

Slip, Sliding Away:  
The Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod  
and Prayer-Fellowship

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## DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this paper to retired Professor Carl Laurenz and all of the men who worked on the Intersynodical Committee. Their work is tough and demanding. Having researched this paper, I am convinced that they deserve recommendation and recognition. They have remained faithful to God's Word and the Confessions when errorists have attempted to mislead them by trick use of words, faulty logic, and incomplete or slanted exegesis of the text. The Intersynodical Committee has done a fine job in presenting our Confession based on God's word. My hat goes off to these hardworking, diligent men.

Thomas R. Gumm

When we go to church on Sunday and say the Lord's Prayer, we are proclaiming fellowship. When we sit down at a meal and pray, we are exhibiting fellowship. Our evening devotions, shut-in calls, beginning and closing a meeting with prayer; all these exhibit a fellowship or unity between the people present and our Lord. It sounds so simple, but prayer-fellowship has been the subject of debates for a long time. Should prayer-fellowship be included in pulpit and altar fellowship, or does prayer-fellowship belong in a separate category? Is there a difference between joint prayer and prayer-fellowship? Who can we pray with and who should we not? Is the Bible clear on prayer-fellowship, or is it a situation in a gray area for each person to decide for himself? When the theologians from different church bodies come together, should they begin the meeting with prayer because they are attempting to iron out doctrinal differences?

Lutheran bodies in America have struggled with these various questions. This paper is meant to focus on the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod and its struggle with prayer-fellowship. In the span of forty years we can detect a subtle, consistent change. First, there is total rejection of false doctrine. Then a slip by a few

theologians and another slip in other areas of fellowship. Then more slipping and finally sliding away from the true, established doctrine based on the Bible. There are many factors that come into play in this sad story. But because of space, we will deal with only the major points and attempt to fill in the progression of the great sliding away.

The main cast of characters are the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod, the American Lutheran Church, the Wisconsin Synod, and the following three men: Dr. Adolph Brux, Dr. Theodore Graebner, and Dr. William Arndt. From 1903 to the 1950's is the time of transition and change. It is during this period that a complete about-face came about in the doctrine of prayer-fellowship. It went from an expression of faith, to joint prayer with those who wish to discuss doctrine, to those Christians who do not disagree with fundamental doctrines. It is a steady lowering of the standards and importance of prayer-fellowship.

#### I. 1904, Detroit

Between the years 1903 to 1906, Iowa, Ohio, Buffalo, and Missouri held free conferences to discuss doctrinal differences and agreement. At these meetings, the Ohio and Iowa Synods encouraged the assembly to have an opening prayer. The men of the Missouri Synod refused,

stating it would be an active part of fellowship which in actuality did not exist between these groups. Both Ohio and Iowa felt they were being degraded or called false teachers if Missouri would not pray with them. Whereupon Missouri explained their doctrinal position on prayer-fellowship.

In 1904, Dr. Gerhard Bente, a professor at Concor-  
dia Seminary, presented a paper "Why Can't We Establish  
and Maintain Common Prayer Services with Iowa and Ohio  
Synods?" Within the thirty pages of this paper, he  
explains very clearly the doctrinal differences between  
the synods with Bible passages to back it up. In the  
paper he stresses the point that Ohio and Iowa were not  
considered heretics, but rather "weak Christians and  
needing our brotherly support."<sup>1</sup> He then cautions Iowa  
and Ohio, for in their theological journals they had  
called Missouri "Calvinists, heretics, sectionists,  
wolves, and apostles of the devil!"<sup>2</sup> because Missouri  
had defended the doctrines of election, conversion,  
the Church, and fellowship. Ohio and Iowa certainly  
quickly took the offensive in name-calling, yet felt  
offended when Missouri stood up for Biblical doctrine.

Bente continues by showing the different ploys  
used by Ohio and Iowa to spread their false doctrine:

1. They will put you on the defensive and make you

doubt your position.<sup>3</sup> 2. They will make you feel that you are offending them.<sup>4</sup> 3. They will call certain doctrines "open questions."<sup>5</sup> 4. They will use pre-conceived ideas in understanding a Bible passage.<sup>6</sup> 5. They will use general terms which can be understood in many ways so both parties can agree on the wording, yet have two different interpretations.<sup>7</sup> In his conclusion of this section, he says they are putting solae gratia and solae scriptura in question.<sup>8</sup>

As the paper continues, watch for these points, for in the controversy over prayer-fellowship, they come up over and over again. In 1904 the Missouri Synod stood firm, proclaimed the truth, and refused to weaken, slip, and fall into false doctrine.

## II. Dr. Adolf Brux - Slip

The Brux Case could easily be described as a comedy of errors. In terms of time, the case took from 1924 to 1940 before it was settled. It was well known, being brought before committees, boards, and finally the 1935 Synod Convention. Synod politics and personal conflicts flavor the case. There are misunderstandings, accusations, counterattacks, letters, bad judgments, boards overstepping their authority, and very little Bible study. Over the years of the

controversy, Brux read and presented his paper numerous times to many different groups in order to get a fair appraisal and decree.

At this time the author wishes to inform the reader that the majority of the material on the Brux case comes directly from Brux. The Missouri Synod published very little of its official records in regard to Brux. The author also commends Dr. Brux for his honesty. Brux could have easily edited or ripped out of context statements of the synod. However Brux faithfully reproduced entire personal letters of Arndt, Synodical decisions, and minutes of meetings which present the Synod's side of the story.

Dr. Adolph A. Brux was a missionary to the Moham-medans in India. He was a bright, intelligent individual who was tenacious over a point until proven wrong. From his records one may say that he was well organized and thorough. Also from his writings a person is able to tell he was a thinker, a kind, compassionate man, who patiently followed the system to get justice. Brux may have been a wonderful person, but his doctrinal position on prayer-fellowship was wrong.

On April 22-25, 1924, Dr. Adolph A. Brux read his paper "Christian Prayer and Unionism" at Krish-nagiri for the North District Conference in India. The paper presented was about sixty pages in length and divided into two parts. Part I covers the exegesis of 13 passages which deal with fellowship and prayer.

Part II applies these passages to situations. This paper produced so much discussion that it was to be presented at the conference again in July along with another paper written supporting the Synod's position.

In his paper Brux claimed that the Synod's position on prayer-fellowship was false because they went farther than Scripture stated. Also Brux claimed that the Synod's position was neither historical nor in line with the Confessions. Brux stated the Synod's position and then commented:

A careful reading of the above summarization and of the Bible passages adduced, reveals the fact that our position on prayer-fellowship is not based on statements in the Bible which expressly and unequivocally prohibit prayer-fellowship with Christians who stand with us on the same foundation, Christ, . . . 9

What Brux is saying here is that the Bible does not prohibit prayer-fellowship with any Christian who agrees with us on the fundamental doctrines concerning Christ and our salvation. However, we are not able to pray with any false teachers, prophets, apostates, or errorists who deny Christ.

Concerning Church history and the Confessions, Brux makes this statement about the Synod's position:

Our position on prayer-fellowship with Christians of other denominations has, therefore, been arrived at by a process of logical reasoning and deduction from the Scriptures



and the Confessional writings, and is not based on express prohibitions of prayer-fellowship either in Scripture or in the Confessional writings.

This accounts for a noteworthy fact, viz., that of a fluctuation in the theory and practice of prayer-fellowship in the history of the Lutheran Church in general, and also of our Synod in particular. 10

Brux then shows examples for Luther's life in which Luther prayed at the Leipzig debate with Eck in 1519. However, at that time Luther was working to reform the Church and there was no clear break with the Roman Catholic Church.

Brux then brings up the Marburg Colloquy of 1529 where Luther and the Reformed leaders, especially Zwingli rotated preaching at different churches. However, Brux did not keep in mind that neither a Lutheran nor a Reformed Church existed at this time either. Also, both Luther and Zwingli still belonged to the Roman Church and both were trying to reform it, albeit by different means. At that time the problem of altar, pulpit, prayer, and Church fellowship did not exist. Furthermore, Brux failed to examine his case far enough in the area of Luther. After the Marburg Colloquy, Luther never called Zwingli a brother nor could Luther worship with Zwingli, but would rather only show peace and charity towards him.

Brux goes on to say that the Missouri Synod is not basing their doctrine of fellowship on clear-cut prohibitions from the Bible. He claims their doctrine on fellowship is based on logical conclusions. From this point on in Brux's paper, there is a common thread running through it, namely, if we are willing to call anyone a Christians, we should be willing to pray with them also. The Bible passages concerning fellowship don't apply to those we call Christians, but only to those who we do not call Christians. His whole paper is slanted with that thought in mind.

In the exegetical portion of his paper, it becomes evident to the reader that Brux stretches points of exegesis, broadens or narrows definitions of words, and uses his basic theme to modify the meaning of a passage. The passage which has the greatest amount of ink spilled over it is Romans 16:17-18. This passage seemed to cause Brux a lot of trouble.

The best way for the reader to get a flavor of Brux's logic is to read it himself. Two excerpts will be given from Brux's exegesis on Romans 16:17 and they will cover the following part of the passage: "contrary to the doctrine ye have learned and avoid them." Brux feels that this passage deals solely with the Judahizers and any doctrinal matter similar to the Judahizer's

problem. ". . . the doctrine which ye have learned is the apostolic doctrine that forms the counterpart to the doctrine of the Judaizers."<sup>11</sup> Please note that Brux uses the Judaizers because they challenge the fundamental doctrine of Christ and Justification. With this background then, he concludes that this passage may not be used in the area of non-fundamental doctrine disagreement.

Here is part of Brux's argument.

The doctrine of the Judaizers opposed, was contrary to, and undermined, the apostolic doctrine of the grace of God in Christ Jesus without the works of the law, which the Romans had learned, and so the party-divisions (dichostasias) created on the basis of the doctrine of the Judaizers, and the deceptive means (skandala, traps) employed by the Judaizers to establish their doctrine, are, together with the subversive doctrine itself, declared to be "contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned." Contrariwise, "the doctrine which ye have learned" receives its definite character and limitation through the definite article and through the contrast with the opposing doctrine referred to in the context. viz., the limitation to the doctrine of justification by faith without the deeds of the law. Assuredly, 'the doctrine' may not be lifted out of this context and be made to stand by itself and refer to any point of Christian doctrine whatsoever. Even if it be granted that "the doctrine which ye have learned" may refer to all of those fundamental Christian truths which were later incorporated in the so-called Apostles' Creed -- a view which would be quite possible in it self and in keeping with what we know of apostolic Christianity, though it does not appear to fit so well into the context of Rom. 16,17 -- 'the doctrine' would have to

be limited to the fundamental doctrines of Christianity, and could not be extended to include all non-fundamental points of Christian doctrine as well.

This conclusion is confirmed by another important consideration. If "the doctrine which ye have learned" be understood as covering any point of Christian doctrine whatsoever, and be not limited to the central doctrine of Christianity, or to the fundamental doctrines of Christianity, all terms of the text and of the context (creating division, setting traps, serving the belly and not Christ, deceiving by 'good words and fair speeches') will need to be applied to all who differ from us in any particular of doctrine whatsoever, no matter how fine and correct they may stand on the foundation, Christ Himself, and these terms of text and context, together with the injunction to 'avoid,' will lead us to regard them as no longer fellow-members of the body of Christ . . ." 12 (emphasis Brux)

In Brux's own words we see that he understands the Synod's as well as the Biblical understanding of the principles on fellowship. But because Brux doesn't want to believe these clear principles, he turns and twists the definitions to be broader or narrower in scope than they should. Also from this quote one can easily see his running line of thought concerning the idea of being able to have fellowship with those groups who believe the fundamental doctrine of Christ.

In yet another example Brux changes the scope on the terms of admonition and avoid. By changing the scope, he is able to limit or expand the applications

of these two terms to fit his theme.

"And avoid them" (lit. turn yourselves away from them). . . . The persons against whom these injunctions are directed are the well-known men who are making it their business to cause the well-known divisions, and to employ the well-known deceitful tactics against the opposing doctrine (of justification by faith) received from the apostles, in other words, they are not weak and erring Christians, but are antichrists, determined to undermine and subvert Paul's doctrine of justification by faith. . . . but the text contains no suggestion of brotherly admonition. 13 (emphasis Brux)

Here Brux stays with his basic premise and uses his feelings to mold the meaning of the passage. He does not let the passage speak for itself, but rather edits the passage as he sees fit. Brux simply could not and would not believe that this passage applies to anyone we call a Christian. He felt we can only admonish a Christian, but never, on purpose, avoid him. To Brux, the person was a Christian with who we could pray or that person was an antichrist who should be avoided, but never a Christian who we would avoid. Thus Brux never considers a Christian who is a persistent errorist concerning a non-fundamental doctrine. He continues to use this logic and train of thought on the next ten passages in his paper. After going through this much exegesis with this slant, one can predict what Part II, the application, would be like.

### III. The Brux Case: Sliding Into Synod

Normally, a case like that of Brux would be handled by the conference and then fade away. However, the Brux Case didn't end up that way. At the second conference meeting, the conference was split because Brux presented a good case, but the Synod stood for something else. The men of the conference couldn't decide, so they instructed Brux to submit his paper to Rev. Boerger, a member of the Board for Foreign Missions. Brux waited a while because the Caste Controversy had broken out. Since he did not wish to have two controversies going on at the same time, he submitted his paper in 1931, when he returned home on furlough from India.

The real problems begin at this time. Rev. Boerger and Dr. Brux discussed his paper and Boerger came to the conclusion that Brux was correct in his interpretation of the Scripture passages. On August 25, 1931, Dr. Brux presented his paper to a meeting of all the missionaries on furlough. Present at this meeting were Rev. Doerger and Dr. Sommer. These two men attacked Part II of Brux's paper, but did not say a word against Part I, the exegesis of Scripture. Brux neatly swayed the other missionaries by demanding that Dr. Sommer or Rev. Boerger prove from

Scripture, namely Part I, that his application was wrong. Zoerger couldn't say anything because he agreed with Brux on the exegesis. Sommer was stumped because he had not read the paper and therefore requested a discussion on it later. In later discussions, Sommer became frustrated when he couldn't refute Brux's exegesis and finally said, "I am not open to instruction in this matter. I ceased to be open to instruction from the day I took office in the ministry."<sup>14</sup>

It was at this time that Dr. Brux started private correspondence with Dr. Arndt. The correspondence on this subject would cover a decade. Arndt became a major person in the Brux Case. From November 17, 1931 until the matter was settled, Arndt either represented Brux, or sat on a panel discussing Brux, or ended up being accused by Brux of being President Pfotenhauer's hatchet man. The reason Dr. Arndt participated at all in this case was because Arndt was Missouri Synod's professional in the field of Unionism. He was also a professor at Concordia Seminary and the editor of the Concordia Theological Monthly. Before Brux and Arndt could finally get together and discuss this paper, a Plenary Board was called together to discuss it as well as a few other matters.

So far the Synod had followed its rules and regulations, but that soon changed, and the comedy of errors was about to begin. The Plenary Board met, but only four members of the Board had read Brux's paper. The group was divided. So they passed the hot potato on to the Faculty of Concordia Seminary for an opinion. The Faculty declined an opinion and sent it on to the Board for Foreign Missions. That Board asked Brux to meet with two of his former professors at Concordia Seminary, Dr. L. Fuerbringer and Dr. Theo. Graebner. This meeting occurred on February 19, 1932. It turned into a mess because Fuerbringer never read Brux's paper and Graebner stated that he had read only 4-5 pages of the essay and then laid it aside as unworthy of further study."<sup>15</sup>

Dr. Arndt stepped in around February 20, 1932 and began working with Brux. Arndt pointed to Walther's articles and specifically to Titus 3:10-11. "Warn a divisive person once, and then warn him a second time. After that, have nothing to do with him. You may be sure that such a man is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned." Brux pointed to his paper saying that the Bible context of the passage dictates that this passage refers to "Jewish gnosticism." Brux then applied the passage this way. "The injunction to 'reject' may



accordingly not be applied to any person who may happen to differ from us in some point or other of doctrine, but must be restricted to such as have rejected admonition."<sup>16</sup>(emphasis Brux) Again Brux is consistent to his feelings that we may pray with anyone we call a Christian, that is, who accepts the fundamental doctrines of the Bible.

On May 16, 1932, the St. Louis Board of Fuerbringer, Graebner, and Arndt sent a recommendation to the Plenary Board stating that Brux held contrary beliefs to the Synod concerning prayer-fellowship. Therefore, they recommended that Brux should not return to India as a missionary.<sup>17</sup> Brux was then invited to appear before the Plenary Board on June 14 at Concordia College, Milwaukee to receive their decision. Again Brux dodged the bullet. Brux requested on favor of the Board before they passed judgment. He asked the Board, by show of hands, who among them had read his paper. Three out of seventeen raised their hands. The Board realized they could not pass judgment honestly, so the vote was suspended until each member could read the essay and a refutation could be written. Somehow this last point of a written refutation was omitted from the official minutes of the meeting. Later on, it was revealed that the minutes were changed at many of the Brux meetings by officials under the direction of either

Arndt, Pfothenhauer, or Brand, the chairman of the Board for Foreign Missions.<sup>18</sup>

The next meeting of the Plenary Board was called on October 4, 1932 at St. Louis. Dr. Brux requested a stenographic report of the meeting because the minutes of the former meeting had been altered. The request was denied for two reasons: 1. the cost; and 2. The Board members would have to watch what they said.<sup>19</sup> The Plenary Board discussed the Romans 16:17-18 section of Brux's paper in depth and two of the other passages briefly. The remaining ten passages of Part I were discarded and the Board plowed on to Part II, the application, with rigor. Brux objected, claiming that Part II didn't make sense unless Part I was thoroughly covered. The Board rejected his plea.

On October 12, 1932, Dr. Brux was recommended not to return to India until he changed his views. Secondly, the Board terminated his income as missionary as of November 30, 1932. Brux was angry and even more angry when he received the official minutes of the Plenary Board, which were again altered. Brux then protested to the Board of Foreign Missions and President Pfothenhauer of the Synod. They both upheld the decision of the Plenary Board. On December 8, 1932 the Board for Foreign Missions published this notice:

"We regret very much that it is incumbent upon us to notify our brethren in the Synod of the saddening relation between Dr. Brux and us. Dr. Brux is now not eligible for a ministerial office in our organization because of his erring doctrinal position."<sup>20</sup> This was one of the biggest mistakes the Board could have made. They did not have the power to declare this statement, but only the District president. This rule can be found on page 29 of the Synodical Handbook.

Brux now became a martyr. Many pastors heard about his case and wanted to know more. Brux received many requests for his paper and many pastors wrote to President Pfotenhauer to re-open his case. Pfotenhauer tried to stay out of the matter, but the pressure grew as more and more pastors took up Brux's position. A committee was called, but they said the Board of Foreign Missions should re-open the case. That Board refused.<sup>21</sup> The only course now open to Brux was to make an appeal to the 1935 Synod Convention.

At the 1935 Synod Convention, Brux was not accused or reprimanded on his paper, but rather because he brought charges against some synod officials. The Convention did this because the Board of Foreign Missions and the other committees who had reviewed Brux's paper had agreed with his exegesis, but not with his

application and practice. They were trapped between a rock and a hard place. The Synod Committee recommended that Brux return to India as a missionary. But the worst part of their decision was that they permitted the following statement to stand and thus left the door wide open for unionistic prayer.

Scripture very plainly prohibits compromise of the truth, indifference to doctrine, unionism, and giving of offense and therefore forbids every kind of prayer-fellowship which involves one of these objectional features. There are in the domain of casuistry cases where the question whether unionistic prayer-fellowship is involved cannot be answered in advance.<sup>22</sup>

The Convention left a possibility for joint prayer if it didn't go against one of those objectional features mentioned. In plain English, it left it up to the individual's own conscience.

#### IV. The A.L.C.: Sliding Into Synod

The American Lutheran Church or A.L.C. was one of the major influences upon the change in the Missouri Synod's understanding on the doctrine of prayer-fellowship. The A.L.C. was formed in 1930. Among its members were the Ohio, Iowa, and Buffalo Synods. These groups may sound familiar to this subject. From the time Bente worked with this group to 1930, the three had not changed in their doctrinal stance. This raises

the question, why didn't Missouri leave this group alone when they knew their past history? Why open discussions? A number of opinions could be offered. After the Missouri Synod turned down the "Chicago Thesis" or, as it is also called, the "Intersynodical Thesis," the Missouri Synod felt isolated and that it may have been overcritical. So the Missouri Synod wrote a doctrinal statement called, "A Brief Statement." Very succinctly it presented Missouri's rejection of the "Chicago These." Special emphasis was placed on conversion and election.

Another reason given for this attempt at unity with the A.L.C. was the purpose given at the 1935 Convention of the Missouri Synod in Cleveland.

Whereas, Our Synod has always recognized the duty and desirability of the 'conservation and promotion of the unity of the true faith (Eph. 4:3-6; ICor. 1:10)' and of a united defense against schism and sectarianism (Handbook, p.1); and

Whereas, God-pleasing Scriptural external union and co-operation is based upon internal unity, oneness in faith, 23 confession, doctrine, and practice.

The Missouri Synod was simply following the purpose listed in their constitution, as this was one of their very reasons for their existence.

At this 1935 Convention, the Synod setup a standing committee to handle the intersynodical discussions.

The group was called "the Committee on Lutheran Church Union." One of the members appointed to this committee was Dr. Arndt. At this same convention Arndt was also busy working with Dr. Brux. The 1935 Convention was truly one of the turning points on fellowship as two areas were brought up: Brux and negotiations with the A.L.C.

Between the years 1935 to 1938, the Union Committee met six times with the A.L.C. group. Great strides were and many differences were settled, or so it seemed. One of the big controversies that came up at the first meeting was prayer. The A.L.C. men wanted to open and close all of the meetings with prayer since the two groups were working together towards doctrinal unity. The A.L.C. men felt that if Missouri didn't pray with them, then Missouri was calling them false teachers. As one can see, this was the same ploy they used back in 1903. The author was not able to find out how these meetings were settled. It wasn't until 1941 that the first Missouri man joined in joint prayer with the A.L.C.<sup>24</sup>

Another event should have opened the eyes of the Missouri Synod. The A.L.C. and the U.L.C.A. were having meetings discussing possible fellowship between the years of 1935 and 1938. Missouri <sup>had</sup> given up on the possibility of fellowship with the L.C.A. years before

because of the great differences in doctrine. The unique standing of the L.C.A. was that they felt they were in fellowship with anyone who called themselves Lutheran or subscribed to the Confessions. The L.C.A. did not want doctrinal discussions, but only organizational meetings concerning externals as well as special joint church services. Dr. Arndt makes note of this in the "Theological Observer" column he wrote, especially during the years of 1936 to 1938.

Also in this column by Dr. Arndt, he reproduced editorials from other Church bodies, especially the A.L.C. and the U.L.C.A., and the Norwegian Lutherans. Many of these editorials shamed Missouri for their strict doctrinal position. One example of this appears in the Concordia Theological Monthly of November 1934.<sup>25</sup> Dr. Arndt also reproduced an article from the Lutheran, July 19, 1934 entitled "Is Missouri's Aloofness Justifiable?" It ridiculed Missouri for teaching its people not to go to just any Lutheran Church when in an area where there was no Missouri Synod Church. Furthermore, the Missouri Synod pastors were labeled as "highly legalistic." The article concluded that such loyalty is foolish and not practical.

The most significant infiltration of the A.L.C. into the Missouri Synod, however, came after the 1938

Convention at St. Louis. One of the recommendations of Committee 16 (the Committee on Lutheran Church Union) reads as follows:

d. "Until Church fellowship has been officially established, the pastors of both Church bodies are encouraged to meet in smaller circles wherever and as often as possible in order to discuss both the doctrinal basis for union and the questions of Church practice. 26

The Convention adopted this provision. The Lutheran Witness records this different circuit meetings that were held between the years of 1938 to 1940. The two main topics of discussion were prayer-fellowship and election. At these meetings the grass roots of the Synod were being filled with doubts and rethinking on these two areas. On election, the Missouri men stood firm, but prayer-fellowship took a beating. The results were seen after 1941 when Missouri started joint prayer.<sup>27</sup>

#### V. Arndt and Graebner: Slip, Sliding Away

That decree of the 1938 Convention set in motion the meeting of many grass root elements. One of those grass root elements was the editors of both the Synod's magazines. Both the Missouri and the A.L.C. editors came together at the Atlantic Hotel in Chicago on February 8, 1939. Both groups were happy and cordial in the news article that told about this historical



occasion, there were two interesting statements.

He (Dr. W. Arndt) pointed out that our Church-papers are not vehicles of information but agencies for exercising leadership and that our constituency looks to our Church-papers to furnish leadership in the direction of a God-pleasing union. 28 (emphasis mine)..

Arndt knew exactly the power that the two Synod magazines had on its people. The pastors were influenced by the C.T.M. because it was written by the faculty members of the Seminary. The Lutheran Witness was read by the lay members of the Synod. Yes, these two papers did give leadership, but in what direction?

The discussion of some of the obstacles in the way of effecting Church-fellowship was marked by the utmost frankness and friendliness, and constructive editorial policies on matters directly and indirectly related to the union movement were agreed upon. 29 (emphasis mine)

Semi-annual conferences were scheduled for this group to meet again. Now both Synods could keep a close watch on each other's editorials. From this point on, a marked difference appears in the reporting of both Arndt and Graebner in their publications.

In the August 3, 1939 issue of The Lutheran Witness, Graebner describes for the people what Church-fellowship is and lays down the requirements for such. Graebner paints a very nice picture of the fellowship between the A.L.C. and Missouri Synods.

Of such a relation our Synod and also the American Lutheran Church have declared that so far as their doctrinal position is concerned, the last obstacles have been removed. Yet by removing the obstacles, they have not simultaneously established fellowship relations.

That which remains to be done in this direction will be done, but that in all things God's name may be hallowed is the prayer of all those who contend for the truth as we know it in the Lutheran Church.<sup>30</sup>  
(emphasis Graebner)

In November of the same year, Graebner ran an article answering questions people had about the Church-Union deliberation. Graebner calmed the people's fears with words that made the problems look insignificant or like possibly just a misunderstanding. An example of this is the question raised concerning the position of Iowa and Ohio (A.L.C.) on Objective Justification.

The answer to this is, a) that the A.L.C. has accepted objective justification by accepting the Missouri Synod's Brief Statement, paragraph 17, and b) that it can be easily shown that the doctrine of the Ohio and Iowa Synods on this point agreed with our own, as in Hymn 116 of our hymnal verse one (the author being M. Loy, a theologian of the Ohio Synod).<sup>31</sup>

What kind of proof is that? The Brief Statement is just that, very brief! It is so general that many interpretations can stand. In the Brief Statement there is no rejection of the old Ohio and Iowa errors concerning justification. Using a hymn verse is also very weak evidence. Graebner uses the same method

concerning inspiration.

Why lay a large portion of the blame on Arndt and Graebner? First of all, Arndt was a respected theologian much like our Professor J.P. Meyer or Carl Lawrenz. Next, Arndt was a professor at Concordia Seminary, a member of the Committee on Lutheran Church Union, and the editor of the Concordia Theological Monthly. In plain English, he was a very important person. When he spoke, people listened. The man was well versed in unionism as seen in his many articles contained in the C.T.M. He was involved in the middle of the Brux case. Once he started changing his views, it influenced his students. His change made pastors re-evaluate their positions, for he had been their teacher. This caused confusion.

Graebner was very much in a similar position. He was a Seminary professor, a respected theologian, and the editor of The Lutheran Witness for many years. He also was considered a very important person. However, Graebner was a conservative at heart. Because he was the editor of a major Synodical paper, he had to write what the Synod officials told him to write. This is often forgotten. One of his former students felt Graebner was pushed into the liberal camp by his conservative associates. The situation was a sad one much like Koehler and the Protestants.

In the 1940's both Arndt and Graebner wrote papers concerning Christian prayer. In both papers, it shows the change these men made as compared to their position in the early 1930's. One would figure that Arndt would not change, especially since he dealt with the Brux case. Both men endorsed a difference between prayer-fellowship and joint prayer. Joint prayer could be conducted in two situations: 1. When two groups come together to discuss religious differences. In such a prayer, they would ask God to permit His true doctrine to come forward and be established. 2. In private joint prayer is allowed. An example of this would be when the relative come over for a Thanksgiving meal. However, here they try to distinguish between joint prayer and prayer-fellowship. When we pray at Church, that is a proclamation of faith and thus be classified as prayer-fellowship rather than joint prayer.<sup>32</sup>

#### VI. Grease that helped the sliding away

The feeling of the times does play an important role in the way people act. In 1935 Dr. Arndt noticed this and wrote a very brief article in the Concordia Theological Monthly. Between the years 1906 to 1934 there were eleven mergers of different Protestant groups. Arndt's comment at the end of the article is

interesting. "The world evidently has become union-minded. Let all followers of Jesus beware lest they desire to have bigness rather than the truth." 33

In the late 1930's came the great depression. People had little and shared much. They worked together. All some of the people had to share was their kindness, their faith, their hard work, and a little food. Then World War II started and the country had to pull together. Church groups sent packages, letters, and many other things off to war. The Churches worked hard with the government. The times promoted unionism.

Besides taking care of the Brux Case and establishing a Union Committee, the 1935 Synod Convention also gave the green light for the Synod to start a chaplaincy program with the navy and army. After the war, when the Missouri Synod people came home, doctrinal differences were blurred because they saw these chaplains praying with other Lutherans. These lay people could say that they prayed with many other Lutherans and a Missouri Synod pastor lead the whole thing.

Another influence of the 1940's was that the United States population became more mobile. People moved to cities for jobs. The times were good and peace was in the world. The people went to church,

to the nearest Lutheran Church if there was no Missouri Synod Church. People had a different attitude, namely, away from confessionalism towards what ever was practical.

Yet one more influence in the late 1940's and early 1950's was that the liberals in the Wisconsin Synod switched synods, causing an increase in the liberal camp of the Missouri Synod. An important person who changed synods was Martin Franzmann. He was a professor at Northwestern College. After he switched, he became a professor at Concordia Seminary and also became one of the members of a committee that worked with the Wisconsin Synod. He was one of the authors of the pamphlet called "A Fraternal word."

### Conclusion

The doctrine of prayer-fellowship in the Missouri Synod has changed from the time of Gerhardt Bente. The Synod which stood firm against error, slipped and slid away into error by 1951. Not one single event can be blamed for this slide. It was the combination of the feelings of the times, key men bending under pressure, the poorly handled and well publicized Brux Case, and, most of all, the three big decisions at the 1935 Synod Convention.

The difference in prayer went from a doctrinal statement to a practical, unoffending event. By praying with any Lutheran allowed no toes to be stepped on. The confessional side of prayer was slowly put to death. The errorists used prayer as a foot in the door. Once the Missouri Synod began having joint prayer, the errorist felt complete fellowship would follow. Professor Lorenz said in an interview that once the joint prayer started, there was no longer an urgent need for doctrinal discussion, because there was fellowship established by that prayer.

The author feels that Missouri has no excuse. The Wisconsin Synod approached them numerous times, wrote many papers, and patiently worked with them. The Missouri Synod has no excuse because history showed them the doctrinal stance of the American Lutheran Church when it was still the Ohio and Iowa Synod. The Missouri Synod has no excuse because their theologians saw the ridicule in the A.L.C. and L.C.A. church magazines. They realized what the A.L.C. and L.C.A. was attempting. The Missouri Synod has no excuse because they changed their doctrine to fit their practice instead of the other way around. Missouri indeed slipped, slipped again, and finally slid away into error.

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