

*How Missouri's Doctrines of Church and Ministry Fostered Unionism,
As Shown by the Development of the Scouting Issue*

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Senior Church History

What went wrong? How did the Missouri Synod become so involved in unionism that Wisconsin had no choice but to break fellowship? How could Theodore Graebner, a leading voice in Missouri, be so opposed to incorporating the Boy Scouts of America in the early years, only to become a major proponent for their implementation a few years later?

These are key questions in understanding the marked swing Missouri had beginning in the early thirties with regard to the Boy Scouts. Officially the “impasse” which led to the Wisconsin/Missouri break was Missouri’s lax fellowship practice.¹ The author intends to show that Missouri’s fellowship deterioration began long before they opened talks with the ALC, or officially recognized the legitimacy of the Boy Scouts, or called for their pastors to engage in the military chaplaincy . The author will show, using the development of the Scouting matter as evidence, that Missouri’s doctrines of church and ministry foster unionism. Missouri was wrought with unionism from within long before it manifested itself externally. Because these issues arose out of a certain historical matter, it is necessary to briefly take up the discussion at that point.

The Cincinnati Case²

The so-called Cincinnati case stemmed from an incident within the Missouri Synod in 1899. A layman had withdrawn his son from the Christian day school of his congregation in Cincinnati in order to enroll him in the public school. The man was excommunicated on the grounds that he had disregarded congregational policy, and had violated the Eighth

¹ Edward C. Fredrich, *The Wisconsin Synod Lutherans* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1992), 206.

² Ibid. All information is taken from pp. 107-111.

Commandment in defense of his actions. When the man appealed the excommunication to the Missouri synod, the synod found that the excommunication was undertaken improperly and was unbiblical. The pastors and the congregation refused to recognize the resolution of the synod and stood their ground on the issue. Who was right? What right did the synod have to overturn a congregational decision, if any? These were the issues that arose within the Synodical Conference, issues that required the insight of men capable of such.

Church and Ministry Writings

Missouri's position was the traditional one. The congregation was the only divinely instituted "church." Therefore, synod was not church and had no power over the congregation in the least. Francis Pieper, the leading dogmatician in Missouri, spelled this out in his 1920 Volume III of *Christian Dogmatics*.

...the union of congregations into larger church bodies, such as conferences, synods, etc., has not been ordained by God. The command "Tell it to the church," according to the context, pertains only to the local church, or congregation, and it must be restricted to the local church. "Tell it to the synod," etc., is a human device...

Christ has commissioned neither some one person (Pope, princes, governors, presidents, etc.), nor a college of persons (bishops, pastors, board of directors, consistories, parliaments, conferences, synods, councils, etc.) to decide and ordain ecclesiastical matters for the Church in any way binding the conscience. When the Papacy demands recognition as *iure divino* the supreme binding authority in the whole Christian Church..., it displays one of the marks which identify the Papacy as the Antichrist prophesied in the Scripture... In general, when the power to make binding decisions and laws in the Church is said to inhere in any body of men, be they ecclesiastics or laymen or a mixed board, this is not a Christian, but a Papistic or Caesaropapistic position, because in the Christian Church God's Word is the only authority and all Christians are and remain responsible directly to God for all they believe and do.

...if we ask what authority or power these representatives, these *ecclesiae representativae*, have, the answer is: With respect to the congregation and the

individual Christians they **always have only advisory power**. (Emphasis added)...The order that obtains in the Christian Church is this: If the question at issue pertains to matters taught and decided in God's Word, the Christian position is that no man and no assembly of men, no matter how learned and renowned they may be, can decide for a Christian what is Scriptural doctrine. This matter every Christian must decide for himself on the basis of the clear, infallible Word of God.³

Missouri equated an authoritative synod to the Papacy. This may, in fact, be because they based the doctrine of the church on history and failed to return to Scripture in shaping their doctrine of the church. It is extremely noteworthy that Franz Pieper almost exclusively uses Luther in deciding what role the synod has as "church."⁴ Hence, synod, or any larger overseeing body, becomes equal to the Papacy. In safeguarding against a "hostile takeover," what Missouri had in fact done is handcuffed itself in regards to fellowship. This will be exhibited later. For now, we note well the official "advisory role" of the synod. This refrain will ring loud later on.

On the Wisconsin side, the "Wauwatosa men," especially (and ironically) August Pieper, took up a fresh study of Scripture to determine the correct doctrine of the church and of its ministry. The traditional view would be challenged, but Pieper clearly showed the traditional view to be narrow. And he did this from Scripture. Through sound exegesis, and the blessings of the LORD, Wisconsin framed a "new" doctrine of church. The synod was found to be church, with all of the authority of the keys and the responsibilities that go with them. We let August Pieper speak (In the interest of brevity, we will pick up after his thorough exegesis):

We scarcely need to mention that when we say: two or more Christians of a place are through their faith, not through the outward organization, the

³ Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics Vol. III* (St. Louis, Concordia Publishing House, 1953), 421, 427, 428.

⁴ Ibid. In outlining *The Representative Church. Church Government*, Pieper extensively quotes Luther four times, while citing him twice more in a limited way. Scripture on the other hand is directly quoted twice, back to back. It is referred to only four more times, twice on matters of adiaphora, and once more in introducing Luther! This does not even count the many times he refers to Missouri synod writings or other dogmaticians. This is not to say that Luther was incorrect in his understanding, surely he was correct with regard to the Pope. But Franz Pieper took these *applications* Luther made in dealing with the Papacy, and used them as universal applications to deal with any form of perceived church "hierarchy." May Scripture always determine our doctrine! Pp. 427-435.

congregation of that place- we are not talking of congregation in the sense of an outwardly organized congregational association, but of congregation in the *proper sense* of the word, “congregation of the saints.” The matter itself, however, is of special practical importance. According to Walther’s Thesis IV on the church, it is *the congregation of the saints* to whom Christ has given the keys...

Is the Wisconsin Synod church or congregation in the strict sense of the word? According to the above, the answer can only be yes...

We ask: What makes a multitude of people into the congregation of God, *congregation* in the proper sense of the word? Answer: *Not the outward organization into an outward local congregation*, but *faith* or being sanctified in Christ Jesus through faith. *A believing synodical assembly is congregation in the proper sense of the word.*

How does one recognize, with divinely required certainty, an assembly as believing, as one that contains believers, therefore as *church* in the strictest sense? Answer: By this, *that it proclaims the gospel...*

Does our synodical assembly then have the marks of the true church?

Answer: Yes! For there the Word reigns *mightily*, with prayer and public preaching and essay and hymn and appointing preachers, with absolution and administering the Sacrament.⁵

Wisconsin’s doctrine of the church was different from Missouri’s. Consequently, their doctrine of the church’s (synod’s) ministry were opposites. While Missouri would always hold to Franz Pieper’s (and the synod constitution’s) statement of the “*advisory role*” of synod, Wisconsin’s doctrine of church transferred all of the power of the keys to the synod in its doctrine of ministry. August Pieper again explains this:

Whether the synod has the power of the keys depends only on this, whether it is church in the proper sense of the word, i.e., a communion of saints. Whether it is, that is decided by the question, whether it has the marks of the true church...

(For brevity, we proceed noting that Pieper has proved this above)

...If the synod is church in the proper sense of the word, then it not only has the power of the keys, but must also use it on its members who sin or err in doctrine.

The church has received the power of the keys as well as the gospel not as an idle possession, but for practical use, for exercising it, for binding and loosing. Its application is throughout a work of love, a work of love of Christ the Good Shepherd, which seeks the erring and lost in order to win them again, as the

⁵ August Pieper, “The Doctrine of the Church and Its Marks Applied to the Synod,” *The Wauwatosa Theology* Vol. III (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1997) 66-68. The article originally appeared in *Theologische Quartalschrift*, Vol.9, No. 2 (1912). It was translated by Floyd Brand and published in *Faith-Life*, Vol. 62, No. 5 (1990).

context of Matthew 18:15ff. shows, a work of brotherly love on the part of those entrusted with the keys for the salvation of the brother who is in danger of being lost eternally.⁶

Here are the first signs of the falling out between the two synods. Though both sides agreed to disagree about this doctrine⁷, there would be serious implications flowing out of this disagreement which would deeply wound their fellowship.

It is noteworthy to respond at this point to Missouri's allegations of Papism. While Missouri saw that any authority of a synod was a form of hierarchical government, that "ruled" with mandates, and conscience-binding laws, Wisconsin never went this far. Synod's only authority was that which Scripture gives to all Christians. The ministry of the keys is not a governmental tool, it is a loving utensil given by the God to his church, to forgive and to warn. Synod's use of this tool was always seen by Wisconsin as a brotherly act- brother warning erring brother. This is Scriptural and God-pleasing.

It would also be good at this point to ponder what Missouri's doctrines of church and ministry did practically. With the local congregation being the only true church, synod was stripped of any practical function. What difference did all of the essays, doctrinal discussions, studies, etc. make practically for individual congregations? What happened when congregations did not abide by synod resolutions, or "advice," in doctrinal matters? Practically, what this doctrine of the church had done is make a synod of individual "congregational synods" within itself. There was no uniform standard of doctrine for all Missourians to look to and say, "This we believe." By limiting the synod's authority to "always and only be advisory," the door was

⁶ August Pieper, "Concerning the Doctrine of the Church and of Its Ministry, with Special Reference to the Synod and Its Discipline," *The Wauwatosa Theology* Vol. III (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1997) 119, 129. The article first appeared in *Theologische Quartalschrift* Vol. 26, No. 4 (1929). It was translated by Prof. Heinrich Vogel in the *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, Vol. 59, No. 2 (1962).

⁷Fredrich, p. 110.

left open for the leaven, and there was no practical way for synod to rid itself thereof. This progression is easily seen in the Boy Scout development.

The Boy Scouts Enter the Scene⁸

The Boy Scouts originated in England and found their way to America in 1910. In 1911, the first *Handbook for Boys* was printed. In 1916, Congress granted the organization a Federal Charter. In the 1929 *Handbook for Boys*, the purpose for scouting is stated thusly:

Scouting helps the Scout to value the great heritage which the past has brought to him in the American way of life, and Scouting points the way to good citizenship through service. Not “getting” but “giving”-not only “receiving” but “giving back” something that shall, as Lincoln phrased it- “make the world better because of our life in it.”

Our America is a melting pot. Our strength has come from every people who here sought liberty under law. In a world which blacks out individual freedom, our America must stand as a light house to freedom-loving men everywhere. Ours is a crusade to keep democracy strong, united- a land of Brotherhood and opportunity. The spirit of the Good Turn- caring about others, is the vital spirit of democracy and civilization.⁹

The Boy Scouts of America seeks to produce morally upright boys who benefit society.

Lutherans correctly designate this “civic righteousness.” The 1939 *Twenty-ninth Annual Report of the Boy Scouts of America* reads, “Character development is the real objective of the Boy

⁸ Boy Scouts of America, *Handbook for Boys* (New Brunswick: Boy Scouts of America National Council, 1948), 449-450. Hereafter referred to as '48 *Handbook*.

⁹ Boy Scouts of America, *Handbook for Boys* (New York: Boy Scouts of America, 1929) 12. Hereafter referred to as '29 *Handbook*

Scout movement.”¹⁰ Needless to say, this was not the mission of the Lutheran church, and early resistance was complete.

Missouri’s Early Resistance

The lead voice in Missouri’s early opposition to the Boy Scout movement was Theodore Graebner. His opposition was based on many things. The Boy Scouts were unionistic. They developed character without law and gospel. They were much like a lodge. He outlines his objections in his tract No. 78, “‘Y’ Religion and Boy Scout Morality.”

The literature of the movement abounds in statements which stress the moral, even religious purpose of Scouting...Among the reasons why a church should adopt Scouting as a part of its work for boys, a folder mentions these: “Scouting is a religious education. Jesus is the Master Scout...The ideals of obedience, cheerfulness, service, and the twelve Scout laws are ideals and principles from the teachings of Jesus...Scouting is a true form of Christian democracy...”

How then does Scouting intend to develop Christian character? Through teaching the essentials of Christian doctrine? No. It is “non-sectarian.”

Not only does Scouting, while avowing a religious purpose, fail to point out the one, true religion; it perverts the religious conceptions of boys by such statements as the following (*Official Handbook*, p. 275): “There are many kinds of religion in the world. One important point, however, about them is that they all involve the worship of the same God...”

The (Scout) pledge has not the form of an oath, yet it is officially called an “oath” throughout Scout literature, and is treated as having the force of an oath...The Scout oath surely falls under the Lord’s injunction: “Swear not at all...”

Now let us observe how this principle will inevitably lead the boys united in Scouting into *unionistic worship and work*. Most troops are organized in connection with churches. Scouting, of course, is “undenominational.” But this only means that the Scout is taught to treat all religions and churches alike...

The law of obedience to officers is one of the points of contact of Scouting with *Secretism*. Obedience to the lodge-officers is part of the obligation of every lodge-member...

¹⁰ *Twenty-ninth Annual Report of the Boy Scouts of America* (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1939), 4. Hereafter referred to as *Boy Scout Report*.

...Scouting teaches that the Scout is necessarily a person of distinction, of whom more is expected than of others...All of which seems to justify the conclusion that the Boy Scout movement is patterned upon lodgery...¹¹

A strong stance against the Boy Scouts indeed! This was the position shared also by Wisconsin in regards to the scouts. In 1929, the Missouri Synod commissioned a special committee to look into the Boy Scout movement as to the plausibility of their implementation within the synod.¹² By the '32 convention, problems were already showing themselves within Missouri.

The 1932 Missouri Convention¹³

The Board for Young People's Work came to the synodical convention of 1932 with an interesting report. The board admitted that a variety of opinions regarding the Boy Scouts existed within the synod.

...As to Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts there was, however, no such unanimity of sentiment. At one extreme we find some groups that adopted our recommendations *in toto*. At the other, a much larger number, we find those who rejected unequivocally our report on the Boy Scouts. Among the latter there was included a formal resolution which declared that Lutheran boys who hold membership, or continue to hold membership, in Scouts will be barred from the Lord's Table. Between these extremes there are graded shadings of approval and disapproval.¹⁴

The board recognized a potential problem as they observed no uniformity in practice among Missourians in the Scouting matter. They even quoted a pastor who admittedly was practicing

¹¹ Theodore Graebner, "'Y' Religion and Boy Scout Morality" (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, undated) 9-16.

¹² *Proceedings of the Thirty-fifth Regular Convention of the Missouri, Ohio, and Other States (1932)* 107. Hereafter, Missouri Synod convention proceedings will be referred to as *Missouri Proceedings* followed by what year the proceedings occurred.

¹³ *Ibid.* 107-110, 160-162. All historical information is gathered from these pages.

¹⁴ *Missouri Proceedings* 1932 p. 107.

contrary to Synod resolution as saying, "Our troop never participates in any general meetings of Scouts which are of a religious or interdenominational nature."¹⁵ The board itself realized what was needed and made a request of the synod.

In view of the variety of opinions which the discussion has evoked and on account of the genuine anxiety which troubles the mind of conscientious pastors and other leaders, we are convinced that Synod must eventually take final and decisive action in the matter.

If the junior organizations (Boy Scouts) are inherently so vicious in purpose and program that membership warrants excommunication, then the Boy Scouts should not be tolerated anywhere in the Missouri Synod, and disciplinary action must be taken against those congregations in which troops are organized, maintained, or tolerated.¹⁶

But hadn't they forgotten something? Synod *always and only has an advisory role*. In answer to the Board's request for finality and decisiveness, Synod gave this reply:

Whereas, We agree with the Board for Young People's Work that the Synod cannot endorse the Boy Scout Movement in its present state; and

Whereas, We must acknowledge the willingness of officials of this organization to remove objectionable features; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Board for Young People's Work be requested to continue its study of this and similar organizations.¹⁷

Despite the willingness of the Boy Scouts of America to meet the demands of Missouri, the movement could not be endorsed. And Synod went as far as to "look into it further" in answer to the request for conviction from the board. That's as far as they were allowed to go- they could only advise. Or could they?

Later, in the same convention, there was a rather interesting Memorial (No. 402) given by the Central Conference of Northern Nebraska.

Whereas, There seems to be a difference of opinion regarding the true interpretation of Article VII of the Constitution of the Missouri Synod, especially

¹⁵ Ibid. p. 108

¹⁶ Ibid. p. 108

¹⁷ Ibid. p. 110

in reference to the meaning and scope of the term “advisory body,” the term being taken by some in the absolute sense, to wit, that each resolution of the Synod becomes valid only after the formal ratification on the part of the individual congregation, while others interpret the term in a relative sense; and

Whereas, Such difference of opinion tends to be detrimental to the work of our Synod, hindering especially sufficient contributions and cooperation for this work; therefore be it

Resolved, That the Central Conference of Northern Nebraska herewith petition the Synod, in session assembled at Milwaukee, Wis., in June, 1932:-

1. To give expression to its attitude towards the true interpretation of said Article VII of the constitution...

2. To cause a brief interpretation of Article VII of the constitution to be written.¹⁸

Voices within the Missouri Synod, both the Board for Young People’s Work and the Central Conference of Northern Nebraska, were finding a practical problem with the Synod’s doctrine of the church- it allowed differences in the practices of doctrine. As to the differences in practice with regard to the Boy Scout matter, concerns would continue to be raised within the Synod for years to come.

The 1935 Synod Convention¹⁹

The new developments at this convention are few. The Board for Young People’s Work continued its discussions with Boy Scout headquarters and marveled at the desire shown by the Boy Scouts to do all they could to meet Missouri’s demands. Yet, the Board could not recommend to synod that they should approve of the movement as of yet, but that they should continue to work with the Boy Scouts to this end.

¹⁸ Ibid. p. 160-161

The 1938 Synod Convention²⁰

Further discussions with Boy Scout headquarters had proved¹⁹ fruitful from Missouri's standpoint. The Board for Young People's Work reported that:

...further adjustments have been made, especially with regard to unionistic services at jamborees and camps. Missouri Synod Scouts in attendance at the Washington assembly of 1937 were directed to churches of our Synod. Our attitude in this matter is therefore recognized and the agreement observed. With this further concession officially granted, our control of Lutheran troops is absolute in those features for which we properly require it.²¹

Along the same lines, the Colorado District requested the adoption of its own resolution by Synod. Among the resolutions, which were eventually adopted at this convention were the following two.

1. It is not within the province of Synod to endorse any secular movement or organization nor, for that reason, to advocate the establishment of Boy Scout troops in our congregations.
2. We have been informed by the Board of Young People's Work that the national headquarters of the Boy Scout organization have so modified their position as to grant to the individual congregation complete control of its troop and that the members of such troops are in no wise required to take part in any activities which are contrary to our principles.²²

¹⁹ *Missouri Proceedings* 1935, pp. 104-105.

²⁰ *Missouri Proceedings* 1938, pp. 122, 341.

²¹ *Ibid.* p. 122

²² *Ibid.* p. 341

Also within this Memorial of the Colorado District was a recognition of the differences of practice within the Synod as well as the need for Synod to take a stand on this issue.

Up to this point, the Synod had in all practicality done nothing with the Boy Scout matter. They could not give it approval and they could only warn against it and try to change it. As far as dealing with the diversity of opinions and practices within the Synod itself, they could do nothing and they did nothing.

The 1941 Synod Convention²³

When asked to define their position on scouting, Synod adopted the following report.

Your committee reports that nothing was brought to its attention which would at this time call for either a more favorable or more unfavorable treatment of the Boy Scout Movement than the one outlined in the resolutions on pages 341 and 122 of the 1938 *Proceedings*. We deem it advisable, therefore, to leave these 1938 resolutions unchanged for the present and refer the whole matter for further study to Synod's Committee on Lodge Information, in conjunction with Synod's Board for Young People's Work.²⁴

Once again, Missouri waffled in defining doctrinal practice. However, the issue of Article VII once again surfaced at this convention.

The Southern California District requested clarification once again to the ambiguity of the article. They did this in a much more poignant way than was done earlier, however.

Now, therefore, in the interest and to the welfare of our Synod and for the information and assistance of the civil courts be it

²³ *Missouri Proceedings* 1941, p. 218-219, 243-246

²⁴ *Ibid.* pp. 418-419

Resolved, That the Synod declares with finality that our church government is synodical in fact as well as in name, that its resolutions and decisions have binding force, that such is also true of the power and authority of the District synods, and that the power, jurisdiction, and authority of both the General Synod and the District synods should and must be exercised and do have binding force, in order

1. That an active and effective “united defense against schism” may be made;

2. That a proper “supervision of the ministers and teachers of the Synod with regard to the performance of their official duties” may be had;...

Resolved, That the Synod declare with finality that Article VII of the Constitution be interpreted as follows:

1. That Synod in its relations to its members is not an ecclesiastical government exercising legislative or coercive powers when it demands unconditional and unqualified submission and surrender to the Word of God, because in that case the Word of God is the rule in fact.

2. That Synod, with respect to the individual congregation’s right of self-government, is an advisory body... (in) such matters as do not include or involve faith, doctrine, practice, or discipline. A *congregation’s* right of self-government does not include any right to trench upon matters of faith, doctrine, practice, or discipline, since the Word of God is the only rule and norm and governs a congregation in these matters. Neither can it violate or encroach upon matters covered by Synod’s Constitution and By-laws...

3. That a resolution of Synod imposing something upon the individual congregation is of binding force when it is in accordance with the direct command or injunction of the Word of God, in which case the local congregation is obliged to adapt itself to the expediency of such resolution.²⁵

Finally, something which safeguards orthodox doctrinal practices within the Synod. And how did Synod act on this Memorial? There is not enough time to act on it now, let there be a committee to study the matter further and report back at the next convention.²⁶ The opportunity had presented itself for the Missouri Synod to purge itself of the leaven which had crept in, but it did not seize it. How sad it is that the concept of orthodoxy needed a special committee to study the plausibility of incorporating orthodoxy within a nominally orthodox synod!

To this point, the inherent practical problem with Missouri’s doctrine of the church has been wholly demonstrated. Though the Synod officially stood opposed to the idea of the Boy

²⁵ Ibid. p. 245

Scouts, Boy Scout troops were popping up all over the Synod. Handcuffed by the “advisory role” spelled out in Article VII of their Constitution, Missouri was incapable of any action beyond further discussions with the Boy Scouts, and Synod waffled over and over again rather than be forced to deal with those who acted opposite of Synod resolutions regarding the Boy Scouts.

The 1944 Synod Convention²⁷

The Synodical convention of 1944 is really the key convention in terms of the Boy Scout issue as to its utter divisiveness between Missouri and Wisconsin. This is the convention where it officially became Missouri Synod policy to allow the Boy Scout Movement into regular synodical practice. In the Synodical Convention of '41, the Board for Young People's Work had given further study of the Boy Scout issue over to the Synod's Committee on Lodge Information. In the report of this committee in '44, the recommendation was made that “the matter of scouting should be left to the individual congregation to decide and that under the circumstances Synod may consider her interests sufficiently protected.”²⁸ And so, different congregations, with different doctrinal ideas and practices became united officially under one common synod. Unionism was now officially being practiced by Missouri within its own Synod. It will be

²⁶ Ibid. p. 246

²⁷ *Missouri Proceedings* 1944, pp. 124-126, 346-347

²⁸ Ibid. pp. 346-347

shown later that even according to their own definitions of unionism, by 1944 Missouri stood condemned.

As to the issue of Article VII left undone in '41, there were further significant developments. The special committee appointed to study the memorial of Southern California came back in unanimous support of the Memorial.²⁹ Nay-sayers, however, were given opportunity to raise objections. Two districts in Minnesota signed to a resolution which demanded that the memorial of Southern California be rejected because

Such supersynodical government wants to deal with force, compulsion. It becomes tyrannical and oppressive. The history of church government shows this. Free speech, the right to properly criticize the action of Synod, of its officers and appointees, is the means whereby we preserve our purity of doctrine and correctness of practice. This would be destroyed by church government. We have with us already the condition that persons are afraid to voice their honest opinions because of fear of official reprisals.³⁰

Synod took no further action on Article VII.

Following Conventions

In the conventions that followed, the Boy Scout issue was restudied a couple of times, but there was no change in the Synod's official stand for allowing each individual congregation to decide what is best. Wisconsin voiced its concern in its 1947 Convention when a letter was sent from their Standing Committee on Church Union to Missouri President Behnken.

We feel constrained to make this appeal because of the many years during which our Synods were united in their stand against participation of young people in either the Boy or the Girl Scouts of America. During that time we were

²⁹ Ibid. p. 124

³⁰ Ibid. p. 126

strengthened by the reports of your committees and by pamphlets issued by some of your leading theologians.

All this changed in 1944 by your acceptance of a report which gives to Scouting a clean bill of health, commends an official manual entitled "Scouting in the Lutheran Church," and gives the assurance that the interests of Synod are sufficiently protected by the concessions which have been made. Since then, the number of troops in your Synod has multiplied rapidly, resulting in great difficulties, especially in such fields where our Synods are working side by side, and creating grave and dangerous strains. We confess that we find it difficult to reconcile the Saginaw Report with the 1938 Resolution of your Synod on this same subject, particularly paragraph three in which you speak of "the naturalistic and unionistic tendencies still prevalent in the Boy Scout movement." We note that this pronouncement was made even *after* the only material change in the Scout Program of which our Synods have been informed had already been made. That these unionistic features have not been eliminated, even now, is indicated, we believe, by the book "Scouting in the Lutheran Church" which to us is a plain instance of unionism with Lutheran synods with whom we are not in fellowship.³¹

With the resolution of Missouri in 1944, Wisconsin began to recognize what was happening in its sister Synod. The unionism that was evident within the Missouri synod had manifested itself outside of the synod in the referred to book "Scouting in the Lutheran Church." We proceed to look at this manual for Scouting which Missouri leaned on to support a newfound favor for implementation of the Boy Scouts.

"Scouting in the Lutheran Church"

It was seen previously that Dr. Theodore Graebner was an early Missouri voice thoroughly opposed to the concept of the Boy Scouts of America. His arguments against were many, but the strongest charge was that the Scout movement was inherently unionistic. In the 1944 edition of "Scouting in the Lutheran Church," one need not go too far to see how Graebner had changed his position and his practice. In the listing of the members of the Lutheran

committee in the preface of the book these denominations are listed as working with Missouri: The American Lutheran Church, the Augustana Synod, the Lutheran Free Church, the Norwegian Lutheran Church, the United Danish Church, the United Lutheran Church, the American Federation of Lutheran Brotherhoods.³²

As far as Graebner's earlier charge of the movement being thoroughly work-righteous and seeking to build up character through the Scout law, his concessions are made obvious already within the first few pages.

The aim and purpose of the Boy Scouts of America, according to its Constitution and By-laws, is to develop character and train for citizenship. By a unique program, peculiar to Scouting alone, these objectives are accomplished through the means of a cleverly devised and graded schedule of tests including nature lore, camping...etc., and an elaborate system of merit badges offered for specialization in the various professions, trades, arts and crafts...

...The Scout Program will build up, first of all, Christian character,...

...Scouting should supplement the Church school and other organizations in aiding the Church in her efforts to help the boy lead a truly Christian life.³³

While Graebner makes a great deal out of the Boy Scouts of America stating that "we recognize that there is no Boy Scout authority which supersedes the authority of the local Pastor and the congregation,"³⁴ they had already had this in place fifteen years earlier. This is the evidence that troubled Wisconsin's Committee on Unionism in '47, as shown in the above mentioned letter. Graebner, along with others in Missouri pointed to the fact that great concessions were made by the Boy Scouts in meeting Missouri's demands. Yet this one was made years before Synod officially supported scouting. Already at the '32 Convention it was reported that the Boy Scouts of America had admitted:

³¹ *Proceedings of the twenty-ninth Convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Wisconsin and Other States* 1947, p. 104-105

³² Lutheran Scouting Committee, *Scouting in the Lutheran Church* (Rock Island, Illinois. Augustana Book Concern (1944), vi.

³³ Ibid. pp. 2-3, 7, 10

³⁴ Theodore Graebner, *A Handbook of Organizations* (St. Louis, Concordia Publishing House, 1948), 343-344.

“It is not only unwise and ill advised for a local council to undertake to interfere in any way with an institution’s management of its own troop, but it has also no authority to do so.”³⁵

Saying that this “concession” was made shortly before 1944³⁶, and on that basis Scouting was permissible, is untenable. The official Scout position did not change between 1932, when Missouri was officially opposed to Scouting, and 1944, when it officially accepted the movement. It is obvious that the new acceptance of Boy Scouting had far less to do with any change in Scout policy than in did in changes in Missouri’s doctrine- especially as to fellowship.

As for Graebner’s flip-flop on the Scouting issue, there is no concrete reason he did what he did. He was the Synod’s lead voice in ^{lodge}lodging matters, maybe he learned to see the Boy Scouts as a seemingly harmless entity in comparison. He may have “bent the rules” because he saw the differences in practice with regards to the Scouts and felt a need to facilitate this in what was a confessional synod. But this is all speculation. The sadness of such action can only be noted and observed, and prayer can be made that we learn from this and that the Holy Spirit lead us to guard against this kind of waffling on matters of doctrinal practice.

Did Missouri Prophecy Their Own “Demise?”

Before concluding, it is interesting to hear some early Missouri voices speak about unionism. It is sad to see how easily these men grasped what unionism is and what it does, and yet, how slow they were in recognizing it in their own midst.

³⁵ *Missouri Proceedings* 1932, p. 107

³⁶ *Missouri Proceedings* 1944, p. 346-347.

Joining in religious worship or in religious work by such as are not in doctrinal agreement, or, in other words, joint work or worship by which the truth is either denied or the appearance of denial, or at least of indifferentism, is given, is religious unionism. Unionism is not an attempt to unite on the basis of doctrine. It decidedly ignores doctrinal differences and from the very outset, as far as doctrine is concerned, agrees to disagree...Its intentional purpose is to give various and varying religious opinions not only a place in the Church, but also in the same body...

Unionism is the result of religious indifferentism. Anyone who really believes that the Bible is the verbally inspired Word of God and acts on that conviction can absolutely not be a unionist. Religious indifferentism finally leads to a total denial of the truth. It is not surprising that this should be so. It is the very nature of the case.³⁷

Franz Pieper adds:

It is common knowledge that the presence of children of God in heterodox churches is urged to prove that it is right, even demanded by charity, to fellowship heterodox churches. This is the exact opposite of what Scripture teaches...

The argument of unionists is contrary even to *natural reason*...

To say that love demands such a practice is a misuse of that word. Love of God and love of brethren rather requires the opposite practice...

...Here he clearly says that Christians are to use the same words also in the same sense. Agreement in words with disagreement in meaning is altogether contrary to the unity God calls for, and to seek such a "unity" ("we agree to disagree") is immoral, a trifling with sacred, divine things, which is unseemly for Christians.³⁸

Finally, most condemning, and most prophetic are the words of Theodore Graebner in his denouncing of the YMCA as unionistic.

On the basis of this creed (for such it truly is), the Y. M. C. A. unites those who subscribe to it into a religious fellowship for worship and religious work. It arbitrarily selects certain Christian teachings as essential for such fellowship, and excludes all other Christian teachings as non-essential for joint worship and work. This is a unionistic position....-a religious fellowship based on an agreement that *not all* that Christ has taught must be accepted and believed...

...But while the Y. M. C. A. does not, like the lodge, attempt to unite all, Jews, Christians, and men of no faith, into religious fellowship, but restricts active membership to those who signify their acceptance of its religious platform, yet the

³⁷ John Fritz, *Pastoral Theology* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1945), 211-213. This is the 2nd Edition, the original was published in 1932.

³⁸ Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics Vol. III* p. 425-426

union established *among these* is a union based upon indifference to doctrine, so far as the distinctive teachings of the Christian denominations are concerned.

This indifferentism to doctrine has worked its logical result. The religious work of the Y. M. C. A. is thoroughly saturated with the New Theology and other forms of modern unbelief. It lists texts for its Bible-classes which are popular presentations of the results of Higher Criticism.³⁹

Higher Criticism? Isn't this exactly how things progressed within Missouri in the years following the split? Wasn't Seminec a full manifestation of what Pieper, Fritz, and Graebner envisioned for a unionistic church body?

Thesis and Conclusion

When a church's synodical assembly is stripped of its designation of church over against the local congregation, it is stripped of the Keys. For all intents and purposes, many of the reasons for synodical assemblies become moot, other than for some administrative chores. There is no reason to have essays. There is no reason to discuss doctrine. The ability to ensure uniformity of doctrine within the synod is gone. More importantly, the ability to warn a brother in error is gone. By all rights, the synod agrees to disagree in doctrine and expression of doctrine. This is what happened in the Missouri^S synod in the early decades of this century. It is very easy to see what results in observing the progression of the Boy Scout issue. When different congregations within Missouri began to act in opposition to synodical resolutions, there was nothing that could be done to discipline. Effectively operating under the same synod were what amounted to be different denominations, because these congregations did not agree on *all* doctrine as our Lord calls us who are in fellowship with one another to do. Instead of dealing

³⁹ Theodore Graebner, "Y' Religion and Boy Scout Morality" pp. 2-4

with the problems they were having, Missouri waffled in their resolutions and eventually changed their doctrine of fellowship. By the time Wisconsin finally broke from Missouri because of its outward unionism, the internal unionism fostered early on under the narrow doctrine of the church had done its damage.

May the Almighty God continue to send his Spirit into the hearts of the men of our Synod as we continually return to his Word for doctrine and truth- for only here do we find the criteria he gives us for right fellowship. May our Synod continue to patiently warn erring brethren through faithful administration of the Keys, and may God grant that through good stewardship of these keys this blessed age of orthodoxy in the WELS continue for the time he has ordained.

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