

PRESIDENT'S PERSONAL LETTER

Dear Fellow Servants in Christ,

For the sake of those of you who were interested in coming but unable to do so because of distance or circumstance, I believe it is my duty to give some detail re the recent consultation in Toowoomba. In doing so I emphasise that I write as an individual, with all the limitations of my humanity which may well include such weaknesses ("errors"??) as theological and emotional bias, imprecision in use of words, lapses of memory etc. In other words, like Peter of old, I was there, I heard everything that was said (apart from some of the excellent personal lunch-break discussions), but what I understood may not be what you understood and may differ in accordance with our own respective humanities.

The Facts

- Just over 30 of us gathered at Good Shepherd Church, an excellent venue, not least being the constant reminder of our Good Shepherd's presence via the simple yet impressive symbolism expressed in such a variety of ways. (I wonder what He thought of some of His silly sheep in those two days – but that's already an opinion, and I must keep to facts!)
- We were excellently served by our hosts, the members of the Congregation, and we owe a great deal to Peter Wiebusch for his warm and capable chairmanship (excellent, in my opinion!)
- As directed, Mel Grieger was the only formal presenter of material. Dr Hebart was not able to come, and it was mutually agreed that it was unnecessary to invite C. Koch. Mel had very little time to prepare his material, and no time to edit it, but was basically satisfied that what was presented represented his position.
- The first paper, some 24 pages, was a response to Dr Hebart's three papers presented at Cooloom. It was a very intense response, claiming, in many instances that Dr Hebart's views either bordered on, or directly constituted, heresy.
- The second paper, somewhat shorter, set out to clarify issues and highlight points of possible controversy re the Word of God. It covered sections on inspiration and authority, inerrancy, divine-human nature of Scripture, formal and material principle, dogma, the Canon, Law and Gospel, re[a]son and faith.
- The last hour of the second day was given over to summary and a discussion on pastoral ethics, particularly as it relates to the wider disseminating of material which was intended for pastors only.

Analysis – Or opinions (and therefore subject to disagreement!)

- As anticipated, two days proved not nearly long enough to finalise any point in terms of satisfactory conclusions or understandings. Most points in the first paper could not be debated at length, and many not touched on at all, not even to e[s]tablish whether Mel had even clearly understood the point that Dr Hebart was making. Likewise with the second, most points were inadequately dealt with, and only three sections were even presented owing to lack of time. These three were inspiration, inerrancy and formal-material principle.
- This meant that assumptions were made and conclusions formed more on what was not said, or at least on statements made that were either inadequately expressed or partially misunderstood. So often we hear only via our prejudices – we are all guilty of this – and Satan uses this to devastating

effect in subverting the truth! If only we could really learn to “put the best construction on everything”!

- There were many fine theological statements made in the discussion, Mel’s included, and it is a pity these could not be preserved. It is a pity, also, that some were clearly not understood, which seemed to indicate a different theological mind-set – even a different semantic framework – which again raises the question, how can anyone stand in judgement over the opinions of another before being absolutely sure that he has understood what the other has said? As examples, I thought I had sufficiently grasped Mel’s and Vern’s application of logic and the “domino theory” to understand their way of thinking and arriving at conclusions. However, when in recent personal discussions they assure me that I’ve got it all wrong, I have to accept their assertion and start again!

[p. 2] - As with many others, I believed that the points made in discussion had gone a long way towards dispelling the fears some have held about so called “liberal” theology in the Church. As I heard the speakers, at least, everyone did affirm the total authority of Scripture; that the whole Bible is God’s Word; that this Word is the only source of true knowledge of God and His total message of salvation! No one spoke of errors in the Scriptures, and I believe it was made quite clear that freedom in Christ did not mean freedom from the Will and directions of God and His Word.

- It came as something of a shock, therefore, to be confronted right near the end with the claim that men had not spoken their minds, or had not stated what they really believed! This raises one of the most serious questions of all, viz a grave if not total breakdown of trust. Does it mean that men are no longer to be believed when, for example, they affirm the above points and solemnly declare, “This is what I believe”?

If, for instance, I am one of those whose word cannot be trusted, then no matter with what seeming conviction or clarity I may still preach the Gospel, or no matter with what earnestness I pray that the Holy Spirit may preserve me and the Church in all truth, some men apparently know that it is not so! I am deceiving the Church, and my deception is all the more dangerous because it comes in the guise of truth!

In all seriousness, Mel and Vern (and any others who feel the same), is this really what you believe about some of your brethren? If so, then, as I have always honoured your honesty and your desire for openness, I am now going to ask you to come out into the open.

In fact, I am going to open the way for you by asking you to expose what you claim to have discovered, viz a “conspiracy of silence” in the Church. If such a conspiracy does exist, then it must be exposed and rooted out so that Christ’s Church may be misled and deceived no longer. If, on the other hand, it does not exist, then, for the sake of all of us, as well as for the many members of the C[hur]ch who are being misled, the sooner this is realised the better.

For the sake of trust the truth must be established so that on the one side men no longer need to carry the burden of guilt, and on the other side innocent men are cleared of suspicion and accusation.

Brethren, I trust I am not being melodramatic. I am simply taking at face value the assertion that the only group within the Church that can be honoured and trusted is A.L.A. The conclusion appears to be that the L.C.A. has ceased to be “church”, and this becomes an impossible situation.

In conclusion, for this time at least, I again emphasise that I am writing personally and confidentially, especially as I have had to make personal references. Further, it is difficult for me to know exactly

how this reads to someone who wasn't there. I have endeavoured to cover as much as possible in limited space and that always involves the risk of being misunderstood. If, therefore, you have serious reservations about anything I have written, please come to me and not to others! The enclosed statement emanating from the Church Council is also to reinforce the pleas that matters are to be clarified at the pastoral level before to the whole Church.

Finally, I am not being devious when I make a plea for Mel and Vern. Your sincerity and conviction are beyond question, even though I am equally convinced that your views are in part misguided and in part highly exaggerated. Yet the very term "exaggeration" in itself recognises a degree of truth, and I do not mean to be patronising when I say that you are rendering us all a real service in drawing our attention to the need for greater precision and clarity in statements that are made concerning the Word of God and the Confessions.

Where Do We Go From Here?

While foreshadowing further consultations, I draw attention to the awaited statement to be issued by the Church (?) and the papers prepared by Dr Hamann.

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Church Council Resolution

Whereas dispute and the threat of disunity in the Church have on account of misunderstandings and disparate views respecting the theology of the Word and especially what the Theses of Agreement declare concerning it, and

Whereas the relevant authorities of the Church have been commissioned to prepare for publication an authoritative interpretation of the relevant theses of Agreement and their implications for current situations in the Church,

be it resolved that this Church Council instruct the President of the District

- a. to inform pastors and congregations of the District that such a statement is forthcoming; and
- b. to appeal to pastors and members of the congregations, pending the release of the said statement, to desist from promoting any particular interpretation of the relevant theses of Agreement, and to tolerate in Christian love brothers and sisters in Christ with interpretations seemingly divergent from their own; and
- c. to encourage pastors and members of the congregations, after the release of the said statement, to discuss the statement on the basis of the Sacred Scriptures; and
- d. to pray unabatingly that the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace may be preserved and the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ shared; and
- e. to write to the relevant authorities in the Church asking that the production of the said statement be regarded as a matter of urgency.

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Personal

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In conclusion, to touch again on the Word of God issue, there is, of course, much more that needs to be discussed and written. I, myself, would like to attempt an analysis of the formal-material principle issue, and if I can achieve this I will send it out in a future mailing. This could apply also to other areas that have been debated.

On the other hand, if you also wish to attempt something and send it to me, I would be happy to include any worthwhile statement that may be [h]elpful. Some of you may well have a greater gift than those who have written in putting things clearly and precisely, or in adding dimensions that we may have overlooked.

May the Lord have mercy on His poor Church – and its pastors! Since I believe, however, that the L.C.A. is still a valid part of His Kingdom, I know that the Holy Spirit will guard and keep us in the faith!

Yours in Christ,

Reinhard Mayer

L.C.A.Q.D./2/11/82/wm