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The Lutheran Church --
Missouri Synod's
Position on Prayer
Fellowship:

*How It Contributed to the Break
in Fellowship between
WELS and LC-MS*

As Chronicled in the Pages
of
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**THE LUTHERAN CHURCH--MISSOURI SYNOD'S POSITION ON PRAYER FELLOWSHIP:
HOW IT CONTRIBUTED TO THE BREAK IN FELLOWSHIP BETWEEN WELS AND LC-MS**

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There are many issues that contributed to the break in fellowship between the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod and the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. The change in LC-MS positions on various doctrinal issues over the course of some 25 years caused the break between the ELS and LC-MS, then between WELS and LC-MS and ultimately the break-up of the Synodical Conference. The break was a heart-wrenching experience, in some cases causing divisions between friends of long-standing and even families. It was certainly an emotional and tragic thing for the WELS to do, to break a relationship which we had enjoyed and cherished for over 90 years.

Yet it was something that had to be done. In the end, after every attempt at patient admonition had been made by our synod, nothing more could be done but to terminate fellowship between the synods. There had been a long history of persistent error by the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod that could no longer be ignored.

As stated before, there were many contributing factors. Yet the majority of the issues in contention had to do with Missouri's laxity concerning fellowship principles. The issues of Boy Scouting, military chaplaincy, the so-called "cooperation in externals" issue, etc. all stemmed from an unscriptural view of the doctrine of fellowship. One other major sticking point between WELS and LC-MS was Missouri's view and practice of prayer fellowship. This is what the focus of this paper will be, particularly during the years 1944, when Missouri's problematic view of prayer fellowship came to the fore, through 1961, the year our Synod convention resolved to

break ties with our beloved sister synod. This paper will specifically focus on this issue of prayer fellowship and how the LC-MS contributed to the break, as recorded and reacted to in the pages of *Theologische Quartalschrift (Theological Quarterly)*.

The *Northwestern Lutheran* served to keep the constituency of the Wisconsin Synod informed on what was transpiring between the synods. It ran articles that recounted the proceedings of synod, as well the points in controversy. To help keep the people informed, pamphlets were also issued in the early 1950s as well on the *Timely Topics* at hand.

The role of the *Theologische Quartalschrift*, later renamed *the Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* in 1960, as the theological publication of the Wisconsin Synod, was to address the issues on a deeper level. It served to keep the pastors and professors of our synod abreast of the situation. It not only reported what transpired in the "News and Comments" and "News Without Comments" sections in each issue, but in other areas as well. Conference essays pertinent to the situation were reprinted in its pages, addressing the controversial debates at hand. Occasionally the problems were addressed in some of the reviews found in the "Reviewer's Desk" portion.

The Missouri Synod's change from conservative and confessional giant to backsliding, compromising unionism was very much on the hearts and in the heads of the theologians of the WELS, as well as the lay people. This paper will show the action and reaction of the men who stood firm against the whelming tide of unionism and heterodoxy as they admonished humbly and patiently. We owe a great debt to the men of our synod who made sure they retained our Great Heritage, the very heritage of the pure Gospel that we enjoy to this day. It always advantageous to remember our roots and take a look at history, for it were not for God using these men, we would not be where we are now, as a church body and possibly even as individuals.

Before looking at the developments regarding prayer fellowship in 1944, we need to set the stage a little. Beginning in the years 1938-1939, the Missouri Synod began to drift away from their position on church fellowship that they had historically always held, the same position that the Synodical Conference adhered to. This position, summed up, is that there must be complete doctrinal agreement in order to establish fellowship with another church body. In 1938, Missouri began to seek to fellowship with the American Lutheran Church (ALC). It was out of these discussions that the Missouri's problematic view on prayer fellowship grew. And it is at this point that we begin.

In 1946, Concordia Publishing House put out a pamphlet entitled "Prayer Fellowship" written by Dr. Theodore Graebner. This pamphlet caused a stir not only because of the positions of the Missouri Synod which were laid out within it, but also because of accusations made against the Wisconsin Synod. So much so, that it was felt that it needed to be addressed in the *Quartalschrift* in two different ways, in the "Kirchengeschichtliche Notizen" and the "Buchertisch" sections. The former dealt with "a discussion of the topic itself" while the latter was "an investigation of certain statements made by the author concerning our Wisconsin Synod and its Seminary."¹

In the discussion of the topic entitled "Fellowships--or Fellowships?" Professor Edmund Reim of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, and later secretary of the synod's Standing Committee in Matters of Church Union, begins by saying:

It is only natural that in times when the thought of union between church bodies is in the foreground, the question of joint prayer and its implications should also receive a particular measure of attention. For prayer is such an important part of the Christian life, and joint prayer such a natural result where Christians meet that its functions and

¹ Edmund Reim, "Prayer Fellowship" review, *Theologische Quartalschrift (Theological Quarterly-* hereafter cited *TQ*) (Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Publishing House) Vol.43 No. 2 (April 1946) p.157

particular sphere, under these prevailing conditions, cannot safely be ignored. Therefore a treatise like Dr. Graebner's "Prayer Fellowship" is certainly both timely and appropriate. It is obvious that in the course of such a discussion a great deal will depend on seeing clearly whether fellowship of prayer is separate and distinct from other fellowships, e.g. that of the altar or the pulpit, or whether they are basically the same--in other words, whether we have Christian *fellowships* or *fellowship*.¹

The article goes on to relate that the LC-MS pamphlet is written from the point of view that there are fellowships, that is degrees or levels of fellowship in which an individual or church body can participate ~~in~~ without it being in opposition to Scripture (incidentally, although the concept of "levels of fellowship" was certainly present, it was not given that title until years later). Dr. Graebner and the synod he represented had been dabbling in the idea that there was a distinct difference between pulpit and altar fellowship and prayer fellowship. Missouri espoused the idea that for pulpit and altar fellowship there needed to exist a deeper doctrinal agreement and understanding than that which was required for prayer fellowship. They contended that they could pray with other Lutheran synods with which they were not in fellowship ~~with~~ at joint conferences and meetings. It was becoming more and more apparent to our theologians that Missouri was indeed weaving a tangled web that strung all the way back to their efforts beginning in 1938 to commence fellowship with the ALC. This is evident in the final paragraphs of Professor Reim's article:

We believe that these lapses (which are not characteristic of the earlier theology of the author) may be traced at least in part to the confusion created by the involved line of thought which must result when one proceeds from the point of view of several distinct fellowships. For this reason we shall continue to speak of *one* fellowship, one *koinonia*, which manifest itself in many different ways. When prayer, altar, and pulpit fellowship are mentioned, these are therefore not so many different fellowships, but outstanding ways in which this one great fellowship manifests itself among Christians. Even as this fellowship is disturbed and eventually destroyed by false teaching, so true unity of doctrine is required for its preservation.

¹ Reim, "Fellowship--or Fellowships?", *TQ* Vol. 43 No. 2 (April 1946) p. 144

Only by retaining this simple and natural point of view can the church exercise the utmost degree of charity and patience without lapsing into doctrinal indifference when dealing with errors that may arise in its own midst, and in its dealings with other church bodies keep its testimony firm without weakening it by vagueness in matters of doctrine.¹

The "Prayer Fellowship" pamphlet was also addressed as a book review also. Here Professor Reim responded to accusations weighed in by Graebner against the WELS and its theologians. An excerpt from that pamphlet, included in the review, is as follows:

A strict application of this principle would mean that we could never, during the past thirty years, have opened a meeting with representatives of the Wisconsin Synod with prayer. We have now for almost a generation acknowledged sharp differences in the doctrine of the ministry and the Church. In official papers the theory has been set forth that 'days in Genesis may signify 'periods.' Chaplaincies have been condemned as a violation of the separation of Church and State, as unionistic, as a denial of the doctrine of the call. Boy Scouts have been condemned as deistic and unionistic.²

This was an attack against Wisconsin, essentially trying to turn the tables around. Dr. Graebner might as well have said, "Hey Wisconsin Synod, you've been on our back about this fellowship issue since 1939, but really you're guilty of the same thing you're accusing us of. We're in fellowship with one another, yet we disagree on some doctrines. Talk about the pot calling the kettle black!"

Professor Reim, who wrote this review, states that this is basically the same thing that Graebner said on the floor of the Synodical Conference convention in Cleveland in 1944. 1944 would have been the time when the specific issue of prayer fellowship would have really started to come to a head, though the difficulties with Missouri's fellowship intentions had been in question since 1938. When Graebner made his remarks at the convention, it followed an essay entitled "The Church and Christian Liberty" by Professor Reim that addressed, among other

¹ Ibid., p.147-148

² Reim, "Prayer Fellowship" review, *TQ*, Vol.43 No.2 (April 1946) p.157

things, how Christian freedom related to church fellowship. The final portion of this essay also appears in the same issue of the *Quartalschrift* (Vol.43 No.2 April 1946).

Professor Reim responds in his review much in the same way that he responded on the floor of the Cleveland convention to Reim's remarks. Reim refutes all of the accusations right down the line. Then he questions Dr. Graebner's judgment in producing the pamphlet in the first place.

In view of this history it strikes us as passing strange that Dr. Graebner should choose to repeat and broadcast these charges without at least setting the record straight on the first count and, in the second matter, without so much as a word of inquiry to, or consultation with a colleague whose doctrinal soundness he is impugning. In other matters which have been under discussion during these last years Dr. Graebner has been quick to invoke the Eighth Commandment. May we remind him?¹

Reim says that Graebner uses these things to support his "new" position on prayer fellowship, yet he knows full well that there is a conservative faction in Missouri that will resist this change.

The author says he is in agreement with those individuals.

It is because we agree with these conservative brethren, value their good opinion very highly, and are ready to do everything possible to preserve the existing fellowship, that we feel constrained to resist a procedure which would drive a wedge between us.

We submit that in publishing this latest booklet Dr. Graebner has rendered a distinct disservice to the cause of unity within our Synodical Conference.²

With the July 1949 issue of the *Quartalschrift* came the first installment of Professor John P. Meyer's excellent essay, "Prayer Fellowship". It was an essay originally read before the Minnesota District Pastoral Conference in New Ulm, April 26-28, 1949. It is an outstanding treatment of the subject and its implications; so much so, that its value was seen for our people today and it is included in its entirety in the volume *Essays on Church Fellowship* published by

¹ Ibid., p.158

² Ibid., p.158

Northwestern Publishing House in 1996. It spoke to the situation of the day when Meyer wrote it and it speaks to our present day climate as well. It appeared in the *Quartalschrift* over the course of six issues.

...It is evident that joint prayer presupposes a common faith, believing in the same God and approaching Him on the same premise. This might be carried out further in relation to the Word which God has given us, whether we accept it as divine in every respect, or assume that it is intermingled with human elements, human inaccuracies and errors, etc: but that will not be necessary to illustrate our point that joint prayer is proper only on the basis of a common faith.

Prayer is an expression of faith. Prayer fellowship presupposes a common faith; in other words, it presupposes church fellowship, established by a common confession of a common faith. Where the practice of the latter (church fellowship) is impossible for a lack of common faith, there also joint prayer will be impossible because there is no common approach to god; or if indulged in spite of the continuing disunity, it becomes sham, simulating a harmony which does not exist.

Prayer fellowship, then, cannot be studied profitably without a brief study of the Scripture doctrine of the Church. A thorough investigation of all phases of church life is not possible at the present time, nor is it necessary for the problem at hand. But three points should receive some attention, viz., the glory of the Church, the unity of the Church, and several things that might disturb this unity, together with their remedies.¹

With these words, Professor Meyer delves into the subject at hand. His approach throughout the essay is one that should be always used in time of controversy and doctrinal disagreements: go to the Scriptures! And Professor Meyer does just that. When there is trouble within the Church, she must always return to the solid foundation that she is built on, God's Holy Word as revealed to mankind in the Bible. This is first and primary source for knowledge and guidance in addressing the issue of prayer fellowship.

The Missouri Synod was promoting at this time the idea that there was a distinction between the terms "prayer fellowship" and "joint prayer." On the one hand, prayer fellowship required doctrinal unity and common faith. On the other had¹, Missouri contended, joint prayer

¹ John Meyer, "Prayer Fellowship", *TQ* Vol.46 No.3 (July 1949) p. 184-185

could be expressed without it crossing fellowship lines and without breaking Scripture. This is merely an artificial distinction.

What does the practice of prayer fellowship, or an occasional joint prayer, do to the glory of the Church, in which Luther rejoices? That depends on the circumstances. A joint prayer may be a jewel of special luster in the Church's diadem--or it may be a disgusting, nauseating pollution.¹

Prayer fellowship, or joint prayer, no matter how much you may dilute the term, stands in close relation to the unity of the Church, either strengthening that unity as a heartfelt expression of it, or undermining it by simulating a unity which does not exist. Since prayer is a fruit of faith, affected in its nature by the nature of the faith from which it flows, joint prayer can be true only if based on a joint faith. ...Is a harmonious joint prayer possible where the unity of the Church is marred in theory or in practice?²

Professor Meyer demonstrates from Scripture that indeed the answer to this question is "no." Any prayer that is participated in where there is not unity in faith and teaching is not only a stench in the nostrils of God, but also promotes disharmony and a unity of appearances only among brothers. This was the very idea that Missouri was embracing all the more tightly with each passing year. Meyer closes his essay with the following prayer:

God help us that we appreciate more and more the great privilege we enjoy by being invited to pray to Him. God help us that we diligently use this privilege to manifest the glory of the Church, to rejoice in its unity, and to strengthen it, to help the weak and to hinder those who cause disruptions.³

In 1952, the Wisconsin Synod Standing Committee on Church Union declared publicly that they were in a state of confession because of the Missouri Synod's unionistic endeavors over the past fourteen years. The following is portion of their report is as follows:

¹ Ibid., p.194-195

² Meyer, "Prayer Fellowship", *TQ* Vol.46 No.4 (October 1949) p.259

³ Meyer, "Prayer Fellowship", *TQ* Vol.47 No.4 (October 1950) p.298

We, therefore, declare, in order to guard our own faith and to remain true to our God, that, though we do not at this time disavow our fellowship with the Missouri Synod in the Synodical Conference, yet, because the confessional basis on which the synods of the Synodical Conference have jointly stood so far has been seriously impaired by the Common Confession, we continue to uphold our protest and to declare that the Missouri Synod by retaining the Common Confession and using it for further steps toward union with the ALC is disrupting the Synodical Conference. Thus while we wait a decision by our Synod in this grave situation we continue our relationship with the Missouri Synod only in the hope that it may still come to see the error of its way.

Hence we find ourselves in a STATE OF CONFESSION (theologically expressed, IN STATU CONFESSIONIS).

We hope and pray that the truth may prevail and that God in His grace may avert the threatening disruption of the Synodical Conference.¹

The problem concerning prayer fellowship with the Common Confession that Missouri was using as its basis for entering into fellowship with the ALC was not what it said about prayer fellowship, but what it didn't. It discussed that there must be a unity of faith for pulpit and altar fellowship, but a reference to prayer fellowship was conspicuous by its absence. It never cleared up this issue and it was not in agreement with Missouri's *Brief Statement* of 1932, which Wisconsin endorsed as well.

In 1953, the Missouri Synod meeting in Houston, Texas, overwhelmingly rejected the request from the Wisconsin Synod to rescind the action of the 1950 convention which approved and accepted the Common Confession as the joint statement of faith between Missouri and the ALC. This request came from Wisconsin's convention of 1951 held in New Ulm, Minnesota, the so-called "New Ulm Resolutions."

Missouri also rejected two other requests contained in the New Ulm Resolutions regarding scouting and joint prayer. A report of the Houston convention from *Religious News Service* is printed in its entirety in the *Quartalschrift*.

¹ "Synodical Conference-A Report", *TQ* Vol.49 No.4 (October 1952) p.293

In each case the delegates reaffirmed the present position of the Missouri Synod. The matter of participation in Scout organizations is left up to individual congregations. "Joint prayer" is permitted at meetings and conferences with other Lutheran bodies.

[The Wisconsin Synod] also opposes joint prayer, except among the members of the Synodical Conference, which, besides the Missouri and Wisconsin Synods, includes the Slovak and Norwegian Synods--*Religious News Service*¹

The resolution passed by Missouri at Houston regarding joint prayer only reaffirmed their previous position and hardened them in their stance. The *Quartalschrift* reports that the New Ulm Resolutions were "courteously but definitely declined."² The following was resolved:

The request for reconsideration of the position on "Joint Prayer" (Reports and Memorials, p.60, No.3) was answered by Resolution No. 14:

RESOLVED, That Synod declares that it does not consider "Joint Prayer" at intersynodical meetings unionistic and sinful, "provided such prayer does not imply denial of truth or support of error" (Proceedings of the 1947 Chicago Convention, page 517)³

A special session of the Standing Committee in Matters of Church Union and the Floor Committee was called to deal with the resolutions passed at Houston. The men on these committees met in Milwaukee on October 8-9, 1953. The Standing Committee in Matters of Church Union, in their report on the Houston Convention of the Missouri Synod, found the following:

We hold that The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod

- 1) by its "deviating to an ever increasing extent from the position we have so long held and defended together," and "from which we find ourselves unable to depart"; and
- 2) by its failure to heed our admonition in some of the matters (Scouting, Joint Prayer, Suspension of negotiations); and
- 3) by declining early action on our admonition to the Common Confessions as a settlement of the controversies in the doctrines treated herein,

¹ "Missouri Synod Again Upholds Doctrinal Agreement", *TQ* Vol.50 No.3 (July 1953) p.211-212

² "Report and Findings of the Standing Committee", *TQ* Vol.50 No.4 (October 1953) p.278

³ *Ibid.*, p.278

has disrupted the Synodical Conference and made it impossible for us to continue our affiliation with the Missouri Synod and our joint labors in the service of the Lord.

We ask that you these findings as well as our entire report be given careful study by your duly appointed Floor Committee, which will then present this convention with appropriate recommendations and resolutions.¹

The Floor Committee was found to be in agreement with the Standing Committee, who saw that Missouri's "Persistent adherence to its unionistic practices (the Common Confession, joint prayer,) has brought about the present break in relations that is now threatening the existence of the Synodical Conference and the continuance of our affiliation with our sister Synod."²

The issue that has opened this serious breach between our Synod and the Missouri Synod and threatened the continuance of the Synodical Conference is Unionism. Unionism is the underlying issue in the controversies regarding the chaplaincy, cooperation with unaffiliated church bodies in service centers, prayer fellowship, and Scouting. The same unionistic spirit is observable in the arrangements that have been made for communion with Lutherans not in fellowship with us, under the excuse of emergency; in negotiations with lodges to make changes in their rituals, and in co-operation in various other areas with the excuse that safeguards have been set up to avoid unionism.

In this manner of unionistic practice Missouri has departed from the position that it once held, a position that made it a stronghold of the Church and a banner to repair to, and that was one of the strongest links that bound us together in the Synodical Conference. Missouri has broken that link.³

After much thought and deliberation, the Floor Committee decided to make Missouri aware of it's many concerns and to defer any action until the Synodical Conference convention in 1954, at which time the doctrines in question could be discussed. Meanwhile, the Committee saw this as a time to instruct the congregations of the Wisconsin Synod in earnest to inform them

¹ Ibid., p. 281

² Ibid., p. 284

³ "Report and Recommendations of the Floor Committee", *TQ*, Vol.50 No.4 (October 1953) p.283

of what was going on and its serious ramifications. It also saw the extra year as another opportunity that the breach between the two synods might be healed. They held out this hope for a return by the LC-MS to its former Scriptural stance on fellowship.

Meanwhile, the LC-MS reaction to Wisconsin's pleas were not ^{favorable} met favorably. In *American Lutheran*, a Missouri Synod publication, this take on Wisconsin was given:

The most recent criticism against our synod on the part of the Wisconsin Synod arose out of the fact that we have been striving, together with representatives of the American Lutheran Church, to arrive at a unity of doctrine and practice on the basis of which the American Lutheran Church and our Synod could establish a firm and happy pulpit and altar fellowship. Anyone who views the facts honestly must admit that the unity which has been achieved between the American Lutheran Church and our synod at this time obviously is very much greater than is the unity which has existed between the Wisconsin Synod and ourselves for a long time.¹

How the mighty had fallen! This once confessional giant was seeing more doctrinal unity with a heterodox Lutheran body than with their own brethren in the Synodical Conference. Unfortunately, the situation would only get worse.

Professor Carl Lawrenz was compelled to submit his essay "The Scriptural Principles Concerning Church Fellowship" for publication in the *Quartalschrift*. This essay also appears in *Our Great Heritage*, volume III, published by Northwestern Publishing House. He had originally presented the essay before the convention of the Dakota-Montana District and of the Nebraska District of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Wisconsin and Other States. He presented the paper to both conventions in June of 1954. Portions of this essay deal directly with the issue of prayer fellowship/joint prayer that we are concerned with here.

Now what is it that we especially want to note after having made this survey of the outward expressions of Christian fellowship? It is this that they are all manifestations of

¹ "As Others See Us", *TQ*, Vol.50 No.4 (October 1953) p.292

one and the same faith, and that as joint expressions they are all manifestations of the fellowship in this common faith. We may classify these expressions of Christian fellowship according to the realm of activity in which they occur. We may speak of pulpit fellowship, of altar fellowship, of prayer fellowship. ... Yet thereby they do not become so many different kinds of fellowship, each quite different from the other. It is not that pulpit fellowship involves something quite different from altar fellowship, and these again something quite different from prayer fellowship. ... It is not that pulpit and altar fellowship require a certain high measure of unity, while prayer fellowship is quite possible among those who are less united. If these joint manifestations of Christian life are not a mere outward sham, then they are all expressions of one and the same fellowship of faith. This, however is not a fellowship of man's own making, but a gift and creation of the Holy Spirit. It is this Scriptural truth and principle that Christian fellowship is a unit concept that is so largely disregarded in present-day union movements.¹

The essay goes on to cite a specific example in the ALC's dealings with the National Lutheran Council. The same thing could also be said of the Missouri Synod and their dealings with the ALC. They were practicing this "levels of fellowship" concept that was being denounced by the Wisconsin Synod on scriptural grounds.

The year 1955 brought strain into the relationships of the members of the Synodical Conference. On June 24, 1955 the Norwegian Synod (known today as the Evangelical Lutheran Synod) broke ties with the LC-MS at their convention. They adopted an action that formally severed their bonds of fellowship with Missouri. In this action, Missouri's new view on prayer fellowship was cited to be one of the major causes for the break.

Then came the Saginaw Resolution of 1944, which attempted to draw a distinction between "joint prayer" and "prayer fellowship"--a distinction which the Missouri Synod previously had never made. These resolutions, accordingly, were also protested by our Norwegian Synod on the grounds that this distinction cannot be supported on the basis of Scripture and opens the door to further unionistic practices. The answer of the Missouri Synod to such protests was the re-affirmation of its 1944 Resolution.²

¹ Carl Lawrenz, "The Scriptural Principles Concerning Church Fellowship", *TQ* Vol.51 No.4 (October 1954) p.274

² "Action of the Thirty-eight Regular Convention of the Norwegian Synod of the American Evangelical Lutheran Church", *TQ* Vol.52 No.3 (July 1955) p.215

The Norwegian Synod expressed regret that it had come to this and it was with heavy hearts that they broke the ties that they had so cherished and been thankful for throughout their own stormy history.

In 1956, the *Quartalschrift* reported that the LC-MS had further hardened in its position on joint prayer. A defense of the Missouri Synod practice was written by their president, Dr. Behnken and reprinted for the readers of the *Quartalschrift*.

We reaffirm the position taken at the Fort Wayne Convention, page 303, paragraph 1, "that in the meantime it be understood that no pulpit, altar, or prayer fellowship has been established between us and the American Lutheran Church; and until such fellowship has been officially declared by the Synods concerned, no action is to be taken by any of our pastors or congregations which ignores the fact that we are not yet united.

"However, joint prayer at intersynodical conferences, asking God for his guidance and blessing upon the deliberations and discussions of His Word, does not militate against the resolution of denial of truth or support of error. Local conditions will determine the advisability of such prayer. Above all, the conscience of a brother must not be violated nor offense be given."

The Centennial Convention of 1947 at Chicago reaffirmed this resolution.

The 1953 Convention at Houston again took up the matter and passed the following resolution:

"Whereas, such prayer at intersynodical meetings does not pretend that doctrinal unity exists where it does not exist, nor intimate that doctrinal differences are unimportant, but rather implores God, from whom true unity may be achieved in those things where it is lacking; be it therefore

"Resolved, that Synod declare that it does not consider Joint Prayer at intersynodical meetings unionistic and sinful 'provided such prayer does not imply denial of truth or support of error.'"¹

In the same year, the Standing Committee on Matters of Church Union issued a report to all the district conventions of the Wisconsin Synod. One resolution from that report dealt with the matter of prayer fellowship:

Resolution 3, Committee 3.

¹ "Dr. Behnken on Joint Prayer", *TQ* Vol.53 No.3 (July 1956) p.216

Subject: CLARIFYING OUR POSITION ON FELLOWSHIP, PRAYER FELLOWSHIP, AND "RELIGIOUS UNIONISM."

WHEREAS, Synod has spoken clearly and unambiguously on fellowship, prayer fellowship, and unionism, and

WHEREAS, However, implications and interpretations have been attached to these expressions of Synod which have disturbed the consciences of some; therefore be it RESOLVED, That the joint theological faculties of Synod be requested to furnish comprehensive studies on these matters, and to make them available to the members of Synod at least one year prior to the next convention of Synod in 1959.¹

Then August of 1956 at a convention in Watertown, the Floor Committee presented resolutions (known as the "Watertown Resolutions") that expressed their concurrence with the Standing Committee's suggestion to "hold in abeyance" on the judgment of the Saginaw resolutions made in 1955 until the next Synod convention. One of these resolutions mentions the deplorable nature of Missouri's stand on prayer fellowship.

WHEREAS, We deplore the specific resolutions which our sister synod passed on the issues of Scouting and military chaplaincy; its stand on prayer fellowship; and the fact that several other issues were not acted upon at all, e.g., the communion agreement with the National Lutheran Council; be it

RESOLVED, That our fellowship with The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod be one of vigorously protesting fellowship to be practiced, where necessary in the light of II Thessalonians 3:14 and 15: "And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother."²

Professor Reim presented a paper to the Minnesota District convention on July 30-August 2, 1956 in New Ulm entitled "The Problem of Scriptural Proof." This essay was printed in the *Quartalschrift* in 1957 and dealt with the "question of Scriptural proof in so far as it had become a problem in the area of our immediate fellowship, the constituent synods of the Synodical

¹ "The Report of the Standing Committee on Matters of Church Union--III. Resolutions on Intersynodical Matters", *TQ* Vol.53 No.4 (October 1956) p.295

² "The Watertown Resolutions", *TQ* Vol.53 No.4 (October 1956) p.298

Conference."¹ It contained references to the disturbing practice of fellowship taking place in the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod.

It should surely not be hard to see what havoc is wrought when this great unit of the truth concerning the fellowship of believers is divided and subdivided into countless fractions, and each of these is then treated as an isolated subject, for separate treatment and consideration. Yet, isn't that just what happens when the concept of fellowship is divided up into the categories of Altar, Pulpit, and Prayer-fellowship? That these are separate and distinct manifestations of fellowship, we will indeed grant. Yet it is one fellowship of faith. That under certain conditions these three categories may have to be named very specifically, for the sake of completeness, we will also grant. It was wise foresight to do that in the first Synodical Conference Resolution that dealt with these issues, in 1940. But when this distinction is made for the sake of allowing the one form under conditions which admittedly would prohibit the others, then the very fabric of which we spoke before is being rent and torn, confusion enters where simple truth should reign, and the problem of bringing Scriptural proof is made many times more difficult than before. But again the fault does not lie with the Word, but in the wayward mind of men.²

In the year 1958, the *Quartalschrift* was quiet on the subject of prayer fellowship and really also on the matter of the crossroads at which our Synod was at with the LC-MS. The news in the *Theological Quarterly* dealt mainly with the merger of four American Lutheran synods to form the ~~Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA)~~ ^{The American Lutheran Church (TALC)}. But in 1959 and 1960, prayer fellowship was being talked about again, specifically how it related to the "cooperation in externals" Missouri was participating in. In an essay entitled "Modern Ecumenism and Cooperation in Externals," the relationship between cooperation in externals and prayer fellowship is discussed. This essay appears in the *Essays in Church Fellowship* volume also. The author states that the kind of cooperation in externals that conservative Lutherans object to is the kind where joint work and worship is involved. This is the kind in which Missouri was becoming more and more entangled .

¹ Reim, "The Problem of Scriptural Proof", *TQ* Vol.54 No.1 (January 1957) p.1

² *Ibid.*, p.7-8

One touchstone by which we can determine whether a certain activity concerns the "spiritual program" of the church or not may be found in this: Does it involve "prayer-fellowship?" ... Those who insist on practising what they call "cooperation in externals" with heterodox Lutherans will be found defending "prayer-fellowship" with them also. Through some strange mental processes that it is hard to analyze they find it wrong to practice "pulpit and altar fellowship" with errorists but see nothing wrong in practising "prayer-fellowship" with them. Scripture has nothing on which to base this distinction. It condemns all "spiritual fellowship" with errorists, while allowing Christians, indeed, to associate with them on the civic, business, and social plane. (I Cor. 5) We can be friendly toward Jews, Turks and heathens, but can no more *pray* with them than we can *worship* with them or *work together* in religious matters. ... But to distinguish between prayer fellowship and pulpit and altar fellowship in the manner that has become so popular, even in our circles today, is to involve oneself in sophistical reasoning such as should be anathema in the church.¹

Finally in 1961 it became apparent to the leaders of the Wisconsin Synod that after 22 years of patient admonition, there was nothing more to do other than break fellowship with the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. The Floor Committee cited the fact that prayer fellowship was one of the first problems in LC-MS and since it reared its ugly head, the loose fellowship practices had slowly crept into other areas like gangrene.

WHEREAS, The Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod has lodged many admonitions and protests with The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod during the past twenty years to win her from the path that leads to liberalism in doctrine and practice (cf. Proceedings 1939, page 159; 1941, page 43ff; 1947, page 104ff; 114f; 1948, page 114ff; 1951, page 110ff; 1953, page 95ff), and

WHEREAS, Our admonitions have largely gone unheeded, and the issues have remained unresolved, ...

The actual practical issues, reoccurring in ever new forms, against which our Synod's admonitions and protests have been directed all these years have already been well summed up in the Synod resolutions of 1953 which pointed, for example, to joint prayer, ...²

¹ George O. Lillegard, "Modern Ecumenism and Cooperation in Externals", *TQ* Vol.56 No.4 (October 1959) p.249-250

² "Resolutions on Intersynodical Matters", *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* Vol.58 No.3 (July 1961) p.297

Though some protested that we should wait to break relations with Missouri, it was stated that although Missouri had not officially adopted their statement *The Theology of Fellowship, Part II*, they had in fact been practicing the unscriptural fellowship principles which were contained in it since 1944.

Some delegates raised the point that *The Theology of Fellowship, Part II*, had not yet been adopted as an official document of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, and thus they felt that our Synod should not reach a decision before the 1962 convention of the Missouri Synod. The conviction prevailed, however, that the position taken in *The Theology of Fellowship, Part II*, was not new; that it had its beginnings already in the 1944 Missouri Synod resolutions on joint prayers; that its application was subsequently expanded, that in the meantime it has become deeply entrenched in the official practices of the Missouri Synod, and that in connection with these practices it has been affirmed also in principle.¹

The WELS would no longer wait to sever the bonds of fellowship nor could they. They had certainly given enough time to Missouri for them to come to their senses.

Resolved: a) That we now suspend fellowship with The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod on the basis of Romans 16:17, 18 with the hope and prayer to God that The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod will hear in this resolution an evangelical summons to "come to herself" (Luke 15:17) and to return to the side of the sister form whom she has estranged herself, ...²

The Wisconsin Synod had watched the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod gradually move toward liberal fellowship practices over the course of twenty some years. They had repeatedly admonished Missouri in the area of prayer fellowship as well as all the other areas in question. They could do no more. It was clear that the LC-MS was persisting in their error and we had to end our cherished relationship. Just a few years later, the Synodical Conference would also dissolve, bringing to an end a marvelous confessional Lutheran organization.

¹ Ibid., p.300

² Ibid., p.301

Yet there was no alternative. Fellowship could not be divided into levels, but was a "unit concept", as the theologians of the Wisconsin Synod had demonstrated from Scripture time and again for over twenty years. There must be complete agreement in doctrine for any kind of fellowship. This was the Scriptural teaching that Missouri refused to adhere to and was one of the driving forces behind the break of fellowship between our synods. The *Theologische Quartalschrift* faithfully reported the patient admonition by Wisconsin Synod to their Missouri brethren and addressed the spiritual issues that were facing the members of both synods.

God grant we cherish the purity of doctrine passed down to us by our fathers, never forgetting their efforts and anguish as they wrestled through the issues of these tumultuous times. Yet let us also in all humility remember that this is a gift from our loving and gracious Father and strive to refrain from thinking that we are above temptation and erring. There but for the grace of God himself do we go ourselves. May God continue to focus us on the truths of his holy and precious Word as we strive to teach them in all purity! SOLA DEO GLORIA!

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