

Shane Krause
CH 3031 Lutheranism in America
Prof. James F. Korthals
12/8/08

“We are No Longer Confessional Brethren:”
The Correspondences of President O.J. Naumann
Surrounding the Breakup of the Synodical Conference

Without a doubt the years surrounding the breakup of the Synodical Conference were some of the most difficult years in the history of the Wisconsin Synod. The confessional unity of the Wisconsin and the Missouri Synods had endured for almost a century. Wisconsin and Missouri embraced their close ties as sister synods who mutually cooperated in the work of Christ's Church. However, that relationship ended in 1961. Wisconsin suspended its fellowship with the Missouri Synod because Missouri had strayed from the confessional stand it had held for so long. It was not a flippant decision on Wisconsin's part. For a quarter of a century the Wisconsin Synod struggled to demonstrate that the Missouri Synod had strayed from the historic biblical confession of the Synodical Conference. Wisconsin offered patient yet stern admonition to Missouri as Wisconsin resolved to preserve fellowship. It was a time of frustration and heartbreak.

During these difficult years, the Lord graciously provided the Wisconsin Synod with the strong leadership of President Oscar J. Naumann. O.J. Naumann was elected Wisconsin Synod president in 1953. He succeeded President John Brenner in the midst of Wisconsin's doctrinal controversies with Missouri. From this prominent position Naumann dealt with the Missouri controversy from a number of different aspects. In the first place, he played an important role in demonstrating to the leadership of the Missouri Synod the objections which Wisconsin had with Missouri's doctrine and practice. Naumann had to respond to the many pastors of both the Wisconsin and Missouri Synods who expressed understandable concern and consternation over the issues facing the Synodical Conference. He also had to reply to many lay people who expressed similar concerns. An examination of O.J. Naumann's correspondences during this pivotal period of the Wisconsin Synod's history reveals a couple important aspects of his convictions, leadership, and personality. Above all, President Naumann was concerned with the

pure teaching of God's Word. He would not compromise the necessity of a clear confession of the truths of the Holy Scriptures. Furthermore, Naumann possessed a pastoral heart of love which prompted his patient and evangelical dealings with those who were erring and with those who were upset and confused by the situation.

One of the most prominent issues which the Wisconsin Synod had challenged was the Missouri Synod's ongoing efforts to establish fellowship with the American Lutheran Church. The ALC clearly represented itself as a church body which didn't believe complete doctrinal fellowship was possible.¹ In spite of the non-confessional stance of the ALC, Missouri attempted to establish fellowship with the ALC. Already in 1939 Wisconsin had resolved to protest Missouri's actions because Missouri was attempting to establish fellowship with the ALC on the basis of two different statements.² One of Wisconsin's direct responses to these Missourian pursuits was the formulation of the Committee on Intersynodical Relations in the early 1950s. This committee had been formulated for the sole purpose of dealing with the issues concerning Wisconsin-Missouri relations.

This Intersynodical Relations Committee had scheduled a meeting in November 1953, just months after Naumann had been elected president. The committee had invited LCMS President John Behnken to attend the meeting. (It was customary for the presidents of both the Wisconsin and Missouri Synods to attend various meetings held by their sister synods.) In the weeks leading up to the meeting, the president of the American Lutheran Church, Dr. Schuh, had learned of the meeting and Dr. Behnken's plans to attend. Schuh contacted Behnken to convey his willingness to attend the meeting in order to offer possible guidance and direction to the Wisconsin Synod. President Behnken hoped Dr. Schuh could attend and wrote to President

¹ E.C. Fredrich. The Wisconsin Synod Lutherans. (Milwaukee: Northwestern, 2000), 199.

² Fredrich, 200.

Naumann to express hope that Naumann would extend an invitation to Schuh. Naumann responded to Behnken with a letter, dated 10 November 1953, which would set the tone for the next decade of interaction between Naumann and Behnken. In tactful yet pointed language Naumann let Behnken know where the American Lutheran Church stood in relation to the Wisconsin Synod:

That Dr. Schuh is sincere and that we respect him as a gentleman who is willing to be of assistance wherever his services might be of value, need not be stated at length.

But that Dr. Schuh as head of a church body, which is committed to the principle that complete agreement is not needed for fellowship between church bodies, should be of assistance to two synods whose fellowship has always been based upon complete agreement is inconceivable. He could with the principles of fellowship which he and his synod are committed at best try to persuade us that the matters which have shaken our fellowship in the Synodical Conference to the very foundations are not divisive, that they are at best differences of opinion or of application, but that they are not of a fundamental and doctrinal nature.

Dr. Schuh could be of great service to your Synod and our's as well as to his own by persuading them to reconsider and rescind the false principles of fellowship expressed in the Sandusky Resolutions and in the Friendly Invitation. Then we would have a common ground upon which we could begin to discuss differences with a view toward establishing unity and fellowship.

At this early date of his presidency, Naumann had solidified his stance as a Lutheran who was primarily concerned about confessionalism. But it was not a confessionalism prompted by a cold heart. Just the opposite was true. Naumann did not wish to see brothers in the faith go astray. His words to Behnken on this occasion were prompted by a heart of love for a fellow Christian. In fact, Naumann testified to his love and concern for Dr. Behnken not long after the Schuh episode. Dr. Behnken's wife died suddenly of an illness in December 1953. Naumann immediately sent a heartfelt letter of condolence to Behnken in order to offer comfort and encouragement. Naumann's words made it apparent that whatever he would say to Behnken in the future was said out of love and concern for a brother in the faith.

A month later President Schuh proclaimed that nothing was standing in the way of the ALC and the LCMS uniting in fellowship on the grounds of the Common Confession. The Common Confession, however, didn't address the issues which would have been major sticking points between the ALC and the LCMS. Naumann wrote Behnken in a letter dated 25 January 1954. Naumann strongly urged that either Behnken or the LCMS praesidium respond to Schuh's statement and affirm that the Common Confession was not enough for establishing fellowship. Naumann wanted quick action so the people of the Wisconsin Synod might have hope that the Synodical Conference could survive.

Earlier that month, Wisconsin and Missouri held a joint Presidents' Meeting, which was attended by both synod presidents as well as the district presidents of both synods. By this time the Wisconsin Synod presidents were aware of the general direction in which Missouri appeared to be moving. Some of the members of Wisconsin's praesidium thought they should no longer engage in joint prayer with the Missouri Synod errorists. Nevertheless, others thought it to be proper to continue praying with the pastors of the Missouri Synod. They reasoned that although the Missourians were erring brothers, they were still brothers.

A difficult situation faced President Naumann. How should Wisconsin convey the seriousness of Missouri's wanderings in a brotherly way without potentially offending the consciences of both the Wisconsin and Missouri pastors? There was no simple solution. Naumann decided to handle the situation in a forthright manner. He prepared a statement which he read on 12 January 1954 before the Presidents' Meeting began.

As I stated to Br. Behnken at our Agenda Meeting, the one or the other of our men may not feel free to join in common prayer at these meetings, because he is convinced he would be doing wrong in acting contrary to his conscience which is bound by God's Word. I had suggested that for the sake of the conscience of such a man or of such men, all of us might agree to open with silent prayer only. We do not wish to violate the conscience of any man.

If the offer of such a procedure is not forthcoming, and common prayer is used to open our sessions, we beg you not to consider our men legalistic or loveless if they refrain from taking part.

On the other hand, when some of us join in common prayer, we do not want our action to be construed as being an indication that we are receding from the position we have taken at our convention last August and October, but that we are still standing now where we stood then. The fact that this meeting has been arranged testifies to the seriousness of the situation and of the problems that confront us.

I am making this statement at this time in order to acquaint you with the situation and to forestall a lengthy discussion on this subject. We will accept the judgment (sic) of the moderator as to the procedure he will follow.

Naumann's statement conveyed the seriousness of the situation. However, it also treated the consciences of all those men attending the meeting with love and care. Later correspondences indicate that Naumann's opening statement offended no one present. The minutes seem to indicate that the meeting was opened with a devotion and common prayer.

In spite of the fact that Naumann's statement offended no one attending the meeting, a good number of Synodical Conference lay people were disturbed by the statement. It should be remembered that although most pastors in the Synodical Conferences were acquainted with the strain between Wisconsin and Missouri, many lay people were unfamiliar with the weighty issues behind the tensions. It seems that many lay members thought the strained relationships in the Synodical Conference were based solely upon, at least by their estimation, trivial matters such as scouting.

In those days it was common practice for the two Milwaukee newspapers, *The Milwaukee Journal* and *The Milwaukee Sentinel*, to report on the happenings of the Lutheran Church. For some lay people these newspaper articles were the only way they obtained information about their church bodies' official proceedings. Members of the press arrived on January 12 to cover

the Presidents' Meeting. However, because of the great possibility of the press misrepresenting the day's proceedings, the presidents decided to close the meeting to the press. In spite of the request, a member of the press from *The Milwaukee Journal*, William Bechtel, hid in the coat racks outside of the conference room during Naumann's opening statement. Bechtel left shortly after the statement had been read and wrote his article solely upon that statement. Bechtel distorted Naumann's words, which prompted a number of shocked and angry Synodical Conference members to write letters of concern to Naumann. However, Naumann took the time to respond to each lay person who was alarmed by the article published in the *Journal*. He responded with an evangelical tone which made clear that his foremost concern was the preservation of confessional Lutheranism. The following is an excerpt from one of those letters, dated 21 April 1954, to a Mrs. Elizabeth Hays:

I can assure you, Mrs. Hays, that we do not take the responsibility laid upon us in these years lightly. We are deeply concerned about the future of the Synodical Conference and of the Lutheran Church in America, but we are also most vitally concerned about retaining the truth of God's Word and of remaining faithful to what He expects of us, His servants, and has commanded us in His Word.

By the summer of 1954 Naumann seemed to be less optimistic about a potential turn-around in Missouri. In a letter dated 11 June 1954, written to Dr. Fuerbringer, a professor at Concordia, St. Louis, who had defended his participation in some sort of unionistic prayer service, Naumann reprimands Fuerbringer for trying to justify his actions. Naumann also chides the leadership of the Missouri Synod for its repeated failings to carry out church discipline in such instances. Finally, Naumann urges Fuerbringer to consider the effect his actions will have on his own students and their future parishioners.

I cannot, however, agree with you that the seriousness of the situation in our country with regard to our nation's youth, nor the deep concern over this common problem on the part of people of other faiths, gives me a right to circumvent the principles of Holy Scripture with regard to Christian fellowship. Drawing a

conclusion, however, from past experience, I am sure that now that you have appeared and prayed at that meeting, your brethren and your officials of the Missouri Synod will do everything in their power to justify your action. . . I beg you seriously to consider how much greater is your responsibility today than it would be even if you were only a pastor in one congregation. You are training pastors for the ministry and are not only confusing them but the members of their congregations. Not our good intentions, but the clear Word of God must be our guide at all times.

The pessimism evident in Naumann' letter to Dr. Fuerbringer, however, was not as evident following the Synodical Conference Convention held a few months later in East Detroit. Although the convention brought little reason for renewed hope, Naumann was convinced that Wisconsin's vigorous protest against Missouri had not yet run its course. Many Wisconsin Synod pastors and lay people believed the time had come to sever ties with Missouri. Many conveyed their perspective to Naumann. Nevertheless, because of Missouri's stated commitment to explore their problems, Naumann believed it was a time for patient admonition. In a correspondence responding to concerns expressed by Mr. Norman A. Gurath, dated 28 September 1954, Naumann demonstrates this evangelical and patient attitude.

The appeals that I receive from many Missouri Synod pastors as well as some laymen ask us to continue our admonition rather than to break off at this time, convince me that the Lord wants us to continue the admonition strengthening those who still are our true brethren in the Missouri Synod. . . I feel confident that the Lord is thereby heaping up the evidence against the manner in which the Missouri Synod members have been led to believe that true doctrinal unity was being established with the American Lutheran Church. . . I am not convinced that the Lord insists that we must succeed at once in bringing Missouri to recognize each one of its errors; but, I do believe that if we succeed in one point, we should not lose courage but continue the admonition under God's blessing until we have either removed all the offensive matters that are now disturbing the Synodical Conference or have reached the conviction that we stand alone in our position and that further admonition is absolutely in vain. Some of our men are convinced that we have passed the date when the latter has come true, but by far a majority are (sic) not of this conviction. I would rather be patient and long-suffering than to sin through rash and legalistic action toward those who have erred.

Leading up to the Wisconsin Synod Convention of 1955, the Intersynodical Relations Committee had recommended that Wisconsin sever its ties with Missouri. When President Behnken received news of this recommendation, he was shocked. He wrote to Naumann in a letter dated 25 June 1955, "I cannot understand how this is possible when the Wisconsin Synod and Missouri Synod are in doctrinal agreement." Although it seems hard to comprehend how Behnken could make such a statement, Naumann wanted to make it clear to Behnken that Wisconsin was attempting to exercise church discipline from a spirit of love and concern. Naumann wrote on 28 June 1955, "The 'preliminary report', which you stated effected you as a shock, is a report which we drew up only after years of waiting, counseling, and consulting. Nor did we draw it up with a light heart."

But the Wisconsin Synod Convention of 1955 voted to hold in abeyance the vote to suspend fellowship with Missouri. Naumann faced a firestorm of criticism for the convention's decision. A number of pastors, including Seminary President Edmund Reim, broke from Wisconsin to form the Church of the Lutheran Confession. Those men believed Wisconsin was erring by maintaining fellowship with the errorists of the Missouri Synod. But Naumann clearly demonstrated why the convention had voted as it had. A letter to Pastor Herman Brauer, dated 16 September 1955, exemplified the reasoning which Naumann had to convey to numerous pastors and laypeople after the convention of 1955.

Our action to defer the actual vote on the resolution to terminate fellowship to a recessed session next fall, was taken out of consideration for the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod and its many members, who have not met in convention since our 1953 Resolutions and 1954 Synodical Conference convention.

For the next five years Naumann's correspondences reflect a definite trend. Naumann wrote repeatedly to Behnken in order to urge him to carry out church discipline against erring pastors within the Missouri Synod. Notable among these correspondences is the letter written to

Behnken regarding Dr. Martin Scharlemann, a professor at Concordia, St. Louis, who, among other things, advocated military chaplaincy and called into question the plenary verbal inspiration of the Bible. Apart from Scharlemann, there were many other admonitions regarding unionistic practices within Missouri. Without question these ongoing admonitions were growing tedious to Naumann. He wrote to Behnken on 10 April 1959, "You can well understand why these announcements again place us at the crossroads. Is it not time to take a different turn lest our failures to do so be understood as approval or at least acquiescence?"

Furthermore, Naumann wrote repeatedly to Wisconsin Synod pastors and lay people who questioned why Wisconsin had not yet broken ties with Missouri. Naumann continually stood by the same reasons for Wisconsin's patience as he did in 1955. Naumann's letter of 13 October 1959 to Pastor H.C. Duehlmeier, of Zion, Sanborn, Minnesota, exemplifies the great patience and love with which Wisconsin was willing to extend to its erring brother.

We are not holding out, because we have personal feelings that the admonition may still prove useful in the future. We are convinced it has borne fruit already today. Missouri is deeply concerned about pure doctrine in its midst especially at seminaries. Missouri has adopted resolutions reinstating doctrinal discipline, and urging its pastors and officials to see to it that this is carried out.

But the Missouri Synod never followed through on its resolutions to carry out church discipline and to restore the teaching of pure doctrine. An impasse had been reached. Therefore, after nearly a decade of formal protesting, the Wisconsin Synod suspended its fellowship with the Missouri Synod at the Wisconsin Synod Convention in August 1961. The repercussions of this division were monumental. Both synods had to learn to live without the sisterly relationship which each had enjoyed for almost one hundred years.

Not long after Wisconsin's suspension of fellowship, the Missouri Synod made it necessary for President Naumann to publically demonstrate what this suspension of fellowship

would entail. The Missouri Synod praesidium had invited Naumann to stand in the receiving line of the Presidential Reception and Buffet at the onset of the Missouri Synod Convention in 1962. It would be the first Missouri Convention since Wisconsin had suspended fellowship. The invitation placed Naumann in an uncomfortable position. It almost seems as if Missouri was testing whether Wisconsin was really serious about what it had declared in August 1961. Naumann was obligated to uphold the confession from which the Wisconsin Synod would not budge. At the same time, he needed to demonstrate that his decision came from the heart of a concerned and loving Christian. He replied with a letter dated 13 April 1962.

I wish, first of all, to thank you for the invitation. I do believe, however, that the action which our Synod felt constrained to take last summer, though with a heavy heart, in suspending fellowship with The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, and the admonition which this action was intended to address to our long-time Sister Synod would hardly be supported by my presence and participation in this reception. Nor would I care to have my presence become the cause for any embarrassment to anyone in attendance. Hence I ask you kindly to excuse me this time.

The 1962 Missouri Synod Convention elected Oliver R. Harms to replace John Behnken as president of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. The commencement of Harm's presidency marked an important juncture in the relationship between the Missouri Synod and the Wisconsin Synod. Would Harms lead Missouri to see the error of its ways and return to the confession of the Synodical Conference. Would Harms lead Missouri to see the folly of unionism? Would he urge his praesidium to carry out the hard task of church discipline? All these questions would be answered negatively. In fact, Harms seemed acutely unaware that any problems existed in the Missouri Synod. One of his first correspondences with President Naumann, dated 18 October 1962, demonstrates this attitude.

It is still my prayer that God somehow would direct us in such a way that we might give one another the hand of fellowship again, which, as you know, The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod has not withdrawn. Personally, while I know

your reasons for having taken the action you did in suspending fellowship with us, I do not understand how you could come to this decision. I make this statement merely to show you that my continued interest is sincere, not something superficial.

For some reason that remains unclear, Naumann was out of office for the latter part of October 1962 and for most of November. Wisconsin Vice-President Irwin J. Habeck assumed Naumann's duties in his absence. By the time Naumann returned to office in late November 1962, President Harms had written a number of letters to Naumann. Naumann's response to Harm's letters, dated 29 November 1962, is of the utmost importance. It demonstrates the Wisconsin Synod's intent to be faithful to the scriptural principles of fellowship. Naumann makes clear that Missouri was the one who had departed from the confession of the Synodical Conference. He also demonstrates that Missouri's practices of inter-Lutheran dialogue violated Missouri's own constitution. The full text of this highly significant letter follows.

Dear Mr. Harms:

Thank you kindly for your letter of November 20, which was aimed at keeping our church informed concerning discussions being carried on by The Lutheran Church-Canada.

We in the Wisconsin Synod are, of course, also interested in theological discussions with other church bodies. It is taken for granted that these discussions must always aim at reaching agreement in doctrine on the basis of a study of the clear Word of God.

All discussions between church bodies must have doctrinal unity as their primary purpose. We have repeatedly stated that we are ready and eager to take part in such discussions. But we feel bound by the Word of God to set three conditions to our participation: 1. Frank admission that doctrinal differences exist; 2. Recognition of the removal of these doctrines through study of the Scriptures as the first duty of all inter-church discussions; and 3. Refraining from joint demonstrations of fellowship before doctrinal agreement and thus fellowship status under the Word has been reached.

Hence you see why we were excluded from the Engstrom free conference (a free conference held in Chicago at the invitation of Dr. Engstrom of the ALC, of which joint common devotions and joint prayer were a feature.) Missouri's

participation in doctrinal discussions with common prayers and devotions with other church bodies not in fellowship with her Synodical conference by participating in discussions at which two synods, purporting to be sister synods, would demonstrate differences in the doctrine and practice of fellowship. We said repeatedly before the Joint Doctrinal Committees: “How can we presume to teach other synods correct Scriptural doctrine and practice while we ourselves would be demonstrating differences in our own midst from the very outset of the meetings? These churches will tell us: “Physician heal thyself!” Or they will say that we can be and remain sister synods despite existing and recognized differences. Missouri and Wisconsin are an example of what is asked for in the Friendly Invitation and in the Sandusky Resolutions.”

As I stated in Chicago earlier this month: “We are determined to uphold the confessional position of the Synodical Conference because it is the Scriptural position. This is confessed also as the Missouri position in Tract No. 10-377, page 10: “However, Missouri Synod Lutherans feel conscience-bound to unite in fellowship and worship only with those with whom they are agreed in Scriptural teachings. In this they believe that they are following God’s Word, which says, ‘Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them.’ (Romans 16:17)”

We hold that the Theology of Fellowship-Part II is a disavowal of this Scripturally correct position confessed and practiced by the Synods of the Synodical Conference for over three-quarters of a century.

This should show in brief our Synod’s position on intersynodical discussions where agreement on the Word has not been reached.

Has not the ALC forbidden its doctrinal commission to take part in discussion unless these are opened with common devotions? This also has a bearing in these matters.

Sincerely yours,

Oscar J. Naumann

Naumann’s admonition fell on deaf ears. Consequently, in 1963 the Wisconsin Synod took the final step in breaking off fellowship ties with the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. Wisconsin withdrew its membership in the Synodical Conference. She could no longer participate in a fellowship organization in which there was not true biblical fellowship. After Wisconsin’s withdrawal, former Missouri Synod President Behnken wrote a letter to Naumann.

In the letter, dated 8 September 1963, Behnken expressed his sorrow over Wisconsin's decision. He also stated that he believed Wisconsin carried out its course of action prematurely. He almost seems to be in a state of shock when he writes, "Does this mean that you are no longer my brother? I consider you as a brother."

Behnken's statement characterizes the Missouri Synod's response to Wisconsin's ongoing reproofs. In spite of the fact that Missouri promised Wisconsin that it would examine its erring doctrine and practices, the Missouri Synod refused to admit that problems existed within her. President Naumann responded to Behnken with scathing words. In a letter dated 31 October 1963, Naumann once again outlined Wisconsin's objections to Missouri's errors. Naumann wrote with unmistakable clarity. His letter was meant to be yet another act of church discipline. His rebuke was stern. Nevertheless, Naumann demonstrates a pastor's loving heart which is obligated to deal with erring brothers in a straightforward manner.

Dear Dr. Behnken:

Your letter of August 30 was received a few days after it was sent. I have delayed answering it simply because our words and answers, our well meant pleas and admonitions, had seemingly been so much in vain in the past.

Even while our Doctrinal Unity Committees were discussing the doctrine and practice of fellowship, and we were patiently waiting from year to year for your Synod to present in writing the promised confessional position on fellowship, your tracts and texts on dogmatics and pastoral theology confessed one thing and your officials, faculties, and constituents practiced quite another. I need not spell this out. You will recall how, because of unfavorable press reaction, you backed down on your agreement not to meet with the National Lutheran Council, but to concentrate on our problems and discussions in the Synodical Conference.

We did agree on and adopt a synthesized Statement on Scripture. What did you do with it? Have you practiced according to it? Was it so inferior that you needed the "Form and Function" statement?

Why did you not "make earnest" with the Statement on Scripture in the Scharlemann Case? It was never applied or practiced in his case. Of what value is a confession that we are not willing to live?

Why did you tell the Cleveland convention that our delegation declared an impasse after only one evening's discussion of your Theology of Fellowship-Part Two? If you did not know that that statement was false before you received my letter at Cleveland, delivered the next day, you knew it then. Yet you permitted the delegates and the entire convention to transact its business and adopt its resolutions, also those pertaining to intersynodical matters, while laboring under the influence of that falsehood. Not until the dying moments of the convention did you correct your false report, after it was too late, and then you nicely erased all records of your false report from the printed record. Such conduct is for me simply inconceivable on the part of one who wants to be called a brother.

When a church body fails to deal effectively in obedience to God's Word with error and errorists in its midst, when instead it lets these men mislead one into fellowship demonstrations with known errorists, then that church body has lost its orthodox confessional character. See the statement on fellowship in the Brief Statement and in Tract 10377.

The Brief Statement warned that in tolerating unionism a church body runs the constant risk of losing the Word of God entirely. Paragraph 28.-But of course, you can't hold your professors and pastors to teach according to the Brief Statement, because the San Francisco Resolution No. 9 was unconstitutional.-Do you actually believe, Dr. Behnken, that those who objected to Resolution 9 were concerned about constitutional procedure? They were concerned about being restrained by its clear-cut confession!

But why should I write any more? Your Synod has set its course. Its method of dealing with men like Herman Otten, A.T. Kretzmann, Harold Romoser, and others is known. Meanwhile Dr. Martin Scharlemann, Dr. Martin Marty, Dr. Jaroslav Pelikan and others of like mind remain and are hailed as great lights in the Synod.

If you want to know what the dominant thinking of your membership concerning our Synod and its action is, read the editorial In the American Lutheran, Volume XLVI, No. 10, October 1963, page 5. In case you do not have this periodical I will quote the article referred to above.

Will the Albatross Remain?

"One news release dealing (sic) with the Wisconsin Synod convention reported that the delegates voted to encourage the synod's Commission on Doctrinal Matters to attend future inter-Lutheran meetings as observers, if this can be done without compromising the Wisconsin Synod's doctrinal position.

On the face of it, the decision is commendable. The Wisconsin Synod should participate in inter-Lutheran meetings, especially if it feels it has something to

contribute to the discussions. Through personal confrontation Wisconsin Synod representatives may well discover, as countless members of the Missouri Synod have, that there are many more confessionally orthodox Lutherans around than they had imagined.

Yet the Wisconsin Synod's decision to be present at inter-Lutheran meetings could have unhappy consequences. For much too long The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod allowed the objections of Wisconsin Synod members to determine its relation to other churches. Hopefully, the Wisconsin decision to attend inter-Lutheran meetings was motivated by something more than a desire to continue to hold the Missouri Synod in check. Whether Wisconsin is present or not, it is high time for Missouri to do what it ought to do and not what Wisconsin wants it to do."

This is only one of many such expressions. And you need not say that this is not an official periodical of your Synod. You praise, thank, and subsidize the American Lutheran Publicity Bureau in its activity.

We are shocked and saddened, too, Dr. Behnken. We pleaded with you for years concerning the matters that shocked us. At first they shocked you, too, but you became accustomed to those shocks and learned to live with them.

God's Word forbids us to live with the causes of these shocks, lest we lose the Word of God entirely...

Church history shows that those church bodies that relax their strict Scriptural fellowship practice, slowly but surely change their attitude toward Holy Scripture. That is the reason our Lord warns us in Romans 16:17 to avoid makers of offenses and divisions. Your Brief Statement clearly confesses this and warns against the danger of losing the Word of God entirely. In your Synod the attitude toward Holy Scriptures has been definitely changed through the infiltration, encirclement, and subversion (cf. Martin Marty in the Christian Century) of the Statementarians and the intellectuals at your seminaries and your other schools. They have succeeded in limiting the scope of application of such Scripture passages as Romans 16:17, and the end is not yet.

I hope and pray that we may ever remain brothers in faith by the grace of God. We are no longer confessional brethren. I can no longer for confessional reasons join you in prayer, in worship or at the communion table in the visible church. I pray that the Lord would ever keep us His children and heirs of His heavenly kingdom, that we may be brethren in the Holy Christian Church, the Communion of Saints. May he deliver us from every evil, also from all error, from within and from without!...

With kindest personal regards,

Sincerely yours,

Oscar J. Naumann

The writing of this letter seems to have been a watershed moment in Naumann's correspondences with the Missouri Synod. There were occasional letters received and letters written thereafter, but with nowhere near the frequency with which letters had been exchanged previously. It seems as though Naumann finally had communicated that Wisconsin and Missouri were no longer of a like mind. The Wisconsin Synod was bound by God's Word to continue in the confession of the Synodical Conference. The Missouri Synod had decided to depart from it. Even those within Missouri admitted this after the fact. Roland Wiederaenders, who once served as first vice president in the Missouri Synod acknowledged:

We have not dealt honestly and openly with our pastors and people. We have refused to state our changing theological position in open, honest, forthright, simple, and clear words. Over and over again we said that nothing was changing but all the while we were aware of the changes taking place.³

What, then, is the legacy which President Oscar J. Naumann left behind? It is a legacy of love. It is a love for confessional Lutheranism. Naumann was committed to preserving the truths of God's Word in the Wisconsin Synod. He would not compromise the only Word which gives eternal life. Furthermore, Naumann's is a legacy of love for the souls of others. The guidance and admonition which he offered as the leader of the Wisconsin Synod did not spring from a heart bent on discord and division. Naumann desired unity-but not a synthetic unity. He desired a unity based on God's Word. The pure truth of God's Word is where the saving gospel resides. It was Naumann's love for souls which bound him to confess the truth, no matter what the cost.

³ Mark E. Braun. A Tale of Two Synods: Events That Led to the Split between Wisconsin and Missouri. (Milwaukee: Northwestern, 2003), 6.

Bibliography

Braun, Mark E. A Tale of Two Synods: Events That Led to the Split between Wisconsin and Missouri. Milwaukee: Northwestern, 2003.

The Correspondences of O.J. Naumann, Box 6 of 10, Files 144-161. The Historical Archives of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Milwaukee.

Fredrich, E.C. The Wisconsin Synod Lutherans. Milwaukee: Northwestern, 2000.