

The Doctrinal Differences Between The Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, And The Church of the Lutheran Confession, The Concordia Lutheran Conference, And the Lutheran Churches of the Reformation

By Lyle W. Lange

The years between 1939-1961 constituted a crucial period in our Synod's history. They involved turmoil within the Synodical Conference over the unionistic practices of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. Our Synod exercised patient and persistent admonition in an attempt to bring the Mo. Synod back to its fellowship position outlined in the *Brief Statement* of 1932 and exercised in its earlier history. The tension of the 40's turned into the turbulence of the 50's. Pres. Naumann outlined the concern of our Synod for the entire decade when he stated in the 1955 Saginaw convention,

We implore the Holy Spirit to guide and direct us as we try to decide in the face of all the reports whether the Lord would now have us apply His definite command, "Avoid them", or, whether we still have an unpaid debt of love to those whose fellowship we cherished so many years. We are intent upon obeying the Word of God.ⁱ

The doctrinal deviations of the Mo. Synod disturbed its own unity as well as the unity of the Synodical Conference. In the 50's and 60's, a number of groups withdrew from the Mo. synod for confessional reasons. We shall treat two of them, the Lutheran Churches of the Reformation and the Concordia Lutheran Conference, later in this paper. The turmoil of the 50's also caused a division in our own ranks. Some from our midst questioned the exegesis and application of Rom 16:17 as enunciated and carried out by our Synod. A number of these individuals withdrew from our fellowship and formed the Church of the Lutheran Confession. It is this group to which we shall first turn our attention in this paper.

This essayist is of the opinion that it is helpful to couch the differences between the WELS and The CLC in the setting of conflict with Mo. It is for this reason that we begin with the period of inter-synodical tension from 1939-1949, before we study the intra-synodical tension of the 50's. Another reason for starting with 1939 is it is an historical "terminus a quo" for the CLC. In "Origin of the CLC-Mark ...Avoid," Pastor Paul F. Nolting states,

The official Proceedings of the conventions of the WELS exhaustively "marked" Mo. as an erring church body in 1953, in fact ever since 1939, but continued admonishing her within the bonds of fellowship until 1961. This course of action was rationalized and defended on the grounds that the "marking" was not yet conclusive, that there allegedly were new "rays of hope," and that the continuing fellowship was vigorously protesting. Many present members of the CLC participated in this contradiction of "marking" yet fellowshiping. But the CLC has disavowed this as error and has returned to the simple scriptural position that the "marking" enjoined in Rom 16:17 is to be followed by the "avoiding" without a time lapse allowing for a process of admonition and without artificially delaying the official, conclusive "marking."ⁱⁱ

This statement summarizes the barrier which exists between the CLC and our own WELS. In this essay we shall look at the historical developments which led to the withdrawal from our fellowship by the CLC men as well as examine the doctrine in controversy.

Also, permit me a personal note. It is with some trepidation that I present this paper. I was in grade school at Sanborn, Minnesota, when the fires of the CLC controversy were burning brightly in that area. Though I was aware of the conflict then, I did not comprehend the full ramifications of the issues involved. There are many of you present today who were in the thick of the conflict at that time, who are far more qualified to speak on these issues than I am. Yet, since you were not assigned this essay and I was, I shall attempt as best I can to focus on the central issue. I shall also attempt, where possible, to allow the historical participants to speak for themselves. I pray the Lord will lead me to present the issues involved in such a way as to edify His church.

Doctrinal Differences Between the CLC and WELS

The historical situation of the 1930's lent itself to the negotiations between the ALC and the Missouri Synod. Ethnic and language barriers were dropping. The conflicts overseas and the depression had placed a premium on cooperation between individuals and groups. The teaching that joint worship and church work must follow, not promote, doctrinal unity, was considered outmoded and obstructionistic. It was a time of outreach for the Missouri Synod. Her outreach, however, fell into line with the spirit of the times. It led to contacts which strained both the fellowship and the fellowship principles of the Synodical Conference.

In 1938, the *Union Resolutions of the Missouri Synod* joined the *Brief Statement* with the ALC's *Declaration* as a joint settlement of past differences. These differences were far from resolved, however. In her 1938 convention at Sandusky, Ohio, the ALC stipulated that the Brief Statement of Mo. must be viewed in light of the ALC's Declaration. Further, the ALC was unwilling to leave the American Lutheran Conference with which it was affiliated. In 1939 the ALC and the ULCA reached the Pittsburgh agreement which denied the verbal inspiration of Scripture. The statement that the Holy Spirit supplied to the writers "content and fitting word" was explained by one of the parties as not meaning verbal inspiration. (Let us remember that this expression surfaced later in the *Common Confession*.)

At the 1939 convention at Watertown, our Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wis. and Other States expressed its concern over these events. The convention adopted the recommendations of the Committee on Church Union Matters, which called for a single, joint statement between both the Mo. Synod and the ALC, covering the contested doctrines thetically and antithetically. It also stated, "that under existing conditions further negotiations for establishing church fellowship would involve a denial of the truth."ⁱⁱⁱ

In its convention at Ft. Wayne in 1941, Missouri recognized the need for a single confessional document. Yet, they began joint work with the AN in relief of missions and establishment of service centers. This "cooperation in externals" was further complicated by the actions of the ALC. In its 1940 convention at Detroit, the AN did not rescind the Sandusky resolutions but did officially endorse the Pittsburgh Agreement. The ALC also spoke of the strategic importance of the American Lutheran Conference in bringing together the extremes of Lutheranism, the ULCA and the Mo. Synod.

Bit by bit the once solid foundations of the Mo. Synod began to crumble. In a May 11, 1943, article in the Lutheran Witness, Dr. Arndt, Chairman of the Mo. Synod Committee for Doctrinal Unity, expressed the opinion that the obstacle to fellowship with the ALC was a different view of fellowship.^{iv} In 1944 the Union Committee of the Mo. Synod and the ALC published a single document of agreement, entitled, "Doctrinal Affirmation." In essence, this document modified the Brief Statement in the areas of inspiration, the means of grace, and the last things, by additions and omissions.^v In that same year, a Mo. Synod resolution gave scouting a clean bill of health. The Manual, "Scouting In The Lutheran Church," was commended with the assurance that the interests of the Synod were protected by the concessions the national scouting organization had made. Our synod viewed the book, "Scouting In The Lutheran Church," as an instance of unionism with Lutheran synods with whom we were not in fellowship.^{vi}

In September 1945, the "Statement of the Forty-Four" appeared in Mo. Issued by 44 pastors and professors (including five professors of Concordia Seminary at St. Louis and at least a dozen other prominent

leaders in the synod),^{vii} it openly challenged the fellowship position outlined by the *Brief Statement*. Of interest to us is the statement,

We affirm our conviction that in keeping with the historic Lutheran tradition and in harmony with the Synodical resolution adopted in 1938 regarding church fellowship, such fellowship is possible without complete agreement in details of doctrine and practice which have never been considered divisive in the Lutheran Church.^{viii}

Though this statement was withdrawn from discussion, it was never adequately disavowed.

The AN did not accept the Doctrinal Affirmation of 1944: In 1946, it rejected the document as not acceptable. It instructed its Committee on Fellowship to explore the measure of agreement we have with other Lutheran bodies and to further such agreement toward the goal of true unity.^{ix}

Following this directive in 1947 the ALC Committee issued a “Friendly Invitation” to Mo. to resume negotiations. It explained its rejection of the Doctrinal Affirmation as based on an allowable and wholesome latitude of theological opinion on the basis of the teachings of the Word of God.^x

The committee stated,

It is neither necessary nor possible to agree in all nonfundamental doctrines.^{xi}

As the decade of the 40’s drew to a close, the negotiations between Mo. and the ALC continued, and the incidents of joint worship and work increased.^{xii}

During this time, our Synod continued its activity of protesting and admonishing. Each synod convention devoted considerable time and energy to the matter of fellowship. During this process, there were some rays of hope. In the 1947 convention at Watertown, we adopted a set of theses on scouting.^{xiii} In 1949, the Standing Committee on Church Union reported to the convention at St. Lucas in Milwaukee,

It was the favorable impression of our representatives that this new Mo. committee is making a sincere effort to understand our Wisconsin position.^{xiv}

Yet, at the same time, our Committee on Church Union reported, “With deep concern we note that the ties which have united us particularly with the Synod of Missouri are being loosened.”^{xv} It is against this background that we enter into the decade of the 50’s.

In 1950, Mo. and the ALC produced the *Common Confession*. Our 1951 convention at New Ulm devoted 8 full sessions to considering this document. Six essays, on the means of grace (R. Hoenecke), election (A. Schuetze), conversion (T. Adascheck), justification and redemption (E. Wendland, Jr.), the last things (O. Siegler), and the church and ministry (E. E. Kowalke) were read to aid the delegates in their study of the *Common Confession*. Pres. Brenner set the tone for the convention when he stated,

It will become evident that we have dealt patiently with our sister synod. Since 1939, we have met many times with the various groups that have represented it and have practiced Christian admonition.^{xvi}

The *Common Confession* was weighed and found wanting, particularly in the areas of justification (leaving room for the idea it is not complete until faith is added, thus destroying the objective nature of justification), conversion (where room was left for it to be based on man’s attitude; further, the distinction between natural and willful resistance was not rejected), election (election in view of faith was not rejected), means of grace (the “content and fitting word” of the *Pittsburgh Agreement* was used) the church (the church was externalized and fellowship principles obscured), and the last things (room was left for making the doctrine that the Papacy is the Anti-Christ an historical judgment). The Common Confession ignored the principle of

“*sola gratia*” and was weakest in what it did not say. For this reason, we insisted that formal antitheses were necessary for a clear confession of the truth. The verdict of our 1951 convention was that the Common Confession was in fact a denial of the truth, since it claimed to be a settlement of doctrinal differences which were not settled in fact.

In the meeting of the Synodical Conference in 1952 at St. Paul, the floor committee report declaring the Common Confession to be inadequate was set aside to await part 2, which would be acted on by Mo. in convention in 1956. Our delegates then declared themselves “*in statu confessionis*” because they felt the issues in contention had not been addressed. This set the stage for the 1953 Synod convention at Watertown. The Committee on Church Union reported to the delegates that our New Ulm resolutions sent to Mo. Synod “were courteously but definitely declined.”^{xvii} The Committee presented the following resolution to the convention.

We hold that the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod,

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

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

The Floor Committee on Church Union brought to the floor a resolution to continue “*in statu confessionis*” and pursue the matter through the Synodical Conference convention in 1954. Pres. Behnken of the Mo. Synod who was present at our convention offered to have the Praesidia and District Presidents of the two Synods meet in an attempt to resolve the issues. The Synod adopted the floor committee resolution in the spirit of Gal. 6:1-2, “Brethren if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual restore such an one in the spirit of meekness.”^{xix} The substitute motion of Prof. Winfred Schaller to terminate fellowship was deferred to a special Synod convention held in the Fall at Bethesda Lutheran Church in Milwaukee. This resolution was not adopted.

In the October, 1954, issue of the *Quartalschrift*, an essay entitled “The Scriptural Principles Concerning Fellowship” was printed. The following excerpts from that essay are pertinent to our discussion:

Thus, our answer to the question: Whom can we recognize and acknowledge as Christian brethren? must of necessity be this: Those who profess faith in Christ as their Savior and with this profession embrace and accept His entire Word. With them, but only them, can we express fellowship of faith in all of its manifestations.^{xx}

But in order to understand properly what we have just said about the basis and prerequisite for Christian fellowship, we need to distinguish with Scripture between an adherent of false doctrine or practice and a weak brother.^{xxi}

Weakness in faith is in itself not a barrier for Christian fellowship. It is rather an inducement for exercising our fellowship for the purpose of helping our brethren overcome their weakness.^{xxii}

Scripture also speaks very concretely of weakness of faith as it is found in believers and lets us distinguish a number of types.^{xxiii}

The following are then listed:

- 1) a lack of trust in God's promises which does not prevent expressions of fellowship but rather calls for them.^{xxiv} "Weak brethren distinguish themselves from scoffers and unbelievers in their willingness to receive spiritual help and instruction."^{xxv}
- 2) a weakness pertaining to the use of adiaphora. These we are to receive, but not with doubtful disputations, overbearing arguments or condescending instruction.^{xxvi}
- 3) a weakness which manifests itself in a lack of understanding of Christian truths, in an involvement in error or in a deviation from Christian life.^{xxvii} "When those who have been our brethren show a lack of Christian understanding or become enmeshed in error, we too, are to treat them as weak brethren as long as we still have reason to assume they are ready to receive correction and instruction."^{xxviii}

Concerning the limitations and restrictions of admonition, the essay stated

With equal clarity the Lord tells us likewise in His Word that we can no longer recognize and treat those as brethren who in spite of earnest admonition, persistently cling to an error in doctrine, who demand recognition and toleration for their error and make propaganda for it.^{xxix}

From all of this we see that in the matter of the outward expression of Christian fellowship particularly two Christian principles need to direct us, the great debt of love which the Lord would have us pay to the weak brother, and His clear injunction to avoid those who adhere to false doctrine and practice and all who make themselves partakers of their evil deeds. Conscientious recognition of both principles will lead to an evangelical practice also in meeting many difficult situations that confront us, situations which properly lie in the field of casuistry.^{xxx}

Thus, the question which was hotly debated over the next years was whether the time had come to break with Mo. or whether we still had a debt of love to fulfill. In the midst of this debate another question arose, one which caused the CLC to chart its own course. The contention of the men who eventually formed the CLC was that Ro. 16:17 does not allow for admonition but rather dictates an immediate suspension of fellowship.

In his President's Report to the 1955 Saginaw Convention, Pres. Naumann stated,

"We have reached the conviction that through these differences divisions and offenses have been caused contrary to the doctrine which we have learned. And when that is the case, the Lord our God has a definite command for us: "Avoid them." For those of us who have been closest to these problems, it appears quite definite that we must now obey the Lord's Word in Romans 16:17."^{xxxi}

This statement has often been cited by men from the CLC to demonstrate that at Saginaw in 1955, we had conclusively marked Mo. as persistent errorists and thus we sinned by not terminating fellowship. Over against this, it should be noted that Pres. Naumann shortly thereafter in the same report said:

"We implore the Holy Spirit to guide and direct us as we try to decide in the face of all the reports whether the Lord would now have us apply His definite command "Avoid them!" or whether we still have an unpaid debt of love to those whose fellowship we cherished so many years."^{xxxii}

The Standing Committee On Church Union recommended termination of fellowship with Mo. However, the floor committee resolution recommended postponement of final action until a recessed convention to be held in 1956. The rationale for this resolution was expressed in this way,

1. This resolution has far reaching spiritual consequences.
2. This continues to heed the Scriptural exhortations to patience and forbearance in love by giving the Lutheran Church, Mo. Synod, opportunity to express itself in its 1956 convention.^{xxxiii}

The resolution passed by a vote of 94 -47. It was after this action was taken that Prof. Edmund Reim declared he was continuing fellowship with the Wis. Synod under protest. He tendered his resignation as Secretary of the Standing Committee on Church Union and as President and Professor at the Seminary. By a unanimous vote the Synod asked him to continue in all his positions.

By the time the 1956 recessed convention was held at Watertown, there were some new rays of hope. Missouri had declined membership in the LWF, and had stated why. Further, she had set aside the *Common Confession* as a basic document to establish fellowship. On the basis of this information, the resolution was passed to hold the Saginaw Resolution in abeyance until the next convention. The resolution passed by a vote of 108-19. It should be noted that the essay for the convention was an exegesis of Ro. 16:17-18, delivered by Prof. E. E. Kowalke

At the 1957 New Ulm Convention, Pres. Naumann reflected on the divisions in the Synod when he stated,

Many individuals, several conferences, and one entire District are convinced that we as a Synod are guilty of disobedience to God's Word because we have not as yet applied the injunction of Ro. 15:17-18 to the Lutheran Church-Mo. Synod. Others in Synod are of the conviction that doctrinal discussions as now carried on are the one means by which we can testify of our convictions.^{xxxiv}

The floor committee on Union Matters recommended to the convention, not unanimously, however, to sever fellowship with Mo. The resolution was lost by a vote of 61 to 77. The resolution then was passed to continue a vigorously protesting fellowship over against the No. Synod. It was after this that Reim, with Paul Albrecht and Winfred Schaller, withdrew from our fellowship.^{xxxv}

On Sept. 25, 1957, Paul Nolting of Sleepy Eye delivered an exegesis of Ro. 16:17 to the New Ulm Pastoral Conference. In this essay Nolting set forth what he regarded to be the sin of the Wisconsin Synod—disobedience to Ro. 16:17. He formulated his opinions in the form of theses and antitheses. Thesis/Antithesis II stated:

We affirm the meaning of the verb σκοπεῖν to be a careful observing in the interest of, and affecting, the observer without an effect upon the observed, except when the object is reflexive.

We reject the addition of the concept of admonition to the verb, σκοπεῖν.^{xxxvi}

The thrust of this statement was that,

The marking is to have a definite effect upon those doing the marking...The marker is to avoid those whom he has carefully observed to be causing divisions and offenses. However, the marking has no effect upon those causing divisions and offenses.^{xxxvii}

Thesis/Antithesis three stated:

We affirm that the simultaneous physical and practical effect of the marking upon the marker is the avoiding. We reject the insertion of a period of admonition between the marking and the avoiding.^{xxviii}

Over against this idea of “marking” expressed by Nolting, it should be noted that the 1954 essay on Fellowship in the *Quartalschrift* stated,

The Roman Christians should take note of those who are causing divisions and offenses in opposition to the doctrine which had been taught to them.^{xxxix}

Thus they were well able to keep a watchful eye on anyone who deviated from the doctrine which they had learned.^{xl} (Underlining mine)

In a 1980 essay printed in the quarterly, the same point concerning σκοπεῖν is made.

The present infinitive σκοπεῖν is dependent on the main verb παρακαλῶ. The KJV translation “mark” has led to the widespread misconception that σκοπέω means to brand, label or designate, and the conclusion has been drawn that the moment someone has been stamped an errorist he is to be avoided. Actually, the word σκοπεῖν comes from a familiar Greek root σκέοπ that has to do with seeing. The noun σκοπός means a watchman, sentry, guard. So the verb σκοπεῖν means “to be on the lookout for.” It suggests the picture of a sentinel standing guard on a city wall, shielding his eyes and carefully scanning the horizon for any sign of approaching danger. Paul is urging the Roman Christians to keep a sharp lookout for enemies, for anyone posing a threat to their faith.^{xli}

Nolting’s view of the verb [7-fiUI7optV led him to his conclusion:

Romans 16:17 *presupposes* (emphasis the author’s) loving admonition. It comes after such admonition has failed, for .it has to do with people who are persistently disobedient, and are thus causing divisions and offenses. This passage is the end of the trail. Its only admonition is the possible admonitory effect of the “avoiding.”^{xlii}

This was the opinion which gave rise to the CLC. A Protest Committee was formulated by our Synod to deal with those protesting the continuance of fellowship with Mo. In 1958 a letter was sent to the members of the Synod by the Protest Committee. It was accompanied by a document entitled “A Report To The Protest Committee.” This document defended the right of the Saginaw Convention to hold in abeyance termination of fellowship. It stated,

What our Synod therefore held in abeyance at Saginaw was not merely the “avoiding,” the breaking of fellowship, enjoined in Ro. 16:17f, but also the conclusive application of the very judgment of this passage, namely the judgment that the Mo. Synod was persistent in causing divisions and offenses.^{xliii}

In answer to the question, “Is the application of Ro. 16:17f. to the Mo. Synod simply a matter of obedience to the Word of God?”, the document stated

The fact that an individual or a church body has fallen into an error of doctrine or practice, or even the fact that the individual or the church body still defends that error of doctrine or practice, is not yet in itself a reason for terminating church fellowship. Rather both facts may still be

inducements for practicing this fellowship most vigorously in efforts to overcome the error and its defense. Termination of church fellowship is called for when you have reached the conviction that admonition is of no further avail and that the erring brother or church body demands recognition for their error.

We will surely all grant that when we deal with an individual erring brother in our congregational work, we know of no simple mechanical formula by which we can come to the conviction that he now ceases to be a weak brother and must be regarded and treated as a persistent errorist. Surely then when a church body has become involved in error, a church body in which there will always be a number of trends in evidence and striving for mastery, one trend supporting the error and fostering it, another still testifying against it, it will take an even richer exercise of Christian judgment to come to a decision in the matter.^{xliv}

In *An Open Letter To The Protest Committee*, dated Oct. 29, 1958, Edmund Reim took issue with the Report To The Protest Committee. Though he spoke of a number of issues, the essence of his argument is stated as follows:

Is it not an injection of a foreign, man-made thought into the simple sense of Ro. 16:17-18 to say that “termination of church fellowship is called for when you have reached the conviction that admonition is of no further avail and that the erring brother or church body demands recognition for their error!” After all, the passage in question states that this is to be done when one has “marked” (noted, identified, recognized) them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine that we have learned.^{xlv}

In a document entitled, “A Call For Decision,” dated Feb. 8, 1959, the signers stated,

We herewith implore our Synod to recognize both the Scriptural validity of this our confession and the untenable nature of the “termination of fellowship” thesis advanced by the Synod’s Protest Committee. We affirm that the document entitled, “A Report To The Protest Committee” is in its nature and content divisive, despite its conciliatory tone, because it does violence to clear Scripture. In its historical presentation, the Report distorts plain, documented facts relative to the action of the Saginaw Convention of 1955.^{xlvi}

The Saginaw Convention of 1959 rejected these charges as well as other charges that the Synod sinned in its resolutions at Saginaw (1955), Watertown (1956) and New Ulm (1957).^{xlvii}

The Saginaw convention of 1959 resolved to continue discussions with Mo. By the time of the 1961, Synod Convention at Wisconsin Lutheran High School discussions with Mo. had reached an impasse. By a vote of 124-49 fellowship with Mo. was terminated. By this time, however, the CLC men had gone their own way. Even though we as a Synod broke with Mo., they feel the issue is not settled. In his “Mark and Avoid” of 1970, Paul Nolting charges that both the ELS and the WELS have become guilty of false doctrine because they broke for the wrong reason.^{xlviii} He cites as proof, the fact that no disciplinary action was taken against those who voted against the break with Mo.^{xlix} Since the early 1960’s discussions with the CLC have gone nowhere. We have disavowed their official interpretation of our fellowship position as inaccurate (that Ro. 16:17 is reduced to human judgment) and have replied that their demands for a review of all that happened between 1955-1961 would not prove fruitful. In fact, the only way we could resume discussions with the CLC would be to confess, “*Pater, pecavi.*”

Perhaps the best conclusion to the matter would be to quote from two essays delivered to the 1975 Synod Convention at Watertown.

In the long course of these dealings with Missouri some understandably became impatient and concluded that a break was long overdue. To some this conviction came in 1953, to others in 1955, to still others, in 1957 or later. No one would argue that it was a moral fault for them to leave the Wisconsin Synod when their consciences and their convictions regarding Romans 16:17 told them that that was the God-pleasing thing to do. However, the Wis. Synod held and holds that the Romans passage in question is not correctly interpreted when it is understood to preclude the duty and opportunity of admonishing further the church body or smaller segment thereof that has fallen into error. Passages that urge us to endeavor to preserve the bond of fellowship and to help the weak compel us to reject the stand and the charges of those in the Church of the Lutheran Confession, and, as opportunity arises, to testify regarding those passages. It is our prayer that God's grace might recall CLC members from the byway of doctrine into which they were led in the course of the fellowship controversy with Mo. This is a byway, we hasten to add, concerning which we readily and sincerely say, "There but for the grace of God go I."ⁱ

It was when the Mo. Synod over a period of two decades persisted in and defended unionistic practices that this suspension became scripturally necessary. If this fellowship had been maintained, there is little doubt that the practice of the Wis. Synod would have suffered a like deterioration. At the same time the Synod found itself accused by some of its own members of procrastination in the application of Ro. 16:17-18 to the Mo. Synod. This resulted in the accusation that the Synod held to a false doctrine of fellowship, and the formation of the Church of the Lutheran Confession by those pastors and congregations that felt conscience bound to leave the Synod. Thus, in this controversy there were forces pulling the Synod toward liberalism on the one hand and toward a rigorism akin to legalism on the other.ⁱⁱ

A further development of interest is the CLC's attitude toward the AAL. In an essay delivered to the Tenth Convention of the CLC in 1972, Rev Arvid Gullerud cites a number of conclusions arrived at by the faculty of Immanuel Lutheran College in 1965.

It is therefore evident that

- as a school we cannot solicit support from this source (VAL) without denying the Scriptural principles to which our CLC stands committed.
- as for our students, we can for the same reason neither recommend nor endorse these scholarships, but must rather warn against the offence which could result from acceptance of this aid.^{lii}

The members of Bethel Lutheran Church of Spring, Texas, acting on the work of the ILC faculty, adopted the resolution of the Church Council which stated:

Whereas, the work that AAL is doing in its program is church work, i.e., joint church work with such as are not united in the confession of their faith, hence unionistic in character; THEREFORE, it is obvious that the Word condemns membership in and/or support of AAL.^{liii}

This matter was subsequently referred to the CLC convention in 1972 for consideration. The current statistics of the CLC might also be of interest: 71 ordained men, 66 congregations, 6,475 confirmed members.

Let us now turn our attention to two groups which separated from the LCMS, the Concordia Lutheran Conference and the Lutheran Churches of the Reformation.

The Differences Between the WELS and the Concordia Lutheran Conference

The Concordia Lutheran Conference (hereafter CLC) is really a splinter from a split. It traces its origin to the Orthodox Lutheran Conference (hereafter OLC). The founding meeting of the OLC took place at Okabena, MN on Sept. 26, 1951. When the Mo. Synod and the ALC adopted the Common Confession in 1950, the St. Louis Study Club voiced its disapproval. Originally, this Study Club was comprised of a group of Mo. Synod men concerned about the St. Louis' faculty's opinion on engagement. These men attracted others who were concerned about doctrinal erosion in their synod. When the Common Confession was produced, these men were invited to meet at St. John's Church in Okabena. It was at this meeting that the decision to form a new fellowship was made. Articles of Agreement were drawn up and the OLC was formed.

The doctrinal base for the OLC was the canonical Scriptures, the *Book of Concord* of 1580, and the *Brief Statement* of 1932. In specific, the 1938 *ALC Doctrinal Declaration*, the 1944 *Doctrinal Affirmation*, and the 1950 *Common Confession* were rejected.

The OLC did not withdraw from the Synodical Conference, but indicated a desire for fellowship with the WELS. These overtures were complicated, however, by two factors. One was a breakdown in communication between the WELS and the OLC. The other factor was that we had not yet terminated fellowship with the Mo. Synod.

As time went on, the OLC viewed with suspicion our continued fellowship with Mo. Part of the problem was a different definition of the term "*in statu confessionis*." The definition we employed is stated as follows:

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

The OLC defined "state of confession" in this way:

A suspension of religious fellowship from the church body to which one belongs as a final strenuous protest against error in doctrine or practice. Such action is based on II Thes. 3:14, 15, 20.^{lv}

Though we continued in a state of confession with Mo., the OLC viewed this as a doctrinal deviation. At this time when relations between the OLC and the WELS were waning, a split occurred in the OLC which gave rise to the CLC.

Dr. P.E. Kretzmann, who in 1955 was teaching at the OLC seminary in Minneapolis, made a remark relative to a hypothetical situation which was later challenged. Kretzmann remarked to his class that he could preach for a WELS pastor in Mankato, since he had been vocal about his desire for a break with Mo; Pastor E. C. Hallstein of Clark, S.D., who had left the Wis. Synod two years earlier, challenged that statement as unionistic. Charges and counter charges by the two parties led to an impasse. Further complicating matters was the claim by Pastor Schupmann that he alone had jurisdiction in the matter, since Dr. Kretzmann belonged to his church. Dr. Kretzmann declared that unless all charges against him were withdrawn by Dec. 31, 1955, he would no longer consider the men charging him with unionism as brethren.^{lvi}

Since no charges were retracted, the two factions parted ways. The group which supported Kretzmann was called the Minneapolis Faction. The group which supported Hallstein formed the CLC. On Jan 18 & 19, 1956, the CLC was officially organized. Though both groups originally maintained the name OLC from

Feb.-Dec. 1956, the latter group finally chose the name “Concordia Lutheran Conference.” When the WELS terminated fellowship with the Mo. Synod in 1961, the OLC indicated it desired to join us in fellowship. On Feb. 28, 1962, the WELS Commission on Doc. Matters met at the NPH with the remnant of the OLC. Subsequently, the OLC was dissolved and its four remaining members joined our Synod.

The CLC at its inception reiterated its adherence to the canonical Scriptures, the *Book of Concord*, and the *Brief Statement* of 1932. It was in the area of fellowship and the church and ministry where the differences between the CLC and WELS lay. The CLC rejected the WELS teaching that the Synod is church. In its statement on the relation of the conference to its members, the CLC constitution stated:

According to Scripture teaching and example, each congregation, or church, is independent, sovereign, and autonomous in its own affairs, subject alone to Holy Scripture, and a conference or synod is neither of higher nor equal authority to any of its congregations.^{lvii}

In an article entitled, “How the False Doctrine on the Church and Ministry (as it is taught by the WELS, COLC, and the ELS) Endangers Other Plain Teachings of the Bible,” the so-called “true” doctrine on the church and ministry was stated as follows:

The word church is therefore used in Scripture to refer to a specific group of true believers in a certain locality or definite place. This is the local congregation as God sees it—the local congregation of the *Una Sancta* which alone has the full power of the Keys.^{lviii}

Concerning the ministry, the article stated:

The ministry, therefore, is the authority to administer publicly the common rights of the spiritual priesthood in behalf of the local congregation. A local church may, in Christian liberty, establish auxiliary offices or offices of help to the ministry or pastoral office... Certainly we must not overlook the fact that because the office of the parochial school teacher is a part of the ministry of the Word inasmuch as he is called to teach the Word of God to the children of the congregation, he is also entitled to the honor attached to the work of the ministry. The local church may establish, keep, or do away with such auxiliary offices as circumstances and conditions require. But not the office of the public ministry of the Word (the pastoral office) which is the only divinely instituted office and consequently the highest office in the church. (NOTE: Synodical offices and the office of a professor in a seminary are also auxiliary offices to the one Office of the Ministry whose incumbents are elected by the local congregation either by direct referendum or through the delegates in Convention assembled.)^{lix}

The article further charged that errors in the area of the church and ministry had led to a host of other errors, namely:

The principle of sole Scripture was undermined when doctrines were established by a deduction from etymology; (a reference to the WELS exegesis of f K K ekkhisi’a <T) church discipline was confused because any and every group of Christians could decide on a case of excommunication; (because the WELS position classified grouping of Christians other than the local congregation as church); antinomianism was taught when people object to the teaching that Christians are commanded by God to form a local congregation and to establish the pastoral office; (a reference to WELS position that the form of the church and public ministry is a matter of liberty.)

The CLC regarded WELS as a heterodox church body because it did not break with the Mo. Synod. They mistrusted any Synodical body because of the tyrannical treatment they said congregations received from the Mo. Synod officials when congregations wished to break from them.

The CLC position on church and ministry was further exemplified by the attitude of Pastor Mehlberg when he accepted the position as instructor at the CLC Seminary, then at Christ Church in Milwaukee. The 1959 *Concordia Lutheran* reported:

Your Committee on Theological education prepared and sent to the Rev. E. L. Mehlberg the request to serve as first instructor of our seminary. We are happy to inform our readers that Pastor Mehlberg accepted this request with the express understanding on his part, as well as ours, that while it should not and could not be regarded as a divine call as true Lutherans ordinarily use the term, because it was limited to tenure of office, it was none the less a God-pleasing Solemn Arrangement to prepare men for the office of the holy ministry.^{lx}

The subsequent history of the CLC has been one of further fragmentation. In 1961, 1969, and 1972 a number of pastors and congregations resigned or were suspended from the conference for various reasons. One of the CLC men joined the WELS because of the doctrine of the church and ministry. The Nov.-Dec. issue of the *Concordia Lutheran* reported that the CLC Seminary at Tinley Park, Illinois, was no longer conducting classes, and had no prospects for the Seminary. Its seminary professors are in a semi-retired status. The CLC, according to the 1983 statistics, has 7 ordained ministers, 6 congregations, with 218 confirmed and 359 baptized members.^{lxi}

The CLC never achieved union with Lutheran Churches of the Reformation though they basically shared the same position. This was due, in large part, to the internal turmoil within the LCR. We now turn our attention to this church body.

The Doctrinal Differences Between the WELS and the Lutheran Churches of the Reformation.

It is important to, note the plural form of “churches” in the name of the LCR. This group shared the same disposition toward synodical bodies which the OLC and CLC had exhibited. Their rejection of the Synod as “church” and their fear of a “super-church” caused the LCR to form a federation which upheld the independence and sovereignty of the local congregations. In their own words,

The Lutheran Churches of the Reformation is an attempt to provide service to a group of congregations for the avowed purpose of promoting doctrinal unity, theological and pedagogical training, within the framework of congregational independence.^{lxii}

This type of structure which stressed congregational independence was at the root of many of the problems experienced by the LCR in its history. It was an invitation to conflict with little practical way to resolve it.

On the one hand, the LCR’s roots reach back to the OLC. Dr. P. E. Kretzmann and Pastor W. H. McLaughlin left the OLC and joined a free conference of congregations. They published *The Conservative Lutheran Defender* and often took issue with the WELS position on church and ministry. In 1964 these two joined the LCR and the *Defender* ceased publication. McLaughlin became professor at the Minneapolis branch of the Martin Luther Institute of Sacred Studies. He then moved to Shepherd, Michigan, to become dean at the Seminary’s permanent home. He died in 1976. Dr. Kretzmann died in 1965.

On the other hand, the LCR’s roots reach back to the State of the Church Conference, a group of conservatives in the Mo. Synod who protested its doctrinal deviations. Chairman of this group was the Rev. Cameron MacKenzie of St. Matthew’s in Detroit. In 1961 a group of over 400 pastors, teachers, and laymen of the LCMS met to discuss the burning issues. Later that year they began publishing their own theological

journal. *The Faithful Word* Volume I - No. 1 detailed a list of resolutions the group wished to have heard at the LCMS Cleveland Convention in 1962.

The Conference's hopes for action on their resolutions were not realized, however. In essence, they were ignored. This led to the formation of the LCR. In 1964 the federation was organized at Emmaus church in Chicago.

There was initial contact between WELS representatives and the LCR. It soon became apparent, however, that there were differences in the area of the church and ministry. The position of the LCR can be briefly summarized as follows:

1. A synod cannot be equated with a local congregation as "a church," because the Scriptures nowhere designate such a grouping as "church," and because a synod does not maintain the pastorate in its midst in the manner prescribed and ordained by God. The God-ordained relationship of Christians to the pastoral office is "of the essence" when designating any group as "a church."
2. Only the local congregation has been given the authority to exercise the keys publicly. Titus 1:5 indicated it is God's will and order that the church establish the pastorate.
3. The pastorate is the public ministry of the Keys, and all other forms or phases are of the pastorate.^{lxiii}

In the discussion on these doctrines, the LCR accused the WELS of departing from the position on church and ministry of Adolph Hoenecke. An attempt was made to trace the "Wauwautosa - John Meyer" teaching on church and ministry back to the *Principles of Ev. Lutheran Church Polity*, published by Johann Wilhelm Friedrich Hoefling of the University of Erlangen in 1850. At the heart of the issue was the debate over the historical-grammatical versus the a-historic/dogmatic approach to Scripture.^{lxiv}

Time will not permit an excursus into this debate with all its hermeneutical ramifications. A few comments will have to suffice. In the first place, one can understand the LCR's concern over the historical-grammatical approach. Mo. under the guise of careful exegesis had explained away a number of clear statements of Scripture. Consider the statement of the 44:

We therefore deplore the fact that Romans 16:17,18 has been applied to all Christians who differ from us in certain points of doctrine. It is our conviction, based on sound exegetical and hermeneutical principles, that this text does not apply to the present situation in the Lutheran Church of America.^{lxv}

Secondly, one must be careful not to becloud the perspicuity of Scripture by stating a higher knowledge of interpretation is necessary before Scripture can be understood. Further, the importance of the analogy of faith must be recognized when interpreting Scripture. Yet, it must also be stressed that hermeneutics involves exegesis, not eisegesis. One cannot approach Scripture with preconceived dogmatic opinions and place them into the text. Scripture must be interpreted in its historical-grammatical sense if we are to teach what is taught by God.

Appeal was often made to Dr. Walther as the champion of the teaching that only the local congregation is divinely instituted. Yet, even Dr. Walther's writings on the church and ministry controversy with the Buffalo Synod must be viewed in their historical setting. The question of whether a synod is church was not at stake in the controversy with the Buffalo Synod. The question was whether the ministerium was the church and whether the congregation had to take orders from the ministerium. Over against the Buffalo view, Walther defended the divine rights of the congregation, maintaining the congregation had the full power of the Keys. From this, however, some have drawn the conclusion that the local congregation alone is the divinely ordained form of Church. Further, it has been concluded that the Synod is not church and the pastorate is the only divinely ordained form of the ministry. All other offices, then, were said to be auxiliary offices and to derive their authority from the parish ministry.

It was the so-called Cincinnati case in 1904 which caused our Synod to take a fresh look at the matter of the church and ministry. Our Seminary led the way in this study. In this connection, the approach of our Seminary has been well described in the words of Prof. Kowalke:

In the case of our Seminary, Hoenecke had supplied the clear and sound doctrinal position. His theology was preeminently Scriptural in its quality. The references to the works of earlier theologians were definitely of secondary importance. But his field was nevertheless that of systematic theology. And there the danger is always present of bowing to precedent, of emphasizing tradition, of stressing the system—if not in the work of a pioneer teacher, then in the attitude of his followers. Here the emphasis on sound historical and grammatical interpretation of Scripture, on a thorough introduction of the student into the full and coherent content of Scripture, and on an unrelenting effort to determine what the words of Scripture mean to say, rather than what man would like to have them say—the things which were the distinctive contribution of Koehler and Pieper (and we may add, Meyer) - served to create the pattern of a balanced theology which our Seminary is trying to follow to this day.^{lxvi}

In recent history two LCR men have joined the WELS because they disagreed with the LCR position on church and ministry. The Federation for Authentic Lutheranism, comprised of ex-Missourians, also spoke out against the position of the LCR, calling it a deduction from Walther's theses. One might add that if the historical context of "*sedes doctrinae*" on the church and ministry were noted, the confusion of *ἐκκλησία* with the local congregation would disappear.

Because of its loose federation, the history of the LCR has been plagued with internal difficulties. According to the 1983 statistics, the LCR has 8 ordained ministers and 14 congregations. The study center at Shepherd, Michigan, had to close its doors recently.

As we conclude this study, it would ill-behoove us to stand and say, "Lord, I thank you we are not as other synods are." Rather, let us thank God for his grace and guidance. Let us pursue his work in the future with a prayer that, as he has been with us in the past, he would also sustain us in the future.

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