

## Responses to 'A covenant for biblical renewal within the LCA' April 2015

A number of friends have asked me to describe the responses I have received from LCA pastors and laypeople to the mid-February posting of 'A covenant'. No doubt my first thoughts have been similar to those of fellow signatories – deep gratitude for the expressions of support and encouragement by phone, email and in personal conversation. Most of these pastors and laypeople do not hold highly influential positions in the LCA; they are 'the quiet in the land' ('die Stillen im Lande', as the Germans put it). Their responses have one common theme – the concern, in the words of the Small Catechism, that our 'dear Father in heaven' would help us to 'keep his name holy.' This happens 'when the Word of God is taught in its truth and purity.' (The First Petition)

The critical responses to 'A covenant,' on the other hand, are many and various. Most often, they have taken these three forms:

1. The covenant is 'divisive.' It threatens the unity of the LCA. Rebuttal: This response calls to mind Elijah's confrontation with Ahab. Ahab sees Elijah coming to meet him, and says, 'Is it you, you troubler of Israel?' Elijah answers: 'I have not troubled Israel, but you have.' (verses 17,18) So now we may well ask: 'Who is troubling the LCA? Is it those who still believe and confess that the Bible is the truthful, error-free word of God 'as a whole and in all its parts'? Is it those who believe that to ordain women would be to disobey the Lord's clear command? (1 Corinthians 14:37) Or are the troublers and dividers of Israel those who promote a critical attitude to the Scriptures and advocate women's ordination? (for a more comprehensive reply to the charge of 'divisiveness' see the paragraph from Pastor Peter Koehne at the end of these rebuttals)

2. The covenant makes personal attacks on individuals. Rebuttal: On the contrary, the covenant follows the pattern of The Book of Concord, where the Lutheran Reformers, beginning with the Augsburg Confession, state what they 'believe, teach and confess', and follow up by summarising and rejecting the contrary teaching. This method makes for great clarity in Lutheran teaching. In following a similar format in 'A covenant', we have not named any person.

3. Those who prepared and signed the covenant reject LCA teaching on scripture. This is evidently the case, because the covenant focuses on the Theses of Agreement and overlooks 'A Consensus Statement on Holy Scripture.' The Consensus Statement settled our disputes about scripture once and for all, and was endorsed by the LCA in 1987.

Rebuttal: The second paragraph of the introduction to the Consensus Statement begins by referring to 'the careful formulations' regarding the nature of Holy Scripture which are 'given in the Theses of Agreement.' However, despite 'the extensive treatment' in the TA, it was as early as 1968 that 'it became necessary for the Church to adopt a further statement: 'An explanation of paragraphs dealing with inspiration and inerrancy in the Theses of Agreement.' The introduction goes on to describe the series of disputes leading up to the Consensus Statement.

It should be noted that the LCA's August 1984 Convention endorsed the Consensus Statement (CS) 'for study.' So it was formulated and endorsed for study thirty-one (31) years ago, before its formal adoption at the 1987 convention! This small 7-page document sees itself as clarifying some points in the Theses of Agreement, a clarification that had become necessary because of ongoing controversies about scripture. That it serves as a commentary on the far more significant document, the TA, is evident from its numerous references to the Theses. The same applies to CS Attachment 1, 'Towards a common understanding of the authority of scripture,' where the Introduction notes: *'In the following document 'Scripture' is understood in accordance with the Theses of Agreement (TA) 1:1,2).* Attachment 2, 'The extent and authority of the canon,' which clarifies an issue troubling LCA theologians in the 1980s.

Now that 31 years have passed since the formulation of the Consensus Statement, we see the LCA, together with Lutheran, Anglican and other churches around the world, convulsed by disputes precipitated by far more radical approaches to scripture, and by issues not even mentioned in the Consensus Statement (the ordination of women, the blessing in churches of same sex couples, and the ordination of homosexuals). These seismic events call for a fresh document that addresses the crisis in churches today.

Dr Greg Lockwood

P.S. Communication from Pastor Koehne:

Signatories of the Covenant have been labelled 'divisive'. That description reminds us of Ahab's words to Elijah: 'Is that you, you troubler of Israel?' Elijah replied that it was Ahab and his family who were the troublers of Israel because they had abandoned the Lord's commands. (1 Kings 18:17,18) Always, those who stand by God's Word are called trouble-makers, breakers of unity. It was the case with Athanasius. His persistent rejection of Arianism threatened unity – the unity of the church and the unity of the state. Constantine, therefore, banished him to Treves. We should also remember that the Prussian king also called our forefathers a divisive element in church and state because they would not give up their Lutheran heritage; that's why we are in Australia. Luther's name is still treated with contempt, because, as his detractors claim, he destroyed the unity of the church. In 1917, Anglicans declined the invitation of Trinity Lutheran in East Melbourne to participate in the celebration of the Reformation because they considered it divisive. There are also Lutheran pastors in the LCA who denigrate the Theses of Agreement and call it divisive because it states: '... if the error is persisted in, in spite of instruction, warning, and earnest witness, it must at last lead to a separation' (Thesis I.4,a). However, to maintain unity through a consensus that 'assigns error equal right with truth' is hypocrisy. False teaching must be rejected, even if this leads to division. To be called 'troublers' and 'dividers of unity' is nothing new; name-calling has always been used to destroy the reputation of defenders of truth. The old saying is just as valid in the world as in the church: 'Give a dog a bad name, and then hang him.'

In Him, Peter Koehne