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The Lutheran Council in the United States of America

A Preliminary Report on the Proposed New Inter-Lutheran Association

By MARTIN H. FRANZMANN
ALFRED O. FUERBRINGER

One of the major questions before our Synod at its 1965 convention will no doubt be "Shall we take part in a proposed new Lutheran cooperative association?" The question will not be altogether new. The Cleveland convention of 1962 resolved

that the President of the Synod, in consultation with the Commission on Theology and Church Relations, appoint seven representatives of the Synod to meet with a similar number of representatives of other Lutheran church bodies in the United States willing to enter into conversations regarding a Lutheran interchurch association . . . that this committee of seven issue a full report to the Synod three months prior to the next convention. (1962 *Proceedings*, Res. 3—27, p. 109)

This paper is, of course, not yet the full report requested by the above resolution. It is, rather, a preliminary progress report on how things have gone since the Cleveland convention, an attempt to indicate what the conversations between the appointed bodies have led to, and a sketch of the proposed Lutheran interchurch association as it has now taken shape.

This paper tries to answer three questions that delegates to the 1965 convention of our Synod will have to ask if they are to vote wisely and responsibly on this matter. These three questions are:

- I. *How did we get here?* What is the history of this movement toward a new Lutheran interchurch association, or council?
- II. *Where are we going?* What will the new association be like? What will it mean for the life and work of our Synod?
- III. *What will it cost?* How does this new association affect our stewardship of money?

I. HOW DID WE GET HERE?

Actually we have not arrived at this point very suddenly. There has been an inter-Lutheran cooperative association since 1918, the National Lutheran Council (NLC). Neither our Synod nor any other synod of the Lutheran Synodical Conference has ever been a participating body of that council, largely because that council was not in a position to go into the question of the doctrinal differences which prevented its participating bodies from having pulpit and altar fellowship with one another. Our Synod did, however, have considerable contact and did practice some cooperation with the National Lutheran Council, notably in the area of ministry to the armed forces.

By 1958 it became apparent that the two great mergers which resulted in the

present ALC and LCA would create a new situation within the National Lutheran Council. In that year the National Lutheran Council extended to our Synod an invitation to examine the whole question of cooperative activities in American Lutheranism. (The invitation was extended also to the other synods of the Lutheran Synodical Conference. They declined. The SELC joined in the conversation with NLC later and is at present working closely with our Synod in this matter and is moving in the same direction.) The Doctrinal Unity Committee of our Synod accepted the invitation, since the theological or doctrinal questions were now not being left out of the discussions as they had been in the National Lutheran Council.

The result was a series of three meetings attended by members of our Doctrinal Unity Committee, the Executive Committee of the National Lutheran Council, and a selected number of theologians and churchmen from both groups (Chicago, July 7—9, 1960; St. Louis, Nov. 18, 19, 1960; and Chicago, Oct. 30—Nov. 1, 1961). The six essays read and discussed at these meetings have been published and sent to all the clergy of the churches represented (*Essays on the Lutheran Confessions Basic to Lutheran Cooperation and Toward Cooperation Among American Lutherans*. Extra copies are available at a cost of 25 cents). These publications also give a record of the men who took part in the discussions and a brief history of the course of events. It is highly desirable that all delegates to the 1965 convention should have and study them.

What did the papers and the discussions reveal? First of all, they showed a degree of basic agreement in Lutheran faith and

conviction which is heartening and encouraging. Our discussions of what is essential to the true unity of the church ("It is enough to agree concerning the doctrine of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments," Augsburg Confession, Article VII) and of what it means to subscribe to, or accept, the Lutheran Confessions showed that the statement which we have made in the first paragraph in the preamble of the proposed constitution for the new council is sincere and meaningful language on the part of all participants:

. . . The participating Lutheran church bodies acknowledge the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the only source and the infallible norm of all church doctrine and practice, and see in the three Ecumenical Creeds and the Confessions of the Lutheran Church, especially in the Unaltered Augsburg Confession and Luther's Small Catechism, a pure exposition of the Word of God.

The papers and discussions showed also (and this is freely acknowledged by all) that we do not have that full agreement in doctrine and practice which we of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod consider essential to the establishment of pulpit and altar fellowship.

These two facts, both taken seriously, have dictated the nature and function of the proposed new council. We have decided to recommend to our several church bodies that we join forces to overcome, as the Spirit gives us grace, the existing differences and to cooperate in such activities and in such a way that existing differences are not ignored or glossed over. The proposed council will not itself be a channel for negotiations looking toward the establishment of pulpit and altar fellowship. Such negotiations may be carried on by the

several bodies outside the framework of the council. There is a clean-cut definition of the present situation as well as a well-defined set of procedures.

II. WHERE ARE WE GOING?

What sort of organization will the new council be? We shall, obviously, be keeping closer company with our fellow Lutherans of the LCA and the ALC than ever before (and perhaps be drawn closer to our old friends and brothers of the SELC too). On what terms and for what purposes shall we be associated with them? The proposed constitution spells this out clearly in general terms, and the bylaws will spell it out in detail. Both will be available for study well in advance of our 1965 convention.

One thing is very clear: theology, the study and discussion of the Gospel in all its fullness and all its meaning for the life of the church, will be in the center of things. The proposed constitution lists among the "Purposes and Objectives" of the organization:

- a) To further the witness, the work, and the interests of the participating bodies.
- b) To seek to achieve theological consensus [that is, a full agreement and a common will and purpose concerning the Gospel] in a systematic and continuing way on the basis of the Scriptures and the witness of the Lutheran Confessions.

And the constitution expressly states (Art. II, Sec. 3) that "all the participating bodies shall take part in the Division of Theological Studies," whereas each participating body may or may not participate in any of the other activities of the council.

This gives us a wonderful opportunity.

We have for years been trying to set in motion and keep in motion a long-range, continuing doctrinal discussion among all Lutherans in America, in order that all Lutherans in America might witness to their Lord in full harmony both in word and in deed. The new emphasis on theology in the proposed council looks like an answer to our prayers. If we participate in this council, we shall be able to hear fully the concerns of our fellow Lutherans, to meet them, to clear up misunderstandings, and to be enriched and matured in the process. We shall be heard by them in a way that we have not been heard before and shall be able to share with fellow Lutherans those theological gifts which God has given us. If we use this opportunity humbly and courageously, we shall find in it a blessing for ourselves and others.

The new council can mean much for our witness. It can also mean a great deal for our work. The proposed constitution takes great care to safeguard the confessional or theological position of each participating body. No one need participate with a bad conscience. The preamble states:

. . . The participating bodies are of the conviction that they should and can more effectively carry on their work and further a Lutheran witness by cooperating in matters of common interest and responsibility, *cooperation in which is not at variance with their doctrine and practice*" (emphasis ours).

And Art. II, Sec. 3 of the constitution says:

In all other work of the council [outside the Division of Theological Studies] each participating body may determine whether to participate in a division, department, commission, and office.

The terms of cooperation are clearly defined, and withdrawal from the council, if withdrawal should ever become necessary or advisable, is a simple matter:

Participation in the council may be terminated by withdrawal upon action by the church body concerned. (Art. II, Sec. 4)

One can get an idea of the kind of cooperative work which might be carried on by church bodies participating in the council by looking at the descriptions of the proposed divisions of the council. (The constitution defines a division as "a comprehensive administrative unit in which means are provided for cooperation within a circumscribed segment of the council's activity.") None of the activities outlined is, or need be, unionistic in character. So, for example, the proposed Division of Educational Services "provides means for consultation, cooperation, and coordination of activities (a) in the fields of church and church-related education, and (b) in the campus ministry at non-Lutheran institutions of higher learning." This obviously does not mean that all the participating bodies unite to do religious teaching or carry on campus ministries together (which would amount to pulpit and altar fellowship). Rather, the division's work will consist in convening meetings of Lutheran educators at various levels, maintaining liaison with Lutheran professional and special interest groups in the field of education, and serving as a forum in which the college and university work agencies of the participating bodies "can share plans, procedures, and program ideas." Some of the work planned for this division is already being carried on in an informal manner.

The work of the Division of Service to Military Personnel will not radically change

the present situation. This division will provide regular, permanent channels for the kind of cooperation that has been carried on for years between our Armed Services Commission and the corresponding unit of the National Lutheran Council.

Throughout the descriptions of the other divisions (Mission Services, Public Relations, Welfare Services) and of the Office of Research, Statistics, and Archives, it is apparent that the words of the preamble to the constitution have not been forgotten. The cooperation between the participating bodies is designed to be a cooperation "which is not at variance with their doctrine and practice."

We should remember when we ask, "Where are we going?" that a cooperative council cannot be our ultimate goal. We cannot come to rest here. We must continue to work at the long task of seeking a doctrinally united Lutheran Church in the United States of America. The proposed council can be a means toward that end, and we should use it and any other means that may present themselves in sober wisdom and with the high confidence of faith.

III. WHAT WILL IT COST?

The question of cost cannot be the first or the most important question in the church. Certainly it has not been the prime question in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. We have built up a school system, the largest among Protestants, and have not allowed the staggering and constantly growing annual costs to serve as a deterrent. There are other areas of work where the Spirit has given us a genuine disregard for Mammon and all his works. God be thanked for it.

But the question of cost is inescapable.

If we are generous for the Gospel's sake, we must also be wise and responsible in our generosity. Largeheartedness without clearheadedness is not good stewardship. We shall have to take a good hard look at the cost of participation in the proposed council.

Obviously no one can give a close estimate of the cost at this point or forecast what the cost might come to in the future as the work of the council develops. Preliminary estimates of the annual budget indicate that the cost for a church body which participates in all the activities of the council would be in the neighborhood of 20 cents for each baptized member (or somewhat over \$500,000 a year for The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod, considering the present size of the Synod and the current purchasing power of the dollar).

Not all of the expense entailed by participation in the proposed council will be new cost, over and above present expenditures. Furthermore, some activities which we now carry on alone will no doubt be done jointly with others. This means we are expending about one third of the estimated sum at present. One cost will certainly be new, that of the Division of Theological Studies (\$32,500 for the first year, about \$11,000 for our Synod). But this is an expense that we should assume gratefully and gladly. Never in our history has God given us such an opportunity as this; as Dr. Alvin Rogness put it in his paper at our third meeting:

For the churches to be allied . . . with one another in the task of examination, definition, reproof, correction, and communication would be splendid strategy for this hour. To know whom we have believed, to rest securely in the Word alone, to

understand and appreciate the treasure God has given us historically as Lutherans, to communicate in the form of sound and relevant words, and to do this as pledged brothers and not as uneasy strangers, this . . . is to meet the need of this heterodox hour. (*Toward Cooperation Among American Lutherans*, p. 14)

If the Missouri Synod decides, at its 1965 convention, to become a participating body of the proposed Lutheran Council and the other bodies do the same at their 1966 conventions, the new agency will, God willing, come into being as a successor to the National Lutheran Council on Jan. 1, 1967.

The proposed constitution is appended to this report.

CONSTITUTION OF THE LUTHERAN COUNCIL IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Preamble

WHEREAS, In their respective constitutions, the participating Lutheran church bodies acknowledge the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the only source and the infallible norm of all church doctrine and practice, and see in the three Ecumenical Creeds and in the Confessions of the Lutheran Church, especially in the Unaltered Augsburg Confession and Luther's Small Catechism, a pure exposition of the Word of God; and

WHEREAS, The participating bodies are of the conviction that they should and can more effectively carry on their work and further a Lutheran witness by cooperating in matters of common interest and responsibility, cooperation in which is not at variance with their doctrine and practice;

Therefore the participating bodies do hereby establish and will maintain a common council to be governed by the following constitution.

ARTICLE I

Name and Incorporation

SECTION 1. The name of this agency shall be the Lutheran Council in the United States of America, hereinafter referred to as council.

SECTION 2. This council shall be incorporated.

ARTICLE II

Participating Bodies

SECTION 1. The participating bodies shall be the Lutheran church bodies in the United States of America which shall have approved the constitution prior to the establishment of the council or are subsequently admitted to participation in the council as provided in Section 2 of this Article.

SECTION 2. A Lutheran church body in the United States of America may be admitted to participation in the council by a majority vote of the representatives present and voting at a meeting of the council followed by a two thirds vote of the delegation of the participating bodies, each delegation casting a single vote approving such admission.

Prior to such action the applicant church body shall certify to the officers of the council its approval of the constitution of the council and its desire and purpose to participate.

SECTION 3. All the participating bodies shall take part in the Division of Theological Studies. In all other work of the council each participating body may determine whether to participate in a division, department, commission, and office. The representatives of a participating body shall not be entitled in meetings of the council or its Executive Committee to vote on any matter specifically related to a phase of the council's work in which such body is not participating.

SECTION 4. Participation in the council may be terminated by withdrawal upon action by the church body concerned. Such termi-

nation shall become effective three months after written notice thereof. A participating body which withdraws from the council shall be expected to fulfill the obligations which it had assumed for specific projects of the council and its assigned share of the budget's support of the council for the year in which its withdrawal becomes effective.

SECTION 5. All assets acquired by the council shall belong solely to the council during its continued existence. A participating body, upon its withdrawal, shall have no right or claim to any of the assets of the council.

ARTICLE III

Representation

SECTION 1. Each participating body shall be entitled to one representative for every two hundred thousand baptized members in the United States of America, or remaining major fraction thereof; provided, however, that each participating body shall be entitled to at least one representative.

SECTION 2. The basis for calculating representation for each year shall be the baptized membership of each participating body as of January 1 of the preceding year.

SECTION 3. Each participating body shall certify to the secretary of the council its list of representatives at least thirty (30) days prior to each annual meeting.

SECTION 4. In case a representative is prevented from attending any meeting of the council, his place at such meeting may be filled by an alternate selected by his participating body.

ARTICLE IV

Purposes and Objectives

The purposes and objectives of this council are:

- a. To further the witness, the work, and the interests of the participating bodies.
- b. To seek to achieve theological consensus

in a systematic and continuing way on the basis of the Scriptures and the witness of the Lutheran Confessions.

- c. To provide an instrumentality through which the participating bodies may work together in fulfilling their responsibility of Christian service where coordination or joint activity is deemed by them to be desirable and feasible.

ARTICLE V

Functions

The functions of the council shall be:

- a. To provide a forum in which the participating bodies will discuss their mutual concerns and may plan common action;
- b. To establish procedures and provide resources for theological study and discussion;
- c. To promote understanding, amity, and helpful relationships with other Lutheran churches in the United States of America;
- d. To bring to the attention of the participating bodies matters which in its judgment may require utterance or action on their part;
- e. To represent the interests of the council, and the interests of a participating body so requesting, in matters which require common action before
- 1) the American public
 - 2) the national government and state governments
 - 3) organized bodies and agencies outside the Lutheran Church
- f. To make studies and surveys regarding present or proposed fields of work and to submit recommendations to the participating bodies based thereon;
- g. To perform specific services on behalf of one or more of the participating bodies upon a purchase of service basis;
- h. To establish liaison and cooperate with unofficial or voluntary inter-Lutheran groups at their request subject to action by the council in each instance;
- i. To take necessary steps to meet emergencies requiring common action;
- j. To undertake additional functions and services upon approval by a majority of the participating bodies.

ARTICLE VI

Authority and Powers

SECTION 1. The council shall have authority:

- a. To regulate its proceedings and to conduct its activities in accordance with this constitution.
- b. To elect or appoint the necessary officers and members of its staff, to terminate their service when it deems this advisable, and to fill vacancies.
- c. To oversee, review the work of, control and coordinate its divisions, departments, commissions, offices, and committees.
- d. To obtain, appropriate, and administer funds for its work and to control its finances and business.
- e. To determine the external relations of the council to religious and secular organizations and movements either directly or through one or more of its divisions, such determination to be subject to the unanimous approval of the participating bodies.
- f. To purchase, receive by gift, bequest or devise, or otherwise acquire and to hold, manage, sell, convey, or otherwise dispose of, real and personal property.

SECTION 2. The council shall submit annual reports of its activities to the participating bodies and at the request of one or more of them shall make special reports.

ARTICLE VII

Meetings

SECTION 1. There shall be an annual meeting of the council. Other regular meetings may be held as determined by the council.

SECTION 2. Special meetings may be called by the Executive Committee.

SECTION 3. A majority of the representatives entitled to be present, representing a majority of the participating bodies, shall constitute a quorum.

SECTION 4. Each representative shall be notified in writing of each meeting at least fifteen days prior to the date of the meeting.

ARTICLE VIII

Officers

SECTION 1. The officers of the council shall include a President, a Vice-President, and a Secretary, elected by ballot at the annual meeting from among the representatives of the participating bodies. The Executive Committee shall select the Treasurer of the council. All officers shall take office at the conclusion of the meeting at which they are elected and shall continue to serve in such capacity until their successors assume office.

SECTION 2. No officer, except the Treasurer, may serve more than three full one-year terms in succession.

SECTION 3. The officers of the council shall serve in the same capacities as officers of the Executive Committee.

ARTICLE IX

Committees

SECTION 1. The council shall have an Executive Committee, which shall also serve as its Board of Directors, consisting of the President, Vice-President, and Secretary, and seven additional representatives to be elected

at the annual meeting. All the participating bodies shall be represented in the membership of the Executive Committee. In the interim between meetings of the council the Executive Committee shall carry forward the work of the council, arrange for the execution of the orders and resolutions of its meetings, fill vacancies in the staff, and, subject to review by the council, perform such duties as the council may assign. At each regular or special meeting of the council it shall make a report of its actions.

SECTION 2. A standing committee for each division, department, and commission shall be appointed annually by the Executive Committee upon nominations made by the participating bodies. Each body shall have representation on the committee of each division, department, or commission in which such body is participating. Such representation shall be equitably distributed among the participating bodies in general in proportion to their baptized membership.

SECTION 3. Other committees may be established as the council may determine.

ARTICLE X

Divisions, Departments, Commissions, Offices

SECTION 1. The council shall establish divisions, departments, commissions, and offices to carry on its work.

SECTION 2. A division is a comprehensive administrative unit in which, under the direction of a division committee, means are provided for cooperation within a circumscribed segment of the council's activity. It shall supervise such departments, commissions, and offices as are assigned to its scope of responsibility.

SECTION 3. A department is an operative unit within a division through which an activity of a special or technical nature is carried on in behalf of the council.

SECTION 4. A commission is an administrative committee under the general secretariat or within the structure of a division appointed by the council to meet emergency situations.

SECTION 5. An office is an executive unit charged with a special or technical assignment under the supervision either of a division or of the general secretariat.

ARTICLE XI

Staff

SECTION 1. The council shall have a General Secretary who shall be elected at an annual meeting for a term of four years, and such other executive personnel as may be required from time to time.

SECTION 2. The General Secretary shall exercise administrative responsibility over the other members of the staff.

SECTION 3. No member of the staff may serve as a representative of a participating body, nor shall he be a member of a committee of the council.

ARTICLE XII

Financial Support

SECTION 1. The regular financial support of the council shall be derived mainly from appropriations made by the participating bodies in proportion to their baptized membership.

SECTION 2. Special or emergency work shall be financed out of funds available to

the council or by such means as the participating bodies may determine in each case.

ARTICLE XIII

Bylaws

Bylaws consistent with the constitution may be adopted or amended by a two-thirds vote of the representatives present and voting at a duly called meeting of the council, provided that notice of each proposed amendment shall have been sent to each representative and to the president of each participating body at least thirty days prior to the date of the meeting. A provision of the bylaws may be suspended by a three-fourths vote of the representatives present and voting at any meeting.

ARTICLE XIV

Amendments

Amendments of this constitution may be proposed in writing at any meeting of the council or at any meeting of the Executive Committee. Notice in writing of any amendment thus proposed shall be mailed by the Secretary to all representatives and to the presidents of all participating bodies. Action on such proposed amendment may be taken at any meeting of the council held three months or more after the mailing of such notices. A two-thirds vote of the representatives present and voting at such meeting followed by approval by two thirds of the participating bodies shall be required for the adoption of an amendment.