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Lutheran Unity and Union in Canada (Part 3)

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SPECIAL REPORT

LUTHERAN UNITY AND UNION IN CANADA

(Part III)

Introduction

At the seven Canadian Lutheran jurisdictional church conventions held in 1974, delegates were given the opportunity of indicating their feelings about church union. Responses were received from 1107 persons (ELCC-314; LCA-CS-420; LC-C-373). Part 1 of the Special Report (January, CONSENSUS, pp. 25-30) focused on whether people favoured, opposed or had mixed feelings about a union of Canadian Lutheranism.

Part 2 of the Special Report (April, CONSENSUS, pp. 29-32) focused on whether the respondents perceived any differences in teaching (doctrine) between the various Lutheran bodies and whether these differences hindered the consolidation of the Lutheran Churches in Canada.

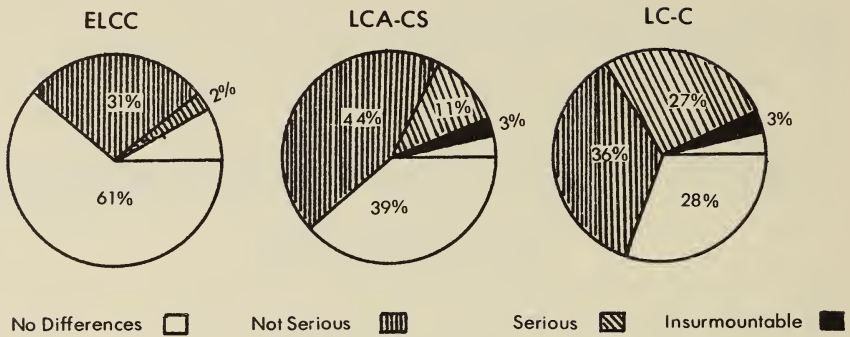
The survey shows that some of those who responded felt that the differences in teaching seriously jeopardized the quest for one Lutheran Church in Canada. This was true particularly within Lutheran Church-Canada when 30 percent felt the differences to be serious. Yet most of those who answered the questionnaire felt either that no differences exist or that the differences are not serious deterrents to Lutheran union (ELCC - 90 percent; LCA-CS - 86 percent; LC-C - 64 percent). Only a small portion of the respondents felt that the differences were insurmountable and would rule out the possibility of church union (LCA-CS - 1 percent; LC-C - 2 percent).

The analysis below reflects whether those who responded to the questionnaire perceived any differences in practice between the various Lutheran bodies in Canada from personal experience. The respondents were asked to indicate what these differences were.

In addition, it should be mentioned that in the perception of some persons particular differences were felt to be doctrinal in nature. For others they were felt to be difference of practice.

Awareness of Differences

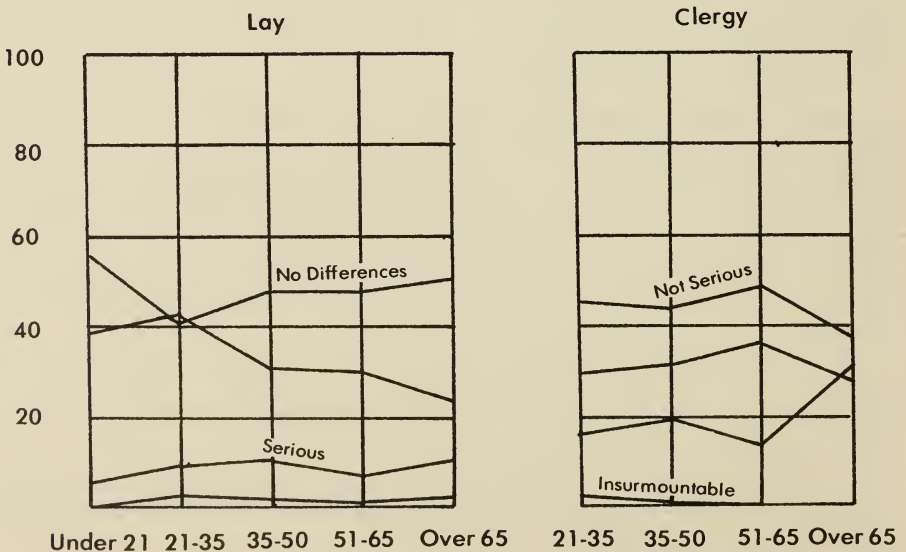
PROFILE BY JURISDICTIONAL UNIT



The graphs above indicate that, of the three Lutheran bodies, The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Canada has the least awareness of difference in practice. 92 percent of ELCC respondents either felt that there were no differences in practice or that the differences were not serious. Responses from the Lutheran Church in America - Canada Section and Lutheran Church-Canada show 83 percent and 64 percent respectively in these categories.

About 27 percent of LC-C, 11 percent of LCA-Cs and 2 percent of ELCC respondents felt that the differences were serious. An additional 3 percent and 2 percent from LC-C and LCA-CS respectively felt that the differences would preclude the possibility of Lutheran union in Canada.

PROFILE BY AGE



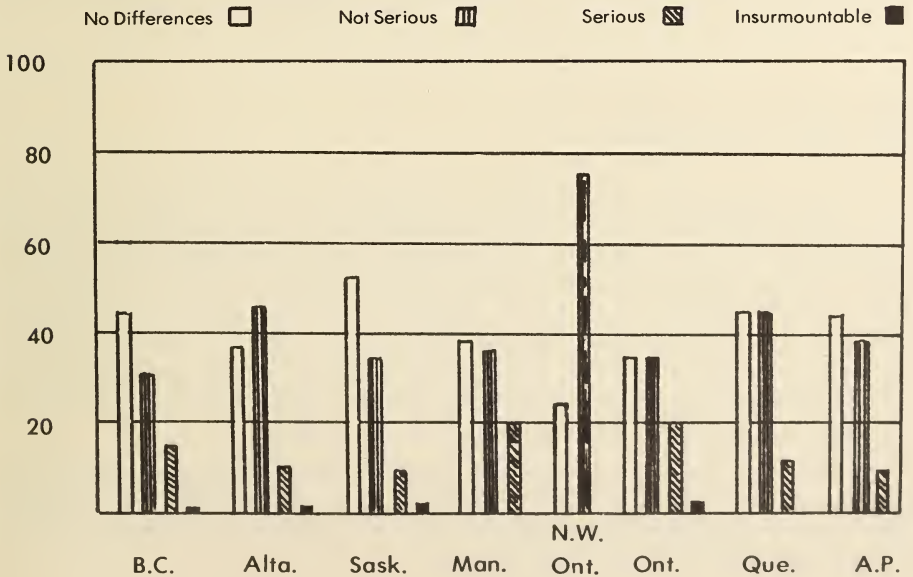
The graphs above show that 96 percent of the respondents under 21 felt either that there were no differences in practice or that the differences were not serious. On the graph reflecting lay opinion, the portion of the respondents who felt either no differences or no significant differences in practice registers. 84 percent in the 21-35 age category, 82 percent in the 36-50 age group, 80 percent in the 51-65 age bracket and 75 percent among those over 65 years of age.

On the clergy graph 76 percent in the 21-35 and 36-50 age categories felt that there were no differences or no significant differences in practice. 86 percent in the 51-65 age group and 65 percent of those over 65 years of age also felt this way. As one might expect, the clergy group consistently has at least 10 percent less than the lay group who feel that there are no differences in practice.

Among lay people, those who felt that the differences in practice were serious ranged from 4 percent in the under 21 age bracket to 11 percent in the 36-50 and over 65 age categories. Lay persons in the 21-35 and 51-65 age group registered 9 percent and 7 percent respectively at this level. Between 1 percent and 3 percent of the lay persons over 21 felt that the differences were insurmountable.

The clergy graph generally registers between 6 percent to 9 percent higher than the lay graph in the various categories reflecting respondents who feel that the differences in practice are serious. Among those over 65 the gap reflects a 20 percent difference. Only two age categories on the clergy graph register responses which indicate the conviction that the differences are insurmountable. Contrary to what might be assumed these are the two lower age categories i.e. 21-35 and 36-50 age brackets.

PROFILE BY GEOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION



When respondents from a particular province or region are taken as a group there is fluctuation but no really significant difference in the various categories. Those who felt that there are either no differences or no significant differences range from 72 percent and 73 percent in Ontario and B.C. respectively to 100 percent in North Western Ontario (LC-C persons in that area were not part of the survey). Manitoba had 76 percent, Alberta and the Atlantic Provinces 82 percent, Saskatchewan 87 percent and Quebec 88 percent in these categories (Quebec also lacked LC-C in the survey).

The category of respondents who felt the differences to be serious ranged between 8 percent and 9 percent in Saskatchewan and the Atlantic Provinces respectively to 20 percent in Manitoba and Ontario. Alberta and Quebec had 10 percent and 11 percent respectively. In B.C. 16 percent of the respondents were of this conviction. 3 percent of the Ontario respondents felt that there were insurmountable differences in practice between the churches. Alberta and Saskatchewan registered 2 percent in this category and B.C. registered 1 percent.

The ELCC consistently has more than half of its respondents indicating that they experienced no differences in practice between the churches. An interesting exception to this pattern is Alberta where differences though not deemed serious are felt by more than half of the respondents. Another pattern which emerges is that about 25 percent of LC-C respondents feel the differences to be serious. An exception to this pattern is Manitoba where almost half of the respondents were in this category.

Respondents who felt that insurmountable obstacles confronted Lutheran union all came either from the LCA-Cs or LC-C. 4 percent of the Alberta LCA-CS respondents and the Saskatchewan and Ontario LC-C respondents felt this way. The same response was given by 3 percent of the Ontario LCA-CS respondents and the B.C. LC-C respondents. 2 percent and 1 percent of the Saskatchewan LCA-CS and the Alberta LC-C response also registered this conviction.

Brief Analysis

The survey shows that, also in the area of practice, many Lutherans in Canada are aware of differences. This is true particularly in the case of those who are members of the LCA-CS and LC-C. Some feel that these differences in practice are too great to allow for a union of the churches. However, most Lutherans feel that these differences can either be reconciled or that they should be allowed to exist in a united church. Undeniably each church now allows a certain degree of divergence in church life. This is seen to be healthy. But the question of how much divergence can be tolerated without building disunity into the structure of the church is one which must seriously be kept in mind.

A profile of concerns most commonly raised by those who felt that there were differences in doctrine and or practice between the churches follows below. Since there are considerable overlapping of the two areas (doctrine and practice) the concerns are not divided into categories.

PROFILE OF CONCERNS MOST COMMONLY RAISED

	ELCC	LCS-CS	LC-C
1. Authority and Interpretation of Scripture			
a) Serious or insurmountable	8	27	67
b) Mentioned, not seen as serious	29	68	42
2. Ordination and or Role of Women in the Church			
a) Serious or insurmountable	0	29	33
b) Mentioned, not seen as serious	9	49	25
3. Practice Relating to Lodges			
a) Serious or insurmountable	0	10	56
b) Mentioned, not seen as serious	15	38	61
4. Communion Practices (includes altar fellowship)			
a) Serious or insurmountable	1	24	27
b) Mentioned, not seen as serious	24	63	13
5. Ecumenical Involvement (includes Joint Worship)			
a) Serious or insurmountable	0	14	21
b) Mentioned, not seen as serious	2	29	11

Also cited a number of times:

Confessional subscription (by LC-C); differing standards of piety and church (by ELCC); and, church discipline (by each of the three).

NJT