

Kiessling, Elmer

The Tie that Binds

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Elmer Kiessling

34th Biennial Convention, WELS
Dr. Martin Luther College
August 7 - 14, 1957

2. Re: Staffing of School — That the power to authorize the Board of Regents to call the Director of the Academy be placed into the hands of the President of the Synod.

3. Re: Building Construction — That, IF the Synod authorize a major building-fund collection, the Nebraska Academy project be included.

4. Re: Constitution — That, IF the Synod act favorably on the above recommendations, the Committee on Constitution be instructed to make the necessary amendments.

III. Arizona-California Academy

(See Memorial — Arizona-California District Pastoral Conference)

The Memorial bids that the Synod keep in mind the need for an academy in that District.

Our Recommendation

We recommend that the Synod heed the request.

Paul J. Gieschen, Chairman

Marvin Hanke, Secretary

Action by the Convention:

Section I, A, pertaining to the establishing of a Teacher-Training School in the Milwaukee area, was referred to the Educational Survey Committee with instructions to make exhaustive studies of the Milwaukee College plans and an alternate Dr. Martin Luther College expansion plan and to provide a detailed prospectus for each plan for consideration at the 1958 District Conventions and for final action at the 1959 Joint Synod Convention.

The remaining sections of the report of Floor Committee No. 5 were adopted.

The following resolution was also adopted:

RESOLVED, that this Convention authorize the Board of Trustees together with the Conference of Presidents to inaugurate a program for raising funds to carry out the building projects voted by this Convention or definitely contemplated in its resolutions.

ESSAYS

THE TIE THAT BINDS

Blest be the tie that binds

Our hearts in Christian love.

The fellowship of kindred minds

Is like to that above.

For more than a century there has existed within our Synod a fellowship of kindred minds. What is the nature of the peculiar tie that has bound them to each other? How strong is it today? Has it been worth being preserved in the past? Is it worth being preserved today? To throw light upon these questions let us take a glance back into our history.

I. The Early Period of Our Synod's History — from 1850 to the 1860's

At the first regular meeting of the Wisconsin Synod in May 1850, at Granville, Wisconsin, there were present in an official capacity five pastors and one layman. Of the five ministers two were dismissed from the Synod for misconduct within the next two years, and two others withdrew soon afterward — the treasurer, Wrede, to return to Germany, the secretary, Weinmann, to accept a call to Baltimore.

That left only Pastor John Muehlhaeuser, the venerable first president of the Synod. But Muehlhaeuser, though a staunch Lutheran, was not what we today would call a confessional Lutheran. His mild regime and his friendliness toward candidates sent over by the unionistic mission societies of Germany were not to the liking of the stricter element that joined our Synod in the 1850's. Within a decade he was replaced by a more vigorous president, and though he was given the honorary title of Senior, he knew that his policies had been repudiated.

Nothing further is known about the layman who represented Grace Church of Milwaukee. But we do know about half of the congregation at Granville broke away in the middle fifties to found a Presbyterian church that is still in existence. The synodical tie did not prove quite strong enough to hold the founding fathers, or for that matter many of the others who came to us in those early years and soon left again for one reason or another.

But Wisconsin is only one of the four synods that finally united to form the Joint Synod. Were there perhaps more cohesive forces at work in the other three? Alas not. The Minnesota Synod was founded by an elderly missionary from the east, Father Heyer. Much of the early work of gatherings in Lutherans was done by an able traveling missionary, Rev. G. Fachtmann. Both men had unionistic tendencies. Heyer returned to the east; Fachtmann was ousted around 1870. It was only after a decade that the stricter Lutheran element finally got control.

Almost the same thing happened in Michigan. The first synod, founded by the rather easygoing Pastor F. Schmidt in the 1840's, was replaced about 1860 by a second, a loosely organized group struggling along for 35 years without too much growth until it split in the 1890's on questions that resulted from the union with Wisconsin and Minnesota. It was 1910 before the two factions within the Michigan Synod were completely reconciled and the union with the two sister synods was consummated.

The group that eventually became the present Nebraska District had a somewhat different history. A mass migration by covered wagon from Wisconsin to the western prairies, and the thrilling task of building a new country and a new church were certainly unifying experiences. But one of the reasons why these people had migrated was to preserve the principle of congregational independence. They didn't believe in synods. Thus even in Nebraska unity was achieved by a divisive principle.

With such beginnings it is surprising that our Joint Synod ever grew into the strong union that it is. Truly, the grace of God was strong among us to create a binding tie in spite of what happened in earlier years. Yet everyone knows that there are still centrifugal tendencies among us. There are numerous instances, especially in the last 35 years, where the tie that binds has proved to be the tie that is easily broken, as both individuals and whole congregations have severed their connections with us. The question arises: Does this condition stem from our early history? Are we, so to say, doomed by our origins?

I do not think so. It can be proved historically that the early centrifugal tendencies passed away long ago and have no direct connection with those in operation today. But this much must be said. That early history has had its effect in a kind of negative way — not for something it created, but for something it left uncreated. It was not our destiny at the outset to come under the influence of powerful forces making for cohesiveness. How different in this respect were the experiences of those early Saxons who became founders of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. Everything that happened to them — the persecutions in the old country, the great emigration with the loss of one of their ships at sea, the catastrophic effect of misplaced faith in a hypocritical leader, the emergence of a second strong personality, C. F. W. Waiher, to lead the newcomers out of spiritual anguish to faith and solidarity — all these things were like fires that refined, tempered and fused. Out of this crucible of the Lord came a compact body with a marked esprit de corps and great attractive power. Such experiences

were missing in our early history. As a result, our union has always been more loose and casual.

II. Sixty Years of Synodical Growth toward Unity — from the 1860's to 1920

Yet we ought not complain, because the second period of our history, from the 1860's to about 1920, witnessed any number of unifying experiences and almost made up for the lack of them in the first decade. I assume that most of you are acquainted with the main facts of our synodical history. I will therefore just mention the events or movements that made for more effective unity. First among these was the arrival of a group of positive Lutherans, beginning in the middle 1850's. Among the pastors four were especially influential. They were John Bading, Philip Koehler, Gottlieb Reim and Adolph Hoenecke. The first three had pastorates in the area northwest of Milwaukee in the so-called Northwestern Conference — a term that became almost synonymous with vigorous church discipline. Under the promptings of men like these the Synod founded its first seminary in 1863 and its college, Northwestern, in 1865, both institutions being located in Watertown. Its first periodical, the *Gemeindeblatt*, also appeared in 1865. Under the editorship of Hoenecke, the *Gemeindeblatt* served not only as the congregational paper but the theological organ of the Synod until the founding of the *Theological Quarterly* in 1905.

Conservative Lutheran men now being in the saddle, the Synod ceased to fraternize with Reformed church members and congregations, and broke with the German missionary societies, though that meant a loss in revenue.

Our people had smarted under the harsh criticism of the Missouri Synod. But they were fair-minded enough to recognize that the criticisms had not been wholly unwarranted. In 1869 Pres. Bading stated: "Let us concede frankly and honestly that, although many of the charges against us were exaggerated, unfair, malicious, and not according to the love which corrects, yet some things really touched a sore spot."

By that time our Synod was already so positive in its confessional stand that it could reject membership in the General Council after a brief period of hopeful affiliation and refuse membership in the Iowa Synod because of differences in doctrine. About that time we began negotiations with the Missouri Synod with a view to mutual recognition as orthodox Lutheran bodies. The first steps were in fact taken to unite the two groups, Wisconsin placing the facilities of Northwestern College at the disposal of Missouri, and Missouri placing its St. Louis seminary at our service. This friendly relationship was strengthened by the formation of the Synodical Conference in 1872.

The synods having proceeded thus far, it was natural to speak of merging them altogether. The plan was to form a single synod in each state. But now the unexpected happened. Wisconsin, though it approved the idea of state synods in principle, refused to go along with it for fear of being absorbed and "losing its independence." Had our fathers at that time followed the lead of Missouri, it is almost certain that there would be no Wisconsin Synod today. Our identity would have been lost, though we might have retained a position something like that of Her Majesty's loyal opposition in Parliament.

Whatever opinions one may have concerning the wisdom of this action of the fathers — I don't suppose any of you doubt that they acted wisely — this much is certain: their decision represented a long stride toward synodical solidarity. In fact it proved that a feeling of togetherness was already present. It is characteristic that the next project undertaken was the refunding of the seminary in 1878. From this time on we had our own cradle of theological culture, and it has always played a highly important rule in developing unity of feeling. The work of four outstanding personalities, beginning with Hoenecke and continuing with John P. Koehler, August Pieper, and John Schaller, was especially notable up to about the year 1920. The teaching was so distinctive that it was called by a special name — the Wauwatosa theology, of which more will be said later.

Let us return to the 1870's. The controversy over election or predestination which broke out in the latter part of that decade probably aided the cause of solidarity in both Wisconsin and Minnesota. It was one of those theological quarrels that began within the ranks of the clergy. A few pastors and congregations changed sides. But on the whole it ended with both sides being farther apart than ever and each believing more firmly that he had been right. It is interesting to note how Prof. J. P. Koehler who himself lived through the excitement, summed up its effects in his *History of the Wisconsin Synod*:

"The upshot of all this unrest and confusion and the forces at work in the Synodical Conference hardly were a credit to any of the embattled parties or to the theology of the day. A mistaken zeal for the house of God and plain partisan policy; high emotion and a certain amount of indifference; intense loyalty to personalities and synods — on the other hand individualism and independence; ruthless and ill breeding, intensified by the study of the passionate polemics of old dogmatists, personal interest and practical politics — all were at play more or less according to geographical antecedents, theological training and personal make-up."

May I add that in my humble opinion this statement holds for a good many theological controversies. However, at the moment I am trying to say almost the opposite. I have the feeling that this controversy over predestination crystallized theological opinions for many in both Wisconsin and Minnesota and made the two groups see eye to eye with each other on this important question. Then and there was formulated the doctrine which we still hold, that it is impossible to look into the counsels of God, that we know from Scripture only that man is saved by God's grace and that he is lost by his own rejection of that grace.

The outcome of the quarrel therefore helped to prepare the ground for what might be called the last cohesive progress in our circles up to 1920. This was the successful attempt to form a more nearly perfect union among the synods of Wisconsin, Minnesota, Michigan, and Nebraska. The attempt began in the 1890's with the merger of the first three and culminated in the formation of the Joint Synod in 1917. Coming as it did in the quadricentennial year of the Reformation, this achievement seemed like the climax of what our fathers had striven for and an augury of more effective preaching of the Gospel in the future. The great Biblical doctrines once more brought to light by Martin Luther could now be preached and taught with new power. And so they were, in home congregations and in an increasing number of missions, in seminary, college and parochial school.

Two of the firstfruits of the union of 1892 were the mission among the Apaches and the teachers' training school at New Ulm. Before the founding of our African missions, Apacheland served as a kind of symbol of our corporate work among heathen. The very mention of New Ulm brings to mind the subject of Christian education, which was of the deepest concern to our fathers as it is to us. Parish schools and heathen missions have been great unifying forces.

III. The Period from about 1920 to the Present

And that brings us to what might be called the last chapter in our history from about 1920 to the present. Thus far we have noted that after an early period of about a dozen years in which the ties binding our Synod were rather loose, we enjoyed more than half a century of healthy growth in the opposite direction. In these last 35 years both trends are still in evidence. Looking in one direction, one is impressed by our compactness and solidarity; in the other, by a crumbling, not to say splintering, tendency. We have a strong strain of individualism and an equally strong bent toward belonging together. Perhaps it might best serve the purposes of this paper if I were to delineate each of these two tendencies and show both their admirable and less admirable sides.

Individualism — A. Its Admirable Features

First then let us consider the admirable aspects of our individualism. Individualism begins at the doors of each local church and parsonage. We are congregationalists because we believe that each congregation is sovereign in its own affairs. It can't be dominated by any outside group, like a synod, without its own permission. We do try to act according to the Scriptural injunction: Let all things be done decently and in order. Thus in a case of a vacancy we urge a congregation to notify the District president. Either the president or some clergyman designated by him usually helps the congregation choose and call a new pastor. Most congregations are thankful for this help. But time and again they show their independence by ignoring the names on the list and calling a pastor of their own choice, perhaps even from a different synod.

Again there is nothing but moral compulsion and the law of Christian love to induce churches to support the Synod in its education, missionary and administrative work. For the convenience of church members a quota per communicant is figured out. Faithful members try to fill that quota or even go beyond it. But they also have the privilege of refusing. They may be reminded of their duty by visitors. But a congregation may refuse even these proffered services. In fact it may sever its connections with our Synod or it may not even join Synod in the first place. There are still a few congregations — and there were more in the not too distant past — who because they were afraid of losing their independence, simply refused to join the Synod, though they contributed to its support.

This freedom or independence is just as noticeable in the case of the pastor. Once he is duly ordained, called and installed in a congregation, he is on his own during good behavior, answerable only to his conscience and his God. He cannot be removed except for serious misdemeanors or neglect of office. This security he has because of the divinity of the call. His congregation members and ministerial brethren can and sometimes do admonish him if he is remiss in his duties. But as long as he does his work with a reasonable amount of faithfulness and keeps up good relations with his people, he enjoys a measure of independence which only the oldtime farmer used to share with him.

May I add that the same is true of the professor at any of our schools, at least at Northwestern. Having taught there for 30 years I can say that during all that time there has been no abridgement of what teachers prize very highly — their academic freedom or the right to teach their courses as they see fit. A professor, supposedly, is well screened before he is called or appointed. But once he is on the job, he likes to be free from interference and have absolute authority in his classroom. In many schools in our country outside pressure groups do sometimes interfere. One professor who accepted a call into the ministry later remarked that he regretted the step. "Northwestern," he said, "is the most democratic place on earth."

A second feature of our individualism is that we tolerate and even nurture criticism in our midst. In what other organization can employees — beginners — criticize their elders so freely. Everyone has the right of free speech in conferences, board meetings and Synod meetings. We have few executive or secret sessions. Memorials are accepted, filed, printed, carefully listened to and discussed even when occasionally they bear the earmarks of immaturity, extremism or uncharitableness. Not long ago — and I don't believe it was the first time — a District meeting was called just because of the obstreperousness of a single person. I suppose the general idea is that we do not want to quench the spirit of God. He may work through the lowly as well as the exalted, the friendly as well as the opinionated, the dull as well as the bright, the rank and file as well as those in authority, the young as well as the old. There is no hierarchy or aristocracy in our church. Neither do we let any man despise our youth.

A third point. We may say without boasting that we rarely use our individualism to show off. We frown on all species of self-advertising. Our

individualists act as they do for conscience' sake out of an inner compulsion and often with a seemingly complete disregard of consequences. There isn't among us much of the spirit that led the Pharisees to pray ostentatiously and brag about themselves. We don't like to parade our piety, a fact that must be entered on the credit side of our ledger.

In the course of a century we have developed many outstanding personalities in our church — personalities that have been tempered and refined by the spirit of God. Our system seems to nurture them. They are, I believe, another admirable product of our individualism, the fourth. Every one of you, I am sure, can recall some great personality — a pastor, teacher, or layman — whom you have known and admired. For the pastors of my generation the shock of recognition that attends the contact with a great personality often came during the first days and weeks of theological study. We went to the seminary as a matter of routine, sometimes rather unwillingly. Once there, we were swept off our feet by the magnificent presentation of God's dealings with man in our course in church history. We were kindled with enthusiasm for the Gospel in the course in Scripture study. We learned to appreciate the fine qualities of thoroughness and humility in the courses in pastoral theology and educational psychology. The memories of three hallowed seminary years are still vivid for most ministers. In a sense every congregation profits from those moments which its pastor has spent in study at the feet of consecrated teachers. Very likely you laymen feel toward your pastors as we pastors felt toward our teachers, and as those teachers, and we and you too, feel toward the Master of us all — our Lord Jesus Christ.

And now, a last instance of our individualism. They say that a man cannot become a successful banker unless he has the ability to say no. Much of the same could be said of a good minister. Stuart Chase once noted that our age is the age of yes-men. In the pioneer age, he noted, many more men said no more often and more forcefully. Then he goes on to say: "With the no-men will lie character, courage, individuality, saltiness. With the yes-men will lie radios, automobiles, bathtubs, and a complete paralysis of the will to act in accordance with fundamental inclinations."

In believe that the ability to say no — at least to outsiders — is common in our Synod and that it has been partly responsible for preserving intact the traditions of our fathers. The Ten Tribes of Israel were lost because they couldn't say no to the heathen around them, thereby losing their peculiar treasure and their right to be called a chosen people. The faithful Jews of the O. T. possessed that ability in high measure. Thereby they kept the oracles of God committed to them.

Individualism — B. Its Less Admirable Features

Thus far we have dwelt on the admirable side of our individualism. As usual ideals suffer in the rough and tumble of life. Let me run down the line now and show how our fine freedoms are sometimes neglected or misused. Being about to enter on a most delicate subject, I want to beg forgiveness in advance if at any time I tread too boldly. My ideal is to speak with fairness and in the spirit of love, but as I just remarked, ideals suffer in practice. I'll again start with the pastor and his congregation and mention just one lapse that becomes painfully apparent in all too many financial reports in our Synod. How often in these last 35 years has there not been a needless deficit or shortage? But that alone wouldn't be the saddest feature of these reports. It is rather this that so many churches in the most prosperous areas of our country, old established congregations with plenty of money for everything else, have fallen short of their quota for synodical work anywhere up to 90%. The result is that missionary hopes are blighted, educational institutions have to postpone needed improvements, opportunities for growth are missed and the bond of fellowship is strained. A general feeling of discouragement and irritability settles like a fog upon the whole Synod. And only because certain pastors and their congregations

There is another problem concerning personalities. What if they begin to clash with one another. The Church certainly is not edified if it has to stand in the crossfire between its high-placed men. People do take sides, and soon a rift in the fellowship goes down the line from faculties and student bodies to congregations. We have suffered from this situation in the Wisconsin Synod.

As I look back over the last 35 years, it seems to me that all too many of our members have accentuated their individual personalities at the expense of the fellowship. There have been instances in which they threw down the gauntlet, saying in effect: Either the Synod follows my wishes at once or I will walk out. And they have walked out, slamming the door after them. Sometimes because of their militant impatience, they have been shown the door. In either case the fellowship has been ruptured. My impression is that most of these extremist individuals have been young. Many synods and denominations are troubled by younger men who are liberals. Our younger extremists always tend to be ultra conservative. It seems to have been that way already in the 1880's, judging from a statement made by J. P. Koehler in his *History of the Wisconsin Synod*. Speaking of himself in the third person, he wrote: "Though he was something of a lone rider, he had prevented the organization of a conservative younger party in 1882 because such parties are bound to become cliques." One thinks of an observation recently made by Chancellor L. A. Kimpton of the University of Chicago:

"It is said that the mark of adolescence is to be prepared, loudly and blantly to die for a cause, and that maturity comes only when one is prepared, humbly, but quietly and confidently, to live for one."

To young friends everywhere, some of us older individualists would often like to say: Wait a while. Don't go faster than your own brethren. You certainly may try to urge them on in what you consider the right direction. But do it evangelically and patiently. Some of the things you are so impatient about today may and will resolve themselves suddenly. There is just a possibility that you may modify your own views, and as a result your consciences, on a given matter. You say that is impossible. I could give you several instances of highly consecrated men whose views and consciences did change, sometimes just because of a marriage.

But let me quote to you from a letter written by a person who in 1925 took a position so unyielding that it became one of the factors leading to the schism that plagued our Synod and still plagues it. You may remember that among the chief Protestants, as they later called themselves, were two young lady school teachers who took their old pastor to task for allegedly not preaching or administering the Gospel correctly. In 1939, 14 years later, one of these young ladies wrote from Europe to the editor of Faith Life, who published her letter in the March issue of 1939. I ran across it while reading the *History of the Wisconsin Synod*, by J. P. Koehler, which appeared in Faith Life in installments from 1938 to 1943. Here is a quote from the letter.

"Personally I am convinced that our protest of 1925 was not the Christlike manner or method to testify for some truths and against the worldliness in the church, and therefore I withdraw my protest. I very much regret that some things are printed in Faith Life, though I think highly of the paper. I would plead with you, dear brother, to leave all references or at least articles pertaining to the controversy aside, at least for a time. I have no doubt that you will bitterly regret some day that you have printed much that is printed and Synod likewise will regret the suspensions."

Here then we have an example of one who protested not wisely but too well. I want to pay her this tribute, though, that she was big enough to admit it.

One more comment before I leave the subject of individualism. You remember the words of praise we had for the men who can say no. But

have disregarded the needs of the fellowship to which they belong to indulge in their own rugged — or as someone called it, ragged — individualism.

Criticism, we said before, is an expression of healthy individualism. But what if it descends to the level of cantankerous carping or condemnation? One harsh indictment that rolls all too glibly off the tongues of the disgruntled is that a particular individual or the whole Synod has hardening of the heart, that it is living under a curse. In such instances it has always seemed to me that the word of Christ applies: Judge not, lest ye be judged. Certainly we all need criticism. But in a family fellowship like ours we finally have to take each other as we are with all our shortcomings. If just won't do to condemn a man because he doesn't come up to your expectations, because he may not warm up to you or you to him, because he doesn't get as excited about a certain issue as you do, or, if he happens to be an official, because he makes a decision you don't like.

Let us again consider that praiseworthy aversion to self-advertising. It may, however, mean hiding one's light under a bushel or not giving proper honor where honor is due. Besides being somewhat irritating, this utter scorn of publicity may be the subtlest form of self-glorification. Emily Dickenson has a humorous poem on the subject:

How dreary to be somebody,

How public, like a frog

To tell your name the livelong day

To an admiring bog.

I confess I warm up to the sentiment of that poem. But recently when I asked a class whether they disliked publicity or whether they preferred to see their names in the papers, they nearly all turned thumbs down on Emily. It occurred to me then that we who have a passion for anonymity are not quite like the vast majority of mankind and that we are a bit unfair when we criticize those churches who make much of publicity. To be sure, they may be imitating the Pharisee or the frog, who tells his name the livelong day to an admiring bog. But they may also be following the Lord's command to preach from the housetops what has been told in the ear.

There is another unfavorable aspect to this dislike of self-advertising, and that is the phenomenon of bad publicity. We sometimes carry our individualism so far that we pay no attention whatever to public relations. Such a thing as an occasional, friendly chat with the local newspaper editor is not as common among us as it is among pastors of other denominations. As a result we have now and then had what is called a poor press. Items that made many squirm have appeared in the newspapers about us. The usual reaction is to blame the papers or to assume the martyr complex. But we might as well accept the fact that newspapers are here to stay and that they will print news about the Wisconsin Synod, now that they know it exists. Fortunately in this country newspapers lean over backwards to favor the churches. They will even give the eccentric Jehovah Witnesses a great play. It will pay us to cultivate friendly relations with them because they, too, are a means of spreading the Gospel, just like books, the radio and television.

Among the finest creations of the spirit of individualism we mentioned the outstanding personality. But during the first century of our existence we didn't do too well either in local congregations or Synod in holding on to our outstanding personalities. We nurtured them, then lost many of them. If my observation is correct I should say that until recently it was almost the rule that when one of our members acquired a university education or wealth or social prominence, he joined some other church. We lose bright boys even in our schools. And in the ranks of the clergy whom we have trained, more than a few have left our Synod to serve outside it. We may not be at fault. In fact, in recent years we seem to be learning that with all our admiration for the common man, we dare not neglect the uncommon man.

there certainly is the danger, also, of getting the everlasting no habit, of acquiring a kind of negative attitude in church work, as though Christianity consisted in not doing certain things instead of being a positive force that sweeps past obstacles or makes them serve its triumphant progress. To say no is often actually the easy way out. It may mean turning away from an urgent but unpleasant problem instead of coming to grips with it.

It is my impression that some of us sometimes say no out of mere force of habit, and then keep on saying no for fear of losing face. I can think of a dozen items, ranging all the way from accreditation to the granting of B.D. degrees at the Seminary, from the Revised Standard Version of the Bible to Lutheran high schools, from speech courses for theological students to clerical vestments, which were originally greeted with a chorus of noes, at least in certain quarters. Yet today the chorus is much less vociferous, and the forbidding minor key seems to be resolving itself into an affirmative major. Take the Jews again. There was one fateful time in their history when they should have said yes, but because of a deeply ingrained habit they instinctively turned away from Him who was the fulfillment of all their prophecies, the sole reason for their being the chosen race.

Synodical Cohesiveness — A. Its Admirable Features

Now let me turn to the forces that in the last 35 years have tended toward synodical cohesiveness and loyalty. First and foremost among these I should mention our faith in the Scripture as the inspired Word of God and in our confessional writings as a correct presentation of Bible doctrines. I have the conviction that anyone could walk into any of our parochial school classes in religion, into any confirmation class or any church service and come away from it hearing the same doctrine in all points. Many of those who were brought up in our circles and are now outside agree with us. I recall a conversation of more than 30 years ago in which a man who was then already saying harsh things about us and continued to say them to the end of his life outside the Synod, suddenly remarked, somewhat off guard: "Why, I haven't the slightest doubts about the correctness of the Wisconsin point of view." That point of view is as definite a thing as the American way of life, and neither an American nor a member of the Wisconsin Synod would have to waste much time before he could state it in words. We quibble about procedures, programs, and personalities, but are united in doctrine. And that is an achievement in an age of doubt.

We may go a step farther and say that our Synod's Lutheranism has a distinct quality of its own. I mentioned that our Seminary with its faculty of outstanding personalities developed what has been called the Wauwatosa theology or popularly the Wauwatosa gospel. Its essential feature was a fresh approach to the study of the Bible. There have been old style Lutherans who looked on the Bible as a collection of prooftexts for doctrines or of rules for Christian conduct. Our professors looked upon it as the inspired record of God's merciful dealings with men in history.

In practice that meant that much stress was placed on reading whole books of the Bible in the original languages — that is why we still stress languages so much at Northwestern — and of gaining a broad perspective of sacred history as revealed in the whole Bible, not only in bits of it contained in prooftexts. It also meant the intensive study of church history to see how the Gospel had affected and transformed the world in the last 2000 years. Since therefore the emphasis was on exegesis — that is, language study and interpretation — and on history, the term "exegetical historical" was often given to this approach. To describe it from a slightly different angle let me quote from a letter written by Vice-president Irwin Habeck at the time this paper was assigned:

"We do not want regimentation. We want the cooperation of free men who hold common convictions because they have been brought to those convictions by the Word of God. That, I believe,

is what the exegetical-historical approach was intended to do, to let each come to conviction by independent study of the Word and the revelation of God's ways in His working in history. Since convictions thus arrived at grow, and growth does not follow the same time-table in every case, there will be an evangelical attitude, which clings firmly to the ideals set forth in the Word but patiently waits for growth toward them."

That is saying it vigorously and concisely.

Happily there are also new movements in our church life which should have unitive effects. I refer to the revival of the Christian year as the summary of the great acts of God to which the Church needs always to return for refreshment, to the new interest in liturgics and church music, to the scholarly work in Bible study that is being done in various study groups and by a number of gifted individuals. I could also point to the new devotional booklets that are being readied for distribution, to the many papers and pamphlets that have been produced by many men on subjects in controversy between us and a sister synod, to the projects of creating Lutheran Young people's clubs and of publicizing our work by the stewardship committee, to the ever continuing work in education, the new texts, manuals and courses for vacation Bible study, Sunday and parish schools.

One other powerful tie binding us to each other is an outward one. Let us not underestimate it on that account. I refer to our synodical system with its officials, committees, boards, conferences — the whole machinery that runs our schools, missions, meetings, business affairs. Recently there have been appearing in the Northwestern Lutheran under the title "Know your Synod," questions with answers that bring more information about this elaborate setup to our people. In this respect our Synod is just like all other churches, like all other organizations, including our government. The more people there are, the more complex life becomes, the more machinery is needed to cater to all needs. That machinery is absolutely essential to stability and progress. My feeling is that for many years our system has been functioning to the best of its ability. Our Synod is a democracy, which means that under God we ourselves are the government. Our officials are always answerable to us, removable by us. We have placed them in their offices because we thought they were spiritually dedicated, well-balanced, hard working men whose one interest is to further the cause of the Gospel and make the Wisconsin Synod an effective organ of that Gospel.

In the July issue of Harper's magazine a Methodist pastor writing about the woes of young ministers makes quite a point of the fact that in his denomination the bishops are all too dominating, the rank and file, on the other hand, too ambitious. Here is a quotation: "The outright bootlicking, backslapping, and applepolishing which go on in the aggressive fight for position, place and prestige are appalling to a sensitive young minister." It seems to me that such a harsh criticism could not be leveled against our Synod.

I should rather say that leadership has had an uphill path to follow with us. It is often not easy to get men to run for office. A few years ago a number of Districts had some difficulty in drafting candidates for the presidency. Our people, as a whole, distrust centralization, strong leadership, so-called syndicalism. Anyone who has ambitions to become a kind of permanent chairman or board member or oracle in our Synod had better walk circumspectly because most of us are individualists and states-righters who tend to criticize officials with the same freedom, and sometimes recklessness, with which Americans in general criticize their leaders and lawmakers.

Synodical Cohesiveness — B. Its Less Admirable Features

What I have said thus far about cohesiveness represents the credit side of the ledger. Let us now consider briefly some liabilities. You remember

we described the Wauwatosa theology in the ideal. Let us now compare it with the reality. Beautifully as it is, it hasn't always strengthened the tie that binds. It has rather been a bone of contention. To explain just how that happened is difficult. Perhaps one might put it this way. Some didn't appreciate it enough; others appreciated it too much. The first group said in effect: It is an ideal, but ideals don't work in the practical field. There we need something the people can understand — and it is true, people don't always understand the niceties of the Wauwatosa theology. Also, the first group said, children, learning their religion, need proof texts, definite short statements they can lay their hands on. This first group was also irritated by what they considered the insistent, overbearing manner in which the second group presented their views. The practitioners and proteges of the Wauwatosa gospel did often assume a lofty attitude and make extreme claims, coupled with uncomplimentary remarks about their opponents. They intimated, and still intimate, that their theology is the only vital theology to be found in the Wisconsin Synod. One of their number once told me in so many words that it was the greatest creative effort of the last century in the whole world. Such exaggerated notions don't help a good cause, and I still maintain that the Wauwatosa theology is a good cause. To keep it so, perhaps we should bear in mind Paul's advice in Romans 12:3: "For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith."

There have also been liabilities in our synodical setup, which I represented as a powerful unifying force. One hears complaints about politics in our Church or about men who follow the party line, as it were, to get ahead. There was some indication that, in spite of our tendency toward individualism, we were developing a company of yes-men who said no to everything outside and yes to everything within because they thought it the safest way. Privately they disagreed, or made believe they did, but publicly they conformed. I don't believe, however, that we were or are near that stage described by Stuart Chase as having "a paralysis of the will to act in accordance with fundamental inclinations."

On the other hand, criticism of the synodical system got completely out of hand 30 years ago. The split in the 1920's came largely as a result of dissatisfaction with alleged highhanded actions on the part of officials. We may as well admit that there was bumbling, officiousness, inefficiency and plain politics in a few areas. But things changed, as they always do eventually. Yet sometimes it is hard to wait until they do and easy to grow indignant. If an official lacks qualities of leadership, we feel we can hardly excuse him for being so easygoing and ineffective. If he has a forceful personality and runs affairs his own way, we are afraid of developing a pope. If treasurers and boards hold on to their funds — at least missionaries and building committees sometimes think they do — if the Synod does not decide to establish a new school in a certain District or if it postpones final action on an all important decision in order to consider it prayerfully for another year, then any number of intense individuals find their patience running out and often resort to drastic actions. A few may sever their ties with us, jump synods, withhold collections, thereby rolling up their people. They scold their brethren, even declare them in danger of being under the judgment. They stage rump meetings such as they would never tolerate for a minute in their own congregations. Under such conditions one wonders whether the tie forged by our fathers will hold and whether the synodical system so carefully developed will be cast upon the dust heap.

IV. The Need of the Present Hour

Thus far I have spoken about the trends of both individualism and cohesiveness and tried to show their admirable and less admirable sides as revealed in our history these last 35 years. Which ought to be stressed

more at the present time? I should say both, but only in their admirable aspects. We don't want to yield our individuality or personal freedom, that wonderful liberty of the children of God, of which Luther writes in one of his finest treatises: "A Christian man is a perfectly free Lord of all, subject to none, yet a Christian man is a perfectly dutiful servant, subject to all." Paul said it before him in I Cor. 9:19: "For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more" (cf. Rom. 18:8).

But let us be careful of what has been called ragged individualism, the kind that is ready to go it alone on the slightest pretext. That type had a heyday in the 1920's. There are indications that it might have another heyday in the 1950's. And what has ragged individualism ever accomplished? Nothing that could not have been better achieved within the fellowship. Much besides that is hateful, harmful, regrettable. The role of the militant dissenter, the malcontent, the schismatic is not a happy one. His family usually suffers with him. Having had several close friends among those who placed themselves into an improper relationship to their synod in the 1920's, I know very well how lives can be embittered in such instances. It means the loss of friends, not so much because they turn against the separatist, but because he turns from them. It means keeping up the fiction that he is completely right and his onetime brethren are completely wrong, that he has the vision of an Old Testamental prophet, while they have hardening of the heart, the worst of sins. It means standing ineffectively on the sidelines and in the case of a minister, usually without a congregation, nursing one's wrath and becoming more irreconcilable over the years in the ghetto of separatism.

Well, there is an inevitability about the course of history which we can neither foretell nor forestall. God has His own way in this world in spite of all our views and supposedly good advice. And He makes things work out for the best. He has made use of separatists. To their credit it should be said that our country might not have been founded when it was or the way it was but for the Puritans, who were dissenters. Yet who would want to say that schismatics are God's ideal. The Apostle Paul has sometimes been hailed as the patron saint of come-outers, but I ask you to reread I Corinthians, chapter 1. How the Apostle scouted the idea of cliques and factions within the Corinthian church. "Every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ. Is Christ divided?" he asks. The very thought is horrendous to him. Paul wanted to deliver his Church united to the next generation and he did.

Therefore I say that, desirable as our individualism is, the need of the present hour is for cohesiveness. We must remain united if we want to take a positive stand on important questions. If I may be permitted to change Paul's picture in I Corinthians 14:8, I should put it this way: The trumpet must not only give a certain sound, but a single sound and one that is in tune. If some players want to sound off before the group is ready or if their trumpets are of different pitches, there can be no elevating tones. And if some of the trumpeters walk off in a temper and keep on blasting by themselves, that won't produce any edifying music either. If the spirit of harmony is momentarily lacking, it would seem to be better to wait and mark time, prayerfully, until God in His mercy restores it. In the meanwhile there are a thousand things to do in the Church of God that are not quite so spectacular as smashing the tie that binds but perhaps more important in the long run. There is the ever present need to do mission work, to nurture the gifts of the Spirit within congregations and to encourage the work of Christian scholarship in the schools. Let these things be done well and we don't have to feel that we are remiss in our duties or in danger of losing our heritage.

At this time I should like to quote the last paragraph of the *History of the Wisconsin Synod* by the late Prof. J. P. Koehler. He represented both of the tendencies I have tried to present. He was perhaps the greatest individualist we have produced, and came to grief because of that indi-

vidualism as far as his relations with the Synod were concerned. But he never lost his sense of belonging to it during all the lonely years he spent in a place far removed from the scene of his lifework. That is shown in this last paragraph which seems to me to be more forceful because it came from him. It appeared in print in 1943, when he was almost 85, and though he lived to be 92, I rather think it was the last thing he wrote for publication. This is what he says:

"May God, through His Holy Spirit, preserve Synod and all who with her call upon the name of the Lord in that soberness of which even the old Greeks in their human wisdom knew enough to say 'Nothing without measure,' that soberness which Paul in Romans 12:3 would have applied to the divine gift, and of which he makes application through the whole chapter for all children of God, in all their doing, for all time."

God has indeed given us many peculiar gifts, and one of the greatest is our Synod. Imperfect it may be — all human institutions are — yet it is still the best instrument we have to rise above human frailties and do the Lord's work as we are supposed to do it in this terrible and beautiful world. Let us therefore strive to preserve it. Let us work for unity among ourselves and seek the ideal that Paul inculcated upon the Corinthians: "Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and the same judgment."

Blest be the tie that binds

Our hearts in Christian love,
The fellowship of kindred minds
Is like to that above.

Dr. E. Kiessling

MOTIVATION

Cain and Abel each brought an offering to the Lord. Cain, the tiller of the soil, brought of the fruit of the ground. Abel, the keeper of the sheep, brought of the firstlings of his flock. Adam and Eve, looking upon their two sons as they offered, may well have been pleased that both served God with the fruit of their labors. But what did God see? "The Lord had respect unto Abel and to his offering: but unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect" (Gen. 4:4, 5). Both were bringing sacrifices to God, the sacrifice of one was God-pleasing, that of the other not. What is the reason? Hebrews 11:4 answers this question, "By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain." Abel was a believer. Cain was not. Abel's offering was motivated by love to God, Cain's by self-righteousness.

Important is not only what we do, but why we do it. God looks not only upon the outward deed, but upon the motive that caused it to be done. Although the end does not justify the means or motive, neither is an outwardly correct means or action God-pleasing if it is inspired by false motives.

We see the importance of proper motivation in our lives as Christians, likewise also in our work as a Church, as a Synod. Certainly it will ever be well for us in all that we do to search our hearts, to examine our motives, to ask the question: What is leading me to do this? What moves me to this action?

The answer to that question is not always easy to discover. Motivation is not simply a matter of the mind, but of the heart. Our conscious mind may give one reason for our action; our heart may, without our realizing it, be moved by many other forces, desires, motives. However, it will surely be well for us ever to be warned against false motivation, to be directed by Scripture to that which is according to the will of God and in a searching and instructive way apply that to our hearts and souls. It is well for us

as a Synod ever to examine what we do in the light of proper Scriptural motivation. May God guide us as we do so now, first asking this question: What should motivate a Christian? Secondly: How does that apply to our practical church life? Thirdly: How can proper Christian motivation be attained?

I. What Should Motivate a Christian

Why do people do the things they do? Why did John join the church? Why did Mary run away from home? Why did Fred save a drowning boy? Why did Charles become a criminal? We recognize that there should be, that there is a reason for a person's actions. How often isn't the question asked: But why did you do it?

There are many motivating forces that influence people. Hate, love, fear, compassion, envy, love of money, gratitude, distrust, these are but some of the many and complex motives that influence men. What we want to know is what does, what should motivate a Christian. What should motivate us specifically in our church work? What is the proper motivation for mission work, for giving, for the various activities in which the Church is engaged, the work it does, the decisions it makes? What answer does Scripture give us to the question: What should motivate a Christian?

In Ephesians 5:1,2 we read: "Be ye therefore followers of God as dear children; and walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us as an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour." The Ephesians are called "dear children," we might better say, "beloved children." They are the objects of God's love. As such they ought to be followers of God. The Ephesians know that Christ loved them with such a selfless, amazing love that He offered up Himself as a sacrifice to God for their salvation. That is why they also should walk in love. As beloved children, as such whom Christ loves, they will love God, be followers of God, serve Christ.

To the Corinthians, in the 5th chapter of his second letter, Paul writes in verse 14: "For the love of Christ constraineth us." Christ's love to us as it is apparent in that He died for all constrains us: that motivates us in everything so that in verse 17 he then says: "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature." One commentator (Hoffmann) says in this connection: "Die Liebe, mit der der Herr mich liebt, ist meine einzige Triebfeder in all meinem Tun. Sie beherrscht mich unbeschränkt, sie reguliert mein ganzes Benehmen gegen die Glieder seiner Gemeinde." (The love with which the Lord loves me is the only motive in everything I do. It rules me absolutely, regulates my entire conduct over against the members of His church.)

In chapter 5 of Paul's letter to the Galatians he admonishes them to "stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free," not to be entangled again in salvation by works, which means that they will lose Christ. Then in verse 5 and 6 we read, "For we through the Spirit wait for the hope of righteousness by faith. For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love." We are saved, not by works, but by faith which embraces Christ Jesus. That is free salvation. But that faith is a living thing in us, it worketh by love, it has embraced the love of God, it responds by loving God in turn. This will be the motivating force in all we as Christians do.

What is stated in these passages (many more might be adduced) is exemplified in Luke, chapter 7. A Pharisee invited Christ to his house for meat. He did not wash Christ's feet as He entered, gave Him no kiss of welcome, did not anoint His head with oil. While Christ was sitting at meat, a woman in the city, which was a sinner, came with an alabaster box of ointment, washed His feet with her tears, dried them with her hair, kissed and anointed them. What moved this woman to her action, and what had failed to move the Pharisee? Jesus says: "Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much; but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little." The great love this sinful woman displayed in her actions