

THE LCA AND THE LUTHERAN WORLD FEDERATION

The *Document of Union* adopted by the Lutheran Church of Australia (LCA) at its formation in 1966 acknowledged membership in the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) was a problem that involved the doctrine of the church. For, although the LWF has a specific doctrinal basis, and acts in church work that involves the essence of the church, it claims that it is a federation and not a church. For that reason the LCA agreed that it would not seek affiliation with the LWF until the implications of affiliation were resolved. Some time ago the LCA entered into associate membership with the LWF, and now its Commission on Theology and Inter-Church Relations is examining full membership. This is just one example of how public teaching and practice do not stay where they are put in the LCA.

To argue that the LWF is a federation and not a church is as illogical as saying, "The ball is not round. It is blue." Why cannot it be both? Since the assembly at Budapest in 1984 all member churches of the LWF are in full altar and pulpit fellowship with each other. Since that is so, any claim that the LWF is merely a federation and not churchly is laughable. A glance at the agendas at LWF assemblies shows that it has departments on theology and other areas like a church body, and discusses proposals that are little different from proposals on the agenda of any church convention. The LWF also has individual Lutheran congregations under its umbrella. It is not the full story that all member churches of the LWF are fully autonomous and that the LWF may act on behalf of its constituents only on matters committed to it.

When people take membership in any organisation, they say a great deal about themselves. A person who joins the Freemasons says a great deal about his Christian convictions, for example. In the Scriptures there is a principle of co-responsibility. John wrote, "If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house or say a greeting to him. For the person who says a greeting to him shares in his wicked deeds" (2 J 10-11). In the member churches of LWF many things are taught and tolerated that are against the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions. Those who join the LWF knowing that, become co-responsible for such teachings and toleration. Among the chief of the errors from which confessional Lutherans ought to separate themselves are the LWF's officially sponsored denial of justification through faith alone in its dialogue about justification with the Roman Catholic Church. Although the document affirms grace alone, it consistently couples sanctification (or renewal) with justification, and nowhere affirms that justification and salvation are through faith alone (R 3:28). Another is the policy of "reconciled diversity" that the LWF officially adopts and sponsors. The Scriptures nowhere countenance false teaching and are in no way "reconciled" to different teachings of the Gospel (G 1:8-9).

With respect to member churches of the LWF, many of them have compromised the teaching of the Lutheran Confessions about the real presence of Christ's body and blood in the Lord's Supper. The member churches of the United Evangelical Lutheran Church in Germany in its Leuenberg Concord has compromised the real presence with Reformed teaching. About seven Lutheran Church bodies of northern Europe also adopted a declaration at Porvoo in October 1992 that recognised the attendance of Anglicans at the Lutheran Lord's Supper. It bypassed the great differences within Anglicanism about the real presence. The Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (ELCA) has also denied the Lutheran doctrine of the real presence by compromising agreements with several Reformed churches in the USA. The ELCA is heterodox in other ways as well. When a church that has the name Lutheran takes membership in the LWF, which has the Lutheran Confessions as its nominal basis, knowing that many of its member churches have denied the truth, they become co-responsible for the errors of those member churches. By the LWF's stated policy since Budapest in 1984, member churches of LWF are in full fellowship with all such nominally Lutheran church bodies.

The Church of Sweden is making it difficult for pastors who oppose ordination of women to continue. It does not even insist on the baptism of infants or that all its members should be baptised into Jesus Christ.

There is a minority of Lutheran churches throughout the world that want to be confessional and have not joined the LWF. Sadly, many of them are not in fellowship with each other for various reasons. What is needed in our time is a realignment of confessional Lutherans on the basis of a new Formula of Concord that addresses issues that confront confessional Lutheran Christians, today. It is important to know where one's true friends are. However, formally joining the LWF would mean that the LCA signals to confessional Lutheran churches across the globe that it does not recognise them as its true friends.

Then there is the issue of women pastors. Not only have a number of member churches of the Lutheran World Federation ordained women, contrary to 1 Cor 14:31-38, and 1 Tim 2:11-14, but some leaders of the LWF have also been actively promoting that cause. The LCA is already deeply divided on this question. Full

membership in the LWF can only work against the minority in the LCA who still oppose this unscriptural practice. Leaders at Geneva will certainly give moral support to those who favour having women pastors. Recently, several member churches of the LWF in eastern Europe have decided to discontinue having women pastors. The church in the Ukraine, DELKU, is one of them. It is associated with the German State Churches. However, German State Church leaders have been putting pressure on them to revoke their decision.

It has to be said that the proposal for the LCA to become a full member of the LWF is consistent with its deliberate decision to go down the falsely “ecumenical” (read “unionistic”) road. Its past president, Lance Steicke, is now the President of the National Council of Churches in Australia, and John Henderson, an LCA pastor, became its secretary. The whole ecumenical movement of our time adopts the errors that the church of Jesus Christ is an object of sight. On the contrary, all true believers of all times and places have always been one in Christ. Jesus’ prayer for that unity has always been fulfilled. The unity of the church is of the same fabric as the nature of the church. Both are hidden, but have as their visible marks the pure teaching of the Gospel and the right administration of the Sacraments. The ecumenical movement of today abandons the confession that Christians are one in the Father and the Son on the basis of the Word that Jesus gave His disciples. (J 17:20-26; *Augsburg Confession* VII).