An interim conference was held at Immanuel Lutheran Church, Mankato, MN, on January 13-15, 1959. In attendance were 21 pastors, 7 teachers, 16 lay people and 4 seminary students. Discussions were held on the following subjects: "Concerning Church Fellowship"; "The Doctrine of the Church"; the work of missions, Christian education, and The Lutheran Spokesman. A serious interest in Christian education was shown by the group. It was pointed out that Immanuel, Mankato, had 34 students ready for high school and about 14 students ready for college and seminary. The conference could do nothing at that time to further the efforts of Christian higher education because an organized church body was not formed, which would be needed in accordance with civil law. Despite the obstacle, Immanuel congregation on May 25 gave approval for the establishment of a Lutheran High School and to provide college courses and a theological seminary. With absolutely no funds available, members began the task of establishing Immanuel Lutheran High School and College. This blessing of the Lord will be considered later.

Another interim conference was held at Our Redeemer's Lutheran Church, Red Wing, Minnesota, on August 18-21, 1959. Reports were offered on the following subjects: "Church and Ministry", "The Doctrine of the Church," and "Concerning Church Fellowship". A committee was chosen to begin work on framing a constitution. In reviewing the convention reports of the Wisconsin and Evangelical Lutheran Synods, it was clear that their unscriptural stands on Church Fellowship were not withdrawn.

With the passing of the Interim Conference at Mankato in January, 1960, important decisions were not made in haste. It is easy for us to see that the Lord was moving this group in establishing a church body firmly grounded in Scripture, and a fellowship-assembly that was truly united.

It had been two years since the first interim conference at Mankato. In these two years the Word of the Lord had prevailed and was still the main concern. Missions and Christian education were of great importance to this group. With a common basis for confession, the group went about the orderly task of organizing into a formal church body.

The Interim Convention held at Trinity Lutheran Church, Watertown, SD, on August 9-12, 1960, as well as the recessed sessions held at Sleepy Eye, MN, on January 24-26, 1961, is recognized as the organizing convention of the Church of the Lutheran Confession. "We call ourselves 'Church' because we are gathered together in Christ's name. We call ourselves 'Lutheran' because we are continuing as children of the Reformation. We take seriously our heritage: Scripture alone, faith alone, grace alone. We say 'Confession' because our faith must be a living faith, unashamed of its God. We want to confess its author and preserver before both friend and foe, that His name be hallowed in the hearts and lives of all." (The Lutheran Spokesman, September, 1960, p. 2.)

Although organizing the church body was of great importance, the convention chose to hear the doctrinal essays before proceeding with the paperwork. When business and external matters of a church organization push aside the study of Scripture without giving them proper consideration, then the spiritual health of a church group is doubtful.

After adopting the confessional stand and constitution, 89 signatures were recorded with the secretary. Incorporation took place on December 23, 1960. At that time, thirty-four congregations were listed as charter members. At the recessed session in January, elections were held with Pastor Paul Albrecht of Bowdle, SD, being elected the first president of the CLC. In addition to other officers, four boards of control were established: Trustees, Doctrine, Missions, and Education.

The Mission Board took over the financial responsibility for the Japan mission. The Board of Trustees assumed responsibility for a growing Immanuel Lutheran College through the Board of Education.

So often we find the world stopping to praise the accomplishments of man. Those brethren who at last found a unity in the confessional stand of the CLC did not give self-praise but gave praises to God.

It was recorded in The Lutheran Spokesman of September, 1960, that after the report of the constitution committee was adopted all business ceased. The convention then arose to sing God's praises.

Songs of praise and thanksgiving could be heard throughout the CLC in the hearts and minds of those who withstood the temptations of compromising God's Word.

The blessings of the Lord were shown in many ways: common confessional statements, schools for Christian education, an expanding mission field, essays and articles that would spread the Word through The Lutheran Spokesman, and the Journal of Theology. All were outgrowths of simple trust in the provider Lord.

There were also those weak brethren who for conscience' sake could not accept the confessional statements as they were developed and returned to their past affiliations. This was the exception rather than the rule.

Articles about pastors and congregations who were being moved by the Lord began to fill the pages of The Lutheran Spokesman. This was cause for rejoicing. However, these were also trying times. Accounts of pastors being asked to resign or congregations going to court to determine property rights were mentioned. For many there was no question of status. They were a minority. Some were forced to leave churches built with their own hands. Relocation meant holding services in homes, theaters, basements, garages, or rented quarters. Where the Lord provided an established church, burdens were not light. Needs were shown in the mission field and in Chris-

tian education. Giving for the Lord became a way of life. Time, labor, and money were offered freely and willingly, and rightly it should be, for we are the Lord's.

While previous Lutheran synods were viewing the realignment as a loveless and impatient action by conservative elements in the synods, it was apparent that many were not familiar with the controversy over Church Fellowship, or failed to recognize the importance.

Often decisions to join the CLC meant families and friends could not enjoy the pleasure of Christian fellowship and prayer. Misunderstandings over the issue of Church Fellowship arose and have left scars in the hearts of many families.

We must remember church councils, church bodies, and synod organizations are not perfect. The believer needs to cling to the Word of truth, enjoy the fellowship of fellow believers when he can, and recognize that such fellowship has ceased when teachings are followed that are contrary to His truth. The believer will need to pray for strength to leave home, family, home church, or beloved synod, when the Word of God according to Romans 16:17 applies.

We see the Word of God has been the center of attention since the beginning of the Church of the Lutheran Confession. The early years taught us to guard and protect that Word. Whenever controversy has risen among the brethren of the CLC, they have looked to the Scriptures, for Scripture is clear and unchangeable.

#### Christian Education

Interest in Christian education was not something new to those congregations who joined hands to form the CLC. Some of the congregations were supporting Christian day schools prior to separating from their former synods. The teachers of congregations supporting the early conferences

assembled at Immanuel Lutheran School, October 22-23, 1959. This was their first formal Teachers' Conference. The opportunity to deal with the needs of the teachers and discuss the problems directly related to the classroom was welcomed. The chairman of the conference was Mr. Robert Rehm of Mankato. Teacher LeRoy Greening of Cheyenne presented an essay, "The Role of the Teacher in the Present Controversy." It pointed out that teachers must be aware of the unionistic trend of the time. Only then can they properly prepare their pupils to live in the world and yet not be of the world.

Prior to the first Teachers' Conference, congregations saw an immediate need for an institution of Christian higher education, since the schools of the Synodical Conference were no longer in confessional agreement. This led to the establishment of Immanuel Lutheran High School, College and Seminary by Immanuel Lutheran Church, Mankato. Continuing God's Word was foremost in the hearts of the members as they labored to remodel and redecorate a building suitable for the high school. The high school opened its doors on September 8, 1959, with a total of twenty-four students. Dedication was then held on September 13, with the installation of Professor Edmund Reim as dean and professor of theology. Professor Robert Dommer, principal and instructor, and Mrs. Hilbert (Adelgunde) Schaller, instructor, were installed in the high school department. Along with parttime faculty help, Immanuel College and Seminary began holding classes on September 17, with a total enrollment of eleven college and two seminary students.

From this simple beginning the Lord has blessed the CLC with more day schools and has provided Immanuel Lutheran College with room to grow on its campus in Eau Claire, WI.

Christian education is indeed a blessing of the Lord. The Lord led His children to see the value, gave them strength to build, and provided teachers to instruct the students.

He does this today also, for it is only through instruction in His Holy Word that the believing child of God will be prepared in the heart and mind. The burden of keeping His Word pure is still present. The enemies of darkness are all around us. We must look to Him for continued guidance and support. For we know what God ordains is always good.

Presented to the joint Wisconsin  
Pastoral Conference and CLC Teachers'  
Conference, October 18, 1978,  
by Professor Michael Buck