THE DOCTRINAL REASONS FOR FAL'S EXISTENCE

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C.H. 373

March 24, 1980

On All Saint's Day, November 1, 1971, at Libertyville, Illinois, a group of 7 congregations comprising 8000 souls, along with their pastors organized themselves as an authentically Lutheran church body under the name of The Federation For Authentic Lutheranism(FAL). The 7 congregations which on this date became voting charter members were Grace, Bishop, California; St. Paul, Escondido, California; St. Paul's, North Hollywood, California; St. John's, Libertyville, Illinois; St. Paul's, Round Lake, Illinois; Holy Trinity, Okauchee, Wisconsin; and St. John's, Watertown, Wisconsin. Their prime purpose at this gathering, called the "constituting convention," was to draw up a constitution that could be used as a guideline for all future activity in which this group would be involved. However, by holding such a convention they were also making a clear and emphatic statement not only to the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, to which they had all previously been members, but also to all the world, that, because of LCMS's deviating course, these 7 congregations were taking the last step in their state of confessional protest by breaking all ties with their previous synod and forming a new group based on true scriptural fellowship and unity of the Spirit "in the bond of peace." Eph 4:3.

Prior to the November 1, 1971, organizing convention this group which took the acronym FAL was divided into two lesser united groups known as the Conference of Authentic Lutherism on the West Coast(CAL) and the Free Association for Authentic Lutheranism in the Mid-West. In very general terms we might say that the reasen these two groups were organized prior to 1971 was first of all doctrinal; and secondly, to establish a

united front for the up-coming LCMS Convention in Milwaukee of that year in which they might present to the conference an ultimatum with regard to scriptural and confessional requirements that needed to be met. However, subsequent to the Milwaukee convention, and in particular the November 1 "constituting convention," saw its reason for organizing as again twofold: first, doctrinal; but secondly, to provide a haven completely separate from LCMS to which conscious-bound Christians and congregations could seek refuge. This is brought out in a FAL tract which read:

> (There are) Lutheran congregations and individuals today who for conscience reasons are withdrawing from synodical membership in heterodox Lutheran bodies(impure, unfaithful to Scripture) and declaring themselves independent. The FAL wishes to aid those who are contemplating such a step.

Thus, while we see a shift in secondary reasons of FAL's existence, with the Milwaukee convention serving as the focal point, yet one reason remained constant throughout their history--the doctrinal issues that were at the heart of the matter. Furthermore, while the events which occured subsequent to November 1, 1971, in regard to this second reason--their success and failure, their hopes and aspirations, their internal conflicts and problems, their dissolution four years later,--is beyond the scope of this paper and has been treated substantially by my colleague, Daniel J. Kolosovsky, in a paper entitled, "The Dissolution of the Federation for Authentic Lutheranism: A Compendium;" however, the purpose of this paper is to examine carefully the first and foremost reason for FAL's existence, i.e. those constant doctrinal conflicts between the members of FAL and their previous synodical affiliation the LCMS.

What doctrinal issues existed between the two? On what scriptural evidence did the two base their arguments? Why did the members of FAL find it necessary to separate themselves from their brethren? These are some of the questions we wish to answer in this paper. This, or course, will not be an exhaustive examination of every scriptural point of argument involved in the controversies(less this church history paper turn into a dogmatics paper) but a general overview of the scriptural arguments in connection with subsequent action of the part of both LCMS and FAL is, I think, of value since first of all these struggles are not so different from the ones experienced in our own synod(WELS) 10 years earlier to FAL's constituting convention, and secondly, because differences in dogmatics and exegesis will always be the source of controversies and struggles, and the better equipped we are in dealing with these the greater the possibility of avoiding them. For the most part the doctrinal position of FAL will be determined from their offical publication, "Sola Scriptura," which was published bi-monthly beginning with a March-April edition in 1970.

The first doctrinal controversy that eventually led to the formation of FAL was, of course, the doctrine on the infallibility of Scripture. That this truly was at the heart of the matter for FAL members is evident by the title they gave their official publication, "Sola Scriptura," and the great number of articles(especially in the earlier editions) which dealt directly with just this matter. FAL viewed Holy Scripture as the Word of God, not merely containing the Word of God, and whole-heartedly supported Scripture's "normative authority." For this they

appealed to Scripture itself which testified to its infallibility and inerrancy in passages like 2 Tm 3:16, Jn 10:35, and others. Along with these passages FAL also appealed to Luther and the Confessions. Although the Confessions devoted no special article to the subject of sola Scriptura, FAL pointed out that they "demonstrate it from beginning to end."("Sola Scriptura" Vol. 1, #1b, p.4) The Confessions described how Scripture is "the only rule and norm according to which all doctrines and teachers alike must be appraised and judged" and "the only judge, rule and norm according to which as the only touchstone all doctrines should and must be understood and judged as good or evil, right or wrong."(Formula of Concord, Epitome I,1,3) Luther also indicated his understanding of the authority and inerrancy of Scripture when he wrote:

> The Holy Scripture is the Word of God, written and(as I might say) lettered and formed in letters, just as Christ is the eternal Word of God cloaked in human flesh. And just as Christ was thought of and dealt with by the world(in der Welt gehalten und gehandelt) so is the written Word of God, too.(WA 48, 31, 4; SL IX, 1770)

The FAL members were convinced that their stand on the inerrancy and authority of Scripture was no different from Luther and the earlier reformers' stand. Furthermore, they felt that this position was carried down through the history of confessional Lutheranism. While being severly attacked by many ever since the time of Barth they felt that the LCMS had, until recently, maintained this same doctrine as exemplified by C.F.W. Walther:

> It is absolutely necessary that we maintain the doctrine of inspiration as taught by our orthodox dogmaticians. If the possibility that Scripture contained the least error were admitted, it would become the business of man to sift the truth from error. That places man over Scripture and Scripture is no longer the source and norm

> of doctrine...(and) introduces a rationalistic germ into theology and infects the whole body of doctrine. (quoted in "Sola Scriptura" from Lutheran Loyality, July, 1951, p. 14)

Thus, we perhaps see why FAL chose the title "authentic" Lutheranism. They viewed their doctrine of Scripture as being the correct exposition of Scripture itself and which has historically and traditionally been upheld from Luther and the "old" Lutheran church, in particular the LCMS, until the very recent past. This is in contrast to the now "unauthentic" Lutheranism exemplified in particular by Barth, the ALC and the tendency of many in the LCMS.

FAL rejected the liberal position of modern biblical interpretation which has led to a denial of certain parts of Scripture's content on the grounds that some things, e.g. geography, history, poetry etc., are not ultimately important in theological discussions; that The Scriptures can contain error and one must sift through these falsehoods to find the real saving message. The decrease of emphasis in the objective propositions of Scripture has then turned them into a subjective, existential experience as described by Barth, "The human side of its(the Church's) life with the Bible can consist only in the fact that it prays that the Bible may be the Word of God here and now, that there may take place that work of the Holy Spirit...(which is) the divine side of the Church's life."(Carl Barth, Church Dogmatics, p. 514).

It is precisely this theology which FAL saw as permeating the ALC position on Scripture which can be found in many of the writings of its officials, theologians and pastors. Almost all of the recently published ALC liturature, periodical or book form, has been committed to the neo-orthodox line of thinking

which allows one to call the Bible the "Word of God" and yet not actually mean it in so many words. This is true of The Bible: Book of Faith, Theological Perspectives, When God Speaks, A Reexamination of Lutheran and Reformed Traditions, etc. While the offical doctrinal position on the Scriptures of the ALC may appear completely orthodox, FAL recognized that the same traditional words were used under the disguise of different meanings. For example, ALC maintains the doctrine "that the Bible is absolutely and infallibily right in all matters pertaining to its saving proclamation, that is, as regards the 'redemptive word,' but fallible and subject to the usual human foibles and failings on other matters not central to salvation."("Sola Scriptura," Vol. 1, #1b, p. 19) This obviously is different from the traditional understanding of the word "infallible." Furthermore, FAL was quick to point out the position of the then ALC president, Dr. Fred A. Schoitz as follows:

> He frankly disavous that 'a committment to textual inerrancy'(making no distinction between the original autographs and lasting manuscripts) is required by the doctrine of Scripture's inspiration and then tries to throw people off guard by warning that the support of inerrancy is a virtual denial of theology of the cross. ("Sola Scriptura," Vol. 1, #1b, p. 6)

FAL, of course, was greatly interested in the doctrinal stand of the ALC because of the events which transpired before(and directly effected) the decision of FAL members to drop out of the Missouri Synod. Two events stand out as particularly noteworthy and for FAL particularly disturbing. The first was in 1965 when the joint commissioners of the LCMS and the ALC produced an essay, "The Lutheran Confessions and Sola Scriptura,"(1965) which framed a bases for altar and pulpit fellowship between the two

synods. In this essay the commissioners managed to avoid the controversial issues of the doctrine of Scripture by restricting themselves in such a way that the elements dividing Lutheran Churches could be--and were--avoided. As Eugene F. Klug remarded:

> The LCMS-ALC Commissioners' essay, "The Lutheran Confessions and Sola Scriptura,"(1965) skated around the question, affirming only that "the Scriptures are God's address to man." It did not make plain that the Scriptures are the Word of God ontologically, this is, is their very being, in their very form as God-given text as well as functionally or dynamically, because they bring God's Word to the hearts and minds of sinners to work faith. By stressing only the latter point, the essay, wittingly or unwittingly, played into the hands of neo-orthodox thinking.("Sola Scriptura," Vol. 1, #1b, p. 4)

Secondly, and probably the one single most important event which led to the organization which would come to be known as FAL occured at the July 11-18, 1969, 48th Regular Convention of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod at Denver, Colorado, in which the LCMS Denver Fellowship Resolution 3-15 was passed on the second try by the vote of 522 "for," 438 "against." The resolution in essence is summarized by the second "Be it resolved," which states, "That with joy and praise to God the Synod herewith formally declares itself to be in altar and pulpit fellowship with The American Lutheran Chruch..."(Convention Proceedings, 1969, p. 98) This was the Resolution that provided the emotional and doctrinal stimuli that told the men of FAL that something drastic needed to be done, and that "something" was the eventual leaving of the Synod. It was a particularly bitter pill to swallow since the "authentic" Lutherans within the Missouri Synod and all the conservatives in general had placed a great deal of confidence in Dr. Jacob A. Preus to lead their cause in this struggle. A few weeks prior to his election as LCMS President in Denver of that same convention Dr. Preus addressed a gathering of concerned

California Lutherans, some of whom would eventually become FAL Members, and told them that the Synod's proposed fellowship was unscriptural.("Sola Scriptura," Vol. 3,#6, p. 15) And yet after being elected President at Denver, "he called upon delegates to vote according to their conscience and promised to abide by the decision of this convention, pledging himself to use strenuous efforts to draw all Lutherans together."(Convention Proceedings, 1969, pp. 98-99) Then at a later assembly of conservative clergymen in Chicago(called the Labor Day Assembly, 1969) Dr. Preus told them to "cool it," forget the controversy and "get down to business."("Sola Scriptura," Vol. 3, #6, p. 15) The FAL men(and undoubtedly many others) felt that they had been betrayed by the one man they had put such great confidence and hope.

These two events were seen as steps taken by the LCMS in the direction of not simply compromising but divorcing the traditional doctrine of Scripture that had always been practiced within the LCMS and accepting the neo-orthodox position which was so dreaded by the men of FAL. That this position had already infiltrated the LCMS to a certain degree was generally known. For with editorial approval the"Concordia Theological Monthly," March, 1969, offered an article by Dr. Kent S. Knutson, the newly appointed president of Wartbury Seminary, on "The Authority of Scripture," which in the final analysis argues against sola Scriptura by stating:

> The authority is in its material principle, in its substance, not in the character of its form. In the Scriptures God speaks to us His judgmental and His redemptive word, and we hear Him speak. That is its power. That is its Authority.(p. 164)

Furthermore, five years earlier in the October, 1964, issue of "Concordia Theological Monthly" Richard Jungkuntz presented an article on "An Approach to the Exegesis of John 10:34-36," (pp. 556ff) in which he gave an interpretation that could very easily be understood as supporting the neo-orthodox view of Scripture. This text contains those simple words, "The Scripture cannot be broken," and have always been used to speak of verbal inspiration and inerrancy of the Bible. It is understood in the sense that the Word of God is given to men in such a way that it is an unbroken and unbreakable unity with divine authority. It is a Word that man cannot or will not break. This interpretation is firmly established by the context and line of thought. However, Jungkuntz attempts to demonstrate that John uses the term "luoo," "broken," not in the sense of "break," but "to loose, to undo." And on the bases of Mt 5:17-18 he concludes that "luoo" must be taken to mean "render incapable of fulfillment." The statement then of Jesus would read, "Scripture cannot be kept from fulfillment." Any liberal could agree with that statement.

Thus, we see the tendency to tolerate liberal doctrine within the LCMS even at this early date. The practice of doctrinal discipline at the same time was for all practical purposes non-existent. This was true prior to the Denver convention and it was also true subsequent to the convention in such documents by LCMS as "Openness and Trust."(1971) This document was a definitive statement announcing the refusal to practice doctrinal discipline. The document clearly challenged the Bible-based beliefs of the LCMS of the past. The "Openness

and Trust" document declared that "We specifically hold that differences concerning: creation, the Lord's Supper, the infallibility of Scripture...are not to be the basis for inclusion or exclusion of people among the true disciples of Jesus Christ." Furthermore, when discipline was exercised it usually was a matter of too little too late. The Concordia Theological Seminary of recent years is a prime example. When Dr. J.A.O. Preus released his 160 page report in 1972 he noted that a majority of the synod's St. Louis Concordia Seminary professors were teaching contrary to their church's doctrine as found by a Fact-Finding Committee which had been investigating faculty positions for more than two years. One of the finds of this committee was, "A false doctrine of the matter of Holy Scriptures coupled with methods of interpretation which effectually erode the authority of the Scriptures." It appeared that an honest attempt was made in "cleaning house" of this aberration as indicated by the eventual appearence of Seminex. However, in the mean time countless students who graduated from that Seminary are now full-fledge pastors. No action was taken with them. And furthermore, how could a whole seminary faculty "go bad" before the evidence of an existing problem is ever recognized?

Thus, we can say that the toleration of the LCMS with regard to liberal doctrines of Scripture was known to exist by most even prior to Denver convention. But for the men of FAL the "straw that broke the camel's back" was the Denver Convention and Resolution 3-15 because it was a conscious and deliberate announcement of fellowship with a known heterodox position on this doctrine. The inerrancy of Scripture was a doctrine which the men of FAL cherished very much, because it was firmly based

on Scripture and had been faithfully taught by the Confessions and earlier LCMS history. Any deviation from this stance could not be tolerated. It was one of the two important doctrinal issues which led to the breaking with LCMS and the 1971 constituting Convention of FAL.

Any attempt to present reasons for these men not leaving earlier would be purely speculative. However, perhaps it can be summed up in one word, "hope." Where there is hope there usually is patience. They hoped that the neo-orthodox tendencies would be recognized for what they really were. They hoped that the proper disciplinary action would be taken to remove such tendencies. As long as this hope existed the thought of severing ties with the Synod were postponed. However, the Denver convention for the men of FAL marked the breaking point because now, with the adoption of Resolution 3-15, a second scriptural principle besides the doctrine on the inerrancy of Scripture came into play, and that was the doctrine of fellowship. The two, of course, are closely tied together. Which one of the two played the greater role in the eventual formation of FAL is really an academic question. It was inevitable that both would become important issues.

One of the important axioms verified from the whole FAL experience is the fact that where doctrinal controversy exists it is the result of careless and faulty exegesis on the part of the errorists. This was briefly shown in regard to the doctrine on Scripture and John 10:34. In connection with the fellowship issue that confronted the men of FAL this point is once again verified with the passage Rm 16:17. We reproduce it here in both the Greek and English for easy reference:

Parakaloo de humas, adelfoi, skipein tous tas
I beseech now you brethren to mark the(those) the

dichostasias kai ta skandala para taen didachaen
divisions and the offenses contrary to the doctrine

haen emathete poiountas, kai ekklinete ap' autous.
which you learned are making and turn away from them.

The "conservative" translation based on sound exegesis would suggest the following translation: "Now I beseech you, brethren, mark those who cause the divisions and the offenses contrary to the doctrine which you learned; and avoid them." In this translation the phrase "contrary to the doctrine which you have learned" is used as an adjective to modify and describe the "divisions" and "offenses." The sense is this: doctrinal deviations from the standard are forbidden. However, a "liberal" translation would read as follows: "Now I beseech you, brethren mark those who, contrary to the doctrine which you have learned, cause divisions and offenses; and avoid them." Here the phrase "contrary to the doctrine which you have learned" is made to modify the activity of causing divisions and offenses. It is understood as a prepositional phrase used as an adverb, and the sense being that the making of divisions is forbidden, while nothing is said about doctrinal standards. After a much detailed and involved exegesis of this passage by both sides(which is too extensive to discuss here) the men of FAL, upon the bases of sound grammatical interpretation, opted for the first understanding and came to the conviction that Rm 16:17 forbids "any deviation whatever from the standard delivered to the saints by God's uniquely inspired prophets and apostles; that every heresy, large or small, is to be condemned, and that no heterodoxy ever be given recognition, standing or toleration in the

confessionally faithful community."("Sola Scriptura," Vol. 1, #4, p. 11) In FAL's estimation, however, the LCMS had shown evidence of supporting the second(liberal) interpretation of Rm 16:17; in particular, by two recent documents. The first was the official statement made by the LCMS's"Report and Recommendations of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations" part three--"Theology of Fellowship" which stated:

1. Christians must be on guard against disruptors.
2. Such men are not victims of part disruptions, but cause new ones.
3. "The doctrine which ye have learned" is the "Gospel."
4. Therefore, the troublmakers are not erring Christians, but people who attack the church's very foundations, namely the Gospel.("Sola Scriptura," Vol. 1, #4, p. 12)

Overtones of the liberal interpretation of Rm 16:17 permeate throughout these four points. Point one places the emphasis on the activity of disruption rather than its content. Point three gives a new definition to the words "doctrine which ye have learned," which is foreign to Paul. The commission's definition is in a "wider" sense to mean the minimum amount of doctrine necessary for salvation. That this indeed is the understanding is brought out in the concluding point four which implies that the "troublemakers" are not those who advocate heterodoxy but only total heretics. Thus excluding from fellowship only those who are actually outside the church by totally denying its beliefs. But is this what Paul had in mind by the phrase? Not at all! From the context of the chapter it is obvious that the "doctrine" to which Paul refers is the content of "all" that the Lord commanded the apostles. And "every" doctrine which destroys directly or indirectly the Gospel is to "be avoided."("Sola Scriptura,"

Vol. 1, #5, pp. 14-16)

The second document was the "A Call to Openness and Trust," from which we have already quoted and in which we see:

> a pluralistic stance toward articles of doctrine, such as the article de Scriptura(of Scripture) and the article deferring the manner of Christ's presence in the sacrament of the altar; for a tolerance of a trend toward situational ethics, itc. All this is said not to disrupt the unity in the Gospel."("Sola Scriptura," Vol. 1, #4, p. 13)

Thus we see how the exegesis of certain scriptural passages, in this case Rm 16:17 in particular, had a direct bearing on the outward practices of both LCMS and FAL. In the case of LCMS, perhaps it was the desire for certain outward practices, in this case unionism, which dictated their exegesis. This is a direct deviation of the "sola Scriptura" principle. And when Scripture is deemphasized and placed in the background in favor of secular advantage, then false notions will be allowed to exist. FAL recognized this deemphasis, for it was earlier substantiated at the 1965 LCMS synodical convention in Detroit under Resolution 1-01F which stated that:

> We recognize that the Christian lives in the tension between his own imperfect understanding of God's truth and her knowledge that in spite of errors and divisions he is joined together in Christ's body with all who truly believe in its Head. The Christian lives in the tension between Christ's lordship which is perfect, and his own discipleship, which is not."(Proceedings of the 46th Regular Convention of the LCMS, p. 81)

When Scripture is viewed as no longer being able to serve as a lamp and a guide to discern between truth and error, the error will persist.

These were some of the differences in scriptural interpretation and church practice which existed between FAL and the liberal element of the LCMS and which eventually led to a break in fellowship. There is one more aspect, however, to the FAL story in connection with differences in fellowship

practices at which we wish to look. This was not the direct result of any exegetical differences--although perhaps it could be seen as a difference in the implementation of the words "and avoid them." It existed among the conservative element of the LCMS subsequent to the Denver convention, and within the FAL Synod itself both before and after the break with Missouri was made. This conservative element of which the men of FAL played an active part before their break was for all practical purposes in agreement concerning the vital issues of the day and the exegesis of pertinent scriptural passages which applied to those issues. However, just after the Denver convention we see three different attitudes developing within this element. Some wished simply to ignore this crises that had developed. They felt that everybody was still holding the same beliefs in the Synod, that there was the same unity and unanimity of doctrine that there was in the early days of the Synod. Others took the position that, granted, they did not have unity of doctrine, but the Synod was the most important thing. That regardless of deviations from the doctrinal stand, one must under all conditions remain within the Synod. A large number of the conservatives took this position. Finally, there were those who recognized doctrinal diversity in the Synod and knew that this diversity was dead wrong. Those who adopted this position, inorder to maintain a good conscience, found it necessary to enter a confessional protest against the problem with the church. To use the expression which is employed in Lutheran theology, it was essential to enter into "status confessionis," i.e. to go into the confessional state of protest over against a problem

which is not being cleared up as it ought be. The term itself and the procedure of declaring oneself in "status confessionis" was based on Article X of the Epitome of the Formula of Concord, Antithesis 3, which declares:

> We reject and condemn as false and contrary to God's Word...that in a time of persecution and when a public confession is required one may make concessions to or come to an understanding with the enemies of the Holy Ghost...in such indifferent things and ceremonies."(Triglotta, p. 828)

In the LCMS some 246 pastors, 133 teachers and 294 laymen declared themsleves to be in "status confessionis" immediately after the Denver Convention. Also, the Lutheran Free Churches of Germany, France, Belguim and Finland entered the same protesting state at that time. However, within this large group two views of the meaning of the "status confessionis" were advanced.

One view regarded it as a declaration of protest against doctrinal deviation while fellowship relations would continue according to the status quo. The other, which was comprised mostly of FAL members, regarded it as a formal declaration of protest against doctrinal deviation which necessitated an ending of fellowship with those who caused divisions contrary to orthodox doctrine. In other words, if the circumstances which called forth the protest were not corrected in due time, the implication was that the protest would lead to the severing of fellowship relations. It is obvious that this latter interpretation was the position of the men of FAL who left the LCMS and organized their own Synod. It was also ~~true~~ true for those pastors and congregations who left the LCMS and either became independent or eventually joined an orthodox Synod. This occured frequently both before and after FAL made their move(I personally can

remember when my home church, Trinity, in Crete, Illinois, left the LCMS in 1961, and several years later joined the WELS). This action was the result of taking the words "and avoid them" seriously. It certainly was not an easy thing to do from the standpoint of personal ties and relationships, but the men of FAL and many other ex-Missouriites followed the advise of C.F.W. Walther who said at the origin of the Missouri Synod:

> Never allow the Synod to become your highest value, If the Synod ever deviates from Christian truth and you can't clean it up let the Synod go. The important thing is God's Word!"("Sola Scriptura," Vol. 1, #5, p.4)

The final chapter of the "status confessionis" controversy was written within FAL itself in 1974. Some of the congregations and pastors which had broken from LCMS and who were now members of FAL continued to practice pulpit and altar fellowship with those pastors and congregations who were still members of LCMS and who confessed the same doctrine as FAL, but who had not broken with LCMS. Six congregations in particular within FAL were found practicing this type of "selective fellowship." However, it is obvious that the majority of FAL members did not view this practice as consistent with proper fellowship practices. The FAL position in the matter was in agreement with W.M. Oesch who wrote:

> Therefore pulpit and altar fellowship with protesters must not be practiced until they have reached the full status confessionis, that is, until they have reached the stage at which they refrain from altar and pulpit fellowship with their deviating fellows as the ultimate protest.("Sola Scriptura," Vol. 1, #4, pp. 23-24)

We have attempted to prove several points in this paper. First, the main reason for the men of FAL leaving the LCMS and organizing their own was doctrinal. Secondly, those doctrinal reasons were

primarily twofold: the inerrancy of Scripture and fellowship practices. Thirdly, the doctrinal differences and the subsequent church practices were the result of different interpretations placed upon key passages of Scripture, in particular, John 10:35 and Rm 16:17. Fourthly, the "status confessionis" practices with the conservative element differed because of differences of opinions as to how far it should be carried through. Fifthly, the men of FAL are an inspiration and example for all "authentic" Lutherans who value the Word of God above the word of men.