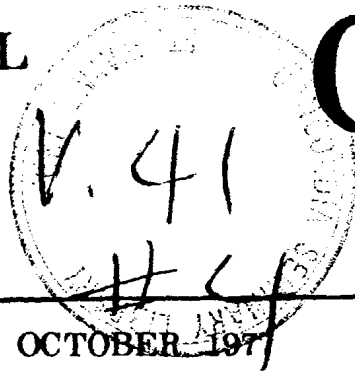


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Concordia Theological Seminary
Fort Wayne, Indiana

Theological Observer

LCUSA

The Division of Theological Studies of the Lutheran Council in the U. S. A. sponsored a conference on May 3-5 of this year to examine the "problem" of the historical-critical method of Biblical interpretation. Six papers were assigned: two theoretical assessments of historical criticism by exegetes, two such assessments by systematicians, and two actual exegetical treatments of parables to put theory into practice. One LC-MS clergyman was chosen for each type of presentation, and each Missourian contribution was counterbalanced by an offering from the LCA or ALC.

What transpired was fascinating. First of all, it was readily observable that all three Missouri Synod papers were of a totally different nature than their counterparts. Each Missourian assessment or exegesis was intensely theological, pertinent to the topic under discussion, and pointed in its treatment of that topic. The papers from the LCA and ALC, by contrast, tended to be "personal", almost testimonial in nature; did not, at times, deal with the issue (one was a superb exposition of the so-called New Hermeneutic, but nothing more); and often were vague and generalized.

Secondly, a different attitude toward the importance of doctrine in Christian faith and life on the part of both LCA and ALC participants was observable, an attitude which, it became increasingly clear, was crucial to their understanding of the requirements for fellowship. One of the most engaging and gracious scholars at the conference (ALC) illustrated this in his closing remarks. He said he felt that some of the participants on "his side" had not been entirely fair and forthright in their assessments of the LCA-ALC and LC-MS attitudes toward the historical critical method. A goodly number had contended that *no difference* existed between the the two sides at all (a most incredible assertion and one worthy of separate and extensive treatment), and this, he said, was manifestly not so. There were real and deep differences in the doctrine of Holy Scripture, in methods of interpretation, and in attitudes toward the Confessions. But, he went on to say, *these differences are not significant*. Finally, they make no difference. And therefore, they should not be divisive of fellowship but should be treated as "open questions," for which contradictory opinions are perfectly permissible and acceptable.

Thirdly, each side at this conference had a different attitude toward the nature of truth. For LCA and ALC theologians, truth was subjective and experiential. Something is true "for me," many said, or "from our perspective today." A correspondence theory of truth was specifically repudiated by several of the participants. This, in turn, led to a complete emasculation, nay perversion, of the English language. In the final devotion, the Bible was described as "both errant and inerrant," with the enlightening explanation that such a formulation preserved the paradoxical nature of Christianity and of God's revelation. It is interesting to note that Dr. David Preus, President of the ALC, has succumbed to something similar, for he has said (*Reporter*, 1 August 1977, p. 2):

We are even willing to affirm 'the inerrancy of Scripture'....But when we are told that we must believe that inerrancy means just exactly what some Missouri Synod theologians say it means...that smacks to us of ecclesiastical pride and tyranny.

In both of these cases a technical term has lost its cognitive content and has become a mere totem or "rabbit's foot" (to use Kurt Marquart's phrase) which creates oneness and true fellowship regardless of its meaning.

James W. Voelz