FORMATION OF ONE CHURCH IN GERMANY. Luther and true Lutherans in Germany had distinguished themselves by their unswerving loyalty to the Scriptures. The Reformed, the followers of Zwingli and Calvin, ultimately allowed human reason to decide matters of doctrine. Sadly by the early 1800’s, the Lutheran church in Germany had departed to a large extent from the doctrines that Luther regarded as so precious. To many, human reason reigned supreme, Scripture was no longer looked upon as God’s Word and few knew the true way to salvation through Christ the Saviour. In the wars brought by Napoleon in the early 1800’s, much of Prussia was devastated by the many battles that were fought. But a very sincere King, Frederick William III, took the throne, with the desire to again make Prussia strong. In his desire to unify the country, he decided in 1817 to attempt to unify the church by uniting the Lutheran and Reformed Churches together to form the Evangelical Church (State Prussian Church).

COMPROMISE IN DOCTRINE OF LORD’S SUPPER. One of the differences between the Lutherans and Reformed was the doctrine of the Lord’s Supper. In 1830 the King ordered that a new church liturgy (Agenda) be used in the Union Church. The Lutherans believed Christ’s body and blood to be truly present in the Lord’s Supper. The Reformed declared that this was not so, the bread and the wine merely representing Christ’s body and blood. The Agenda proposed a compromise, using the words, “Christ said: This is My body; Christ said: This is My blood.” Each side could then understand these words as they pleased. There was no true unity in doctrine. Though many accepted this, true Lutherans were not prepared to accept such a false union and refused to be a part of the Union Church. The King decided to use coercive measures to force them to join. Churches were closed, pastors were dismissed from office and imprisoned, people were fined for attending true Lutheran services and some farmers were even forced to billet small groups of soldiers. Their faith meant so much to the faithful Lutherans that they refused to budge in the face of such persecution. Yet finally they began to yearn to travel to a place where they had religious freedom.

PASTOR KAVEL AND HIS FLOCK LEAVE GERMANY. Amongst the faithful Lutheran pastors was Pastor Kavel. He had trained at Berlin University, not an orthodox Seminary. He had belonged to the Union Church, but began reading the writings of Dr Scheibel, an orthodox Lutheran professor of Breslau University. This convinced him of his duty to leave the Union Church. He took up the idea of his members to leave Germany. He visited London, England, and there visited George Fife Angas, a wealthy British businessman, who offered to settle the persecuted Lutherans in Australia. Angas advanced money both for their fares, as well as for the purchase of land in the new colony. When the King allowed them to leave, they boarded barges in June 1838, and began their long journey to Hamburg harbour and finally to Australia.

SETTLEMENT IN ADELAIDE, SOUTH AUSTRALIA. The first of three boatloads having arrived at Port Adelaide, Pastor Kavel and his flock first settled at Klemzig on the Torrens River, now a suburb of Adelaide. The second boatload settled at Hahndorf, named in honour of their ship Captain, Hahn, who helped his passengers find this rich farming district. A third boatload settled at Glen Osmond. Pastor Kavel was faithful to his members and endeavoured to teach them the Word of God. He had learned the English language, and so was a great help in them settling the new country. However his training had not been soundly Lutheran, and thus he had a number of false ideas. His people chiefly were farmers, growing vegetable crops to sell in Adelaide. They took their religious life seriously, seeing to it that there was regular religious instruction in both church and home. The first Lutheran Convention in Australia was held in 1839 under a Gum Tree at Glen Osmond. At this Convention an Apostolic Constitution was adopted. Though it had some fine points, yet it also had unscriptural elements. Undue prominence was given to the office of elder, allowing them to rule the congregation, and Kavel would not regard someone as truly Lutheran who would not accept his Apostolic Constitution.

FRITZSCHE ARRIVES IN ADELAIDE. About this time, four missionaries from Dresden, Germany had been brought out by Mr Angas to help Christianise the aboriginals. Their names were Schuermann, Teichelmann, Meyer and Klose. They began mission work in South Australia, even setting up a school for the natives in the Adelaide area. Since they would not accept Kavel’s Apostolic Constitution, Kavel would not regard them as truly Lutheran. Meanwhile, Pastor Fritzschke, a sound Lutheran Pastor who had received a thorough, orthodox Lutheran training under Dr Scheibel, was encouraged by Pastor Kavel to travel with his flock to South Australia. He arrived in 1842, his members settling in Hahndorf, Lobethal, and in Bethany in the Barossa Valley. Fritzschke compensated for what Kavel lacked in sound Lutheran Theology. Much trouble was made by a man by name Krumnow, who tried to gather around him members of Kavel and Fritzschke. In due time he was excommunicated, and left to settle in Victoria in a communistic settlement he established.

TROUBLE LEADS TO SPLIT BETWEEN KAVEL AND FRITZSCHE. Three issues now arose between Kavel and Fritzschke which eventually lead to a split between them. The first of these was the Apostolic Constitution, which Fritzschke also was unhappy with, but was prepared to patiently deal with in love. Secondly, Kavel had false millenialistic ideas on which he refused to budge. Finally, at the 1846 Convention in Bethany, Kavel had raised 6 protests against the Lutheran Confessions, passages with which he said he could not agree. At the Convention, Kavel objected to the attendance of the
FIRST TRAINING OF PASTORS IN AUSTRALIA/ CONFESSIONAL UNION. In due time the Dresden Missionaries assisted Pastor Fritzsche in serving his congregations. However Fritzsche saw the need to train other pastors for the Lord’s work. From 1845-1855, a seminary was set up by him at Lobethal, the building still standing today. Three men, Oster, Henzel and Strempel were given a thorough, orthodox Lutheran training by Fritzsche, and became pastors in the Evangelical Lutheran Synod in Australia, as the Fritzsche group later became known. Meanwhile both Kavel (1860) and Fritzsche (1863) died. Both groups decided to meet to bring about a union. Their purpose was jointly to establish a mission in Central Australia amongst the Aborigines (Lake Killalpaninna). Sadly, this union was not based on a complete settlement of matters of doctrine. The millenium was effectively looked upon as an Open Question. This Confessional Union lasted from 1864 to 1874 when the Kavel group went into fellowship with other liberal Lutheran churches in South Australia and Victoria. The Fritzsche group (ELSA) could not accept this as Scriptural and severed the Confessional Union.

CONTACT WITH MISSOURI SYNOD/ EXPANSION OF ELSA. The ELSA had been receiving ministers from the Hermannsburg Mission Institute in Germany. Though they were on the whole sound, they were inflicted with pietism, an undue emphasis on the Christian life. Other liberal Lutheran Synods in South Australia and Victoria received pastors from Basle, Switzerland (thoroughly liberal), and Neuendettelsau, Germany (Open Questions principal). In the 1880’s, the ELSA made contact with the orthodox Missouri Synod in America, founded by Dr Walther. ELSA pastors subscribed to their church papers, were instructed by the fine doctrinal articles, Australian men trained in Missouri Seminaries, and in due time pastors and Seminary professors were called from America to serve in Australia. Missouri men who made their mark on the ELSA were Dr C F Graebner, Prof Koch, Dr Janzow, and Dr Nickel. Thus Missouri had a strengthening affect on the doctrinal position of the ELSA. In the late 1890’s, the ELSA had a College and Seminary at Murtoa, Victoria, where Pastor Peters, writer of The Judge is at the Door, was principal. In 1904, this Seminary was transferred to Adelaide, becoming Concordia Seminary. Director was Prof C F Graebner, other teachers being Profs G C Koch, Zschech and Winkler. About this time congregations belonging to the ELSA were forming in Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland.

HEIDENREICH CONTROVERSY. In 1877, the ELSA had established a mission in central Australia on the Finke River, called Herrmannsburg Mission Station. After a number of years the ELSA could not continue to support the Herrmannsburg mission. It was purchased by the congregations of Pastor Heidenreich, Bethany, and resold to the Immanuel Synod (Kavel’s group). Heidenreich, contrary to the teaching of the ELSA, agreed to support financially this mission, now belonging to a heterodox Lutheran church. Their sinful action caused great controversy. Finally it resulted in a Convention at Eudunda in 1902, at which Pastor Nickel presented a fine essay on Church Fellowship. The matter was resolved at this Convention when fellowship was severed with the Heidenreichs. The Heidenreich group remained independent until they joined the UELCA in 1926.

FORMATION OF UELCA. In the early 1900’s, apart from the ELSA, there were 5 other Lutheran Synods, 2 in Queensland, one in Victoria and 2 in South Australia. They were all obtaining pastors mostly from Germany. However due to German hatred connected with World War I, in 1919 the Commonwealth Government banned persons of German nationality coming to Australia. There was a need to establish a Seminary to train their own pastors in Australia. But all of these synods were too small to undertake such a venture. Pastor Leidig from the Immanuel Synod in South Australia encouraged talks between the various synods towards a union of all 5 synods. Since there were major differences in doctrine that held them apart, it was proposed that they simply declare such matters Open Questions, in other words agree to disagree agreeably. Thus, in 1921, the UELCA was formed on the basis of the evil Open Questions Theory. Shortly after, Immanuel College and Seminary was established in Adelaide, which after the union to form the LCA became Luther Seminary.

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN ELSA AND UELCA. After 1926 there were only 2 Lutheran bodies in Australia. In 1928 negotiations between the two bodies were attempted. However they broke up because the differences were too great. In what did these differences consist? The UELCA taught falsely in the following matters: Open Questions, Holy Scriptures, the Last Things, the Millenium, Antichrist, Conversion of Israel, Church and Ministry, Election, Christ as the God-man, Attitude to the Lutheran Confessions, Sunday, Church Fellowship and Engagement. These differences were clearly recognised by both churches.

A CHANGE IN THE ELSA (ELCA). Already in 1930, Prof Zschech made the comment to Pastor Kleinig, “We (the ELSA) are no longer the old ones. A different spirit is entering our church.” In 1926 Dr Hamaan (snr) was called as professor to Concordia Seminary, Adelaide. Being a highly educated man, he soon was highly respected by the ELSA. But sadly he was infected with a false view on the doctrine of Church Fellowship. In 1941 he wrote an article in the Theological Magazine of his church proposing a change in position on the doctrine of church fellowship. In regard to Rom 16:17-18 he claimed that the command, “Mark and Avoid,” should no longer be applied to all false teachers, but only to those who can be proven to be unbelievers. This false position was accepted by the ELCA (its new name) in 1948, at a Pastoral Conference held at Jindera,
OUTWARD UNION ACHIEVED/ FORMATION OF LCA. After this change in position of 1948, the ELCA quickly gave way to the UELCA’S position in one doctrinal matter after another. A document called the Theses of Agreement was drawn up which supposedly settled the differences between the two churches. However it was based on the evil Open Questions Principle, having cleverly worded statements which allowed each side to retain their former teachings. This is clearly seen by Theses I, para 4 (e), which states that differences in doctrine need not hinder fellowship between the churches. The Theses of Agreement were adopted by the UELCA in 1956 and ELCA in 1959. However union did not occur for another 7 years because of the different overseas bodies with which both churches were in fellowship. The UELCA, for example, was a member of the LWF (Lutheran World Federation). This was a clear sign that there was no true unity between them. Finally in 1965, the Document of Union was drawn up which proposed that both churches cut their overseas fellowships, in order that union could proceed. Differences in these matters were declared to be Open Questions, and the suggestion made that they be settled after union by the united church. Both churches accepted this document in 1965, resulting in the declaration of fellowship in Nov 1965, and formation of the LCA in 1966. This was a sad day for true Lutheranism in Australia.

FORMATION OF ELCR. To the events just described, only one faithful pastor from the ELCA objected and was prepared, taking his stand on Scripture, to leave the now heterodox ELCA. This was Pastor F G Kleinig, who had been trained in Concordia Seminary, ELSA, graduating in 1924. Recognising that the ELCA had departed from Scripture, he and a number of solid lay Christians refused to be a part of the LCA. A number of independent Lutheran congregations were formed at Kumbia, Murgon, Maryborough, Gympie and Woombye, Queensland, who called Pastor Kleinig to be their shepherd. In March-May, 1966, a number of meetings were held, which resulted in the formation of the Evangelical Lutheran Congregations of the Reformation (ELCR), Pastor Kleinig being their sole pastor. The ELCR was characterised by love for and loyalty to Christ and the pure Word, adherence to pure Lutheran teaching, and out of love to Jesus the leading of Godly lives. Within a short time a church paper Steadfast was begun, a young people’s organisation Lutherleague was established and regular conventions held.

CALLING OF PASTOR/CONTROVERSY. Within a short time the need was seen to provide assistance for Pastor Kleinig in his huge workload. A pastor named Keith Hunter in 1967 was called from the LCR in America (its members were formerly members of the Missouri Synod). The ELCR had sought and obtained fellowship with the LCR in 1966. Pastor Hunter served ELCR congregations at Maryborough, Gympie, Woombye and later Brisbane. However the matter of the wearing of the head covering in public worship arose, Pastor Hunter refusing to support the position taken by the ELCR. This lead he and about 40 members to sever fellowship with the ELCR in 1971. In the following year, the ELCR severed fellowship with the LCR in America. For a time the Hunter group remained independent, in due time calling pastors from America to serve them, and finally forming the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Australia.

FURTHER CONTROVERSY. Sadly after these events, the devil did not leave the ELCR alone. Audley Grieger, a lay missionary from the LCA, left and in 1971 was accepted into membership in the ELCR. He was appointed as a vicar of the ELCR while he began theological studies for the ministry under Pastor Kleinig. However problems soon arose with him in the area of worldly indecent dress of women and long hair of men. Pastor Kleinig preached and taught concerning the matter, as well as writing a fine essay. To the application of this Grieger together with his family objected, leaving in 1973. He formed the Orthodox Evangelical Lutheran Church (OELC), of which he is the only pastor.

FURTHER PASTORS TRAINED. In 1972 Student Bryce Winter began theological studies under Pastor Kleinig, being ordained on July 5, 1975. In this same year Pastor Kleinig retired from the ministry, but continued on as a theological professor for the training of students. In 1976 Student Gavin Winter began studies for the ministry under Pastors Kleinig and Bryce Winter, being ordained on June 29, 1980. For a time both pastors together served all the congregations of the ELCR, however in 1983 Pastor Bryce Winter was called to serve Kingaroy and Toowoomba congregations, with Pastor Gavin Winter asked to serve Brisbane, Lowood and Woombye congregations. A sad occurrence was a doctrinal dispute over the use of a Catholic Campsite in 1983, which lead to a number of members leaving, together with Pastor Kleinig who had then been retired for 8 years. Pastor Kleinig died in 1987. About 1990, a group of congregations left the LCA for doctrinal reasons and formed the Australian Evangelical Lutheran Church (AELC), Pastors C Priebbenow, M Grieger and V Grieger serving their members.

FURTHER EXPANSION. In 1977 a congregation joined the ELCR in Lowood. As well, preaching places at Biloela, Hervey Bay and Cairns (Qld), Wairalda (NSW), Melbourne and Nhill (Vic), Adelaide and Naracoorte (SA) and Burnie and Deloraine (Tas) are presently being served. May God in His mercy grant that the ELCR continue to remain faithful to pure Lutheran teaching, that through God’s Word souls be rescued from sin and kept in the true faith to eternal life.

Lutheran Synods in Australia at present are:- LCA, ELSA, OELC, AELC and ELCR.

GLW