

The Status Controversiae in the Synodical Conference

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[The Principle Question in the Controversy within the Synodical Conference.]

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Status Controversia is a technical expression familiar from its use in the Book of Concord. Ten of the twelve articles of the Epitome of the Formula of Concord feature the heading:

STATUS CONTROVERSIA

The Principal Question in this Controversy.

Thus for example Article I, entitled: *Of Original Sin*, opens with a paragraph that sets forth the status controversiae as follows:

Whether original sin is properly and without any distinction man's corrupt nature, substance and essence, or at any rate the principal and best part of his essence (substance), namely, the rational soul itself in its highest state and powers; OR whether, even after the Fall, there is a distinction between man's substance, essence, body, soul, and original sin, so that the nature(itself) is one thing, and original sin, which inheres in the corrupt nature and corrupts the nature, another.

We observe, therefore, that status controversiae is not, as a casual reader might unguardedly suppose, to be translated: The state of the controversy, or the status quo. It denotes, rather, the point at issue. When in a doctrinal controversy the area of debate, the actual cleavage, has been narrowed down to a clear definition of the opposing positions, then the status controversiae has been established, and from that point of departure the issue can be debated conclusively.

It is in this accepted sense of the term that the assigned subject is to be developed. The order is a large one. Narrowing down the point of a controversy so that it can be presented in brief, concise, inclusive manner is always a delicate task requiring thorough comprehension of the materials involved as well as an objective attitude. But establishing "The Status Controversiae in the Synodical Conference" calls for an abnormal expenditure of time and labor which must depend for its success upon the correctness of the premise that the entire upheaval in our church body dating back to 1938 can be reduced to, and formulated in, its essence.

So far as this writer knows, this has never been attempted. The closest approach to the fixing of a status controversiae was made by the Wisconsin Synod Convention of 1953 which said: "The issue that has opened the serious breach between our Synod and the Missouri Synod and threatens the continuance of the Synodical Conference is Unionism." (Proceed. p.103). Without entering in upon a discussion of the correctness of this evaluation, it must be said that the use of a pat term cannot serve as a basis from which the issues can be carefully debated. The word Unionism is an indictment, not a statement of the status controversiae which would necessarily have to define unionism and fix the contrasting positions.

Nevertheless the statement of the 1953 Convention created a welcome precedent. It did place us on record as supposing that the situation dividing the Synodical Conference can be reduced to a basic issue. A careful review of the historical development over the past twenty years justified the expectation. The question remains whether the core of the disruptive force among us can be penetrated and analyzed. This paper represents a deliberate effort in that direction.

Is there a Controversy in the Synodical Conference?

We might well wish that this were a minor step in our melancholy undertaking and that it could be negotiated in brevity. Unhappily the question cannot be treated as an elementary one because it is of the essence of the present situation that the extent of our intersynodical and intrasynodical difficulties has been played down in some quarters. This is significant in itself and may well help to put us upon the track of the true status controversiae.

On the one hand, private expressions were heard here and there which seemed to say or imply that the whole debate agitating the members of the Synodical Conference is a tempest in a teapot. When our Synod and the Norwegian Synod began to sound alarms and voice rebukes, there were those who showed little inclination for taking them seriously. Today the concern is certainly more widely felt and the general attitude has become far more realistic; but there remains a disturbingly prevalent attitude deploring the high-tension atmosphere which has developed and tending to minimize the gravity of existing differences. Nothing contributed more to the downgrading of the issues, it seems to me, than the occasional reports one heard of the activities of members of our Synod who seemed to find the exercise of normal fellowship relations with the Missouri Synod quite consistent with Synod's declaration, first of a protesting, then of a vigorously protesting fellowship.

The Synodical Protest Committee, in its Report to the Convection of 1957, voiced this criticism:

A number of later protests were possibly encouraged, and further warrant and justification may have been given to the earlier ones by the fact that in many instances all evidence of a "vigorously protesting fellowship," which our Synod resolved to practice, seems to have been lacking, and fellowship relations with the Missouri Synod seem to be carried on as though there were nothing at all between us. Members of the Synod may need to ask themselves whether through possible neglect in earnestly observing this resolution of the Synod they have not augmented the problem which exists for some of our brethren. (Proceedings 1957, p.147, 4.)

Aside from the fact that any actual flouting of a moral commitment made in the fear of God casts reflections upon such commitment and exposes our Synod to ridicule, any indifference with which the status confessionis is more honored in the breach than in the observance implies that any existent controversy is academic and must not be regarded as profoundly serious.

On the other hand, those who have professed deep concern and who permit the issues materially to affect their actions and attitudes, have on occasion been subjected to the indignity of being characterized as members of a "lunatic fringe." A casual observer might be led to the assumption that the debate among us features sober confessionalism vs. extremism, or Christian love vs. rigorous, uncharitable dogmatism. If the issue is thus distorted, this may be just another symptom which offers a clue to the object of our search in this paper.

If it is impossible, except for the most radical dissembler, to make a serious denial of the existence of controversy in the Synodical Conference, an appearance of plausibility has been given to the contention that the controversy is not a doctrinal one. It has been alleged on more than one occasion that, while the Norwegian Synod has indeed raised a charge of false doctrine against the Common Confession, the Wisconsin Synod has refrained from lodging that particular indictment against statements of any sister Synod. By way of further explanation it is sometimes suggested that our differences lie in the field of practical application rather than in doctrine. In other words, our unity on the doctrinal platform of the Synodical Conference remains unimpaired; but a diversity has appeared in the application of certain doctrines to practical matters of church life and discipline.

None of these allegations or interpretations can stand in the face of facts and sound Lutheran theology. Our Synod in 1951 declared:

...that we not only find the Common Confession to be inadequate in the points noted (cf. Review of the Common Confession), but that we also hold that the adoption of the Common Confession by the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod involves an untruth and creates a basically untruthful situation since this action has been officially interpreted as a settlement of past differences which are in fact not settled. (Proceedings 1951, p.147, No. 2).

That this declaration constitutes a moderately phrased but manifest charge of false doctrine against the Common Confession and the Synod which adopted it was publicly affirmed in an official publication of our Synod with the following words:

A doctrinal statement may be scriptural and correct, and yet fall short of meeting an issue that it is meant to settle. A confessional document may set forth nothing but Biblical truths in its various individual parts, and yet fail to meet the issue, to serve the very purpose for which it is designed. In either case this may be called an "inadequacy." If this term is used, it must, however, be with the clear understanding that by reason of this inadequacy such a statement or such a confession actually constitutes false doctrine. Otherwise we are only deceiving ourselves. Others will be quick to see through such a subterfuge.

That is why the claim that the Common Confession is Scriptural in its various statements means nothing. It certainly does not prove this document to be an orthodox confession. And to admit its inadequacy even while treating this as though it were but a minor weakness is to ignore the fact that in a confessional statement, in a document meant to be the settlement of old doctrinal controversies, such 'inadequacies' constitute a most serious failing. The document must stand or fall by the manner in which it settles or fails to settle the old issues. If it fails, - as we believe it does - this means that the Common Confession, in spite of all its correct statements, not merely contains false doctrine. It is false doctrine. (*Quartalschrift* April 1954, pp.87-88.)

In passing, it should be noted that this quotation does not say that each doctrinal statement of the Common Confession is actually in itself scripturally correct. It merely affirms that, even if this were so, in its inadequacy it is an instrument of doctrinal falseness. And to this finding something further must now be added. Although the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod has ruled that the Common Confession "can no longer serve as a functioning union document," this change in its status cannot repeal the verdict of heterodoxy that rests upon it. For no formal confessional document of the Church can be judged apart from its place in history. Whether it is formally declared to be a settlement or not: If in its treatment of doctrine it fails to meet the controversies of the past and neglects to define the Truth of the doctrines treated in their essential parts, it remains inadequate and therefore false, a menace to the Church until abrogated. Sins of omission are sins always (James 4:17), and in matters of doctrine they become error.

The above disposes of the view which desires to limit the controversial area in the Synodical Conference to the field of practice. We might include the observation that the distinction between joint prayer and prayer fellowship affirmed by Missouri in 1944, and consistently upheld since, is argued and defended as a doctrinal position by that Body, as indeed it must be, entirely apart from its application. The doctrinal basis upon which it rests is, however, false.

In actual fact our Synod has long since established the status controversiae in several matters of doctrine that are at issue in the Synodical Conference since 1938. This service was rendered by various excellent essays prepared for intersynodical discussion, as well as by tracts issued at considerable effort and expense for the briefing of our laity in these matters. He who reads these documents with intelligent application will soon find that the controversy is indeed a doctrinal one, involving the inviolable and precious Word.

We cannot repeat this effort now; nor does the assignment call for it. Our purpose is to establish the status controversiae in the Synodical Conference. In order to know what to look for, it needed to be confirmed that the problem is a doctrinal one.

That it has been this from the inception of the present disruption can be demonstrated by a reference to the 1938 resolutions of the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod. These included the following paragraphs:

While the Missouri Synod teaches, on the basis of 2 Thess. 2,3-12 and in accord with the Smalcald Articles (Part II, Article IV,10), that the Pope is the very Antichrist for the past and the future, your Committee finds that the synodical fathers have declared that a deviation in this doctrine need not be divisive of church fellowship.

While the Missouri Synod teaches on the basis of the Scriptures that we are not to look forward to a universal conversion of all Jews before the end of the world, your Committee finds that the synodical fathers have declared that (such) deviation in this doctrine need not be regarded as a cause for division.

In regard to this assumption of a physical resurrection of the martyrs before Judgment Day the Missouri Synod teaches that this is a misinterpretation of Rev. 20:4, since according to the statements of the Scriptures and the confessional writings there will be only one resurrection, and that on Judgment Day. Your Committee finds that the synodical fathers have declared that this erroneous assumption need not be divisive of church fellowship.

These portions also of the report of Floor Committee No. 16 were adopted by the Convention at St. Louis "unanimously through a rising vote."

Here we have a doctrinal pronouncement. It speaks of doctrines of Holy Scripture which are non-divisive. That the concept of "non-divisive doctrine" is in itself heterodox ought to be clear to all genuine Lutheranism. Evidently it was not then, and is not now.

For a long time after 1938 there was no official reaction to this part of the St. Louis resolutions, so far as I am aware, on the part of the constituent Synods of the Synodical Conference, with one notable semi-official exception to which I shall refer later. But in 1950 it became a public issue within the Missouri Synod itself. The occasion was provided by an essay delivered by Dr. W. Arndt in the California and Nevada Districts. With reference to this essay and in response to criticism Dr. Arndt himself later wrote: "I do not present anything new in my essay as far as doctrinal views are concerned, but I do sponsor the positions which our Synod gave expression to in 1938." Memorials which vigorously protested the Arndt position that had actually become the Synod's position in 1938 were addressed to the 1950 Convention. One of these memorials (No.609) quotes Dr. Arndt as saying: "Church fellowship is not made impossible by the existence of error in the view of an individual or of a church body, provided these errors are of a non-fundamental nature and the right attitude toward Christ and the Word of God is maintained."

The memorial pointed out that this is the position of the old Iowa Synod, from the writings of which it quotes the following:

There are doctrines, even doctrines of the Bible, concerning which members of our Church may hold different views and convictions without thereby being compelled to refuse each other church fellowship; and that these are the very doctrines for the sake of which the Missourians adjudge us to be heretical. In such matters unity should indeed be sought; but it is not absolutely required, as in the doctrines of faith.

Dr. Reu also wrote, in the pamphlet entitled: *In the Interest of Lutheran Unity*, p.38:

Whoever thinks that he must, on account of non-agreement in non-fundamentals, sever or reject church fellowship with brethren who bow as sincerely as he does to the Word of God, and who desire above all to accord supreme authority to the Scriptures, should be made to understand that

he separates himself from his brethren on account of something which has nothing to do with our salvation and stands far out in the periphery of Christian doctrine.....

This is the position which gained official sanction in the Missouri Synod in 1938, was defended by Dr. Arndt, and remains the dominant view in his Synod. It vindicates the affirmation of the Statement of the '44 which declared: "Church fellowship is possible without complete agreement in details of doctrine and practice which have never been considered divisive in the Lutheran Church." (Par.11). But the conviction of the protesters also remains; and the two positions enjoy coexistence in the Missouri Synod and in the Synodical Conference.

Leaving for the present the scene in the Synodical Conference as such, we come to our own Synod, where there is controversy also. Again we must contend against any phlegmatic failure to recognize its very existence. We are all aware of tensions in our church body. Attention has been called to what some have characterized as a spirit of separatism that allegedly shows itself in the actions and pronouncements of certain synodicals. Pastors and congregations have withdrawn from Synod in varying degree, and others are maintaining a form of affiliation that might by some be defined as a status confessionis. Terms such as "crackpot" and "lunatic" have been hurled at those who feel constrained thus to testify against what they believe to be an unscriptural course which the Synod has chosen. Whatever just and unqualified censure all stupid name-calling merits, it serves a constructive purpose in that those who indulge in it are thereby deprived of the right to argue against the existence of controversy among us. Their conduct is not the best evidence of a unity of the spirit preserved in the bond of peace, just as it is not in demonstration of the Spirit and of spiritual power. Of course there is controversy in the Wisconsin Synod - painful, wide-spread and serious.

Is it doctrinal controversy? Here a demonstration is not so simple; for from the concerted testimony of our Synod against the errors of Missouri there has grown a well-documented premise that the Wisconsin Synod is at least confessionally united. However much we may squabble among ourselves, being opinionated individualists, it is said our differences lie in the area of human judgment. This point of view, which seems widely held and is frequently voiced, has been epitomized in a portion of an essay delivered by Prof. John Meyer before the Mississippi Valley Pastoral Conference at La Crosse on January 21 last.

The debate on the floor of the Synod (namely at New Ulm 1957) showed:

- a) There is no difference in our evaluation of Mo's errors - Both sides reject them.
- b) There is no difference regarding the divisive nature of the errors. Both sides agree that persistence in the errors will necessitate a break.
- c) The difference is: the ones insist that obedience to God's Word demands a separation now - while the others feel that such action can not be justified in view of Mo's plea and promise.

(Our Synod in distress: I,2.)

The question that arises is whether this difference constitutes a doctrinal difference. If it does not - if indeed the conflict thus aroused is an insignificant contest between opposing opinions - one would have just reason to regard the minority's attitude as contentious and disruptive. This would not excuse vindictive and unbrotherly recriminations levelled against members of that minority. But it would bring this essay to an abrupt end at this point because there would be no purpose in seeking out a status controversiae, at least not for the sake of those who are united in doctrine and agreed on what ails Missouri.

But the evidence, if only we face it squarely, establishes beyond reasonable doubt the fact, that as in the Synodical Conference, so within our own Body the issue is one of doctrine.

On the one hand, this is the plea of numerous members of Synod; and it would be fantastically presumptuous to dismiss their allegations out of hand as the mouthings of theological incompetents. Among them are sober, able men of God whose voices were heard with attention and respect in orthodox Lutheran circles until the present dissention intervened. Some of them held or still hold positions of high trust in our

church body and their record of devotion to the Synod cannot be challenged without incurring the guilt of scurrilous libel. Is it to be supposed that such men have lost either their theological acumen or their integrity overnight? Yet they have reacted almost violently, as if stung in their consciences or frightened by the sudden dark-shadow of error threatening their souls, their work and their vows of holy orders. Only the most callous and unimaginative will coldly dismiss their insistent exhortations as the speech of men attempting to rule the Church with autocratic human opinion.

The evidence, on the other hand, does not support the judgment of those who may harbor the opinion that certain synodicals are people who hate Missouri, are jealous of her greatness, or for some other personal reason have been stalking that Synod seeking cause for breaking fellowship relations with her. Nor does the evidence warrant a general conclusion that those of the majority view, for reasons of the flesh such as relationship, fear of men and preservation of gainful employment do not want to obey God's Word and find excuses for deferring Scriptural action. How much of fleshly considerations is present in this controversy, who can say but God? And why talk about it? Of sinful weakness there is no lack in any of us. But no true Christian will be utterly committed to that in his life. Surely he is devoted to the Gospel and cherishes it. If there be false sons within our pale and they become manifest, we have directives for dealing with them. But let us not ignore the evidence in hand and fall prey to Satan by salving either our fears and apprehensions or our indifference to the situation by indulging in unsupportable charges and recriminations. Give Satan credit for doing better than seeking to divide a true church body with childish motivations. He cannot disrupt an orthodox Synod with such weapons or he would have done so long ago. He strikes much more deeply. Human failings were all too evident in the character and actions of the fathers of our church, as we well know. The Synodical Conference and our Synod were fused into a confessing Church despite those weaknesses, so long as the doctrine was preserved inviolate and vigorously defended. It would not be otherwise today.

The evidence supports the proposition that our Synod is torn by a doctrinal controversy, even as the issue in the Synodical Conference is doctrinal. In order to establish the status controversiae, it is necessary to isolate the point at which confessional positions stand in opposition to each other. Yet the casual observer will not be inclined to agree to the proposition that the status controversiae in the Synodical Conference is identical with the status controversiae within the Wisconsin Synod. Even if it is conceded that our internal conflict involves doctrine, it will be argued that our struggle with Missouri covers large details of confession in which we stand united among ourselves. On the surface this is undoubtedly a true observation. But the distinction is a superficial one. Consideration of the evidence indicates that, if we are to isolate the actual status controversiae in the Synodical Conference, we will be laying a finger upon the wound in our own Body. For the point of division in the Synodical Conference and in the Wisconsin Synod is on a front that has developed at the very heart of all doctrine. The issue appears to lie in the area of the perspicuity, or clarity, of Holy Scripture. We differ, apparently, in our evaluation of the constraint that is laid upon us by the word of Peter: "If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God." (1 Pet.4:11). This division can be so profound in its scope that unity of doctrine becomes a relative term; and although no specific dogma of Scripture may be in manifest controversy, yet all of them are. That is the conclusion to which a study of the evidence points. To demonstrate that is the task of the next section.

II.

To approach the present controversy in the Synodical Conference with remedial efforts governed by the assumption that we are all agreed upon the truth and practical application of the clarity of Holy Scripture is, one must regretfully say, to render hopeless every attempt to attain to unity within the Synodical Conference or our Synod. The schism which exists in attitude toward that basic concept revealed itself at the inception of the whole problem twenty years ago. Unfortunately this was not immediately recognized by many of us.

When in 1938 the Missouri Synod adopted the articles of agreement with the American Lutheran Church and stated that they "constituted a settlement of the doctrinal controversies" and "a sufficient doctrinal basis for church fellowship between the Missouri Synod and the A.L.C.," a great clamor arose. The Agreement

was attacked at various points and from various angles. We cannot and shall not attempt to rehearse this debate here. But it should be noted that relatively little emphasis was laid in the debate of that time upon that portion of the report of Floor Committee No.16 which dealt with certain non-fundamental doctrines. Pertaining to the doctrines of Antichrist, the Conversion of the Jews, Physical Resurrection of Martyrs and the Thousand Years of Rev.20, the "Declaration" of the A.L.C. which became a part of the Agreement had said: "We expect no more than this that the honorable Synod of Missouri will declare that the points mentioned there are not disruptive of church fellowship." The Missouri Synod agreed to this and declared, as we have seen, that deviation in these doctrines need not be divisive of church fellowship. In the following year, at Sandusky, the A.L.C. triumphantly declared its conviction "that it is neither necessary nor possible to agree in all non-fundamental doctrines."

As stated, the concession of Missouri that there are doctrines of Holy Scripture in which divergent views can be tolerated was not the primary target of Synodical Conference opposition to the 1938 Agreement. Our Synod pointed emphatically to the Sandusky Resolution of A.L.C., but did not go all out in apprising Missouri that she had committed herself to the same error. Yet here lay the very essence of the subsequent controversy in our midst. It was duly noted, but little regarded by most. In an article in the *Quartalschrift*, issue of April 1939, Prof. M. Lehninger pointed a finger at this crevasse in the publica doctrina of our body. He wrote:

Is this not tantamount to a toleration of differences in non-fundamentals on the part of the Missouri Synod, even though it pledges itself to work toward full agreement? Is it not the granting of license to preach and teach unscriptural doctrines? For if they are not un-Scriptural, why should Missouri wish to work toward full agreement in these points? If the other views for which toleration is asked are Scriptural as well as our own teaching, then we certainly would not quibble with any one over the choice of language. It would not only be wasted time and effort but down-right sinful stubbornness.

Should we accept the articles of doctrinal agreement in their present form, we would find ourselves in a position similar to that of the former Iowa Synod: We would emphatically deny that the views on non-fundamentals mentioned in the "Declaration" under VI,B ever had been or are now the official doctrine of our synod, but would have to admit at the same time that we are tolerating them in our midst, thus giving them an official status of some sort, if not by our sanction, then by sufferance.

Approaching the situation, as we see it, from another side, we may well assume that the A.L.C. demands, as we do, that anti-Scriptural doctrines must not be tolerated in the Church. Consequently, the views for which toleration is asked are Scriptural in the opinion of the A.L.C. Our consent, then, to consider them as non-divisive of church fellowship, i.e., to consider them as Scriptural would be an admission on our part: God has revealed to us certain doctrines of faith, but has not clearly and unmistakably told us what we really should believe concerning them. That is a denial of the perspicuity and all-sufficiency of the Scriptures. It is nothing short of blasphemy. It is the stand-point of a pernicious unionism which has wrought, and is still working, such great havoc in the Church. Then, indeed, all that is left is to confess with the A.L.C. that it is neither necessary nor possible to reach full agreement. Against that we pray with Luther in the first petition: "from this preserve us, Heavenly Father!" For "he that teaches....otherwise than God's Word teaches, profanes the name of God among us."

Granting for the sake of argument: the views for which toleration is asked seem innocent enough in themselves and further: there have always been churchmen of good repute in their time who have held peculiar, not generally accepted views in certain points of doctrine - what follows? Not the truth of the dictum of the A.L.C., that it is neither necessary nor possible to agree in non-fundamentals. Not a spineless yielding to unionistic tendencies, tempting us to establish fraternal relations with others over the sacrifice of the Scriptures as the unailing guide in all matters of faith and life. Rather that we bow down before our God with humble and contrite

hearts and pray for the guidance of the Holy Spirit lest we be betrayed by the evil imaginations of our hearts, lest we close our eyes against the bright rays of the sun of truth shining in His Word with a clarity which makes tolerance of divergent views in doctrines of faith a sin. No; we cannot subscribe to articles of union as a basis for future church-fellowship which by declaring certain views as not disruptive of church-fellowship gives them a right, a confessional standing, in the new church-affiliation.

The initial breakdown in the Synodical Conference position on the perspicuity of Scripture opened a seam that crept through the entire structure of our confessional unity. Its fatal consequences are seen at many points. It created a haven of refuge for the 1945 Statement of the '44 in Missouri, for the new error of a visible side of the Church in Missouri's confession, for the sophistry of the distinction between joint prayer and prayer-fellowship. It necessitated a committee within Missouri to study the question: "What is a doctrine?" Unquestionably it contributed materially to the unionistic character of the Common Confession. Should we be surprised if its consequences are being felt in our Body now; if we, too, are wrestling with a spirit that generates uncertainty in matters of doctrine and calls into question the perspicuity of holy Scripture by submitting clear Scripture to the mercy of the vagaries of human interpretation and judgment?

Once again confusion has come to prevail widely regarding the true nature of Scripture as a light that shineth in a dark place. The problem posed by Satan in the beginning: "Yea, hath God said...?" has indeed never disappeared beyond the horizon of the visible church. In some sections of the Lutheran Church in America that vile question has been a determining factor for a century, as we shall have occasion to recall. But now it has invaded the confines of the Synodical Conference in what one is tempted to call an epidemic form.

In his book: "The Inspiration of Scripture," published in 1955, Dr. Robert Preuss, then a member of the Norwegian Synod but now professor at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, presents a systematic summary of the argument for the clarity of Scripture. It may serve us here to establish the basis for our further reflections and our analysis of the present situation. I quote a portion of chapter 8:

Scripture is clear and sufficient because it is God's Word to men. Unless Scripture is clear, it cannot be said to be sufficient. How can we be saved through faith in the message of Scripture if that message is not clear? Rome taught that the witness of the Church was needed to make Scripture clear. This was also the persuasion of the Lutheran syncretists. The orthodox teachers hold that the Church is the interpreter of Scripture, but in such a way that each Christian searches and interprets Scripture himself. The Bible does not require the interpretation of others. It is not clear merely implicitly; it clearly sets forth all that we need know to be saved. The perspicuity of Scripture consists not merely in the fact that it enlightens the person who already understands its literal meaning; Scripture is itself a light, it is inherently clear, making wise the simple, namely, those who allow themselves to be persuaded. (This is a somewhat dubious terminology). The apostle calls this prophetic Word a *luechnon phainonta en auchmeeroo topoo*. It is a median through which God enlightens us, and hence it is called not only a *phoos* but also a *phootismos*. (2Cor.4:4.) If Scripture were lucid only because it gave enlightenment after it was understood, it would not differ from the most obscure enigma or Sibyllian oracle. But it actually illumines our understanding and leads us to Christ, and when He is found we have everything necessary for salvation. What is not clearly set forth in Scripture is not necessary for salvation. Quenstedt explains the Lutheran position very explicitly. The Lutheran thesis does not pertain to the clarity or understand-ability of the contents of Scripture (*evidentia rerum*), but to the clarity of the words (*claritas verborum*) with which the revealed content of Scripture is made known. There are many impenetrable mysteries in Scripture which are unclear in that they cannot be grasped by human intellect, but these mysteries have not been recorded in Scripture in obscure or ambiguous language. The Lutheran thesis does not pertain to the things of God (*res Dei*) but to the things of Scripture (*res Scriptura*). The things of God are often unknown and obscure to us,

but the things of Scripture are clear The things of God are obscure in themselves, but they are recorded clearly in Scripture.

Such is the historic position of the orthodox Lutheran church regarding the perspicuity of Scripture. But when we continue reading Dr. Preuss's summary, we are startled by the very next following sentences which read:

The Lutheran thesis does not pertain to every verse of Scripture. There is much in Scripture which is obscure and difficult to understand not only because of the rerum sublimitas but also because of the Holy Spirit's wording in Scripture." (pp.156-157, op.Cit.)

Here we find ourselves confronted with a most unfortunate manner of expression which substantially contains a disavowal of what Dr. Preuss has just painstakingly established. The Lutheran thesis is: "Scripture is clear and sufficient because it is God's Word to men." Now we hear that this thesis does not apply to every verse. We submit that, if this is as represented, the perspicuity of Scripture in our theology is dead!

It is interesting to reflect upon what the fathers would have said in response to that repeal of a basic principle in their theology. Nor need we idly speculate; we shall hear.

He who distinguishes between clear and darker passages of the Scripture cannot well be understood otherwise than that he speaks of the outward clarity, external clarity of the words in which the various doctrines are revealed. And then this affirmation is exactly as false and deceitful as a general accusation of obscurity levelled against Scripture. It does then not concern the ease of apperception, but the very possibility of apperception. If Scripture is at all understandable, then it is clear; if not at all, then dark....

Others reject the article of the perspicuity of Scripture with better grace in this way: They say, Scripture in itself, objectively, is indeed clearer, but practically it is not understandable with certainty in all doctrines of faith for us poor; weak people. Scripture is not at fault, but our natural powers of understanding are so weak, our human mind is not adequate for certain knowledge of Scripture. But.....this rests on confusion of exceptional cases with the normal condition of human powers of apperception, of the healthy human mind.

Aug. Pieper, *Quartalschr.* Vol.I, pp.69-71.

If you speak of the inner clearness, no man sees one iota in the Scriptures but he that hath the Spirit of God. All have a darkened heart, so that, even if they know how to speak of, and set forth, all things in the Scripture, yet they cannot feel them or know them; nor do they believe that they are the creatures of God or anything else, according to Ps.14,1: "The fool hath said in his heart, God is nothing." For the Spirit is required to understand the whole of the Scripture and every part of it. If you speak of the external clearness, nothing whatever is left obscure or ambiguous; but all things that are in the Scriptures are by the Word brought forth into the clearest light and proclaimed to the whole world.

Luther: St.L. XVIII:1683f.

The inevitable consequence of an impaired confession regarding the clarity of Holy Scripture is the essential total loss of doctrinal certainty resting upon the Word alone. Theology then becomes a mere consensus of human opinion, a distillation of varying views, a compounding of disparate interpretations into the comfortable agreement of a majority. To what lengths this can lead is illustrated by means of an article in the very first issue of the *Quartalschrift* from the pen of Prof. Aug. Pieper, aptly entitled: "Neuere Faelschungen des Schriftprinzips." from which I quote the following excerpt. It begins as Prof. Pieper is quoting from the periodical "Wachende Kirche" (Buffalo Synod) of Aug. 15, 1903 saying:

A valued exchange periodical, the Ev. Luth. Gemeindeblatt of the Wisconsin Synod, remarks in an article entitled: "Where lies the difference?" as follows: "In establishing the doctrine of election, specifically with reference to the place assigned to faith in the matter of election, we are convinced that the essential difference between our opponents and us lies in this latter area. If we succeed in persuading the opponents of the incorrectness of their position on this point, we have established unity; if this effort fails, all possibility of unity is removed, since for the sake of outward peace we can surrender no single portions no matter how minor and certainly none as major as this part of the clear Truth of God."

What the Wisconsin Synod church paper here openly declares, others perhaps may also be entertaining in their hearts. That is not to be reckoned as evil-mindedness or stubbornness, no, it is only unconscious narrow-mindedness. Though we may be yet so convinced of the correctness of our position - and it would not be a good thing if we were not - the more we search and the more deeply we penetrate to an understanding of the Truth, the more obvious it becomes for us that we know only in part and therefore have no right to lay claim to inerrancy. And that must make us willing to listen also to others.

The proper disposition toward the furthering of unity of our church requires that each one be mindful of the fact that among the opponents there are also faithful, pious men who also have the Holy Ghost, and the gift of knowledge, are conscientious and search diligently in God's Word and the Confessions. When they nevertheless arrive at another understanding than ourselves, we may be yet so convinced of our position, but who can guarantee that we really are entirely correct? At the very least could not the partial understanding of others supplement our own? Not only to teach, but willingness to learn, that is what humility requires. Not our understanding of God's Word, but the Word itself must serve as sole norm.

...(Pieper)...The possibility of Christian certainty is thus made to depend upon the consensus of all those whose personal Christianity we are not prepared to question - that is, upon the consensus of all Christians, the whole Church. A doctrinal certainty resting upon the Word of Scripture alone is allegedly impossible. To illustrate: Until we must refuse to concede the Christianity of our individual opponents in the doctrine of election, we have no guarantee that we are actually completely correct in our teaching. Or as long as Luther and the Lutherans could not properly declare that their Reformed opponents were no Christians and possessed no spiritual gifts they had no assurance that they were really entirely correct.

It is manifest that a denial of the possibility of Christian certainty secured by Scripture alone expresses a fundamental error....

...The terrible offense lies in the erroneous idea: Who will guarantee us that we are truly and perfectly correct as long as other Christians hold to a doctrine different than ours? The consequence of this thinking is the despair of Pilate: "What is Truth?" - total unbelief. Even in the realm of philosophy the rule of Scepticism invariably indicated dissolution and led to a hopeless conclusion; in theology its ascendance must even more swiftly bring about the total ruin of the Church, which exists only by faith.

In passing we remark that this is the old papistic error, namely that a certain knowledge of Scripture is not possible without the infallible interpretation of the Church - the Pope. Faith and knowledge are therewith toppled from their secure foundation upon the Scripture and are made to depend upon the consensus of the theologians. Thus the essence of Christian knowledge and the Christian faith, that is, their divine origin, their divine foundation, their divine, spiritual nature, their infallible certainty, their sanctifying power and saving effect, is nullified. Knowledge and faith thus become a purely human, uncertain superstition, a product of human consensus. And who will then guarantee us that we are really entirely correct, when all those who personally

still have the Spirit and faith agree to our understanding of the Word? Can we not all jointly err thoroughly? Luther says: “But if the Scripture, which the interpreters interpret, is dark, who will assure us that precisely their explanation is reliable? A different, a new interpretation! Now who will interpret this? Thus it will go on indefinitely.” (*De Servo Arbitrio*, XVIII, 1745.)
Quartalschr. I, p.40 ff.

By those who have surrendered the doctrine of the perspicuity of Scripture, great emphasis is laid upon the proposition that Scripture is clear in all things that we need to know to be saved. That this is a true statement requires no further witness here. But the material this covered is then restricted to the so-called fundamental doctrines.

These are said to be clearly revealed. And if it is pointed out that, once we have withdrawn from the truth that all Scripture is profitable for doctrine, we have thereby forfeited the right to assume that all series of fundamental doctrines are clear, refuge is sought in a false application of the analogy of Scripture.

How this false use operates is described by Dr. A. Hoenecke in the following words:

What use is to be made of the analogy of faith? It is being demanded that the individual articles of faith be subject to modification by the totality of Scripture. How erroneous that is was today privately illustrated to me by a certain Pastor:

A man who had forgotten the birthday and baptismal day of his child came to the Pastor for a baptismal certificate. By what data shall the Pastor fill out the certificate? According to the totality of the church records? Or shall he draw from the marriage or burial records? Certainly not, but specifically from the baptismal record. Thus also the individual doctrines of Scripture are to be derived from their specific recording, that is, from the series in which God has expressly revealed and recorded them.

Our opponents are guilty of peculiar errors of logic. Dr. Schuette and Dr. Richter have emphasized that one doctrine sheds light upon another. That is certainly true. We know very well that the individual doctrines of Scripture are not disjointed members, unconnected, disorganized pieces. The Gospel is a single great Truth concerning God, Grace, Christ, faith, and thus Truth is in one way or another more or less the content of all individual doctrines. But - and here our opponents make their mistake - this fact does not exclude the other, namely that each individual doctrine has its peculiar form, something which sharply and clearly distinguishes it from all other doctrines, something which gives to it specific characteristics, idiosyncrasies, its specific nature. The doctrine of Baptism, for example, contains the concepts of God, Christ, and Grace in common with other doctrines; but it does not through these become the doctrine of Baptism. As such it is established by the specifics it teaches concerning the essence, form and effect of the baptismal act. And this it shares with no other doctrine; therefore this cannot be learned from any other passage save those alone which expressly teach them, that is, from the sedes concerning Baptism. *Quartalschr.* I, p.111.

Luther severely scores the misuse of the analogy of faith which is necessitated when the clarity of individual passages is no longer granted. He says:

If every passage of Scripture must be interpreted by another passage of Scripture, where shall we find an end to the comparing of the Scripture? For by this means it will come to pass that no passage of Scripture is regarded as certain and clear, and such comparison of one passage with another can legitimately go on indefinitely. By this process someone else will venture to interpret John 6 by means of the Lord's Supper just as you on the other hand presume to interpret the Lord's Supper by means of John 6, and he will make use of your rule that one passage must be interpreted by the other.

Are you not aware that you have thus laid down a most unreliable principle and are proceeding from the particular to the general? For this rule: One passage must be interpreted by another is without doubt only true in a particular matter, namely that a doubtful and dark passage must be interpreted by a clear and certain one. For to undertake to interpret clear and certain passages by comparing them with others is to mock the Truth most unseemly and to bring clouds into the light. Likewise, if one wanted to explain all passages by comparison with others, that would mean throwing the entire Scripture together into one interminable and uncertain formless heap. St.L. XX, 327. (To Carlstadt).

All Scripture is so clear that, as Dr. F. Pieper says, "all Christians, every one of them, can and should use Scripture as *norma doctrinae* and as *judex controversiarum*." But at this very point our Church has contracted a dangerous infection. We are involved in controversy and cannot seem to get the matter adjudicated. Though we all profess allegiance to the historic position of Lutheranism, we seem to have wandered into an atmosphere of what has long been cherished by others as "a wholesome and allowable latitude of theological opinion." Let us but remind ourselves of the directives given by Dr. Pieper in his *Dogmatics* (I,p.350ff.) and ask ourselves whether these are functioning properly among us.

To settle a doctrinal controversy, two rules, to which also our old theologians constantly call attention, must be observed. 1) Define exactly the question at issue (*status controversiae*); and 2) when that has been done, let those passages speak which treat of the controversial point. Then Scripture itself will decide the matter with the greatest clearness and certainty. It will, of course, not force the external acceptance of its decision and externally stop the mouth of the gainsayer, but it will either inwardly convince and persuade him, as was the case with the servants of the Sanhedrin (John 7:46), or it will confront him who tenaciously clings to his error with the dire possibility of becoming an *autokatakritos* (Titus 3:11: "knowing that he that is such is subverted and sinneth, being condemned of himself"). Baier's statement is to the point: "Though Holy Scripture does not force men by external power to acquiesce in its decision according to the *logon ton esoo*, or so that they do not raise any objection by external act, nevertheless since the meaning of Scripture as the divine voice is plain, it is certain that the hearts of men will be convinced according to the *logon ton esoo*, so that they cannot contradict except against the protest of their conscience" (Baier-Walther I,186). It is for this reason that Scripture says of Scripture that it speaks, testifies, accuses, judges, concludes under sin, stops the mouth, etc. (John 19:24; Rom.3:21; John 5:45; 12:48; Gal.3:22; Rom.3:19).

Let us also attend upon Pieper's explanation of failure in this pursuit.

Since Scripture is plain on the point that all doctrinal issues can and should be decided by Scripture, the question arises why doctrinal debates and colloquies so seldom achieve the desired end. The answer is intimated in the beginning of this chapter. If the *status controversiae* either is not at all defined - or as happens still oftener - is again lost sight of, the result is that the two parties are talking of different things, and an agreement is out of the question. Nor can an agreement be reached if the controverted point is not placed in the light of Scripture. This happens when an "interpretation" takes the place of Scripture or passages are quoted which treat of a different doctrine. The latter case is of frequent occurrence....Modern theology even goes so far as to demand that each doctrine be derived from "the whole of Scripture.....It is clear that in all these cases Scripture is not heard at all, but its mouth is stopped by a principle foreign to Scripture, exactly as is done in the Papacy." (p.353.)

"A principle foreign to Scripture" indeed! There is the nubbin and the rub. Let us not fail to recognize it plainly.

The clear Scriptures have no longer sufficed for unity in the Synodical Conference. Two years ago a mimeographed list of Scripture texts, more than five pages in length, was issued by our Committee on Church Union, listing the passages with which in its numerous published articles our Synod had established the form of sound doctrine in relation to the intersynodical issues. The answer of Missouri was:

It is one thing to make charges; it is another thing to furnish convincing evidence from the Word of God. The latter is definitely lacking. (Luth. Witness, Aug.2,1955).

In retrospect we may say that the question of the clarity of Scripture first threatened to become a matter at issue in our own Synod in 1951, although doubtless there was little or no awareness of it at that time. The serious stage which had been reached in our relations with the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod was recognized by our delegates and representatives at the St. Paul Convention of the Synodical Conference. Upon the close of the Convention, these delegates met and adopted the well-known resolution which reads:

Since it is God's will that the trumpet do not "give an uncertain sound" (1 Cor.14:8) and since a faith that is not ready to confess in clear and unmistakable terms "creates a basically untruthful situation" ("A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump" Gal.5:9) -

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 (see Constitutions Art.V). Thus while we await a decision by our Synod in this grave situation we continue our present 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.

This resolution indicates the conviction of the delegates that the controversy with Missouri had entered a new phase. Obviously the declaration of a state of confession marked a progression of deterioration in fellowship relations; and since the delegates felt in conscience bound to indicate this by entering a state of confession – were indeed so firmly bound that they felt unable to defer a pronouncement even for themselves until Synod could meet - it must be assumed that the Word of God impelled them to this action. For the Christian conscience is bound only by the clear injunction of Scripture. Yet it is noteworthy that no Scripture was cited in the resolution, to indicate that a state of confession was the relationship required by and responsive to the circumstances. One cannot say, of course, that such Word of the Lord was not in the minds of any or all of the delegates. But before the world and the Church there was no express indication that the status confessionis was governed by any particular Scriptural directive. Thus it was made to appear that the delegates were driven by some inner illumination in determining the proper relationship toward the erring Synod. At a later date, after inquiries had been made by members of Synod, it was officially declared that the action at St. Paul was in response to the enjoinder of God in 2 Thess.3:6.14-15:

Now we command you, brethren in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us....

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.

In 1953 the Synod approved and resolved to make the status confessionis its own. Even at that time no Scripture reference pertinent to the step was included in the text of the resolutions. But by then differences had appeared within Synod regarding the meaning and application of the Thessalonians text. These differences were not, and have to this day not, been adjusted. Although the Synod professes itself to be, not only in a state, but in a vigorous state, of confession, it exists in this state with nothing more than a vague consensus regarding its scriptural basis or its relevancy.

In an essay entitled "Prayer Fellowship" and delivered before the Minn. District Past. Conference in April of 1949, Prof. J. Meyer had touched upon the Thessalonians text. There he said in part:

What does Paul say about the proper course to follow regarding such a man? He says two things. First: "note that man," *seemeiousthe*, literally, mark him for yourselves. We note that Paul uses the present imperative, thus not merely indicating the action itself, but also the duration: they must persist in noting him. For what purpose? Our English Bible, as does also the R.S.V., continues with "and." The Nestle text has the infinitive: *mee synanamignysthai autoon*, thus indicating the purpose for which the Thessalonians were to mark such a man for themselves, namely, not to associate with him, to have nothing to do with him. It may seem superfluous to remark that Paul is speaking strictly about church life, not about social, political, or business affairs. But regarding church life his instruction is very definite: have nothing to do with him - no pulpit and altar fellowship, no prayer fellowship, nor even an occasional joint prayer. And this in spite of the fact that the break has not been consummated, and they still regard him as a fellow-believer. In this way they will show real brotherliness. They will show real brotherly concern. They will show how serious his error is in their estimation, while an occasional joint prayer would, to say the least, take the edge off their testimony.

This essay was published in the *Quartalschrift*, April 1950. Its words seem quite clear. Three years later Synod declared itself in such a relationship toward the Missouri Synod. But it is not recorded that Synod as such ever implemented that relationship in accord with the picture drawn of it in the *Quartalschrift*. I am not aware that our representatives did, subsequent to 1953 and until 1956, ever uniformly or as a body refrain from communing with, or from joint prayer with, representatives of the Missouri Synod at Synodical Conference Convention or Committee meetings. Tacitly everybody has been accorded the moral right and freedom to interpret 2 Thess. as he chooses and to apply the status confessionis according to his inclination. In a pastoral letter dated September 25, 1956, President Naumann stated his view that "We intend, therefore, without declaring a severance of fellowship, to continue in fellowship, but in 'a vigorously protesting fellowship'. That means that we certainly cannot ignore the flagrant offenses that have been given by Missouri men in certain areas of our Synod." This interpretation alters the situation from a state of confession toward a Synod to a state of confession occasionally applied toward certain individuals of that Synod. The result of all this is not only a confused practice based upon God's Word, but a tolerance of varying interpretation which inflicts a judgment of unclarity upon a clear Word of God.

It is not the purpose of this study to introduce a discussion of motivation. We are not inquiring after the preconceived notions or the hidden purposes which may or may not be influencing the prevailing interpretations or uses of 2 Thess. Certainly any misuse of this passage, or any failure to apply its injunction under stated circumstances, is sinful. But at the moment our objective is neither correct exegesis nor indictment of error. The evidence is to lead us to consider what Satan is doing to us. Not only has he awakened controversy among us;

he has led our Synod into the position of setting at naught the perspicuity of Scripture which she confesses. Was the status confessionis an act of obedience to Scripture? If so, what Scripture and what does that Scripture clearly require? There are those who say that it means exactly what it says. There are those who say that the meaning is vague, that the method and extent of withdrawal is subject to individual opinion. But can the Holy Spirit not speak clearly? Can he not tell us what we are to do?

The same question must be asked in the light of Synod's operation with the Scripture in Romans 16:17-18.

In 1955 the Standing Committee on Church Union submitted a formal report to the Convention at Saginaw from which I quote the following portion:

I. D. The Synodical Conference convention has proposed a plan involving the appointments of new committees, to which the task of settling these differences is to be entrusted. This plan, however, envisions a long range program of discussion.

E. In our dealing with our sister Synod we have been earnestly endeavoring to heed the Scriptural exhortations to patience and forbearance in love.

F. We have, however, arrived at the firm conviction that, because of the divisions and offenses that have been caused, and which have until now not been removed, further postponement of a decision would be a violation of the apostolic injunction of Romans 16:17 (I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them).

On the basis of these considerations we recommend the following resolution, which we herewith submit for study by our brethren and for subsequent consideration and action by the synodical convention.

RESOLVED: That with deepest sorrow, taking notice of the fact that the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod is causing divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which we have learned, we, in obedience to God's injunction to avoid such, declare the fellowship which we have had with said Synod to be terminated." (Proceedings, p.79.)

The report of the President read at that Convention had supported this conclusion of the Standing Committee. It said:

The charges which we brought in an effort to do our brotherly duty before God, have been clearly denied. We have reached the conviction that through these differences divisions and offenses have been caused contrary to the doctrine which we have learned. And when that is the case, the Lord our God has a definite command for us: "Avoid them!"

For these of us who have been closest to these problems, it appears quite definite that we must now obey the Lord's Word in Romans 16:17.

The thing to be noted here is that the passage Romans 16:17 was obviously clear to the Standing Committee on Church Union. They declare what it is that God's Word here enjoins, and recommend obedience which consists of "declaring the fellowship---terminated."

The Floor Committee apparently agreed with this clear meaning. For in the Preamble of its report to the Convention it stated: "A church body which creates divisions and offenses by its official resolutions, policies, and practices not in accord with Scripture also becomes subject to the indictment of Romans 16:17-18. The Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod has by its official resolutions, policies, and practices created divisions and offenses both in her own body and in the entire Synodical Conference. Such divisions and offenses are of long standing." (Proceedings, p.85).

And the Floor Committee offered the following resolution:

RESOLVED, that whereas the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod has created divisions and offenses by its official resolutions, policies, and practices not in accord with Scripture, we, in obedience to the command of our Lord in Romans 16:17-18. terminate our fellowship with the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod. (Proceedings, p.86).

Earlier voices had been heard in Synod which said what Romans 16:17 calls for an avoiding that is progressive - a gradual leaning away; or that it could also be understood to refer to the inward avoiding of the errors within our hearts. For example, in an open hearing of the Floor Committee at Saginaw on the evening of Aug. 12, according to notes taken at that session, a Pastor of Synod arose to say:

I want to express my concern about all this talk of the applicability of Rom.16:17. Some divide the delegates into two groups, those who want to sever now, and those (including me) who don't feel bound in conscience to sever yet. But I do feel that Rom.16:17 applies now, in fact we have been applying it....I want to go on record as believing that we are practicing Rom.16:17, but don't want to be accused of violating that word. I don't say that we're violating or rejecting Rom.16:17. I just don't feel that this is the time to take the final step.

But such obvious confusion and such interpolations in the text did not deter either the Standing Committee, the Floor Committee or the Convention from stating clearly what the passage really calls for. Yet things here were not so clear in another respect.

The Standing Committee had, after years of dealing, solemnly declared Missouri to be guilty in the sense of Romans 16:17, and brought indisputable evidence to bear in its report. It said:

The Mo. Synod men on these committees urge a study of Scripture passages. The pertinent passages have, however, been repeatedly and prayerfully considered by our Synod in conventions, by its districts, its conferences and congregations. On the basis of our study of these passages we have over the past years again and again brought our admonition and testimony to the attention of the Mo. Synod. We deplore the fact that our testimony has not been heeded by the Missouri Synod. On the contrary, we find that our testimony is being openly repudiated by Mo. Synod representatives, and we are now publicly being accused of misapplying Scriptures and of bringing false charges against the Mo. Synod. We also deplore the vehement tone and the assertion of Dr. John W. Behnken, President of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, in his last two articles in the Lutheran Witness (July 19 and Aug. 2) that there is no basis for any of the charges of the Wisconsin Synod: "We do not admit the charges. On the contrary, we emphatically deny them." Thus any gains that may have been achieved by the committees mentioned above have practically been nullified by this complete and unconditional denial. (Supplementary Report, Proceed. p.82.)

For some strange reason the Saginaw Convention did not dispute this judgment, yet postponed the action which was called for. Numerous members of Synod charged that this constituted disobedience toward God's Word. Since that Convention, this charge has been countered with the assertion that the objectors misunderstood Synod. Thus in the La Crosse essay outline of Prof. J. Meyer previously cited, the outline brings the following under I.3:

The difference was aggravated by a misunderstanding of the Saginaw Floor Committee's report.

- a) The Preamble summed up the situation thus: “The Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod has by its official resolutions, policies, and practices created divisions and offenses both in her own body and in the entire S.C. - Such divisions and offenses are of long standing. (p.85).
- b) Then pointing to Dr. Behnken's articles, in which he maintains that “the charges of our (Wis.) Synod are false”, the Committee report concludes that this “has made more difficult the possibility of reaching Scriptural agreement on the issues that are dividing the two Synods (p.85).

*The paragraph following this asterisk is set in quotation marks, as are later excerpts from the same source. This is not intended to signify that the material represents a verbatim stenographic record of what was said at the time. The notes that were taken during debate at the Convention are as literal a reproduction of the speakers' expression as was possible under the circumstances. The undersigned desires to state that he accepts responsibility for the accuracy of the quotations, since they represent remarks made in his hearing of which he retains a vivid recollection. Without doubt the wording reproduces correctly both the substance and the flavor of what was said.

- c) Then the Committee recommends deferment of final action to a “recessed session in 1956” in order to give Mo. an “opportunity to express itself in its 1956 convention” - stating among the reasons for this deferment: “This continues to heed the Scriptural exhortation to patience and forbearance in love” (p.86).
- d) If Christian patience still justified a deferment, then the verdict in the Preamble was not to be understood as final. - And our Synod would have been guilty of sinning if it had refused to defer final action.

The quotation here taken from the Floor Committee Report is rather inconclusive because it omits a vital sentence. I have quoted it more fully above. That in the Preamble a verdict was expressed to the effect that the Missouri Synod was causing divisions and offenses in the sense of Rom.16:17 may be arbitrarily denied. But the evidence is overwhelming:

1. We have the wording of the Preamble itself. This wording is quite clear. I have quoted it above.
2. The equally clear affirmation of the Chairman of the Floor Committee from the rostrum during debate on the Preamble on the afternoon of Wednesday, Aug.17, the following exchange took place as noted down in writing at the time:

A Speaker: “It seems to me that we are understanding the Preamble differently. Does it mean that Romans 16:17 applies now or only in 1956?”

The Chairman: “You're misplacing the emphasis. It shows that divisions and offenses are sufficient for cessation of fellowship. Most of the committee feels that it shouldn't apply now. Others don't agree. I think we agree that we aren't ready to agree on its application.”

A few moments later your essayist was given the floor, and this exchange took place:

Schaller: “I was amazed by Frey's statement before. I had the impression from the preamble that the floor committee wants us to concur with their conclusion that Rom.16:17 is applicable now. I know they want us to defer action. But now I see they mean it will apply in a year from now if nothing changes. Is that what you mean?”

Frey: “We feel it is applicable now, but feel for those other reasons that we should defer.”

This, so far as I know, was the final word spoken on that subject in the debate.

3. The Floor Committee Report was the outgrowth of the Committee discussion on the report of the Standing Committee, which spoke unequivocal language regarding Rom.16:17.

4. Synod resolved to discontinue all intersynodical discussions. Such an action would have been relevant and appropriate only if Synod were of the opinion that the judgment of Rom.16:17 was immediately applicable. How otherwise could cessation of such admonition be justified?

From another direction it has been argued, rather naively, that Synod could not have intended to find Missouri guilty in the sense of Rom.16:17 as of then because, had that been the meaning, Synod would have sinned in deferring suitable action. Naturally this begs the question. I am not greatly versed in the terminology of logic and therefore would not know whether to call it a faulty syllogism, reasoning in a circle, *petitio principii*, or all three. But this is a fair example:

1. Cain slew his brother in the field.
2. If Cain had gone to the field with that express purpose, it would have been premeditated murder.
3. Therefore Cain did not go to the field with that purpose.

The hidden premise is that Cain could not have committed premeditated murder. Yet all the evidence points to the fact that the murder was indeed premeditated.

In similar manner, the hidden premise that Synod could not have sinned is presumptuous. It is not a question of premeditation or of motive, of course, in this case. But the evidence that Synod said one thing and then did another is overwhelming.

But the question here is not whether Synod sinned. The question is upon what happened to clear Scripture in our hands. At the 1957 New Ulm Convention the meaning of Rom.16:17-18 was again reflected in the report of the Floor Committee. It quoted the Brief Statement, and said: *hier*.

Since we now find that the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod still upholds resolutions and condones principles and practices which deny the Scriptural truth expressed in Article 28 of its own Brief Statement of Doctrine....we feel conscience bound to declare publicly, that these principles, policies and practices create a division between our synods which the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod alone can remove. Until these offenses have been removed, we cannot fellowship together with the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod as one body, lest our own Wisconsin Synod be affected by the same unionistic spirit which finally weakens and destroys all true doctrine and leads to indifference and liberalism concerning Scriptural truth; therefore be it resolved that we now suspend Church fellowship with the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod on the basis of Romans 16:17-18....

It is on record that a majority of Synod rejected that report. It is also on record that a large minority regarded it as Scriptural and therefore obligatory. Nevertheless the difference has been and is being characterized as lying within the area of human judgment. We have been admonished to respect one another's opinion in this matter. The fact that a majority decision has been declared to be in effect emphasizes the contention that the difference involves a human element, since manifestly majorities cannot be decisive in matters where God has spoken clearly. Did it, then, not speak clearly here, and was the Floor Committee misguided in saying that it felt "conscience bound"?

In answer we are told that, while God has commanded us to avoid, and avoid means the discontinuance of fellowship relations, we are divided upon whether the conditions for such action are at hand. This means however, that God has not spoken clearly. For God said that we should avoid those causing divisions and

offenses contrary to the doctrine which we have learned. The Synod has acknowledged that Missouri is causing divisions and offenses. But do we know what that means? Apparently not.

Here we are confronted with a profound vagueness. We are told that it is not evident to many members of Synod that the state of Missouri has actually reached the point at which that body must be avoided. But this, it seems is not determined by whether Missouri is causing divisions and offenses, nor even whether she has persisted in doing so. A certain factor is missing. What that might be, some seem unwilling or unable to define. We do have a significant observation, however, in the aforementioned essay of Prof. J. Meyer. He asks the question: What is our distress? Before answering it, he rules out certain matters that in his mind are not the chief issue. Point 1 under Roman I in his Outline reads as follows:

1) Not that Missouri went wrong on Scouts, Chaplaincy, CC etc. - That can happen.... cf. Gal; 1Cor. 15; Col; I and II Thess.

Nor that Mo did not at once yield to God's Word as we presented It to them. - It is hard to break a bad habit. - We are grieved by this fact, but it is not real distress.

It calls for patient admonition - as long as Mo does not reject our testimony with indifference or blasphemy. cf. Acts 13:45,46; 18:6; 19:9.

The essayist speaks of Missouri as an erring portion of the brotherhood of faith. He states that patient admonition is required. And he says that such patient admonition of erring brethren must continue as long as they "do not reject our testimony with indifference or blasphemy." This accords also with the expressions of others among us who have maintained that Romans 16:17 applies only to impenitent errorists. When their persistence becomes manifest impenitence, it is said, then we are to avoid them.

It must be admitted that the general practice of our Church in relation to Rom. 16:17 has in the past not been in accord with that view. We have held it to be obligatory for us to avoid the Baptists, Methodists, Presbyterians and their like. Our basis for such practice included the Romans passage. But no theologian among us has, as far as I am aware, ever contended that the Methodist Church is an impenitent Church. We have carefully refrained from making such a judgment, which would automatically classify that church body as heathen. Moreover, there is nothing in the Romans text which says that those causing divisions and offenses are necessarily impenitent, or that we are to determine whether they be in that state. The bare words that God inspired here do not carry that implication. To say, therefore, that patient admonition must continue within the framework of fellowship relations as long as testimony is not rejected "with indifference or blasphemy" is to introduce into the picture an element which the text does not suggest and which the Standing Committee on Church Union in 1955 evidently did not see in the text. Had they seen it, their report of that year could not have been so written.

By now the clear passage is thoroughly obscured. We say that Missouri is causing divisions and offenses, but we say also that she must show herself to be an impenitent and blaspheming body before the command of God applies. To support this, Scripture is cited. The passages, all from the Book of the Acts, deal with a specific type of circumstance. The apostles were preaching to people who had not heard the Gospel before, who were not members of the Christian brotherhood. The task of the Apostles was to bring them to a knowledge of Jesus Christ. This effort continued until the Jews by blasphemous opposition indicated that they wanted nothing of Christ. Then they were left to their fate.

What relevance this has to the problem in hand, or to the situation envisioned by Romans 16:17, is extremely obscure. To illuminate a clear passage of Scripture with other Scriptures dealing with an entirely different subject and situation is hardly the proper method for attaining to the meaning of the Holy Ghost, as earlier quotations from Luther and Dr. Hoenecke have demonstrated to us. Yet in this and in other ways the Romans passage has been variously interpreted; and those interpretations are being granted the right of existence in our church body. We are to respect one another's views. A difference here is not to be considered divisive. Those who do regard it as divisive are classified as extremists and worse. Would it, then; also be extreme for us to reject as unscriptural the Statement of the '44 in that it says:

We...deplore the fact that Romans 16:17 has been applied to Christians who differ from us in certain points of doctrine. It is our conviction, based on sound exegetical and hermeneutical principles, that this text does not apply to the present situation in the Lutheran Church of America"?

If this is not unscriptural, how do we defend our separation from the U.L.C.A., the A.L.C. and others? Or is the confession of the Chicago Study Club Planning Committee in its Re-Affirmation of 1948 true when it says:

Point Five: "That all church-fellowship by participation in joint religious work or worship with those who advocate and support false doctrine is unionism, 1 Cor.1:10; Rom.16:17, even though there be no denial of the truth or approval of error in express words."

Point Six: "That every error, also in details of doctrine, persistently advocated, is divisive of church-fellowship. Mt.28:20; 2 John 10; 1 Cor.1:10;Mt 5:17-19"?

Are we to suppose that both views, nor tolerated within the Missouri Synod, can be maintained without repudiating the clarity of Scripture?

III.

The principal question at issue in the Synodical Conference, therefore, is more basic than any of the several areas of doctrine in which there are unresolved conflicts. If the Missouri Synod needed to re-interpret its position on Scouting, Prayer-fellowship, Antichrist and the nature of the Church, this is but the inevitable consequence of a practical approach to holy Scripture which is at variance with the historic conviction that in all matters of doctrine and practice the Scriptures are not only an infallible guide and norm, but clear and perspicuous, offering certainty to believers and enabling Christians to speak the same things and to be of one mind.

The repeatedly expressed determination of that Synod to abide in the doctrine which it has heretofore professed and its insistent reaffirmation of the Brief Statement should not be regarded as a callous bit of humbug. But this latter document ceases to have any validity as an expression of orthodoxy confessionism in a Synod which has drifted from the secure moorings of a more sure Word of Prophecy which serves as a light in a dark place.

There would be no room for doctrinal controversy in the Synodical Conference if the *pistis quae creditur* (the faith which is to be believed) were regarded as infallibly established by clear Scripture. This *corpus doctrinae* (body of doctrine) had long since been fixed, not only in the Confessions of our church, but in the formal dogmatics of our catechisms. Our present schism is the result of a new refusal to recognize the irrevocable nature of those norms and to accept the one intended meaning of the proof passages upon which they rest.

It is tragic to see how the loss of confidence in the clarity of Scripture renders a church powerless to ward off the corrupting influence of unionism. The story of the Missouri Synod over the past twenty years has been a pathetic record of increasing incapacity for resistance to the trend that seeks compromise with error rather than doctrinal discipline and the isolation of orthodoxy. The earmarks of this trend in a church body are a distaste for polemical theology, and the development of vague, ambiguous doctrinal pronouncements. These have both become conspicuous in Missouri's publications, the *Concordia Theological Monthly* and the *Lutheran Witness*, which often publish without comment the unscriptural doings and teachings of other church bodies. To be dogmatic, that is, positive in affirming the Truth and castigating error is difficult only when it has become necessary to question the clarity and sufficiency of the Word.

Time Magazine is now able to quote Dr. Pelikan, one-time member of the faculty of Concordia Seminary and chief editor of the currently appearing edition of *Luther's Works* in translation, as saying:

There is a growing restlessness with the literal attitude toward the Bible. This comes from the science-minded laity who are unwilling to ignore the meaning of modern science and cosmology. Then, too, the clergy is reading all sorts of things and finding the authors don't have horns. Thus the predictability of the Missouri Synod position has gone down considerably. If Lutheranism is what it claims to be - open to the insights of both the fathers and the brethren - then this is a healthy shift. (Time, April 7, 1958, p.60f.)

That is frank language, the pertinence of which is very difficult to refute convincingly. The evidence upon which it rests is too ponderous to be set aside by the protest of the Lutheran Witness which answered Dr. Pelikan:

All in all, the pastors of the Missouri Synod have dedicated themselves to the service of the Lord Jesus and to the soul-care of His people. Because the Cross and the written Word of our Lord are central in our clergy's thinking, Synod's predictability has been, is now, and, by the Grace of God, will be based on this criterion: What do the inspired Scriptures say? (Witness, May 6, 1958, p.202.)

Unfortunately, Missouri today is not always sure of what Scripture does say. And here lies the source of our difficulties also. The uncertain sound of the trumpet has become clearly audible in the Wisconsin Synod. A phenomenal change has occurred in recent years. If we compare the decisive tone of our exhortations, corrections and witnessing of but a decade ago with the almost deafening polemical silence of today, the distinct impression is gained that we are plagued by an impairment of doctrinal conviction. We still indeed affirm that the errors of Missouri are errors, divisive and offensive; but human judgment begins to play a part in these convictions. Do we not hear our inner divisions defined as a collision of equally valid conscientious convictions; and are there not sometimes untimely admonitions to patience and forbearance? Is it not sometimes regarded as a sign of radical intolerance to assert that there is one, and only one, scripturally directed course of action indicated?

With great subtlety Satan seeks to jockey a church body which earnestly desires to bow before the inerrant, inspired and perspicuous Word of God into a situation wherein, without being explicitly aware of it, we fall victim to a process that undermines and will deprive us of the blessing of the perspicuity and therefore the authority of Holy Scripture.

It has often been said that the present struggle is no longer actually an issue between Synods of opposing views, but between opposing views; that the cleavage is not horizontal, between church bodies, but vertical, running through each Synod. The truth of this is becoming more apparent each year. The Missouri Synod is divided, the Wisconsin Synod is divided and the Norwegian Synod is divided. The real issue is the Word itself, and may be stated as follows:

THE STATUS CONTROVERSIAE

Does a faithful reading of Scripture enable the Holy Ghost to speak to us in unmistakable clarity concerning the doctrine and practice which in all matters of faith and life Christ's Church is to teach and uphold, so that it is neither wholesome nor allowable for an orthodox church body to tolerate a latitude of theological opinion based upon the clear passages of Scripture;

OR

Is Scripture clear, yet not so clear that it cannot be variously interpreted in matters of doctrine and practice without incurring the indictment of error, and must we therefore heed the warning addressed to the

Synodical Conference by its former president, Dr. Walter Baepler, against the temptation "to confuse our spirits with the Holy Spirit, to give our exegesis a finality which is possible only in heaven?"