

1-1-1975

Resume From a Forum on Lutheran Unity

Norman J. Threinen

Follow this and additional works at: <http://scholars.wlu.ca/consensus>

Recommended Citation

Threinen, Norman J. (1975) "Resume From a Forum on Lutheran Unity," *Consensus*: Vol. 1 : Iss. 1 , Article 3.
Available at: <http://scholars.wlu.ca/consensus/vol1/iss1/3>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Scholars Commons @ Laurier. It has been accepted for inclusion in Consensus by an authorized editor of Scholars Commons @ Laurier. For more information, please contact scholarscommons@wlu.ca.

At the jurisdictional church conventions in April, May and June, 1974, Forums on Lutheran Unity were held. Tape recordings of these public discussions were made in several instances. Below is a resume of parts of one such public forum. It took place at the Ontario District Convention on June 8. Forum participants were the three Canadian church presidents -- Dr. S. T. Jacobson (ELCC), Dr. O. A. Olson (LCA -- Canada Section), and Rev. L. N. Scholl (LC-C); the two presidents of the jurisdictional units local to Ontario -- Rev. A. Stanfel (Ontario District -- LC-MS) and Dr. Otto F. Reble (Eastern Canada Synod -- LCA); and a prominent ELCC pastor, Rev. W. Riekert of Ottawa, Dr. T. Ristine, vice-president of the Ontario District moderated the forum. Rev. N. J. Threinen, executive secretary of the JCILR, introduced the speakers and provided back-up information. Since some of the persons speaking from the floor are unidentified, only the forum speakers are named.

FOCUS ON A FORUM

A Resume From a Forum on Lutheran Unity

JACOBSON-- It may be of help to you to know that the idea of extending such an invitation to enter into merger negotiations did not originate solely within the ELCC. It is true there were some talks about it surfacing, but as I review the events leading up to it, I think the greater impetus came from private conversations which we had with the leaders of Canada Section and with the presidents of the Canadian Districts of LC-MS.

This was done deliberately because we did not want to extend an invitation in which nobody had any interest and because it seemed that, right from the beginning, we should try to approach this unitedly. So, after these private discussions had been held, it was concluded that 1972 would be an appropriate time to extend such an invitation. I would like to say that our church has been

pleased that Lutheran Church-Canada has responded affirmatively as has also the Lutheran Church in America -- Canada Section.

OLSON -- You might be interested in knowing how we, in the Lutheran Church in America -- Canada Section, responded to the invitation from the ELCC. There are some people who have the notion that those kind of decisions are made very easily in our church and that is not the case.

We decided that we should bring together two groups of people -- those who are our Committee on Approaches to Lutheran Unity, which in turn represents us on the Joint Commission on Inter-Lutheran Relationships, and then the persons on our Executive Committee of the Canada Section who are not on that Joint Commission. In addition, we wanted to bring together from two to four persons who more specifically represented our three synods -- our regional units that correspond somewhat to your three districts. We had approximately 30 people together in a retreat setting for two days.

We examined what implications this invitation had - its meaning for us. We talked about how we should recommend that our convention respond to it. Those were days of considerable heart-searching for us because, in the Lutheran Church in America, we do not take lightly the relationships that we have with other church bodies any more than you people do. We knew that if we move into a Canadian Church it means that there are going to be different alignments and different relationships for us. While we do not know what they will be until such time as we have agreed together in our negotiations what they will be and until decisions are finally made by the church in Canada, yet we had to think of the possibilities for us. It was on the basis of this studied examination of the situation that we recommended to our convention that we accept the invitation and enter into the negotiations.

SCHOLL -- Let me also review how Lutheran Church-Canada arrived at its acceptance of the invitation on the part of the ELCC to enter into negotiations toward merger. This matter was brought before the Committee on Relations with Other Church Bodies, which is made up of eleven people. Pastor Knoll is the Secretary of our LC-C Committee.

They met in November of 1972 in Edmonton. I was not there for that meeting but I know that they thrashed the thing out thoroughly and they debated among themselves whether they could in conscience go ahead with it because, if once we go ahead and say we mean it, then we want to follow through and negotiate with integrity. We do not want to give the impression that we are playing games. The Committee on Relations with Other Church Bodies accepted the invitation and this report was then brought before the Convention of Lutheran Church-Canada in February of 1973. It was thoroughly debated there in a very spirited way and the motion to accept was unanimously adopted by LC-C. This means that we have said that we are in this all the way and with all the integrity that we know how.

STANFEL -- I have been a member of the Joint Commission on Inter-Lutheran Relationships for something like 12 to 14 years, and the meeting that I missed was the one in 1967 when we thought that perhaps the JCILR was going to go out of business because LCIC had come into being and that the further discussions between the various Lutheran bodies in Canada would be carried on through that agency.

We found, however, that there was still a very real need for the Joint Commission on Inter-Lutheran Relationships. Pastor Scholl has explained to you how the Ontario District relates to this group. The committee of three men appointed by our Board of Directors joins the three-man staff from the Manitoba-Saskatchewan District and the three-man staff from the Alberta-British Columbia District, and this then constitutes the LC-C participation on the Joint Commission on Inter-Lutheran Relationships.

I am 100% dedicated to Lutheran unity in Canada. It will be a unity, however, if my contribution is worth anything, that will be one of integrity; it will be unity that is honest and real. I cannot see a strong Lutheran church for Canada that is based on the least common denominator. There is much that unites us. I don't think that has to be said, but if it does let me emphasize it now. There is much that unites us. There are in my opinion, however, areas of disagreement that still need a closer look. It is my hope and my prayer that in our negotiations together we shall be able to resolve those differences and, so that I don't offend anybody, I will be willing to throw in the word "alleged" differences.

REBLE -- I think that one of the most thrilling moments that I ever lived through as a minister of the church was last fall when I was in Winnipeg when we adopted the seven theses on the Scriptures. It seemed to me at that time that we had taken a big step that might lead and would hopefully lead to an indigenous Lutheran Church in Canada. As president of the Eastern Canada Synod, I see that the key to the indigenous Lutheran Church in Canada is the Ontario District and the Eastern Canada Synod.

In 1962, the Lutheran Church in America came into being made up of four bodies that were the former United Lutheran Church in America, The Augustana Synod, The Suomi Synod, and The American Evangelical Lutheran Church. This merger was of tremendous historic significance and yet it was a merger in which the Eastern Canada Synod was not really involved. None of the other church bodies involved in that merger -- Augustana, Suomi and the American Evangelical Lutheran Church -- was represented in the Eastern Canada so the Eastern Canada Synod doesn't really know what it means to enter into a merger. I remember when I attended the convention of the Eastern Canada Synod on that particular occasion I was absolutely astounded how little enthusiasm there was for the Lutheran Church in America. They were not involved.

If we have an indigenous Lutheran Church in Canada, then the Ontario District and the Eastern Canada Synod are going to be deeply involved. This will be one time where there will have to be a merger.

Of course, The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Canada is involved in Eastern Canada. They have 12 congregations. I am glad that they are here. But you and I, and what we represent, are tremendously important to what can happen across Canada.

RIEKERT -- My history in connection with Lutheran unity goes back to the days of Lutheran exploratory conversations. In 1957 I presented a paper to the group on the matter of whether or not it was financially possible for the Lutherans in Canada to be an indigenous church. I have the paper and I read an excerpt from it to indicate where I stood on Lutheran unity then and where I stand today:

The Church of Jesus Christ is to be found where the Word of God is taught in its truth and purity and the sacraments are rightly administered. I believe that statement meets with agreement. The power of the church to influence the lives of men under God lies not in dollars and cents, not in buildings and institutions, not in boards and committees, but in the spirit-filled Word of God which is the power of God unto salvation.

I think it's high time that we really begin to accentuate that which is positive, and eliminate that which is negative. There are so many positive things and I think we need to look to these.

We in The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Canada also believe that the Word of God is important. We believe that the Scriptures are the Word of God. We believe that it is the infallible norm and guide in matters of faith and life, and as I have conducted my ministry in the west and here in the east for the past year and a half, I have discovered that we are one in theory. Here I am speaking especially of the men in the Missouri Synod.

To be sure, I've known a few with whom I was not in full agreement. But I can say that of some of the men in my own church also. I sat in on the part of your meeting this afternoon; it didn't take me long to discover that there wasn't absolute unanimity in this room. It was apparent by the way you voted on some very critical issues.

I am a little concerned that some of the voting, at least as I read it, wasn't an indication that you are pressing full steam ahead towards one Lutheran Church in Canada, and I ask you to think very seriously about taking these steps that need to be taken.

Constitutions are important and I think we cannot overlook this. That's one of the reasons why I voted against the timetable at the meeting in Winnipeg. Because there are some constitutions that have to be dealt with. But let's not be slaves to a constitution. Let's work to the end that the constitution will no longer keep us from doing the things that the spirit of God is moving us to do.

THREINEN -- Before I turn it over to Dr. Ristine and your questions and comments, I think it would be appropriate to mention something that I neglected to do earlier. The Committee on Relations with Other Church Bodies of Lutheran Church-Canada has been working closely with the Commission on Theology and Church Relations of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. Two representatives of the CTCR were present for the meeting of the committee prior to the Lutheran Church-Canada Convention. The CTCR was also represented at the LC-C Convention and at the meeting last November. It also contributed a lot to the very positive mood of the November meeting to have Dr. J. A. O. Preus there. I would just like to read a brief quote from the talk that he gave. He has given permission for us to use parts of it in the appropriate settings.

The Stateside part of the Missouri Synod is saying, "We want to consult with you; we want to work with you; we want to understand you; we want you to level with us. Tell us what you want and where you want to go, and we're not going to try and stand in your way."

This is the type of comment which tended to set a very positive note to the meeting last November and also probably led to some of the subsequent results of that meeting.

Finances

QUESTION -- How would the balance sheet look financially if an indigenous church would have been formed in 1974?

OLSON -- It's impossible to answer that kind of a question because that study has not been made in detail. However, we do have a bit of experience. We can go to the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Canada. It went autonomous. People said it couldn't be done. They were the smallest of Lutheran bodies. They had a struggle, but they have come through it. They have been making their own decisions and they have been paying their own way.

Laity

QUESTION -- Where do we plug the laity in? How do we move something into the area of the local congregation? How do we get it down to the grass roots where the church really is? How do you move to the local congregation? What program have you envisioned?

RIEKERT -- Perhaps one of the best ways is to give all of the pastors a six month vacation, send them on their way and let the laity deal with some of these problems. The distribution of this one document (Statement on the Holy Scriptures) is one effort. There have been previous efforts. There have been inter-Lutheran meetings at which lay representations was to have been present,

but from some of the discussion I had since coming East apparently these were not too successful.

This document is one of several documents that is to bring the whole issue out into the congregation. If the pastors are afraid to discuss these documents with the members of the congregation, they are not going to get discussed. But I think we owe it to the church, that is to the whole church, to discuss the thesis on the Holy Scriptures and whatever other documents come out. Let's not keep anything from the laity, and let's not try to keep the laity from these documents.

JACOBSON -- I would underscore very much the importance of the laity being involved. I need not remind you that it is a fundamental teaching of the Lutheran Church that the church is not made up of the clergy. There is a universal priesthood of all believers and we ought to realize that practical implications and expressions on that basic theological fact.

I think the laity have several areas where they ought and can be involved. One is, in the representation from the churches to the Joint Commission on Inter-Lutheran Relationships. Another is the study of documents. The laity ought not to be underestimated in the area of theological insight. Nor should the laity underestimate themselves.

I am not now suggesting or proposing some kind of ecclesiastical rebellion. I don't want to say things that are not fitting with the polity of the churches. But I think that the laity must express themselves and, if necessary, take the initiative so that it is the church that speaks and not just the pastors. I say that as a pastor and with all due respect to the ministry.

QUESTION -- How are we to begin in our area? Are we on our own or are we waiting for a push from Winnipeg? Is there a structure, a form that we are working through, or do we develop our own structure and resources?

THREINEN -- The hope was that this whole thing could be as flexible as possible and I suppose that when you try to build flexibility into something you automatically tend not to have any central pushing done. If anyone has any suggestions on how they feel it ought to be carried to the lay level, to the congregational level, let us hear from you. We welcome any type of input that you might have which would help us.

One thing that I could mention -- later on when I pass out this questionnaire we are going to ask people to put down their names and addresses. In this way we hope that we can get 600 to 700 names of lay people across Canada. Maybe the laymen will see a way to get through some of this. I don't know. The Spirit moves in many ways and we hope that he is going to move us.

SCHOLL -- The Manitoba-Saskatchewan District in April, passed a resolution, directing the leaders at the district, the circuit and the congregational level to

seek every opportunity to engage the leaders from the other churches in these kind of discussions. I think that this can be initiated locally.

Why Union?

QUESTION -- You hear about unity in everything, It is to save us money. Regional government was supposed to save us money because we were all going to get together. Well that turned out to cost us about three times as much for everything. You talk about unity so that we can speak with one voice. We can't even speak with one voice as one District here. Why did things happen as they did with the tower of Babel? Are we all supposed to speak with one voice?

I have relatives in other Synods. As a matter of fact I don't think I have any relatives, except my immediate family, in the Missouri Synod. Members of the ALC are doing fine. The LCA are doing fine. Missouri Synod, although we have a few problems, are still doing fine. We need them and they need us like a hole in the head. Why are we pouring thousands of dollars down the drain talking and talking? The only thing that ever seems to come from these talks is that we agree to disagree.

I would like to submit -- right here and now -- why don't we forget all this, get out and do the work that we are supposed to be doing -- Preach the Word of God and build churches? It does not matter to me what Synod it is. As a matter of fact, I think this is a very good thing because if someone here disagrees with the way the Missouri Synod is structured with the doctrine they are teaching, then it is beautiful that they have another synod that they can go to. I would say about all of those that are dissatisfied with the doctrine as we have it laid out in the Missouri Synod, let them go. As far as the other synods are concerned, why don't we say let's be good neighbours, but forget the marriage.

OLSON -- If that is an accurate reading of how people feel, I hope you will take that action at this convention so that we quit talking about it. I was at the first meeting in this present round in 1955. That's 19 years. There is only so much time that one can give to this kind of activity.

I'll tell you why I do it. I do it because I understand the New Testament speaks about one Holy Christian and Apostolic Church. I understand the Lutheran church to be responsible to put into practice in its structures, as much as possible, of the reality of that one Holy Christian and Apostolic Church. I do not look upon the church as having the right to set its own boundaries around it. I consider that we have a responsibility to demonstrate that we believe that there is only one church in this world. That church is built on one foundation -- not on the Holy Scripture as important as our understanding of the Holy Scriptures are. Our church is built on one foundation which is Christ. He has not given us the option that to determine who the others in the family of God are. He has chosen for us

our brothers and sisters and we have got to find the way in which we recognize our brothers and sisters in Christ and demonstrate that unity.

However, we are never going to convince each other by argument. I know that as well as you. I have never seen two friends arrive at friendship at the end of an argument. But if we come closer to Jesus Christ whom, you say and we say, we own as our Lord as well as our Saviour, then we must take seriously what he said about one church and what the apostle says about one church. I think we have to take full responsibilities for our abilities in this, recognizing all the time that only by the blessing of God and the power of the Holy Spirit will we poor humans be able to bring about this kind of unity.

The Australian Precedent

QUESTION -- I belonged to the Lutheran Church in New Zealand at the time when the two synods of Australia were united to form the Lutheran Church in Australia. I can recollect going to conventions for a number of years before then when the question of church union came up. This evening I hear some very familiar terms. What you gentlemen are saying has already been said before.

I think you all understand that there is an element of politicking involved in church union, and there is the other element as we have expressed in documents reflecting theological struggles. I recollect one of the professors of the Evangelical Lutheran Church Australia Seminary in Adelaide saying, "If only we could keep our respective presidents out of it we would get a union tomorrow." The theological staffs had both agreed we could get a consensus in six months as long as we could keep our two respective presidents out of it. One will say black because he knows then that the other one will say white.

So, gentlemen and congregations, I implore you to address yourselves to the basic issues. The statement on the Holy Scriptures, I see as one of the first steps towards it. Don't get dragged in with extraneous events, because it will divert you and you will not get there. Our brethren in Australia did get there. They had their problems. It took a while to get the thing sorted out. But I think any of you who followed the Australian situation through their official publications, any of you who have visited there, any of the synodical leaders who have been down there and have come back again, and I think President Preus would bear this out, that the Australian Church is now on its way to be a national church. Their contributions this present year have gone ahead dramatically. The old hurts have been healed. They have their congregations reorganized. They are working together, and they are going places.

So, gentlemen and congregations, work harder. Look at these things. Don't be scared of them. Your brethren in Australia were not scared of them, and they have something that is really working. I implore you in God's name to do the same.