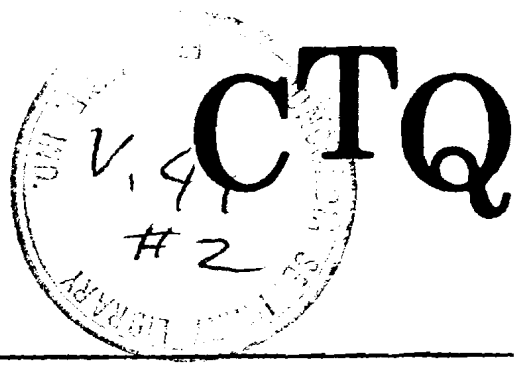


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Concordia Theological Seminary
Fort Wayne, Indiana

Theological Observer

THE YEAR OF CONCORDIA

The year 1977 will mark the fourth centenary of the finalization of the Formula of Concord, the last of the historic Lutheran Confessions and perhaps the most critical from a post-Reformation viewpoint. The other historic Lutheran Confessions were written either by Luther or were known and approved by him. After his death, the Lutheran Church had to face the question of whether it could survive without its founder, or rather its reformer. Was devotion to Lutheranism devotion to a man or that man's principles? Luther as an individual will certainly always attract admiration, especially for his courage. The late Hermann Sasse in his *Here We Stand*, however, identified certain strands of a cultic devotion to Luther which, in a sense, can border on the idolatrous. The production of the Formula of Concord in 1577 did prove that a church could be Lutheran even without a living Luther. It demonstrated that Lutheranism was not merely a reaction to Roman Catholicism on the one side and Calvinism on the other, but that Lutheranism could solve its own problems on the basis of the Holy Scriptures, the previous confessions of the church, and the writings of Martin Luther. The triumphs of the church are always short-lived. For almost thirty years after 1517 Luther guided the church to an appreciation of justification by grace through faith and of the Scriptures as the Word of God. Then for thirty years after his death the church which had been illumined by the Gospel fell into the darkness of confusion. Many doctrines and customs from which Luther freed the church were reintroduced. Then 1577 dawned and the Lutheran Church revived.

Concordia Publishing House is taking the lead among Lutheran publishers in commemorating the fourth centenary of the Formula in this year and of the Book of Concord in 1980. In the last century confessional anniversaries have unleashed an unhealthy ecumenical enthusiasm which has caused churches to unite by denying their own confessional principles. If the years 1977 and 1980 provide an opportunity for pastor and people alike to renew and rekindle their interest in what is uniquely Lutheran, perhaps past dangers can be successfully avoided. Whatever confessional successes will be gained by these years of celebration will always stand in danger of being lost. Already in the 1580's there were notable losses for confessional Lutheranism. Within a century Pietism would blunt the sword, and the Enlightenment and Rationalism would all but annihilate the flame. But in the 1800's it sprang up again in Europe, and even more brilliantly, in America. The Formula of Concord shows that the vigor and commitment of Lutheranism can be rekindled.

The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod is coming out of a confessional struggle for the Holy Scriptures and the Lutheran Symbols. Even before it is over, some are seeing a parallel between the struggle that resulted in the Formula of Concord in 1577 and the struggle which could end in confessional peace for the Missouri Synod in 1977. There have been calls for a conference to restate the confessional truths. It is hard to deny the striking similarities between events four hundred years ago and those which have more recently been accomplished among us. In both cases the participants were Lutheran, and there were real problems that had to be resolved if the church was going to remain Lutheran. I do not think that the Missouri Synod is overemphasizing its importance. In the Missouri Synod alone there are over 6,000 pastors as compared to the 8,000 pastors who signed the Book of Concord. Numbers, however, are not the most important consideration anyway. Circumstances have pushed the Missouri Synod into a prominent position that is quite amazing in the eyes of the public relations directors. The Missouri Synod has an opportunity to revitalize itself and its world with the confessional incentive—and there are no better years to do so than those between 1977 and 1980.

THE AELC CONSTITUTION

The December 3-4, 1976, convention of the Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches adopted a preamble to its constitution which calls for some comment. The AELC is aware that some might find the new group schismatic, and so the preamble sets down the reasons for the group's existence. This preamble is, in effect, a new confession which supercedes all the sixteenth-century Lutheran Confessions because it provides an official interpretation for them. Those organizing the AELC have strenuously objected to the Missouri Synod's alleged practice of adopting new confessions. The inconsistency is obvious.

In its new confession, the AELC has adopted a view of the church common among Episcopalians whereby denominations are considered members of Christ's body. Yet Paul speaks of the body of Christ as consisting in individual believers and not denominations. The AELC's view of the body of Christ is intended, of course, to permit fellowship and especially intercommunion on all levels. The ecumenical expression of the new group will undoubtedly be boundless.

The section on the Scriptures permits newer methods of Biblical interpretation within the traditional framework. The document says that "the Scriptures are God's written Word, recorded by people of faith and inspired by the Holy Spirit, to give us the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith in Christ Jesus." The phrase, "recorded by people of faith," however, has no place whatsoever in a statement on the Scriptures' origin. Those who wrote the Scriptures believed what they wrote, but their faith did not contribute to their being God's word. Equally objectionable is the way in which the inspiration of the Scriptures is limited to their giving us wisdom. Essential to the AELC view is the idea that the Holy Scriptures are primarily a product of the believing community or church. Consider this statement: "The Old Testament is our heritage from God's people Israel, and the New Testament was written and collected in the early Christian community." Anyone aware of the history of the Hebrew people knows that the Old Testament comes from God's appointed prophets and that the Israelites continuously rejected their message. Jesus also made this fact clear in His preaching. The New Testament is the authoritative word of the apostles. Its authority in the church and inspiration does not derive from its being collected "in the early Christian community." It is not difficult to recognize here the view popularized by Bultmann that the individual books of the New Testament were assembled from bits and pieces by early Christian communities. The AELC preamble fails to deal with the inerrancy and infallibility of Scripture. The statement, "the Holy Scriptures will impart to us the infallible Word of God," is a limp attempt to satisfy those who might have concerns here. Indeed, the words "the infallible Word of God" may simply refer to Jesus or the Gospel, since the document is most careless with the phrase.

Many groups in the history of Lutheranism in America have demanded less than total commitment to the Lutheran pattern of doctrine at the time of their organization. It would, however, be difficult to find a group that stated it as blatantly at its foundation as this new organization.

dps

"THE DEBUT OF THE BIBLE AS A PAGAN CLASSIC"

This startling title is used to designate the lead article on the June 1976 issue of the *Bulletin of the Council on the Study of Religion* (VII, 3). The writer, John A. Miles, Jr., envisages the place of the Bible in a culture that has entered the post-Christian era. A comparison is made between the Bible in the post-Christian era and the Homeric literature, which also once served as

sacred literature but which is now studied for its literary value. As Miles puts it, "But let us for the sake argument imagine a time when both the church and the synagogue have conclusively failed, leaving the secular university as the only institution conceivably still interested in the Bible." Miles suggests that under such circumstances the Bible be studied by the principles of Gilbert Highet in his *The Art of Teaching* (New York: Random House, 1950, pp. 73-75). These, in summary, are the principles: (1) Attention would be paid to the beauty of the language. This would necessitate studying the original text in Hebrew and Greek. The emphasis would be on *belles lettres*, the beauty of expression, instead of *bonnes lettres*, the saving aspects of the book which are stressed in the common phrase, "the good book." (2) Little attention would be paid to the reconstruction of the specific historical events; and on that account the theories of Wellhausen, Albright, Moore, Wolfson, Jonas, and others would be mentioned only in passing. (3) The influence of the Bible on civilization and religion, e.g., Luther, Bach's *St. Matthew's Passion*, Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, etc. would be discussed. (4) Attention would be paid to the apparent meaning of the stories in the Bible. Who were Jesus and Moses? Miles points out that in many Bible courses now the instructor assumes that the student is already familiar with the Bible, which is rarely the case anymore. (5) Little attention would be paid to the situation from which the various texts came. Such matters as the four-source hypothesis of the Pentateuch, the distinction of Trito- from Deutero-Isaiah, and the synoptic problem would receive little consideration. (6) Also to be studied would be those whose views of the Bible were negative, e.g., Celsus, Nietzsche, Voltaire. (7) No ethical commitment would be elicited from the student. (8) A study of other religious literature would be made for purposes of comparison.

To Bible-believing Christians the thought that the Bible should be treated as a pagan classic is, of course, immediately repulsive. One must ask Miles whether or not a piece of literature can ever be completely sundered from the purpose for which it was originally written. The Bible is certainly deliberately religious literature and to ignore this is to fail to understand it. Still there is something excitingly refreshing about some of Miles' suggestions for studying the Bible. The liberal exegetical scholar spends a disproportionate amount of time dismembering the sacred text, and the conservative feels honor-bound to reassemble the text. Even the liberal must get a little tired of stacking the theory books on his shelves, and certainly the conservatives are looking for release from the bondage. Of course, somebody caught following principles 2, 4, and 5 above would likely be labelled a Biblicist. But we could easily counter that charge by proclaiming ourselves scholars of pagan classical literature in a post-Christian secular age. Now that sounds respectable.

dps

WHY NOT EFFECTIVE PARENTAL CHOICE OF SCHOOLS?

"End of the Line for VOUCHERS," triumphantly proclaims the June 1976 issue of *Church & State*, official organ of Americans United for Separation of Church and State. People as diverse as economists Milton Friedman (conservative) and Christopher Jencks (liberal) have welcomed the voucher plan. It is obviously designed to maximize genuine educational freedom and pluralism. Under this plan parents of all school-children would, in *Church & State's* own words, receive tax-funded vouchers "equivalent in value to the average amount normally spent per student per year in public schools," which would then "be used by parents to pay tuition to the public, parochial, or private school of their choice."

It is difficult to imagine a scheme more ideally suited to the interests of real justice in a modern, pluralist society. One of the very cornerstones of our civilization is the principle recognised in Article 26 of the *Universal Declaration*

of *Human Rights*: "Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children." It is all very well to say that people are free to send their children to religious or other private schools if they wish. If the cost of such private education is prohibitive, the average person has no chance to exercise this "right." It becomes, in effect, a privilege of a well-to-do elite. Other citizens simply have to put up with the secular, amoral, evolutionist/humanistic indoctrination which increasingly shapes government-dispensed "education" in the Western world. Moreover, Christian parents, who may abhor the secularist educational monopoly, are compelled to support it with their tax-money—and are considered insolent meddlers if they dare to object to the more blatant anti-Christian propaganda in textbooks!

Clearly, the voucher scheme is a most effective remedy. It is perfectly fair that parents/taxpayers should have access on equal terms to public funds for the schools of their own choice. One may on various grounds deplore any Federal involvement in education. But that is now an academic question. Given the fact that Federal funds are being appropriated, no school can in the long term remain viable unless it has access either to public funds or to private wealth. And the church has no business running "snob schools" for a select few. Yet *Church & State* denounces the eminently sensible voucher proposal in the most hysterical terms. For example, the scheme is held to "reduce pluralism and variety in education by providing public subsidies for religious and ideological homogenization within voucher schools. . . ."

One would have thought that it is precisely pluralism and variety that would benefit from the plan. The trouble is that the people who talk most about pluralism really mean by it not a genuine plurality of views, but one single secularist perspective, filled with a homogenized mishmash of relativized views, and imposed on the public through one standard system of government schools. This kind of bogus "pluralism" has, of course, every reason to fear vouchers, for they would effectively take the power of choice away from the educational bureaucrats and restore it to those to whom it rightfully belongs, the parents. If "pluralism" is the name of the game, then let us play it with an honest deck. Even the Supreme Court (*Torcaso v. Watkins*, 1961) has defined "secular humanism" as a religion entitled to protection under the First Amendment. Neither traditional phobias and jealousies nor genuine confessional differences among Christians ought to blind us to the fact that in the name of the First Amendment the nominal Christian majority in this country are being educationally disfranchised by a secular humanist minority.

Oddly enough, *Church & State* also attacks vouchers for the opposite reason: they "provide public subsidy for dividing children and teachers by religion, race, ideology, class and in other ways, *thereby weakening interfaith and community harmony. . . .*" (my emphases). So we really lack the stomach for pluralism after all! Is American nationhood so fragile and precarious that it needs education for cultural conformity to keep it from shattering? One is reminded of Hitler's suffocating slogan: "One People, One Reich, One Fuehrer"! Surely our Bicentennial celebrates something more substantial!

Not surprisingly, the voucher idea has attracted favourable attention overseas. The 1974 "Statement of Principles" of the National Council of Independent Schools (Australia) strongly argues the need for access to public funds if parental choice of education is to be meaningful. The document explicitly refers to "some form of voucher or warrant" as one acceptable "mechanism for recurrent grants." And the Australian publication *News Weekly* (March 10, 1976) expresses great interest in the voucher experiment in the Alum Rock, California, school district. The paper reports:

58% of the teachers thought that, in general, the voucher demonstration would increase the quality of education received by the children of Alum Rock, while 8% thought quality would decrease. . . .

On the issue of quality of parents' choices, 93% of the teachers rated these choices as good or fair. In addition, 62% of the voucher teachers thought actual classroom innovation had increased, while only 9% were of the opposite opinion.

Is it not high time to end the monopolization of the First Amendment by the secular humanists?

Additional material is available from Citizens for Educational Freedom, 844 Washington Building, Washington D.C. 20005.

K. Marquart

EBLA

Few newspapers beyond the *Times* of London contain regular archaeological columns, but most took note during the past few months of what may prove to be the most important archaeological discovery of the century for Old Testament studies, the unearthing of the ancient archives of Ebla by the Italian Archaeological Mission of the University of Rome. The American publicization of the event accompanied the visit of the two men best able to discuss the finds—Professor Paolo Matthiae, the director of the excavation, and Professor Giovanni Pettinato, the epigrapher. Their presentation received the wrapt attention of the members of the Society of Biblical Literature at its annual meeting in St. Louis, 28-31 October 1976.

The Italians began the excavation of Tell Mardikh, a mound of some 230 acres near Aleppo in northwest Syria, in 1964. They uncovered much of interest in the following decade, definitely identifying the tell as the site of the imperial city of Ebla, considered such an important conquest by the great Sargon, king of Akkad, and his grandson Naram-Sin, whose torch brought its history to a close. In other words, according to this observer's chronology, Ebla met its end soon before the birth of Abraham (c. 2166 B.C.). Then in 1974 excitement mounted at Tell Mardikh as the Italian spades turned up some forty clay tablets, some of them bearing witness to a previously unknown West Semitic language. The following season, however, the expedition opened the royal archives of Ebla and took out over 15,000 tablets. The number must now be raised, according to Professor Pettinato, to 20,000; and those so far studied date back to the middle of the third millennium B.C.

The largest class of documents embraces the economic and administrative texts, including oversized tablets dealing with international trade. For the Eblaite empire was, above all, a commercial one. The historical and judicial texts show that Ebla's sphere of influence, including all of Syria and Palestine, reached to the Mesopotamian highlands in the east, Cyprus on the west, and Sinai on the south. These documents now provide the earliest mention of such Palestinian cities as Salim (=Salem), Hazor, Megiddo, Lachish, and Joppa. Now, metropolitan Ebla supposedly had a population of 260,000; but, according to the (tentative) Pettinato reconstruction, the citizens were so intent on commerce that they relied completely upon mercenaries for the military support, when necessary, of their economic hegemony. Such an internal weakness would, of course, explain how the Akkadians were able temporarily to subjugate and finally to obliterate the imperial city. Thus, the Eblaite empire formed an important part of the world into which Abraham was born, and the Eblaite literature will obviously tell us a great deal about the environment of Abraham and the patriarchs who succeeded him.

Contrary to the impression given by most popular reports, the majority—indeed, about eighty per cent—of the tablets are written in Sumerian, the classical language of the ancient Fertile Crescent. The remaining twenty per cent of the documents, however, represent the "new" language which Professor

Pettinato calls Eblaite or Palaeo-Canaanite. It is written, to be sure, in cuneiform, the wedge-shaped characters employed by the Sumerians, but it forms a part of the Northwest Semitic linguistic group to which Aramaic, Hebrew, Ugaritic, and Phoenician also belong. The royal archives of Ebla have produced, in addition, some bilingual texts, including the earliest known vocabularies, listing a goodly number of Sumerian words and their Eblaite counterparts.

Professor Pettinato stresses the close affinities of Eblaite with Phoenician and Hebrew, in particular. Thus, the tablets employ many personal names already familiar to us from Scripture, such as Ish-ra-il (Israel), Ish-ma-il (Ishmael), and Mi-ka-il (Michael). Indeed, the fortunes of Ebla reached their zenith under the scepter of a King Ebrum, to whom even Akkad paid tribute. This datum must topple the critical theory that the Eber of Genesis 11:16 is a mere aetiological fabrication—that the ancient Israelites invented the name (and the man) to explain why they sometimes called themselves Hebrews. “Eber” was, in fact, a real personal name in use at the point in history when, according to Scripture, the name was used by Abraham’s progenitor. The Eblaite religious texts, meanwhile, taking us back another millennium beyond the Ras Shamra literature, show that the use of the word “Canaan” as a proper noun is (in accord with Scripture) much older than most critics have been willing to admit. Also, it seems from the Eblaite tablets that the older form of the name *kemosh* (the god Chemosh) was *kamish*. Professor Pettinato contends that the occurrence of this form (with *yodh* as the vowel-letter rather than *waw*) in Jeremiah 48 indicates the remarkable reliability of the Massoretic text.

In this reviewer’s opinion, finally, the vastness of the royal archives of Ebla underlines once again the conclusion which follows from so much other archaeological evidence: the people of the ancient Near East relied, not upon oral tradition, but upon written documentation to preserve to posterity any matters of importance (and innumerable matters of lesser importance as well). The role of oral tradition in the development of the Old Testament derives not from the history of the second millennium B.C., but from the mythology of the late second millennium A.D. In the light of Ebla, Karnak, Ugarit, etc., it would have been distinctly odd if Moses had not recorded the events and arrangements which constituted the foundation of the Hebrew nation—and, indeed, just as odd if Abraham long before him had not reduced to writing the words and circumstances by which God delivered to him and his heirs the Messianic promise and the ownership of Canaan.

Judicius

THE MANKATO AFFAIR

For several years now Bethany Lutheran College and Seminary have hosted a Reformation lecture series. Such interest in the Reformation, and its impact for today, is worth noting. It was so also this last time, as was demonstrated by the lecture of Prof. E. C. Friedrich, chairman of the Department of Historical Theology at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wisconsin. “The Quest for True Lutheran Identity” was the title of his essay presented during the two-day period, October 28 to 29, 1976. Traced were the ingredients of genuine Lutheran identity, along with a review in sprightly etched fashion, of the history of Lutheran efforts, during a span of two hundred years, at welding together the sundry, scattered strands of Lutherans in America, particularly at achieving a God-pleasing fellowship based on unity of doctrine and practice, not compromise. With Prof. Glenn E. Reichwald of Bethany, the undersigned was one of the reactors or respondents. The essays will be published in the *Lutheran Synod Quarterly*.

This pattern, involving participants from erstwhile Synodical Conference partners, has been the format of the lectures sponsored by the Evangelical Lutheran Synod's "college and seminary on the hill" for almost a decade now. This is a big venture in a way for a small institution. But its significance and impact should not be underestimated. For the present it is really the only major effort at keeping the lines of communication open between synods which in the past shared so much and which still, under God, should explore every possible avenue for restoring fellowship on a Scripturally sound and Confessional basis. Kudos to the brethren of the ELS for continuing a good work! For continuing the quest of true Lutheran identity and unity!

Included in this year's observance was the installation of Rev. Theo. A. Aaberg as president of Bethany Lutheran Seminary. He will be the first president to devote full time to the seminary, a task heretofore simultaneously borne by the administrative head of the college.

President Aaberg brings notable credentials to the office. For many years a parish pastor, he at the same time was an alert observer of and participant in the traumatic proceedings that led to the ELS's fellowship break with Missouri. Foremost, he is also the author of a really first-rate historical chronography of the events connected with the tragic breakup of the Synodical Conference. His book, *A City Set on a Hill* (available from Bethany at \$5.95), was written in 1968 to mark the occasion of the ELS's 50th anniversary. It tells the story of the heroic efforts of the "Small Norwegian Synod" to retain its Confessional integrity at a time (1912-1918) when the unionistic, compromising "Settlement," or "Opgjor," pressed for acceptance within the old Norwegian Lutheran Church. At that time the "Small Norwegian Synod," the present ELS, struggled against great odds, just in order to survive, a spiritual wrestling in which it was greatly aided by a concerned big brother, the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. This debt to Missouri has never been forgotten.

Aaberg's book is more than a dry historical review of the facts pertaining to the ELS's ordeal, much more than a parochial pot-boiler hurriedly put together; it is valuable careful delineation of the crucial years, especially between 1938 to 1960, the years of stress and strain within the Synodical Conference, when the so-called ecumenical *Putsch* affected all of American Lutheranism in general. Especially valuable - since the period is nowhere assessed with such careful attention to detail, to my knowledge - are Aaberg's chapters on "Alert Watchmen" and "A Strained Alliance," where he traces the goings-on especially in Missouri, from the 1938 St. Louis convention (which found the ALC's "Declaration" in agreement with the "Brief Statement") through the troubled 40's and 50's, a period during which Missouri was often like an ecclesiastical yoyo in its doctrinal maneuverings. These chapters supply material which no serious student of Lutheran unity can afford to overlook, especially as the church moves farther away from that time. The present can hardly be understood and meet with meaningful action, if the past is not known. Aaberg's work, therefore, deserves a much wider audience. The possibility is present, after all, that it can be a catalyst for wider concern and greater efforts at removing the roadblocks to true Lutheran unity and fellowship.

The annual "Mankato Affair" itself deserves wider attention. Perhaps it would be expecting too much to hope that it should spearhead the reunion of the separated churches. But God has a way of choosing the small and the unlikely to accomplish His great and wondrous purposes. That lesson is inscribed deeply in human history, from the moment when the promise was first spoken in Eden, Gen. 3:15. It would be a truly God-pleasing fruit to have the "Small Norwegian Synod," the Wisconsin Synod, and Missouri united again by bonds of genuine doctrinal unity and by the kind of uniformity in ecclesiastical practice which, while flexible enough to allow for variations, is nonetheless true to Scriptural and Confessional principles. This would be an occasion for rejoicing also among the

sister churches overseas. Above all, it would be a God-pleasing goal. Missouri ought now come out of the corner and off the ropes where the "moderate" practitioners have forced her and strive resolutely for such God-pleasing fellowship. Towards that end Missouri's resolve at Dallas (summer 1977) ought to be to put substance into its chosen motto, "That We May Grow," by first of all contritely repenting for past offenses against God-given unity of faith and doctrine, and secondly, by repudiating present illicit fellowship alliances where no unity actually exists.

E. F. Klug

LUTHERANS AND ANGLICANS TALK IN AUSTRALIA

The *Lutheran Theological Journal* (August 1976), the publication of the Luther Seminary faculty of the Lutheran Church of Australia, contains a statement of agreements and disagreements between Lutherans and Episcopalians on the matters of the Lord's Supper and the Ministry. Though it does not really plough any new ground, it differs from most contemporary dialog documents in stating points of disagreement. Zwinglian and other mere symbolical interpretations of the Eucharist are rejected. The hurdle of *manducatio indignorum*, however, the doctrine that unbelievers participate in Christ's body and blood in the sacrament, could not be jumped by the Anglicans. The Anglicans insist that union with Christ is a consequent upon faith, and thus cannot imagine non-Christians eating His Body, although they do see such unbelieving participation as leading to the individual's condemnation. In the Wittenberg Concord of 1536, Bucer agreed with Luther in accepting the *manducatio impiorum*. While Lutherans interpreted the *impii* as unbelievers, the Reformed saw the word as referring to those who were less sanctified. The Anglican rejection of the *manducatio indignorum* can be traced back to their understanding of the sacrament as an act requiring faith for completion. Perhaps the concept of union with Christ also needs examination. Is there not a real confrontation of an individual with Christ which is intrinsically different from the union in faith? The eschatological confrontation with Christ does not presuppose faith. Perhaps if the Anglicans would judge this sacrament from its eschatological perspective, the obstacles to their acceptance of the *manducatio indignorum* could be removed. The document drawn up by the Australians is admirable on many points and does indicate that substantive theological discussion is still possible in some circles. Nevertheless, there is an innate frustration in dealing with any group like the Anglicans whose world-wide structure provides great latitude. The Australian discussions on the ministry simply do not take into account recent decisions of sister churches (American Lutheran Church and Protestant Episcopal Church) to ordain women. I hold that such decisions to ordain women destroys a certain apostolic quality of that ministry. Both Lutherans and Anglicans have stressed this aspect of the ministry, but the Anglicans seem to have a little more to lose on this point. In the past differences dividing Lutherans in other countries have proven to be surmountable in Australia. The isolation of the continent has permitted the development of biological and ecclesiastical forms not found elsewhere. The same principle could be at work in the discussions between the Lutherans and Anglicans. Isolation has its benefits.

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