

WELS EFFORTS AT CONFESSIONAL FELLOWSHIP WITH THE GERMAN LUTHERAN FREE CHURCHES

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Preface

During the 1950s and the early 1960s the prime task of our WELS Commission on Doctrinal Matters, now called the Commission on Inter-Church Relations, consisted in offering clear leadership to our Synod in maintaining a firm scriptural confessional position in doctrine and practice. In due time our Synod took resolute confessional action, terminating cherished fellowships of long standing for conscience' sake.

During the subsequent period of more than a decade, our Commission on Inter-Church Relations gave full attention to another phase of its entrusted work. This was the task of endeavoring to strengthen and clarify our fellowship relations with overseas Lutheran bodies with whom all the synods of the Synodical Conference had been in fellowship in the past and with whom our Synod did not suspend fellowship relations when it terminated its fellowship with two of the Synodical Conference church bodies. Strengthening our fellowship relations with these church bodies meant both fostering the mutual conviction that we were still fully united in doctrine and practice and actually helping to make and keep this unity a reality. Clarifying our fellowship with these church bodies meant endeavoring to win their full understanding for our confessional actions and position and to overcome the inconsistency that they were still in fellowship relations with church bodies with whom we had been constrained to terminate our fellowship.

This presentation delineates one of these efforts.

WELS Efforts at Confessional Fellowship With the German Lutheran Free Churches

The Evangelical Lutheran Free Church was founded in 1876 by congregations in Nassau and the Kingdom of Saxony. From its inception the ELF has been in fellowship with the former members of the Synodical Conference of North America. The congregations which formed the original ELF grew partly out of the work of Pastor Friedrich Brunn, who withdrew from the Union State Church in 1848 and founded his first parish at Steeden.

The Evangelical Lutheran (Old Lutheran) Church, otherwise commonly known as the Breslau Synod, was formally recognized as a church by the German government in 1845. It purposed to supply a Lutheran church in German lands (especially Prussia) in which the official church was a Union church. The ELK stayed in church fellowship with the Lutheran Territorial Churches until 1947, practicing church fellowship with them on a selective basis. The ELK broke this fellowship in 1947 because the Lutheran Territorial Churches had joined EKID (1945). The ELK established fellowship with the Saxon Free Church in 1948. In 1949 the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod established fellowship with the ELK on the basis of the *Einigungssätze* (Theses of Agreement). This fellowship was jointly declared at the following Synodical Conference convention by all four synods of the Synodical Conference.

The Independent Evangelical Lutheran Church (*Selbständige Evangelische Lutherische Kirche*) came into being in 1941 through a union of the Independent Evangelical Lutheran Church in Hesse, the Hanoverian Free Church, and the Hermannsburg-Hamburg Free Church. In 1948 a fourth member joined SELK (the old SELK), namely the Evangelical Lutheran Free Church in Baden. SELK was further enlarged in 1950 by a union with the Renitent Church of the U.A.C. in lower Hesse. These five former free churches subsequently formed the five dioceses of SELK. On May 1, 1965, the Baden Diocese voted to secede. Both Hessian churches had resulted from the introduction of the Union Church into Hesse. The Hermannsburg-Hamburg Free Church was brought about in 1890 when the Hermannsburg Mission reestablished its ties with the Hanoverian State Church and the Hanoverian Free Church withdrew from the Hermannsburg Mission to found its own Bleckmar Mission. Fellowship was established between the Evangelical Lutheran Free Church, the Evangelical Lutheran (Old Lutheran) Church, and the Independent Evangelical Lutheran Church in 1950. In this establishment of fellowship the SELK did not formally adopt the *Einigungssätze* but declared that they found nothing in the *Einigungssätze* which went beyond Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions. The Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod did not establish fellowship with SELK at this time because one of its dioceses, the Hermannsburg-Hamburg Diocese, still carried on the Hermannsburg Mission jointly with the Hanoverian State Church, and also because in contacts of our representatives with the superintendent of SELK, Pastor Schrocka, they detected disagreement with the plenary inspiration and full inerrancy of the Holy Scriptures.

Though remaining organizationally independent, the above-mentioned three German Lutheran Free Churches formed a federation of confessional churches and also carried out some common projects in an increasing measure, the *Theologische Hochschule* at Oberursel and the Bleckmar Mission in Natal, South Africa.

Less closely aligned with these Confederated Lutheran Free Churches was the *Evangelische Lutherische Bekenntniskirche* (ELB), the Evangelical Lutheran Confessional Church. It was a continuation of the former Evangelical Lutheran Church in Poland, a WELS mission which was founded at Lodz in 1924. After the flight of its pastors and members from Poland during World War II, the ELB organized as the Evangelical Lutheran Refugee Mission in Germany. It took on its name as the Evangelical Lutheran Confessional Church in 1951.

At a meeting in June 1965, representatives of the three German free churches, the Evangelical Lutheran Free Church, the Evangelical Lutheran (Old Lutheran) Church, and the Independent Evangelical Lutheran Church, gave formal consideration to the matter of effecting an organizational merger. These free churches, had been in church fellowship on the basis of the *Einigungssätze* drawn up in 1947 for more than a decade and a half. Conservative voices at this meeting, however, called attention to differences concerning the Holy Scriptures and church fellowship which had come into evidence and advised that full unanimity in these doctrinal points be re-established before contemplating an organizational union. This seemed all the more

necessary since there was likewise increasing evidence that the three free churches were no longer sharing a common understanding concerning the binding nature of the *Einigungssätze*, though these had spoken clearly also on the nature and authority of the Holy Scriptures and on the scriptural principles of church fellowship.

In response to these apprehensions a committee from the praesidia of the three free churches was instructed to draw up a new consensus, first of all, concerning the Holy Scriptures, a formulation which might possibly replace that of the *Einigungssätze* on this doctrinal point. Early in the summer of 1966 this committee submitted the *Basisformel* as such a formulation to the pastoral conferences of these three free churches for their consideration and evaluation. Not all who had participated in drawing up the *Basisformel* considered it fully adequate. In treating the inerrancy of Scripture, the *Basisformel* purposely avoided the term *irrtumlos* (inerrant), and contented itself with speaking of Scripture merely as *untrüglich*, i.e., as in no wise deceiving. This formulation was officially explained by one of its advocates as having this import that while its wording could still be understood in the sense of an absolute inerrancy of Scripture, it at the same time left room also for another understanding of the inerrancy of Scripture, one which restricted it to matters directly pertaining to Christian faith and life.

When the pastoral conference of the Evangelical Lutheran Free Church rejected the *Basisformel*, though with some dissenting votes, also the other free churches, in whose midst it had met with general approval, recommended dispensing with any further consideration of the *Basisformel*. It was decided instead to return to the *Einigungssätze* as a basis for continued efforts in effecting an organizational union of the three free churches. At its convention in October 1966 the Evangelical Lutheran (Old Lutheran) Church therefore, felt constrained to give expression by resolution to its own conception of the binding nature of the *Einigungssätze* of 1947. The text was this:

**RESOLUTION OF THE 28th GENERAL SYNOD
Evangelical Lutheran (Old Lutheran) Church**

Re: The binding force of the *Einigungssätze* (Theses of Agreement)

The General Synod takes cognizance of the fact that in accordance with the instructions of the 27th General Synod West the *Oberkirchenkollegium*¹ has made great efforts in behalf of further unification of the Free Churches and wishes to continue to do so.

In view of the fact that in the negotiations between these Churches the binding force of the *Einigungssätze* is being evaluated in different ways, the General Synod asserts:

1) The assent of 1947 to the *Einigungssätze* expressed in Synodical Resolution 24/1a, according to which they “are in agreement with the Holy Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions,” does not have the import that the *Einigungssätze* are to be put on a par with the Confessional Writings of our Church. They are also not to be used as a norm when controversies are to be settled. Membership in the Lutheran Church dare not be made dependent upon assent to them. The understanding set forth in the *Einigungssätze* relative to the questions treated therein cannot have conclusive significance for all times and should therefore not stand in the way of further study and discussion of these questions.

On the contrary, with this assent the General Synod of 1947 meant to give expression to that understanding of Scripture and the Confessions concerning these questions to which we have been led in accordance with the measure of our comprehension.

2) The General Synod affirms in full scope the conclusions drawn in 1947, namely that with the *Einigungssätze* the “doctrinal differences which formerly existed between our Church

¹ Its ranking Executive Council

and the Saxon Free Church have been overcome,” and that “it is therefore demanded that church fellowship be established with the Saxon Free Church on the basis of Scripture and the Confessions.”

In explanation of these resolutions, Dr. G. Rost stated the following, among other things, by way of elucidation:

The ecclesiastically particularistic character of the *Einigungssätze*, to which exclusively the Ev. Luth. (Old Lutheran) Church and the Ev. Luth. Free Church have taken a position in a binding manner, also precludes that membership in the Lutheran Church be made dependent on assent to them. On the other hand it would not be comprehensible, how the Ev. Luth. (Old Lutheran) Church and the Ev. Luth. Free Church can have church fellowship with the Independent Ev. Luth. Church, which has not assented to the *Einigungssätze* in a manner binding in church matters.

The ecclesiastically particularistic character of the *Einigungssätze* also precludes that the understanding set forth in them concerning the questions treated therein has a conclusive significance for all times. Further discussion and study of these questions is of necessity already demanded in view of the ecumenical extent of the Lutheran Church and by the aspiration that also on the theological level the world-wide unity of this Church be demonstrated ever and again. All of these negations are, as has been said, not meant to exclude or invalidate a properly understood “binding force” of the *Einigungssätze*. Rather the proposed motion wishes to uphold that understanding of Scripture and the Confessions which the General Synod of 1947 has expressed with its assent and “to which we have been led according to the measure of our comprehension.” To begin with, it should be noted here that there is a perfect and not a pluperfect at the end of this sentence. This means that the comprehension of 1947 is not a matter of the past, beyond which we have advanced and which no longer has any meaning for us. Rather, the perfect states that we still are involved in this comprehension. A restriction of this statement is merely made through the words “according to the measure of our comprehension.” Also here it must be noted, that the restriction which lies in these words is not of a qualitative but of a quantitative nature. This means that the understanding of Scripture and the Confessions, which the General Synod of 1947 expressed, is also today not designated as false. To understand it in any other way would mean that we would have to disavow our own history. Certainly, the understanding set forth in the *Einigungssätze* has at all times had a place in our Church and has always been considered as a legitimate possibility in interpreting Scripture and the Confessions. Hence there is also no retreat back beyond the resolutions of 1947. On the other hand there is not only the possibility, but the necessity of growing beyond the measure of comprehension to which we have been led. Accordingly the resolutions of 1947 and the *Einigungssätze* are not like the notorious historical baggage, which one could or should cast off as soon as possible. Rather, as Prof. Dr. Guenther carried this out before the Regional Synod West, they are to be compared to the ring of a tree, which has inseparably grown into the life of our Church but about which also further year rings will and must be formed organically.

It seems impossible to understand this resolution in any other way than that it gives official endorsement to the principle of areas of wholesome and allowable difference of theological opinion and interpretation in matters of doctrine within a common subscription to the Holy Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions. This general principle would then also allow for the two views of the inerrancy of the Holy Scriptures which were permitted to stand side by side through the carefully chosen wording of the abortive *Basisformel*. When the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod in 1949 established fellowship with the Evangelical Lutheran (Old Lutheran) Church because this body had subscribed to the *Einigungssätze*, our Synod had, of course, understood

the binding nature of these theses of agreement in quite a different manner, had thought of the subscription as an expression of full doctrinal unity. Thus our Synod had also thought of the *Einigungssätze* as a document that could and would be used for doctrinal discipline.

When the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod subsequently met for its thirty-ninth convention in August of 1967, it felt constrained to take note of this 1966 resolution of the Evangelical Lutheran (Old Lutheran) Church with the following action:

WHEREAS, The Wisconsin Ev. Lutheran Synod in 1949 had declared fellowship with the Ev. Lutheran (Old Lutheran) Church in Germany, commonly known as the Breslau Synod; on the basis of the *Einigungssätze* (Statement of Agreement) and on the testimony of our brethren of the Saxon Free Church, that this subscription of the Breslau Synod was indeed a bona fide declaration of doctrinal unity, and

WHEREAS, The October 1966 resolution of the Breslau Synod declares that the doctrinal formulation of the *Einigungssätze* cannot be used for doctrinal discipline or as a test for a true Lutheran position, but that its formulations express an adequate, though not necessarily the only acceptable, interpretation of the Scriptures and of the Lutheran Confessions, and

WHEREAS, This resolution espouses a "latitude of theological interpretation" within a general consensus to the Holy Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions; therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That we note with regret the fact that with its Resolution of October 1966 the Breslau Synod has removed the basis on which fellowship between our two church bodies has rested; and

WHEREAS, Our Commission on Doctrinal Matters has as yet had no opportunity, except through writing, to express its regrets concerning the action taken by the Breslau Synod, and

WHEREAS, The Free Churches in Germany found it inopportune and inadvisable to arrange for any discussions prior to our Convention, and

WHEREAS, The three Free Churches (Breslau, Saxon, and Independent) are discussing and evaluating among themselves the Breslau Resolution of 1966, and

WHEREAS, Our own Church of the Ev. Lutheran Confession in Germany (Bekennniskirche) is also deeply affected by these developments; therefore, be it

RESOLVED, a) That our Synod refrain at this time from taking action on its fellowship status with the Breslau Synod; and be it further

RESOLVED, b) That our Commission on Doctrinal Matters be encouraged to seek further opportunities through personal representatives to enter into direct discussion with representatives of the Breslau Synod regarding the effect which its Resolution of October 1966 has on our continued fellowship relations.

In keeping with the desire and hope expressed in these resolutions, official representatives of our Synod subsequently had an opportunity to discuss this matter with leaders of the Ev. Lutheran (Old Lutheran) Church in the forum of a free conference meeting held at Oberursel, Germany, June 18-20, 1968. In view of various items placed on the agenda of this meeting it had been agreed to expand the attendance so that it might include comparable representations from the other two federated Lutheran free churches of Germany, the Ev. Lutheran Free Church and the Independent Evangelical Lutheran Church, as well as representatives from our Church of the Evangelical Lutheran Confession in Germany, the Ev. Lutheran Free Synod in South Africa, and the newly organized Lutheran Church in South Africa (the former Bleckmar Mission in Africa).

Our representatives were pleased to be informed at this meeting that since our Synod convention in 1967 a new document, *Die Gemeinsame Erklärung* (The Joint Declaration), had been drawn up by representatives of the Ev. Lutheran (Old Lutheran) Church and of the Evangelical Lutheran Free Church for the envisioned purpose of having it replace the 1966 Resolution of the Ev. Lutheran (Old Lutheran) Church. At the time of the Oberursel meeting this new document had already been submitted to four of the five pastoral conferences of the

Ev. Lutheran (Old Lutheran) Church and received their approval. This seemed to indicate that it, would also be accepted by the next General Convention of this church body. The Joint Declaration was accepted at the 65th Synod Convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Free Church as it convened in Wiesbaden, October 23-27, 1968. We are pleased to offer the text of this new document in the following English translation:

THE JOINT DECLARATION

of the Evangelical Lutheran (Old Lutheran) Church, and of the Evangelical Lutheran Free Church with reference to the binding nature of the *Einigungssätze* (Theses of Agreement of 1947)

The mutually expressed assent of 1947 to the *Einigungssätze*, that they are in agreement with the Holy Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions, is to be adhered to.

Our churches therefore also confirm the conclusion reached at that time that with the *Einigungssätze* the doctrinal differences previously obtaining between our churches had been overcome, and still affirm the inference drawn from this fact that as a consequence it was imperative to establish and maintain fellowship with one another.

Now as ever, teaching, preaching, and practice in our churches in the questions previously in controversy are therefore to be in accordance with the consensus that was reached, and everything is to be avoided which calls its validity into question.

For prevailing reasons it is emphasized, however, that the *Einigungssätze* as doctrinal declarations for a specific situation are not being put on a par with the Confessions of the Church, and are not to become the object of a pledge at ordination. The churches are furthermore aware of the fact that beyond this consensus, primarily because of newly arising problems, the questions treated demand further study, and in this sense are to remain open for additional discussion and deliberation in their own midst and with other churches. With this readiness that which has been attained is not to be made doubtful.

This Declaration was accepted by the *Oberkirchenkollegium* (the ranking executive council) of the Evangelical Lutheran (Old Lutheran) Church and by the *Synodalrat* (Synodical Council) of the Evangelical Lutheran Free Church. Most of the pastoral conferences of both churches had already assented to it.

This Declaration still required the confirmation of the General Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Free Church and of the *Generalsynode* (general convention) of the Evangelical Lutheran (Old Lutheran) Church.

In the course of the discussions at the Oberursel meeting our Synod's representatives made the following declaration: "Our synodical resolution with reference to church fellowship with the Evangelical Lutheran (Old Lutheran) Church was our answer to the warding of the 1966 Synod Resolution of the Old Lutheran Church as we have understood it. If this Resolution is now to be replaced by The Joint Declaration, the judgment of—our Synod's 1967 resolution is no longer pertinent and we at present see no reason for terminating our church fellowship with the Old Lutheran Church. An Evaluation of The Joint Declaration will now, first of all, be carefully made by the entire Commission on Doctrinal Matters and thereupon conclusively by our Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod." At its meeting in October 1968 our Commission on Doctrinal Matters approved this declaration of its representatives.

Our representatives were to a considerable extent encouraged in making the above declaration by the discussions carried on at the Oberursel meeting with reference to the absolute inerrancy of the Holy Scriptures, the truth which had always been in the forefront of our Synod's deep concern that the binding force of the *Einigungssätze* (the Theses of Agreement) be upheld. Our representatives had summed up this discussion with the public statement: "On the basis of the oral exchange and The Joint Declaration we have the understanding that a restriction of the inerrancy of the Holy Scriptures to Scriptural statements directly pertaining to matters of Christian faith and Christian life is rejected by all the Lutheran Free Churches represented at this meeting." With one abstention this statement was formally affirmed by all participants.

In the course of the deliberations at the Oberursel meeting it was at the same time evident that there were still matters which called for further discussion and clarification. A need for further clarifications was also

indicated in The Joint Declaration. Yet it was our hope and prayer that the Lord might give grace through His Word and Spirit so that also these clarifications would be made in faithful conformity to our Lutheran Confessions and above all in a firm and unwavering adherence to the Holy Scriptures as the inspired and firmer Word of God.

Our Synod was represented at the Oberursel meeting by President O. J. Naumann; by the chairman and vice-chairman of our Synod's Commission on Doctrinal Matters, Professor Carl Lawrenz and Gerald Hoenecke; by Pastor Edgar Hoenecke, the Executive Secretary of our Synod's Board for World Missions, upon request of the Commission on Doctrinal Matters; and by Pastor Karl Krauss, the chairman of the Executive Committee for the Mission in Germany.

At the aforementioned Oberursel free conference it was indicated to us that officials of the Independent Ev. Lutheran Church (the old SELK) were interested in initiating doctrinal discussions with our Synod. As previously stressed, the SELK stood in fellowship with the Lutheran Free Church and the Evangelical Lutheran (Old Lutheran) Church in Germany and with the Lutheran churches in South Africa with which our Synod was in confessional fellowship, but it was not thus far in fellowship with our Wisconsin Synod. In view of this situation and also of the fact that our two church bodies had heretofore not been in close contact, our Commission was very ready to accept an invitation to doctrinal discussions extended to us by SELK, the Independent Evangelical Lutheran Church.

Our Commission was invited to such a meeting at Bleckmar, Germany, with representatives of the Independent Evangelical Lutheran Church to be held from September 9-11., 1969. President O. J. Naumann, Professors Carl Lawrenz and Professor Gerald Hoenecke, chairman and vice-chairmen of our Commission on Doctrinal Matters, and Pastor Edgar Hoenecke, Executive Secretary of our Synod's Board for World Missions, were asked to represent our Commission at this meeting. Primary topics for the discussions were as follows: The Scriptures, the Ministry, the advisability of drawing up expansions or elaborations of the Lutheran Confessions, a discussion regarding the participation of the Independent Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Hermannsburg Mission, and the Missouri Synod's declaration of fellowship with the American Lutheran Church.

In summarizing the discussions at Bleckmar, our representatives reported that the spokesmen for the Independent Evangelical Lutheran Church voiced adherence to the absolute inerrancy of the Holy Scriptures, but indicated certain reservations when applying this doctrine to an interpretation of Genesis 1. Objection was raised on the part of SELK representatives to the statement in the WELS "This We Believe," article 2. Creation, Man, and Sin: "All this happened in the course of six normal days by the power of God's almighty Word when He said, 'Let there be.'" The meetings also revealed the need for further discussions with respect to the matter of ordination. At the request of our representatives, the spokesmen of the Independent Lutheran Church indicated that written statements would be drawn up on the points in question and forwarded to our Commission for further study. Our Commission waited in vain for a long time for such statements, however, until the final arrival of the *Votum* of the SELK Doctrinal Commission. We will hear about the unsatisfactory content of this document later on.

In early summer of 1970 our Commission addressed a message of concern to our brethren of the Ev. Luth. Free Church and of the Ev. Luth. (Old Luth.) Church in Germany. In view of the issues at stake, we consider it advisable to reprint our communication here in full: (Reports and Memorials, 41 Conv. 1971, pp. 113-118.)

A MESSAGE OF CONCERN TO THE GERMAN FREE CHURCHES

We are living at a time when a false ecumenism, which threatens to undermine all confessionalism, is making its impact on the entire outward Christian church. This false ecumenism, threatens also the Scriptural confessionalism of the Lutheran church. No Lutheran church is exempt from its impact. The principal points of attack of this false ecumenism are the doctrine's of church fellowship and of the Holy Scriptures themselves. To remain confessional a

church must continue to acknowledge the entire Holy Scriptures as the inspired and inerrant Word of God in all of its factual assertions as well as in all of its teachings for Christian faith and life. At the same time it must exercise care that it practices church fellowship, that is, engages in joint worship and church work, with only such individuals, church bodies, and church federations as are fully united with it in Scriptural doctrine and practice. These are truly interlocking positions. Neither position can for any length of time be maintained without maintaining the other likewise. Defection in one of these positions will invariably lead to defection in the other also. What is ultimately at stake in such a breakdown of confessionalism is the very Gospel of God's saving grace in Christ Jesus... ‘

For the sake of preserving the Gospel, the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod has endeavored to maintain an uncompromising stand in these two interlocking positions. Yet the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod is aware of the fact that it is not enough to maintain these positions in its own church body. It must be a matter of equal concern for our Synod that these positions be upheld also by all the church bodies whom it recognizes as confessional brethren.

It is this realization that constrains us to voice some earnest concerns to our brethren of the Evangelical Lutheran Free Church and of the Evangelical Lutheran (Old Lutheran) Church in Germany as they together with the independent Evangelical Lutheran Church are in the process of effecting a merger to form a new Lutheran church body. These concerns are voiced in the fraternal desire that this new church body might from its very inception espouse a clearly Scriptural and uncompromising stand on the aforementioned interlocking positions which are so vital for a truly confessional Lutheran church.

I

Our first concern has to do with relations toward The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. All of the Lutheran Free Churches which are in process of effecting a merger are at present in church fellowship with The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. To maintain an uncompromising position with reference to the doctrines of the Holy Scriptures and of church fellowship, the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod found it necessary to terminate fellowship with The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod in 1961 and subsequently to withdraw from the Synodical Conference in 1963. As early as 1939 our Synod had observed a gradually increasing weakening within The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod with respect to the Scriptural principles of church fellowship. With patient and intensive admonitory testimony, our Synod sought to draw The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod back from its unionistic course. This did not succeed. Instead, The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod defended its defection from the Scriptural principles of church fellowship by the formal adoption of *Theology of Fellowship, Part II*. It underscored the unscriptural fellowship principles enunciated in the above-mentioned document by becoming a charter member of LCUSA, a federation of Lutheran churches not united in doctrine and practice. As The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod proceeded more and more to practice church fellowship in various forms of joint worship and church work with other Lutherans who restricted the authority, historicity, and inerrancy of the Holy Scriptures, it was no longer able to exclude similar errors with reference to the Holy Scriptures from its own midst. These developments in The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod did not escape the notice of the three German Free Churches; nor has there been a lack of testimony on their part against these developments. Yet nine years have passed since the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod has felt conscience-bound to terminate fellowship with The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, while its two sister churches in Germany, the Evangelical Lutheran Free Church and the Evangelical Lutheran (Old Lutheran) Church, have continued their fellowship with this church body. At our doctrinal discussions with our German brethren there was agreement in this that such a confused

state of fellowship relations could be justified only as a temporary situation. It was held that the churches in Germany would have to be allowed more time to gain a clear judgment concerning the actions, trends, and developments within a large American church body far removed from them.

We feel constrained to say at this time, however, that The Missouri Synod's declaration of fellowship with the American Lutheran Church at its Denver convention of 1969 has brought about a new situation. The American Lutheran Church's broken stand on the doctrine of the Holy Scripture and its inerrancy, its fellowship relations with heterodox Lutheran bodies, its ecumenical relations with the Lutheran World Federation, and the World Council of Churches, and its unsound lodge practice, are a matter of knowledge also for the German Free Churches. We are therefore constrained to ask our brethren in Germany at this time how it is still possible for them to continue their fellowship relations with The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. Does not The Missouri Synod's newly-established fellowship with the ALC at the very least demand that the Free Churches declare themselves to be in a state of confession? Should not such a declaration on the part of all three Free Churches supply the clear evidence that they are really united in a sound position on the Holy Scriptures and on the Scriptural principles of church fellowship as they proceed to merge into one body?

II

A second concern which we wish to express has to do with the issues that remained unresolved at the 1959 doctrinal discussions held at Bleckmar by representatives of the Wisconsin Synod and of the Bekenntniskirche in Germany with representatives of the Independent Evangelical Lutheran Church. When at the Bad Hotel discussions at Oberursel of 1968 Wisconsin Synod representatives became fully aware of the imminence of the Free Church merger, they expressed readiness to help initiate conversations with the Independent Evangelical Lutheran Church in the hope of establishing fellowship relations. This was done in the interest of removing another inconsistency in our fellowship relations, namely, that our own Wisconsin Synod and the Bekenntniskirche were in a state of fellowship with only two of the three federated Free Churches of Germany who were contemplating merger. We realized that it would be much easier to determine our fellowship relations with the new church body if at the time of the merger we enjoyed fellowship relations with all the church bodies joined together through the merger. By common agreement of all who participated in the 1969 discussions at Bleckmar as this is reflected in the official minutes, some questions concerning the inerrancy of the Holy Scriptures and concerning the public ministry, specifically the matter of ordination, still remain unresolved and called for further discussions before a declaration of fellowship between the bodies represented would be proper.

Dare this situation be ignored as the Free Churches proceed toward a merger? Does it have no bearing on the question whether the three Free Churches are themselves fully united in the doctrine of the Holy Scriptures and in the Scriptural principles of church fellowship? We at least feel constrained to state that it leaves a measure of uncertainty in this matter for Us.

This uncertainty is all the more real since we are not fully informed on the function that the *Einigungssätze* will have as the doctrinal basis of the proposed merger. We are aware of the fact that the *Common Declaration* was drawn up by the representatives of the Evangelical Lutheran Free Church and the Evangelical Lutheran (Old Lutheran) Church to express their renewed commitment to the *Einigungssätze*. We await with interest the ratification of this *Common Declaration* by the November convention of the Evangelical Lutheran (Old Lutheran) Church. Is the Independent Evangelical Lutheran Church in any way committed to the *Common*

Declaration so that it keeps the clear statements, of the *Einigungssätze* relative to the inspiration, authority, and inerrancy of the Holy Scriptures in force also for them?

III

The third concern which we feel constrained to voice pertains to recent declarations made by the three Federated Lutheran churches through their ranking officers:

a) The authorization of a *Stiftungsprofessur* at Oberursel to be filled by a member of the *Kirchliche Sammlung um Bibel and Bekenntnis*.

We would have to consider the calling of such a professor at the seminary and his participation in the training of future pastors to be a piece of church work which therefore involves church fellowship and requires unity in doctrine and practice between the Free Churches supporting this seminary and the man called from the *Kirchliche Sammlung*. Since the members of the *Kirchliche Sammlung* are still members of the territorial Lutheran churches, evidence of a unity in doctrine and practice with the Lutheran Free Churches to satisfy the Scriptural principles of church fellowship is therefore not evident to us. Has such unity been established on the matter of Scripture and its inerrancy? Is it apparent from the *Braunschweiger Thesen zu Lehre und Auftrag der Kirche*, published by the *Kirchliche Sammlung* and considered representative of its doctrinal position?

b) The declaration given by the Federated Lutheran Free Churches through their ranking officers offering certain conservative pastors of the Lutheran Territorial Church in Bavaria admission to holy communion at the altars of the Free Churches.

Is this declaration of altar fellowship in line with the Scriptural principles of church fellowship? These Bavarian pastors have declared themselves to be in protest against the unrestricted admission of Union Church members at the altars of the Lutheran Church of Bavaria. We ask, however, have these pastors declared their intention of withdrawing from the Territorial Lutheran Church in Bavaria? Is there an indication that they propose to have their congregations withdraw from the fellowship of the Lutheran Territorial Churches? We also find nothing in the declaration which assures us that these pastors take an uncompromising stand on the doctrine of the Holy Scriptures as being God's inspired and inerrant Word in all that they assert as well as teach.

While we are ready and eager to be more fully informed as we voice these fraternal concerns, we nevertheless feel constrained to say that, in our opinion, for actions of the kind advocated in the above declarations, the concept of church fellowship on the basis of which they are made needs to be clearly and carefully defined.

We trust that it will not be taken amiss that we have given expression to our concerns in these very important matters. These are concerns that weigh heavily upon our hearts, even as they weigh heavily upon the hearts of our sister synods abroad. May our gracious God grant His blessing upon, our expressions of concern so that they may also serve the cause of preserving and strengthening the bonds of fellowship between us and our German sister churches.

Under the circumstances prevailing and in response to an invitation, our Commission asked Pres. O. J. Naumann and its chairman and vice-chairman, Professors Carl Lawrenz and Gerald Hoenecke, to attend the convention of the Ev. Lutheran Free Church in Germany, which was held at Steeden on the Lahn, Germany, October 14-18, 1970. As reported by our representatives, the attention of the Steeden convention was directed

primarily toward the planned new church body in Germany to be effected through the merger of the Ev. Lutheran Free Church, the Ev. Lutheran (Old Lutheran) Church, and the Independent Ev. Lutheran Church. Much of the discussion revolved about the confessional position of the merger as reflected in its tentative constitution (*Grundordnung*). Some reassuring resolutions were adopted by the Ev. Lutheran Free Church at its convention proposing certain amendments to the tentative constitution of the merger relative to the doctrines of the Scriptures, church, and ministry.

With respect to the Missouri Synod, the Ev. Lutheran Free Church approved the following resolution:

That it rejects the resolution made by the Missouri Synod in Denver regarding the establishment of fellowship with the ALC, and that it does not find itself in a position to go along with this resolution or to look upon it as binding for itself.

That it supports all brethren in the Missouri Synod who resolutely contend for the observance of Scripture and the Confessions.

That for the time being it would like to await further developments in the Missouri Synod with the hope that the mis-development which came about through the Denver resolution may be overcome.

Then there was the matter of concern which our Commission had raised concerning the declaration of altar fellowship which the ranking officers of the Federated Lutheran Free churches had made with reference to certain protesting pastors of the Lutheran territorial church in Bavaria. It was officially conceded at the Steeden convention that the procedure of establishing a proper consensus in doctrine and practice for intercommunion had really not been followed, and that only by taking the proper steps to provide such a consensus could the declaration stand and be put into operation. It was announced that a meeting between these pastors and official representatives of the three free churches had been arranged for this purpose, and that it would soon take place at Ebrach, Germany.

With respect to the subsequent meeting at Ebrach referred to above, we are sorry to report that it only served to increase the concern which our Commission had voiced in its communication to the Ev. Luth. Free Church and to the Ev. Luth. (Old Luth.) Church in Germany. Joint Communion continued to be practiced and upheld in spite of obvious disagreement in doctrine and practice.

As previously reported to the nine districts of our Synod, our Commission had initiated doctrinal discussions with representatives of the Independent Ev. Lutheran Free Church of Germany in September of 1969 at Bleckmar, Germany. Written statements on the points under discussion had been requested by us of the Ind. Ev. Lutheran Free Church representatives. We received the statements during the summer and fall of 1970, including a position paper by the doctrinal commission of the Independent Ev. Luth. Free Church with respect to the doctrine on Holy Scriptures. We feel constrained to point out that, in spite of our previous discussion with representatives of the Independent Church on the points in question, the Independent Ev. Luth. Free Church failed to commit itself to the absolute inerrancy of Holy Writ. This, of course, was of particular concern to us as we observed the steps that continued to be taken in effecting the merger of the three Free Churches in Germany, involving two church bodies with which our Synod stood in fellowship.

In addition to the aforementioned concern, it should be reported that the Bekenntniskirche (the Church of the Ev. Lutheran Confession), which is supported by our Synod, had established a joint parish with a congregation of the Independent Ev. Lutheran Free Church, although doctrinal consensus had not yet been reached between the two synods. Our Commission had voiced its concern to our brethren of the Bekenntniskirche. We had indicated that through such joint church work, where doctrinal agreement did not exist, the Bekenntniskirche had compromised its confessional position and ultimately also the position of our own Synod. It was our hope that we might yet gain an understanding with our brethren of the Bekenntniskirche with respect to the basic issues involved.

In conclusion, it remained to be seen whether or not the constitution of the proposed merger in Germany would still be revised to meet the concerns expressed by the Steeden convention of the Ev. Lutheran Free

Church, prior to the final implementation of the merger. The official reports which we had received thus far all seemed to indicate that the revisions desired by the Ev. Luth. Free Church had not gained full acceptance by the other two Free Churches. As far as we can judge, the revised constitution leaves the basic doctrinal differences unresolved. As a result, should the merger be consummated without any resolution of the doctrinal differences which still exist within the merging bodies and between the Independent Ev. Luth. Free Church and our Synod, our Commission was of the conviction that our Synod would have no choice but to withhold a declaration of fellowship with the newly-established church body.

In the meantime the Evangelical Lutheran Free Church of Germany met in special convention at Wittingen, Germany, on Oct. 7-9, 1971. The special matter up for decision was the adoption of the proposed constitution of the new Lutheran Free Church which had been planned as a merger of the Evangelical Lutheran Free Church, the Evangelical Lutheran (Old Lutheran) Church, and the Independent Evangelical Lutheran Church. The latter two bodies had already adopted this constitution and thus approved the merger at previous conventions. At its special convention the Evangelical Lutheran Free Church followed suit by adopting the constitution of the new church body by a vote of 63-9. This new church body, like one of the churches merging to form it, was to bear the name of *Selbständige Ev. Lutherische Kirche*, in translation, the Independent Evangelical Lutheran-Church. SELK shall henceforth in this presentation refer to the new merger Church.

Five representatives of WELS attended not only this special convention at Wittingen but also a doctrinal discussion on the previous Wednesday afternoon and evening, October 6, with official representatives of the three merging Lutheran free churches. The discussion meeting was arranged with the hope that a consensus might be established between the Wisconsin Synod and our German affiliate, the Evangelical Lutheran Confessional Church, on the one hand, and the Independent Evangelical Lutheran Church, on the other hand, on certain points of doctrine which thus far had hindered a declaration of church fellowship between them. Our representatives were President O. J. Naumann; the chairman and vicechairman of our Commission, Professors Carl J. Lawrenz and Gerald O. Hoenecke; and two members of our Board for World Missions, Executive Secretary Edgar Hoenecke and Pastor Erwin Froehlich of the Executive Committee for the mission in Germany. Since this doctrinal discussion failed to accomplish its objective our representation had to indicate at the convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Free Church that a declaration of church fellowship on the part of WELS with the old SELK, and thus also a declaration of fellowship with the new merged church, the new SELK when it would go into existence would have to await the favorable outcome of additional doctrinal discussions. It was therefore urged that all parties involved help to arrange for such discussions.

Under the date of December 7, 1971, our Commission addressed a Memorandum for Additional Doctrinal Discussions to the officials of the three merging Free Churches. Herewith we are offering you the full text of this communication

A MEMORANDUM FOR ADDITIONAL DOCTRINAL DISCUSSIONS

During the course of 1970 the Wisconsin Ev. Lutheran Synod addressed *A Message of Fraternal Concern* (Cf. 1971 BoRaM, p. 113ff) to the Evangelical Lutheran Free Church and the Evangelical Lutheran (Old Lutheran) Church. This was done particularly in view of the fact that at this time these churches, together with the Independent Evangelical Lutheran Church, were active in effecting a merger to form a new Lutheran church body. Our concerns were therefore expressed in the fraternal interest that from the very start this new church body might in every respect espouse a clear, scripturally confessional position.

In this message the Wisconsin Synod felt constrained to express concern, first of all, over the fact that the discussions at Bleckmar with the Independent Evangelical Lutheran Church in September 1969 on the part of the Wisconsin Synod and the Evangelical Lutheran Confessional Church were not yet able to lead to a declaration of church fellowship. Questions still remained unresolved concerning the inerrancy of the Holy Scriptures and concerning the public ministry, specifically regarding the matter of ordination. At the time, all participants were therefore agreed that additional discussions were still necessary before a declaration of church fellowship between the churches on both sides of the discussion could take place.

An opportunity for additional doctrinal discussions was not made available, however, until the afternoon of October 6, 1971, at Wittingen, on the day before the pastoral conference and the subsequent synodical convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Free Church. This encounter took place in the form of conversations between the representatives of the *Kirchenleitungen* (the ranking officials of the church bodies involved, tantamount to a praesidium) of the Federated Lutheran Free Churches on the one hand and the representatives of the Wisconsin Synod and the Evangelical Lutheran Confessional Church on the other hand. That upon our entreaties and our urging we received an invitation to discussions structured along these lines already gave expression to something that was stressed with great emphasis by the chairman, *Oberkirchenrat* (the title of the highest official of the Evangelical Lutheran, Old Lutheran, Church, similar to a president). Dr. Gerhard Rost, in the course of the deliberations, Without any dissent on the part of the other representatives of the *Kirchenleitungen*, he stated that “the German Lutheran Free Churches were one in faith, doctrine, and practice.” “This they had documented in an authentic and permanent manner by having enjoyed uncontested pulpit and altar fellowship for more than twenty years. The German Lutheran Free Churches therefore have no further reservations of any kind against an organizational merger.” “What the Wisconsin Synod may indeed still adduce as church divisive differences, is not considered church divisive by the German Lutheran Free Churches.” The German Lutheran Free Churches self-evidently desire to deal further with the Wisconsin Ev. Lutheran Synod, see great value in documenting their doctrinal unity also with her, but will not permit themselves to be disturbed and deterred in their endeavor of effecting an organizational merger by the inquiries of the Wisconsin Synod.

The deliberations themselves on the concerns of the Wisconsin Synod relative to full unity with the Independent Evangelical Lutheran Church in the doctrine of the Holy Scriptures and its inerrancy brought forth the following concluding declaration of Church Superintendent (the title of the highest official of the Independent Evangelical Lutheran Church, similar to a president) Horst Bruegmann:

1. The Votum of the Independent Evangelical Lutheran Church’s Theological Commission on the doctrine of the Holy Scriptures in the Independent Evangelical Lutheran Church had been envisioned as a basis of discussion for the deliberations of my church with the Wisconsin Synod, respectively with the Evangelical Lutheran Confessional Church. Self-evidently it must be read and interpreted in context with the official documents and declarations of the Independent Evangelical Lutheran Church including the Bleckmar Minutes of September 10, 1969.

It has become evident in the deliberations, however, that this Votum does not lend itself as a basis for discussions. It is therefore being withdrawn.

2. On September 14, 1971, the Council of Superintendents of the Independent Evangelical Lutheran Church passed the following resolution:

“The Council of Superintendents agrees with the declaration which Church Superintendent Horst Bruegmann gave to President Dr. Kirsten and Professor Dr. Roensch on July 29, 1971, at Wriedel. This declaration was to the effect that the theses on the clarity of the Holy Scriptures and on the binding nature of the Confessions, as subscribed to in a colloquy of June 23, 1908, between representatives of the Saxon and Hanoverian Free Churches, should be appraised as an expression of the unity in the doctrine of the Holy Scriptures existing for a long time between the participating churches.”

Concerning this the representation of the *Kirchenleitungen* of the Federated Lutheran Free Churches expressed themselves in the following manner on September 15, 1971:

“The representation of the *Kirchenleitungen* welcomes the resolution of the Council of Superintendents on September 14 of this year and is of the conviction that with this resolution the apparent disagreement between the Wisconsin Synod and the SELK (Selbständige Ev.

Lutherische Kirche, or Independent Evangelical Lutheran Church) has been overcome and a clarification of the doctrine of the Holy Scriptures has resulted; therewith it sees the unity in faith and doctrine substantiated, as it was won with great effort in the past (compare Article 3,1 of the Grundordnung) (constitution of the new merged church body, also called the Independent Evangelical Lutheran Church).”

3. The discussion concerning factual questions *de sacra scriptura*, to the extent that they may still be unsettled, can no longer be properly carried on by the Independent Evangelical Lutheran Church with the Wisconsin Synod, respectively with the Evangelical Lutheran Free Church. Rather the discussion partner can only be the Working Fellowship (Arbeitsgemeinschaft) of the Free Evangelical Lutheran Churches of Germany. Very specifically yesterday's discussion of October 6, 1971, has shown that the three churches joined together in the Working Fellowship have no differences among them in the doctrine of the Holy Scriptures.

I hope that the declaration given by me yesterday and officially confirmed today by the Kirchenleitung of the Independent Evangelical Lutheran Church will contribute toward a better understanding of our position and in addition serve toward the improvement of our mutual relationship. Now as before we on our part see no hindrance for the establishment of church fellowship. Probably your judgment is different. At any hand, we are certainly of one mind in the prayer: “Keep us in the truth, give us eternal freedom to praise Thy name through Jesus Christ. Amen.”

This declaration of Church Superintendent Bruegmann as well as the previously quoted comments of Oberkirchenrat Rost were repeated by both of these spokesmen of their churches on Friday at the synodical convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Free Church. This brought it about that during the morning session on Saturday the representation of the Wisconsin Synod, with a heavy heart, yet with a conscience bound in the Scriptures, gave the following declaration:

As representatives of the Wisconsin Synod we appreciate the very candid manner in which Oberkirchenrat Rost as well as Church Superintendent Bruegmann pointed out yesterday, that for them there no longer is anything to hinder a declaration of church fellowship between the Independent Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Wisconsin Synod. We self-evidently accept this as their innermost conviction.

This constrains us, however, to say with similar candidness, that on the basis of the discussions on Wednesday and their outcome, as we have it in the letter of Church Superintendent Bruegmann, we have not been able to gain the certainty that full agreement has now been reached between the Independent Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Wisconsin Synod in the doctrines of the Holy Scriptures and of church fellowship, or in the doctrine of the ministry regarding ordination. The last-mentioned subject was not even touched upon in the discussions on Wednesday.

In this connection it becomes necessary to point out that it was not in accordance with our wish that these necessary doctrinal discussions were postponed until the afternoon and evening immediately before the pastoral conference of the Evangelical Lutheran Free Church. On our part we had not been remiss during the previous two years in earnest efforts to arrange for the necessary additional discussions.

As representatives of the Wisconsin Synod, we are now not in a position, however, to recommend that our Synod declare church fellowship with the independent Evangelical Lutheran Church. If through an appropriate resolution of the Evangelical Lutheran Free Church at this convention the new church body should now come into existence, also a declaration of church fellowship with it on the part of the Wisconsin Synod must await the results of additional doctrinal discussions.

We would like to supply a fuller basis for what has just been said in the following manner:

In the discussions on Wednesday the SELK still continued to advocate an interpretation of the Creation account in Genesis 1 and 2 as a piece of retrospective prophecy. This still deprives us of the certainty that the inerrancy of the Holy Scriptures is being acknowledged also in everything that they reveal to us concerning God's work of creation and that with such an interpretation all concessions toward the theory of evolution are excluded, something that is very vital in our day.

For this reason, as this is evident from the minutes of the discussions at Bleckmar, we had asked the SELK to furnish us with a presentation of its doctrine on the Holy Scriptures. At the same time, and that with the consent and approval of Church Superintendent Bruegmann, we had asked the SELK to supply us with the support of its interpretation of the Creation account as retrospective prophecy from text and context and other passages of Scripture, in order that we might gain the conviction, that with such an interpretation nothing is lost which rightfully belongs to God's revelation concerning His work of creation.

In response to these requests we were, however, given the Votum of the Theological Commission of the SELK. Since we cannot acknowledge various statements in this Votum as being in accordance with Scripture, it does not suffice for us that this Votum has merely been withdrawn as a discussion document. We have to ask: Will that which is set forth in the Votum concerning the Holy Scriptures be tolerated in the midst of the SELK? Since the spokesman for the SELK was not ready to answer this question with a "no," we are not only hindered in coming to the certainty that we are fully agreed with the SELK in the doctrine of the Scripture, but are also deprived of the certainty that we agree in the doctrine of church fellowship and the proper exercise of it.

The situation is very similar in the matter of ordination pertaining to the doctrine of the ministry. Also here something still remained after the deliberations at Bleckmar, as the minutes clearly indicate, which calls for additional discussions. A contribution on this matter was published in the *Lutherische Blaetter* by a member of the SELK which makes assertions concerning ordination and the doctrine of the ministry which we cannot acknowledge as being in harmony with Scripture. Again we must ask: Will these doctrinal statements be tolerated within the SELK? Without a clear "no" we cannot gain the certainty also with respect to this matter that unity in the doctrine of the ministry and the doctrine of church fellowship has been reached between the SELK and the Wisconsin Synod.

Two additional concerns, not mentioned in the above declaration, can likewise not be left out of consideration, if we are to gain the certainty that full unity concerning the scriptural doctrine of church fellowship really exists between our Wisconsin Synod and the new church body which is now to come into existence through a merger. These are therefore also matters upon which we had touched in our *Message of Fraternal Concern*.

1. We asked the following questions: "Does not the Missouri Synod's newly-established fellowship with the ALC at the very least demand that the Free Churches declare themselves to be in a state of confession? Would not such a declaration on the part of all three Free Churches supply the clear evidence that they are really united in a sound position on the Holy Scriptures and on the scriptural principles of church fellowship, as they are proceeding to merge into one body?"

These questions have not become less relevant in 1971 after the Missouri Synod's synodical convention at Milwaukee. Even in Denver both the conservatives and the liberals were agreed in this that full unity in doctrine and practice did not exist between their church and the ALC. Yet the liberals advocated church fellowship with the ALC on the basis that a sufficient consensus existed: the conservatives in the official family of the Missouri Synod, on the other hand, were ready to put up with the church fellowship with the ALC that had been declared contrary to their own judgment in the hope that it would be possible gradually to attain a full consensus. That both approaches with respect to the establishment of church fellowship are contrary to the scriptural doctrine of church fellowship is a testimony that every sound Lutheran church owes to The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod.

The proposed resolution drawn up by the pastoral conference of the Evangelical Lutheran Free Church toward an intensified testimony against the official aberrations of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod did not

come up for deliberation and action at the special synod convention at Wittingen. We also still lack documentary evidence to the effect that SELK and the Evangelical Lutheran (Old Lutheran) Church endorsed the resolution of the Steeden Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Free Church in the matter of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod or that this was transmitted to The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod.

2. The other matter pertains to the declarations of 1969 made by the three Federated Lutheran Free Churches through their Kirchenleitungen: a) with respect to an endowed professorship (Stiftungsprofessur) at the theological seminary at Oberursel to be staffed by a member of the Kirchliche Sammlung um Bibel and Bekenntnis (an association of conservative members of Lutheran territorial churches, stressing greater faithfulness to Scripture and the Confessions); b) with respect to the admission of confessionally concerned pastors of the Lutheran Territorial Church in Bavaria to holy communion at the altars: of the Free Churches.

The fraternal concern which we expressed in our *Message* still continues. We still feel constrained to ask: In what respect do these declarations not involve selective fellowship? The scriptural principles of church fellowship, however, offer no room for selective fellowship. We also cannot gain the conviction that there is full agreement among the participating Free Churches in the evaluation of these declarations. As far as the first declaration is concerned, such unanimity is hardly evident from the document of November 29, 1969, relative to this declaration. The effort of the participating Free Churches at Ebrach, which was meant to supply the other declaration with a scriptural basis, has to our knowledge not yet attained its goal. In this very effort at Ebrach the participation, respectively non-participation, at holy communion on the part of individual representatives of the Free Churches revealed disunity in their own ranks. We still regard it as extremely important that in actions of the kind advocated in these declarations the scriptural basis on which they are to be taken is clearly and carefully set forth.

Confessional fellowship with the Lutheran Free Churches in Germany is indeed a matter that is deeply cherished in the Wisconsin Synod. From the depth of our heart we would like to be in confessional fellowship with the new church body likewise. We have a very keen appreciation for the advantages which would accrue from having three, even four, German Free Churches merge in true unity and upon a firm scriptural basis. It could give an effective witness for the sound Gospel in German lands over against false ecumenism and the mammoth union church that is emerging.

Still we cannot offer the newly constituted free church our church fellowship with a wounded conscience. For we hold the Holy Scriptures in all that they tell us in even higher regard. This is not an intellectual matter for us. The Gospel, the glad tidings of God's saving grace in Christ Jesus, is at stake. Our salvation depends on this that we cling faithfully to everything that Scripture tells us, also to everything that it tells us about itself, about God's creation, about the ministry and the power of the keys, and about church fellowship and the proper way of exercising it.

To be sure, we found also encouragement at Wittingen for further efforts at reaching a full consensus in those points of doctrine which still give us concern. We found it encouraging that at the Saturday synodical sessions at Wittingen Oberkirchenrat Dr. Rost, in response to Pastor Reuters question, affirmed it as justified to understand the adoption of the Joint Declaration concerning the binding nature of the *Einigungssätze* (Theses of Agreement) on the part of the general synod of the Evangelical Lutheran (Old Lutheran) Church as a replacement and revocation of the 1966 resolution concerning this matter. It was likewise encouraging for us that upon another question of Pastor Reuter, Church Superintendent Bruegmann substantiated with a clear "yes" that also today the Independent Evangelical Lutheran Church does not teach differently from what the *Einigungssätze* teach. Because we deeply appreciate these affirmations, we are also not minded to go back on the promise which our representation gave through President O. J. Naumann at the end of the synodical convention, namely, that the Wisconsin Synod would work toward additional discussions.

If such discussions are really to attain their goal, however, willingness on the part of the Wisconsin Synod to exert itself in behalf of such additional discussions does not suffice. Willingness is required likewise on the part of the Federated Free Churches really to enter in a thorough manner upon the aforementioned points of doctrine which still prevent the Wisconsin Synod from declaring church fellowship with the new church

body. If such willingness is lacking because of the conviction that in all instances matters are involved which may properly remain open questions, then the discussions to be arranged will hardly reach their goal.

With the assumption that mutual willingness to reach a full consensus in a thorough manner does exist and that this will be openly substantiated, it still needs to be said that additional discussions, to attain their goal, call for thorough preparatory work, including previously worked out position documents. Because of the great distances separating our churches, a personal oral discussion between official representatives can be arranged only at considerable expenditure of time and means and involves the enlistment of personnel which is generally much in demand. Then, too, such discussions can be arranged for only a few days, which hardly suffice for entering upon the problems involved from beginning to end and for solving them in a fundamental way.

Several matters could probably be disposed of to a great extent even in advance of an oral discussion by the Federated Free Churches themselves. In our opinion, this could and should be done in the matter of the Votum. If it really holds true that also in the new church the binding nature of the *Einiungssätze* is to remain in effect and that also in the new church nothing else is to be taught than what is taught in the *Einigungssätze*, then certainly not everything that is found in the Votum can likewise have a rightful place. Furthermore, if in the new church all teaching regarding the doctrine of the ministry and the authority of the keys is to be in accordance with the *Einigungssätze*, then again much that was said in the article re the Doctrine of the Spiritual Office in the *Lutherische Blaetter*, and which provoked critical analysis in the *Rundblick*, again cannot likewise have validity in the same church. We would like to hope for an appropriate declaration on the part of the Federated Free Churches, which would bring about clarity in these matters and rule out doctrinal positions contrary to the Scriptures.

In case that the Federated Free Churches have already given a joint testimony over against The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, and in case they intend to indicate in an even more incisive manner what must unconditionally be changed in the official position of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, if their fellowship relations with this church are not to be terminated, we would be very happy to receive such testimony in written form. Through such documents the assurance could be fostered that at least in principle we are agreed relative to an evaluation of Missouri, even though we have not drawn the practical consequences as yet in like manner. Thereby the hope would be strengthened that the untenable triangular fellowship relationship which has now obtained for such a very long time among our churches in regard to church fellowship with The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, and which now obtains in the opposite direction with the FAL (Federation for Authentic Lutheranism), may still be overcome. Such hope we find, for example, in the testimonies which our brethren in the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of France and Belgium have been giving with increasing incisiveness over against The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, and which they have submitted also to us in written form.

What as to content would be helpful in a document on which to base a fruitful discussion concerning the declarations of 1969 has already been indicated. Written reports concerning additional clarifications which may have been attained in these matters would be very much welcomed.

As to the doctrine of Scripture and its inerrancy applied to the Creation account, a consensus cannot simply be established by a reaffirmation of the Theses of June 23, 1908, concerning the clarity and inerrancy of the Holy Scriptures. For if in applying these Theses to the Creation account we, nevertheless, go far apart in the interpretation of this highly vital realm of revelation, the disunity in doctrine would still remain. That is why we cannot avoid asking once more for a document in which the advocated interpretation of the Creation account as retrospective prophecy is substantiated from the text and context, and other statements of Scripture. An interpretation of Scripture which cannot be substantiated from Scripture itself simply cannot enjoy recognition in the church. Only on the basis of an exegetical exposition can we come to the certainty that nothing is lost that belongs to the revelatory realm of Holy Scripture and that all unscriptural concessions to the current theory of evolution have been ruled out.

Self-evidently do we declare ourselves ready likewise to furnish written documents which are desired by our discussion partner, the Working Fellowship, of the Free Ev. Lutheran Churches in Germany, as preparation

for an additional discussion in the interest of attaining full consensus. Yes, may the Lord our God give His grace and blessing toward such a goal, for Jesus' sake.

Upon authorization of the Commission on Doctrinal Matters of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod. December 7, 1971

DOCTRINAL DISCUSSIONS AT BLECKMAR

Doctrinal discussions were held in the Mission House at Bleckmar, Germany, June 6-8, 1972, between representatives of the Federated Lutheran Free Churches of Germany and those of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod and the Ev. Lutheran Confessional Church (Ev. Luth. Bekenntniskirche). Also invited as participants were two representatives of the Ev. Luth. Church-Synod of France and Belgium. The discussions were arranged for the early part of June in the hope that full agreement might still be reached on the points of doctrine and practice which were still preventing the Wisconsin Synod and the Bekenntniskirche from declaring church fellowship with the new Independent Ev. Luth. Church (SELK) when it would be officially established on June 25.

The representatives of the Federated Lutheran Free Churches, constituting their Discussion Committee, were President Dr. Hans Kirsten, Oberkirchenrat Dr. Gerhard Rost, Church Superintendent Horst Bruegmann, Superintendent Eberhard Koepsell, and Professors Dr. Manfred Roensch and Dr. Gottfried Hoffmann. Our own Synod was, represented by President O. J. Naumann and the chairman and secretary of its Commission on Doctrinal Matters, Professors Carl J. Lawrenz and O. J. Siegler; the Bekenntniskirche by its president and secretary, Pastors Karl Wengenroth and Armin Zielke; the French Free Church by its president and vice-president, Pastors Jean Bricka and Wilbert Kreiss.

The discussions entered upon the points of doctrine and practice regarding which our Synod's Commission on Doctrinal Matters had sought additional clarification in its Memorandum of December 7, 1971 (see WLQ, Vol. 69, No. 2, pp. 129-136). These were points which had to do with the doctrine of Scripture and its inerrancy, especially its application to the Genesis creation account, with the doctrine of the ministry with respect to ordination, and with some questions of practice in the exercise of church fellowship. As an aid for these discussions the German Discussion Committee had supplied our Doctrinal Commission and its representatives with eighteen discussion documents of varied size. Many of these were past official statements and agreements concerning these matters, others newly drawn up position papers. Our own representation had supplied an additional document on the days of the creation account. This document emphasized that also in an interpretation of the Biblical account of creation and its days full recognition must be given to the outward clarity of Scripture, namely to the truth that what God is telling us in any given portion of Scripture must be determined wholly by the words of Scripture themselves in their full linguistic usage and in accordance with the closer and wider context. Such interpretation must not be influenced by preconceived ideas with which we might approach the text. In the instance of the creation account our interpretation must not be influenced by the current theories of evolution and make concessions to them.

These discussions did not attain the goal of bringing about full agreement in all those points of doctrine and practice, so that our Wisconsin Synod and the Bekenntniskirche were in a position to declare church fellowship with the new SELK. We did feel that they contributed toward greater understanding, that they clarified and resolved some points, and above all pinpointed the matters which must still be weighed carefully at the hand of Scripture through additional discussions if by God's grace full agreement is to be reached. That this be graciously granted was our sincere hope and prayer.

The original SELK Votum on the doctrine of Scripture had been withdrawn and was not replaced by a revision (Document 9) which had the approval of all the theological commissions of the free churches, and which no longer called forth objections in any quarters as to content and wording. Moreover, we were assured that any dissensus or apparent dissensus within the free churches or the new merged church from the doctrinal position regarding Scripture expressed in this revision would call for responsible doctrinal discussions, and, if necessary, for doctrinal discipline.

The specific issue regarding the application of the inerrancy of Scripture to the Genesis account of creation could not be brought to a conclusion, however. Time had not allowed sufficient discussion and revision of Dr. Hoffmann's draft of Document 10 devoted to this matter to enable all the members of the Discussion Committee to commit themselves fully to all of its points in substance and wording. Hence it was evident to all that our representatives would have to await the final wording of Document 10 to determine whether they were in full agreement with the position of the Discussion Committee speaking for SELK.

There was agreement in this that the understanding of the creation account of Scripture cannot be determined by present, past, or future conclusions of scientific research, that the acknowledgment of a creation through the word out of nothing cannot be called into question, that the creation of the kinds and especially of man dare not be interpreted in terms of an evolution from a single original cell, that any understanding of evolution which excludes faith in a divine creator must be rejected. Members of the Discussion Committee, however, pleaded insufficient acquaintance with the concept of theistic evolution to express themselves definitely concerning it.

In the discussion on ordination there was agreement in this that no special grace for the ministry is imparted through ordination, and that there is no word of institution for ordination in the New Testament. At the same time it was expressed that, though not exclusively, still in a special way at ordination the blessing, which God has promised to the ministry, is implored for the one who is being ordained and thereby directed to him. When in agreeing with this we suggested, however, that this could also be said about every formal installation into the ministry, this did not meet with ready acceptance. It is therefore a point which still calls for additional discussion to attain full clarity and a common understanding.

We were assured that all the three free churches share the position of protest which the Ev. Lutheran Free Church has taken over against the LC-MS, that they all endorse the testimony which it has relayed to this church body, and that this would be true also of the new SELK. At the same time it was, acknowledged that new steps were called for to strengthen this testimony and to apprise members of the LC-MS that the continued church fellowship of their German brethren is in jeopardy if their untenable fellowship with the ALC is not terminated and the confessional deterioration in their own midst, especially at the worker training schools; is not arrested. It was stated, however, that the new SELK would at this time not yet go as far as the proposal which President Wengenroth was placing before the Bekenntniskirche at its convention, namely, that of a full state of confession in which there would be no further exercise of church fellowship with the LC-MS.

Unanimity was not reached in evaluating the altar fellowship which the Federated Lutheran Free Churches had established with certain protesting pastors within the Lutheran territorial church of Bavaria. Our representatives had to contend that it violated the scriptural directives concerning church fellowship inasmuch as full doctrinal unity has not been established with, these pastors, and it is not evident that they are preparing their congregations to withdraw from the territorial church if it does not return to a sound confessional position.

Full agreement was also not attained in evaluating the joint worship in which representatives of the Lutheran Free Churches participated at the German-Scandinavian Theologians Conference at Ratzeburg. The same was true regarding the joint testimony and joint worship carried out at an earlier date in connection with the Lutheran Week at Hamburg. Since it was not in the nature of a free conference but involved joint worship and church work with Lutherans with whom full unity in doctrine and practice had not been established, we cannot refrain from considering this to have been in violation of the scriptural directives concerning church fellowship. As a result it became evident to all at the Bleckmar discussions that to attain a common evaluation in these practical matters we would have to begin with a discussion and evaluation of our respective positions on church fellowship and of the scriptural basis adduced for them.

After hearing the report of its representatives at meetings on July 19-20, the Commission on Doctrinal Matters resolved to hold further discussions with the German Discussion Committee, henceforth the committee of the new SELK. The Commission recommended that these discussions be held in the United States, and that representatives of the Ev. Luth. Confessional Church in Germany and the Ev. Luth. Church-Synod of France and Belgium be likewise invited as participants.

Mequon Discussions

A four-day meeting was held at our Seminary in Mequon, Wis., July 17-20, 1973, for the purpose of continuing the doctrinal discussions with representatives of the newly-formed Independent Ev. Lutheran Church of Germany. The following represented the Independent Ev. Lutheran Church (Selbständige Ev. Lutherische Kirche): Dr. Jobst Schoene, Dr. Manfred Roensch, Dr. Gottfried Hoffmann, Pastor Guenter Schulz. Attending from the Ev. Lutheran Church - Synod of France and Belgium were President John Bricka and Pastor Wilbur Kreiss, and from the Ev. Lutheran Confessional Church of Germany (Bekenntniskirche) were President Karl Wengenroth and Pastor Armin Zielke. In addition to the ten members of our Commission and President O. Naumann, the following representatives of our Synod's Board for World Missions were also in attendance: Pastor Edgar Hoenecke, Pastor Karl Krauss, and Pastor Erin Froehlich.

In preparation for the discussions various position papers and doctrinal statements had been exchanged during the preceding year, and it had been agreed that the agenda for the meeting was to be centered on a discussion of the following subjects: (1) the doctrine of the Scripture and its inerrancy, especially its application to the Genesis creation account; (2) the doctrine of church fellowship; and (3) the doctrine of the ministry with respect to ordination. On the third day of the discussions our Commission prepared and submitted the following statement to the representatives of the Independent Ev. Lutheran Church:

To: The representatives of the Selbständige Ev. Lutherische Kirche
 From: The WELS Commission on Doctrinal Matters
 Re: Response of the WELS Commission regarding its discussions with the SELK representatives during the past three days.

The public ministry with particular reference to ordination

Resolved, that on the basis of our discussions this week with the SELK representatives we find ourselves in agreement with the position expressed in the discussions with reference to the doctrine of the public ministry - particularly relative to ordination.

The inerrancy and external clarity of the Scriptures with particular reference to the creation days

Resolved, to advise the SELK representatives:

- 1) that it is our conviction on the basis of the Word of God that the creation days cannot be understood as anything else than ordinary days;
- 2) that we do not contend for the term "ordinary" as such, but that in keeping with the truth of the external clarity of Scriptures we would ask the SELK representatives whether they are ready to commit them selves as representatives of the SELK to the understanding of the creation days as days whose duration was controlled by the functions of the sun and moon as specified in Genesis 1:14 (Cf. also Exodus 20:11).

Church Fellowship

Resolved, to advise the SELK representatives:

- 1) That we agree with the substance of the Overseas Statement "Fellowship in Its Necessary Context of the Doctrine of the Church"² (not including the addendum beginning with the words "This statement bears. . .")

² WELS 1961 Proceedings, pages 177-180, and the revision of Thesis 6 as contained in "Lutherischer Rundblick," 1962, Vol. 9, pages 141ff.

as being in accord with Scriptures. With respect to the term “regularly” in the second sentence of Thesis 3, we assert our agreement in the light of the explanation given in our discussions of this week. As we understand the explanation offered, the term “regularly” is used to indicate that Christians under all normal circumstances will regularly “gather about the pure preaching and the right administration of the Sacraments,” but that the identification of the church’s presence is not dependent upon the regularity as such of such gatherings, even as this truth is, set forth in our Synod’s statement on the church, I,D,3.

2) that we have attempted to give careful attention to the SELK “Stellungnahme. . .” to our Statement on Church Fellowship, but feel constrained to state that we find no Scriptural reason for altering our Statement or the principles outlined therein;

3) that we do not expect church bodies in fellowship with us to formulate their position on church fellowship according to our approach or in line with our terminology, but only that our position be acknowledged as being in harmony with the Scriptures

4) that we would respectfully request the SELK representatives whether they are able, in the light of our discussions and explanations of the past few days, to withdraw any criticism of our Statement on Fellowship - as being unScriptural;

5) that we would not find any conflicting or divisive principles on Church Fellowship between the SELK and the WELS, if the SELK representatives find themselves able to withdraw their prior charges, but in the interest of further clarity would request additional discussion on some practical questions dealing with meetings at Ratzeburg and Hamburg, and with the SELK’s future relationship to the Missouri Synod

After considering our Commission’s “Response. . .” in a separate meeting, the representatives of the Independent Ev. Lutheran Church of Germany presented the following reply:

To: The WELS Commission on Doctrinal Matters
 From: The Representatives of SELK
 Re: Reply to the WELS Commission Proposal of July 19, 1973

The Public Ministry of the Church with Special Reference to Ordination

With thanks we take note of the statement of the WELS Commission on this matter.

The Inerrancy and the Outward Clarity of Scripture with Special Reference to the Creation Days

To 1) We find ourselves in agreement, that - as stated here - the concept “day” also really means day.

To 2) The understanding that the Creation Days are days whose duration was determined by the function of sun and moon (Gen. 1:14) is also our understanding, to which we obligate ourselves as representatives of SELK

Church Fellowship

To 1) and 2): We accept the position of the WELS Commission expressed here.

To 3) and 4): On the basis of the discussions and clarifications we see no cause for Scriptural reasons to call into question the position of WELS relative to church fellowship, without, however, settling upon the approach and the terminology of WELS as the only possibility: On the basis of the discussions and of the declarations made on the part of WELS, our criticisms as though the Statement on Church Fellowship were contrary to Scripture, no longer obtains.

To 5): We are agreed, that we, too, no longer see any divisive and contradictory principles pertaining to church fellowship between WELS and SELK, therefore on our part we no longer raise the previous strictures against

WELS, and ask the Commission of WELS on their part not to raise any strictures against SELK. We are very ready to supply additional information and to enter upon discussion concerning practical questions.

Following the presentation of the foregoing “Reply. . .” of the SELK Representatives, a discussion ensued concerning the practical questions mentioned by our Commission relative to the circumstances of certain meetings which had been held at Ratzeburg and Hamburg, Germany, as well as the matter of the SELK’s future relationship with the Missouri Synod.

With respect to the SELK’s relationship with the Missouri Synod, it was reported at the Mequon meeting that the newly-formed SELK had previously concurred in the protest of the former Ev. Lutheran Free Church of Germany with respect to the Missouri Synod’s declaration of fellowship with the American Lutheran Church and Missouri’s membership in the LCUSA (Cf. communication of October 12, 1972, to Missouri Synod President J. Preus from Dr. G. Rost, present bishop of the SELK). The SELK representatives at Mequon reported, however, that in the light of the 1973 New Orleans convention of the Missouri Synod further action on the part of the SELK would no doubt be deferred, pending additional developments within the Missouri Synod.

In this connection our Commission members urged that in view of the three-cornered relationship now existing, one that cannot continue indefinitely, SELK give special consideration and study to the implications which Missouri’s continued fellowship with the ALC and its partnership in the LCUSA have, and give equal attention to the fact that the Mission Affirmations were unanimously reaffirmed at the New Orleans convention.

Concerning the Ev. Lutheran Confessional Church of Germany (Bekennniskirche), it should be stated that in its last convention of 1972 it had declared itself to be in a formal state of confession over against the Missouri Synod because of the Missouri Synod’s (1) adoption of the Mission Affirmations, (2) fellowship principles as delineated in Theology of Fellowship, and (3) declaration of fellowship with the American Lutheran Church. Likewise the Ev. Lutheran Church - Synod of France and Belgium in its 1971 convention had declared itself to be in a protesting fellowship with the Missouri Synod.

The representative of the Ev. Lutheran Church - Synod of France and Belgium and of the Ev. Lutheran Confessional Church of Germany expressed their wholehearted approval of the developments which had taken place in our discussions with SELK. Thereupon our Commission issued the following statement:

Resolved, that we are ready to practice fellowship now with the SELK representatives here;

that we report this development to our Synod while awaiting full endorsement from the SELK Kirchenleitung (an administrative council similar to our Conference of Presidents) regarding this week’s action;

that after such formal endorsement on the part of the SELK Kirchenleitung, we would be ready to initiate the practice of church fellowship with SELK as such;

that prior to any formal declaration of such fellowship on the part of WELS, we would consider it necessary to seek formal approval also of the church bodies with which we are now in fellowship (Bekennniskirche, ELS, FAL, the Free Evangelical Lutheran Synod of South Africa, the Evangelical Lutheran Church - Synod of France and Belgium, the Lutheran Church in Southern Africa).

Resolved, that with deep joy and fervent thanksgiving to the God of all grace we greet the favorable outcome of the meetings of the past four days, an outcome that has come after many years of arduous discussion and opens the way to full church fellowship.

The second “Resolved” was adopted by all the participants at the meeting on July 20, 1973. The meeting was closed Friday evening, July 20th with a joint devotion in the Seminary chapel conducted by President O. Naumann and Dr. Jobst Schoene.

In response to this report, our Synod in convention passed the following resolution No. 3 regarding the Independent Evangelical Lutheran Church of Germany:

WHEREAS the Evangelical Lutheran Free Church of Germany (Saxon), the Evangelical Lutheran (Old Lutheran) Church (Breslau), and the Independent Evangelical Lutheran Church have formally merged to form a new church body called the Independent Evangelical Lutheran Church (Selbstaendige Evangelische Lutherische Kirche: SELK); and

WHEREAS the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod had been in confessional fellowship with the former Saxon and Breslau churches, but not with the former Independent Evangelical Lutheran Church; and

WHEREAS there were unresolved doctrinal questions which stood in the way of confessional fellowship with the Independent Evangelical Lutheran Church and on which our Commission on Inter-Church Relations was engaged in discussion with the three federated Lutheran church bodies which were in fellowship with each other before the merger; and

WHEREAS our Commission in its supplementary report to the convention now states that at the July 17-20, 1973, meeting at Mequon with representatives of SELK full agreement was reached in all previously unresolved doctrinal questions so that there are also no longer any divisive principles pertaining to church fellowship between WELS and SELK; and

WHEREAS our Commission reports that the newly-formed SELK had previously concurred in the protest of the former Evangelical Lutheran Free Church of Germany in regard to the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod's declaration of fellowship with the American Lutheran Church and the Missouri Synod's membership in the LCUSA; and

WHEREAS our Commission members urged that SELK's present position with regard to the Missouri Synod is one that cannot continue indefinitely; and

WHEREAS our Commission, on the basis of the doctrinal agreement reached, closed the Mequon meeting with the practice of, fellowship with the SELK representatives and

WHEREAS our Commission further stated that it would report this development to the Synod while awaiting full endorsement from the SELK Kirchenleitung (administrative council); and

WHEREAS our Commission stated that after such formal endorsement on the part of the Kirchenleitung it would be ready to initiate the practice of church fellowship with SELK as such; therefore be it

Resolved, a) That we recognize with joy and thanks to God the favorable outcome of these discussions between our Commission and the representatives of SELK; and be it further

Resolved, b) That, on the basis of the Commission's report of the doctrinal consensus with the representatives of SELK, we agree that the Commission's exercise of church fellowship with SELK representatives at the close of the meeting in Mequon was not out of harmony with our Synod's fellowship practice; and be it further

Resolved, c) That we concur in the Commission's recommended procedure whereby our Synod Praesidium would initiate the practice of church fellowship with the SELK upon formal endorsement by the SELK Kirchenleitung of the doctrinal agreement reached at Mequon, and upon the Commission's recommendations; and be it further

Resolved, d). That we concur with the Commission's statement that prior to any formal declaration of fellowship by the Synod with respect to-SELK we would seek formal approval of the church bodies with which we are now in fellowship; and be it finally

Resolved, e) That we join with our Commission in impressing on SELK the need to give special consideration to the implications of its continuing relation with the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod.

Under date of November 27, 1973 a formal communication was received from Dr. G. Rost, Bishop of the Independent Ev. Lutheran Church of Germany. According to Dr. Rost's communication, the following resolutions, (as translated) had been jointly adopted by the SELK Kirchenleitung (Administrative Council) and the SELK Kollegium der Superintendenten (Conference of Superintendents):

1. The SELK Administrative Council and Conference of Superintendents in their session at Bleckmar on November 15, 1973, have taken note of the outcome of doctrinal discussions held at Mequon, Wisconsin, in July of 1973, between the WELS Commission and the SELK delegation.

2. We express our approval of the outcome as recorded (Response of the WELS Commission of July 19, 1973, and Reply of the SELK delegation of July 20, 1973) in the written minutes (German & English) of the discussions. We are therewith proceeding from the premise that the determination of the length of the creation day (Reply of the SELK delegation, "The Inerrancy etc.," part 2) is of a philological-exegetical nature. We furthermore declare, in response to the wish expressed by the WELS Commission, that we reject a historical-critical method of Scriptural interpretation according to which every intervention of God into this world is impossible.

3. We gratefully welcome the resolution of the WELS Commission of July 20, 1973, and the resolution of the WELS convention of August 15, 1973, to continue with SELK the church fellowship which had previously existed with the Ev. Lutheran Free Church and the Ev. Lutheran (Old Lutheran) Church.

Upon receipt of the foregoing communication from Dr. Rost, our commission requested President Naumann to seek clarification regarding some of the wording in the resolutions of the SELK Administrative Council and Conference of Superintendents. The following (in translation) was thereupon included in a letter dated February 26, 1974, from President Naumann to Dr. Rost:

We rejoice that the Administrative Council and the Conference of Superintendents of the Independent Ev. Lutheran Church agree with the outcome of the discussions as recorded in the minutes. According to our understanding, this means that you also agree with the declaration of the representatives of SELK concerning the length of the creation days. This declaration is as follows: "The understanding that the Creation Days are days whose duration was determined by the function of sun and moon (Gen. 1:14) is also our understanding, to which we obligate ourselves as representatives of SELK."

We could expect, however, that a number of questions might be addressed to us when our commission reports to the districts of our Synod that complete unity of doctrine has been attained between our two church bodies.

The first question would concern itself with the second sentence under Point 2 of your communication of November 27, 1973. This sentence states "We are therewith proceeding from the premise that the determination of the length of the creation day Reply of the SELK delegation, "The Inerrancy. . .etc.," part 2) is of a philological-exegetical nature."

Before we make our report to the districts of our Synod, therefore, we would like to assure ourselves that the above sentence in no way restricts or tones down the outcome of our discussions concerning the length of the creation days. Speaking very frankly, we would be very thankful for an answer to this question: Does the above statement want to make of the duration of the creation days an exegetical question and finally regard the entire matter as an open question, that is, a question for which the Scriptures do not offer any answer?

We hope that your answer will reject any such understanding; for such an interpretation of the Scriptures concerning the duration of the creation days would annul the agreement in this matter between our Commission and the representatives of the honorable SELK and really leave this problem unresolved.

This question is of highest importance for us, for it involves the external clarity of Scripture. There is no basis, either philological or exegetical, which permits us to lengthen the duration of the creation days to a year or a month or any other period of time beyond that which is set forth in the creation account. The creation account allows us to understand the concept of the creation day only in such a manner as we normally understand the concept "day," namely, as a period of time regulated by the sun and moon. To pose the possibility of any other time period here, would violate the clear language of Genesis 1:14.

We therefore ask the honorable Independent Ev. Lutheran Church to clarify this matter for us. It is our earnest hope and prayer that our misgivings about this second sentence are unfounded.

Our Commission also noted with joy that the Administrative Council and the Conference of Superintendents of the honorable Independent Ev. Lutheran Church in accordance with the request of WELS included in its position a rejection of the historical-critical method of Scripture study. In the English minutes, which were kept at the doctrinal discussions, this request had been expressed in the following wording:

- Motion that since all present agree that the statement “this leaves no room for the historical-critical method of interpretation” ought to be appended, the German representatives ask their church body to consider this addition.
- Similarly the German minutes read (in translation): It is recommended to add the following addition to the first four theses: these statements leave no room for the historical-critical method. To which thesis this addition is to be made is left open.

The declaration transmitted to us, by using the wording of a preceding sentence in the German minutes, however, expresses itself in such a way that a historical-critical method according to which every intervention of God in this world is impossible is rejected.

This wording raised the question in our Commission whether with this formulation the rejection of the historical-critical method could not be understood by some to be a limited one. According to our conviction the historical-critical method is, however, to be rejected in principle, because it rejects intervention of God and direct revelation of God to man clearly asserted in Holy Scripture. This basic error of the method is also present where every intervention of God in this world is not ruled out with full consistency. A declaration against the historical-critical method of Scripture study which can be understood as being restricted would even prove disadvantageous in our vital common testimony before the Missouri Synod, for the historical-critical method of Scripture study which has been strongly advocated at Concordia Seminary and against which we as true Lutherans ought to take a clear position, is still of the kind that it does not reject every intervention of God in this world with full consistency.

We would be very grateful to you, venerable Bishop Rost, as well as to your Administrative Council, and the Conference of Superintendents of the Honorable SELK, for a further reply to these two questions which still cause us some misgivings. May the Lord in His grace grant us full unity also in this matter, so that together as confessional brethren we with one voice, may serve, praise, and thank Him.

Our Commission on Inter-Church Relations had to await further word from Dr. Rost and the Administrative Council of the Independent Ev. Lutheran Church in Germany.

Under date of August 8, 1974, President Naumann forwarded the following resolution to the SELK Kirchenleitung, which resolution had been adopted by our commission on July 18, 1974:

WHEREAS our Commission on Inter-Church Relations (formerly called the Commission on Doctrinal Matters) was not able to gain the assurance that the SELK Kirchenleitung’s communication of November 27, 1973, constituted a full endorsement of the doctrinal agreement expressed in the Mequon resolutions of July 1973; and

WHEREAS our Commission thereupon in a communication under date of February 26, 1974, requested clarification concerning the Kirchenleitung’s endorsement of the agreements reached on the nature of the creation days and on the rejection of the historical-critical method of Bible interpretation; and

WHEREAS our request for clarification was based on the premise that a formal declaration of church fellowship with SELK could be made only after a full endorsement by the SELK Kirchenleitung of the doctrinal agreement reached at Mequon; and

WHEREAS our Synod in convention also based its resolution concerning a future declaration of church fellowship with SELK on this same premise (cf. 1973 WELS Proceedings, page 92, Resolved, c); and

WHEREAS the communication from the SELK Kirchenleitung, under date of April 30, 1974, expressly states, however, that the clarifications given in response to our questions are offered with the understanding that such clarifications should not be considered necessary for the declaration of church fellowship between our two church bodies, and

WHEREAS all participants in the 1973 Mequon discussions agreed to an unqualified rejection of the historical-critical method of Scriptural interpretation; and

WHEREAS the SELK Kirchenleitung does not appear ready to give full endorsement to such an unqualified rejection of the historical-critical method; and

WHEREAS we know of no form or type of the historical-critical method of interpretation which would be Scripturally acceptable; and

WHEREAS the Kirchenleitung has declared that it is not ready to “dogmatize” the agreement reached at Mequon concerning the nature of the creation days; and

WHEREAS our Commission understands this declaration to mean that the agreement reached at Mequon on this point cannot be made the basis for church discipline where contradictory interpretations are held; and

WHEREAS the granting of such latitude in teaching disregards the external clarity of Scripture in this matter, limits the authority of Scripture, and violates the Scriptural principles of church fellowship; therefore be it

Resolved; a) That we recognize with deep disappointment that the doctrinal consensus on which the members of our doctrinal commission practiced fellowship with the SELK representatives after the Mequon discussions in July 1973 has not been upheld by the SELK Kirchenleitung; and be it further

Resolved, b) That the Commission on Inter-Church Relations state with regret that it therefore does not find itself in a position at this time to recommend a formal declaration of church fellowship with SELK to our Praesidium and to the 1975 convention of our Synod; and be it further

Resolved, c) That in the meantime we earnestly urge the SELK Kirchenleitung to reconsider the position that it has taken over against the doctrinal consensus reached by the participants of the Mequon discussions in July 1973; end be it finally

Resolved, d) That in its reconsideration the SELK Kirchenleitung be respectfully requested to give earnest consideration also to point (e) of our Synod’s resolution in 1973 relative to a declaration of fellowship with SELK, namely, “That we join with our Commission in impressing on SELK the need to give special consideration to the implications of its continuing relation with The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod.” (cf. 1973 WELS Proceedings, page 92, Resolved e; cf. also our Commission’s Supplementary Report, 1973 WELS Proceedings, page 89: “In this connection our Commission members urged that in view of the three-cornered relationship. . .New Orleans convention.”)

Under date of February 12, 1975, the following communication was thereupon received from the SELK Kirchenleitung:

In the Lord Jesus dearly beloved honorable men and brethren!

With deep regret the Kirchenleitung and the College of Superintendents of our Independent Ev. Lutheran Church have learned that you, our honored brethren, were not in a position to reach the conviction that our letter of November 27, 1973 (KL 1734/73) represented a full acknowledgement of the doctrinal agreement reached at Mequon in July 1973. In your resolution of July 18, 1974, you expressed the conviction that the doctrinal consensus, on the basis of which the members of your doctrinal commission practiced church fellowship with the representatives of our church after the discussions at Mequon in July 1973, has not been sustained by our Kirchenleitung.

In several sessions we have considered in detail your evaluation of our position taken in November 1973. This was done in the meeting of the College of Superintendents and the Kirchenleitung on November 8 and 9, 1974; in a consultation on December 10, 1974 with the commission which, represented our church at Mequon; and in two meetings of our Kirchenleitung. On the basis of our discussions we declare emphatically that we accepted the doctrinal agreement arrived at in Mequon and wanted to give it the formal approval asked of us. It was not our intention to raise reservations or limitations in regard to the minutes and declarations of Mequon. Our concern was rather to assert and approve no more and no less than is recorded in the above-mentioned minutes and declarations. We emphasize once more that this was our intention and do this

with the firm confidence that your honorable Synod is also satisfied with the declarations and results of Mequon and will raise no further demands or determinations, beyond these.

Under these presuppositions we should like once more to declare the following to clarify our letter of November 27, 1973:

The Kirchenleitung and College of Superintendents of the Independent Ev. Lutheran Church agree with the recorded results (answer of the WELS commission of July 19/ answer of the SELK delegation of July 20, 1973), as they were arrived at on the basis of the minutes.

This agreement includes the assurances that the Independent Ev. Lutheran Church rejects the historical-critical method of Scripture interpretation according to the wording of the minutes of the Mequon meeting (II-A,3; II-B,3), and rejects any and every method of Scripture interpretation which calls the authority of Holy Scripture into question.

We can assure you furthermore that we are aware of and concerned about the problems of a split church fellowship which results from our simultaneous fellowship with the Missouri Synod and with the Wisconsin Synod, which two bodies are not in fellowship with each other. We realize that we are under obligation to give this problem our continued attention and carefully observe any further developments.

We hope that with the above statements we may have satisfied your concerns, dear honored brethren, and assume that you can now recommend the declaration of pulpit and altar fellowship to your honorable Synod's convention without further difficulties. We therefore confidently look forward to your further reply.

In the fellowship of our common faith and confession we greet you,

The Kirchenleitung and College of Superintendents of the Independent Ev. Lutheran Church,
Dr. Gerhard Rost, Bishop

The next communication from our commission to the SELK Kirchenleitung, under date of March 19, 1975, is as follows:

WHEREAS the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod Commission on Inter-Church Relations has conducted all its doctrinal discussions with the Federated Lutheran Free Church of Germany and subsequently with the Selbstaendige Evangelisch-Lutherische Kirche on the premise that full doctrinal consensus was necessary for the establishment of church fellowship between our two church bodies, and that such consensus would have to reflect itself in the practice of our two church bodies, and that any deviation from such consensus would have to become a matter of doctrinal discipline (Cf. A MESSAGE OF FRATERNAL CONCERN, 1970, and A MEMORANDUM FOR ADDITIONAL DOCTRINAL DISCUSSIONS, 1971); and

WHEREAS the 1973 Mequon agreement relative to the previously unresolved issues between our two church bodies-was based on the aforementioned premise; which premise was recognized by all the participants; and

WHEREAS the SELK Kirchenleitung's official responses (November 1973 and February 1974) to the Mequon agreement did not acknowledge this premise, for it was not willing to make the consensus on the creation days a matter of doctrinal discipline where contradictory positions are upheld; and

WHEREAS such a leeway in teaching compelled our commission to state in its July 1974 communications to the SELK Kirchenleitung that "the granting of such latitude in teaching disregards the external clarity of Scripture in this matter limits the authority of Scripture, and violates the Scriptural principles of church fellowship"; and

WHEREAS the subsequent receipt of the SELK July 1974 INFORMATIONEN, Number 2, confirmed our judgment that the SELK Kirchenleitung had not recognized the basic premise on which the Mequon agreement had been reached; e.g., page 34: "that this document (the agreement at Mequon) was not drawn up for the purpose of exercising doctrinal discipline. . ."; and

WHEREAS the same issue of INFORMATIONEN, No. 2, expresses willingness to extend church fellowship to our Wisconsin Synod, though it again voices strictures concerning the WELS position on church

fellowship, e.g., page 28: "For Wisconsin church fellowship is not only participation in the marks of the church. . . From this follow the characteristically Wisconsin conclusions, which we can hardly understand, like the refusal of joint prayer with Christians with whose churches one is not in full church fellowship; and

WHEREAS our Commission on Inter-Church Relations has now received a communication from the SELK Kirchenleitung under date of February 12, 1975, expressing approval of the doctrinal consensus reached at Mequon in 1973; and

WHEREAS this communication at the same time gives no indication that the Kirchenleitung now acknowledges the premise on which the Mequon agreement was based (no assurance that the consensus on the creation days will be used as a basis for doctrinal discipline); and

WHEREAS the December issue of INFORMATIONEN, Number 3, and its supplement, "Declaration of Agreement by Confessing Lutheran Pastors," received shortly after the Kirchenleitung's communication of February 12, 1975, also indicate no change in the matter of acknowledging the basic premise on which the Mequon agreement was reached, e.g., INFORMATIONEN, page 33, "In general the KARITATIVE ZULASSUNG of such Bavarian-pastors is still in effect who in 1972 subscribed to the so-called OPEN WORD"; DECLARATION OF AGREEMENT BY CONFESSING LUTHERAN PASTORS with its definition of church fellowship restricted to the joint use of the means of grace; with its statements on ordination which make the Mequon agreement in this matter uncertain; in INFORMATIONEN No. 3 no mention of statements that had been made in INFORMATIONEN No. 2 concerning the Mequon meeting and its agreement which had disturbed us and for which our commission had formally asked for correction; therefore be it

Resolved, That our Commission on Inter-Church Relations must still state with regret that it does not find itself in a position at this time to recommend a formal declaration of church fellowship with SELK to our Praesidium and to the 1975 convention of our Synod.

WHEREAS the SELK Kirchenleitung's response relative to its relationship with The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod gives no consideration to the fact that in the eighteen-month interval since the Mequon meeting the official Missouri Synod has not departed from its unscriptural position on church fellowship, especially with the American Lutheran Church and with the LCUSA; and

WHEREAS our Synod had found it necessary in 1961, almost fourteen years ago, to terminate fellowship with The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, specifically because of its deviation from the Scriptural principles and practice of church fellowship; therefore be it

Resolved, That our Commission on Inter-Church Relations also for this reason cannot at this time recommend establishment of formal fellowship with a church body that still wishes to retain its fellowship with The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod.

In connection with the foregoing it should also be reported that the Ev. Lutheran Confessional Church of Germany (Bekennniskirche), at its convention in May 1974, resolved to seek a merger with the SELK. The Bekennniskirche, since its beginnings in Poland in the 1920's, has been supported by our Synod, and its decision to seek a merger with the SELK under present circumstances obviously placed our continued fellowship with the Bekennniskirche into serious question.

Under date of May 24, 1975, Bishop G. Rost of the Independent Ev. Lutheran Church of Germany (SELK) responded to our commission's communication of March 19, 1975 (reported to our 1975 synodical convention), on behalf of the SELK Kirchenleitung (governing body). The letter of Dr. Rost was carefully considered by our commission in the summer and fall of 1975. The main contents of Dr. Rost's letter are indicated in our reply. Under date of November 20, 1975, the following reply was sent to Bishop Rost:

In their meeting on September 19, 1975, the members of our Commission on Inter-Church Relations had your letter of May 24, 1975, before them. In this letter you respond in the name of the Selbstaeudige Evangelisch Lutherische Kirche to the March 15, 1975, resolutions of our commission. You candidly report that these resolutions created great consternation and perplexity in the Pfarrkonvent as well as in the Kirchenleitung. You point out that as a result the general thinking finally went into the direction that the discussions between

our two bodies had thus far not gone deep enough theologically, that in subsequent discussions we would have to lay a wider basis, and that the theological premises and issues underlying the discussions which had thus far been carried on would have to be more fully deliberated and expounded.

Our commission gave due attention to the consternation and perplexity which you report have been evoked by our resolutions of March 15. Upon due self-examination and a careful review of these resolutions, our Commission on Inter-Church Relations does not find itself in a position, however, to agree that this consternation and perplexity was brought about by our commission, or that such a response was inevitable because our commission constantly brought up new reasons why they could not recommend a formal declaration of church fellowship with SELK to our synodical convention. Just as little does our commission find the accusation justified that in various points it has disavowed the agreement reached at Mequon and in instances made itself guilty of demanding something that goes beyond the agreement. We cannot agree that because of such procedures our commission can properly be charged with raising legitimate doubts in SELK as to whether the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod is at all earnestly interested in a positive conclusion of its doctrinal discussions with SELK.

We find it necessary to point out that we do not find your letter factual in setting forth what constituted the agreement at Mequon. You state: "In Mequon there was full agreement in this that the basis of the consensus should be the resolutions of Mequon and the minutes of the discussions that were carried on there." To this we need to say that only the resolutions jointly adopted at the conclusion of the discussions, and any other positions recorded in the minutes as having been jointly endorsed and accepted, were the basis of the Mequon consensus.

The minutes themselves, both those drawn up in German and in English, were accepted by all the participants only in the sense that they were acknowledged as setting forth in a factual way, what had taken place and what had been said in the individual sessions.

The minutes of the individual sessions occasionally indicated that in certain points a consensus had not yet been reached. This was true concerning the declaration on the part of the SELK representatives to which you specifically refer, recorded in the German minutes of Thursday, July 19, 1973 (III-B): "The answer states that this document* (*The document meant was not the Mequon agreement but the SELK discussion document on Creation.) was not formulated for the purpose of exercising church discipline." That this declaration was actually made by the SELK delegates in this particular session is indeed acknowledged by the members of the WELS commission. Yet this does not mean that they agreed that a deviation from a scriptural position in the matter under discussion in this document need not be made a matter of church discipline. For our commission the SELK declaration that was made merely showed that in this particular point agreement had not yet been reached. Because there were still such disagreements the sessions were not yet opened and closed by joint devotions. The joint agreement in this particular matter was not reached until the SELK representatives stated "that the understanding that the creation days are days whose duration was determined by the function of the sun and moon (Gen. 1:14) is also our understanding to which we obligate ourselves as representatives of SELK." We could not understand "to obligate ourselves as representatives of SELK" in any other way than that it means to say that the SELK representatives acknowledged that this understanding of the creation days was the only one to which recognition could be given in SELK, and that a demand of recognition for a contrary understanding would eventually have to become a matter of church discipline. Not until agreement was reached on this matter as well as on all the other previously unresolved issues, did the participants in the Mequon discussions deem it fitting to close the sessions with joint prayer and to arrange for a joint worship service.

In your letter you state that the only theological point of difference according to the CICR resolutions which still stands in the way of church fellowship between our two church bodies is this that the SELK is not yet ready to take pastors into church discipline who do not assent to the statement that the creation days are determined by the sun and who therefore hold a divergent position. We hold that thereby this unresolved matter is unduly minimized in a manner that is not in harmony with the consensus reached at Mequon, in which this point of agreement was put under the heading: The Inerrancy and the Outward Clarity of Scripture With Reference to the Creation Days. The SELK representatives will agree that throughout the Mequon discussions

this was always the context in which the WELS position on the creation days was kept, and that the real concern of WELS lay in this context. It needs to be remembered that it was not the WELS representatives who originally raised the issue of the length of the creation days, but that it was first raised at the Bleckmar discussions by representatives of the old SELK in a critique of *This We Believe*. Already at that time the Wisconsin Synod representatives answered that we could not speak differently of the length of the creation days without violating the doctrine of the outward clarity of Scripture. The position held in a church body on the inerrancy and the clarity of Scripture is, however, one of the foremost issues of the day. It is most vital that a true Lutheran church maintains a sound position on this issue and manifests unwillingness to compromise it on any point.

What above all troubles the Commission on Inter-Church Relations is this, however, that the principal message of its March 15, 1975, resolutions has apparently been overlooked. What has really made it impossible for the Commission to recommend a WELS declaration of church fellowship with SELK is this that on the basis of all the communications received from the SELK Kirchenleitung it has not been able to come to the conviction that the basic premise on which the Mequon agreement was reached is being recognized. That is why we stated in the very first Whereas of the March 15, 1975, resolutions: "The Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod Commission on Inter-Church Relations has conducted all its doctrinal discussions with the federated Lutheran free churches of Germany and subsequently with the Selbststaendige Evangelisch-Lutherische Kirche on the premise that full doctrinal consensus was necessary for the establishment of church fellowship between our two church bodies, and that such consensus would have to reflect itself in the practice of our two church bodies, and that any deviation from such consensus would have to become a matter of doctrinal discipline."

The parenthetical reference to *A Message of Fraternal Concern*, 1970, and to *A Memorandum for Additional Doctrinal Discussions*, 1971, to which you object as irrelevant material, was merely to serve as a reminder that from the very beginning our discussions had operated with this premise. Therefore we go on to say in the second Whereas: "The 1973 Mequon agreement relative to the previous unresolved issues between our two church bodies was based on the aforementioned premise, which premise was recognized by all the participants."

If the participants in the Mequon discussions had not recognized and accepted this premise as the basis for establishing church fellowship, it would certainly have been placed on the agenda as the foremost item...and would have been debated before even entering upon the specific doctrinal points that did form the agenda.

What is adduced in all the other Whereas of our resolutions was merely to show that not only in the matter of the creation days but also with respect to other items on which agreement was reached at Mequon the premise is seemingly not recognized that such agreement must now reflect itself in practice, and that a divergent position in each instance would call for doctrinal discipline beginning with patient admonition.

If this premise is not accepted, then also the consensus reached in the unqualified rejection of the historical-critical method loses real meaning and robs us of assurance in this matter.

The Whereas concerning relations with The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod serve the same purpose of pointing out that Missouri's failure, during the long interval since the Mequon agreement of 1973, to bring its fellowship relations (ALC and LCUSA) into harmony with what Scripture requires as a basis for church fellowship once more makes the triangular relation of our two church bodies with The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod unscriptural and intolerable.

Also your letter of May 24, 1975, in behalf of the SELK Kirchenleitung affords no assurance that the SELK considers full unity of doctrine and practice as a necessary prerequisite for church fellowship.

You assert that the prevailing opinion in the discussion of our March 15 resolutions was this that the CICR resolutions went beyond the *satis est* of Augustana VII. We, on the other hand, are of the conviction that in substance the *satis est* is to be equated with what our resolutions of March 15, 1975, set forth as the premise for church fellowship in our first Whereas. These resolutions with all the Whereas were approved by our WELS in its 1975 convention.

We have felt compelled to express ourselves as candidly as you have in your letter, as to the cause, as we see it, that has kept the Mequon agreement from leading to a formal establishment of church fellowship

between our two bodies. Our Commission is of the conviction that the SELK communications since the Mequon discussions rather than those of the WELS Commission are invalidating the Mequon agreement.

On the other hand, we, too, still entertain the earnest desire for fellowship with the Selbststaendige Evangelisch Lutherische Kirche on the basis of a God-pleasing scriptural unity that has motivated us in all the unstinted efforts that our Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod has expended in carrying on doctrinal discussions during the past decade with SELK and with the federated Lutheran free churches that merged into SELK.

We also recognize that if additional efforts to reach agreement are to be made they will have to begin with a discussion of the unity which Scripture requires for the establishment and practice of church fellowship; for only if we have true agreement on the basic premise of a God-pleasing unity will we be able to reach agreement on individual points of doctrine and practice in which we obviously do not yet have an agreement that prevails throughout our two church bodies. To this help us, dear heavenly Father, for Jesus' sake.

In the meantime our former mission church in Germany, the Ev. Lutheran Confessional Church of Germany, has carried out its decision to merge with the Independent Ev. Lutheran Church of Germany. The merger went into effect as of January 1, 1976. Our Commission therefore regretfully recommends that our Synod now recognize that through this action the Ev. Lutheran Confessional Church of Germany has severed its confessional fellowship with our Synod.

In a letter to President O. J. Naumann under the date of June 25, 1976, our Commission on Inter-Church Relations received an official answer to its letter of November 24, 1975, from Bishop Gerhard Rost. After some introductory comments concerning the moving of the SELK headquarters to Hanover, Dr. Rost wrote as follows:

Not only the moving of our church's headquarters was, however, the reason why we have not answered the communication of the Wisconsin Synod until today. Rather, we have in the meantime considered the answers to your letter of May 25, 1975, very extensively and deliberated upon them in various committees. Not only has the Kirchenleitung repeatedly occupied itself with this matter but also the College of Superintendents have extensively counseled concerning the situation and the course indicated for the future.

We have not found it easy, venerable President Naumann, to convince ourselves that the relation between our churches is still to a very great extent unclarified. Very obviously the resolutions of Mequon were not an adequate expression for an ecclesiastical consensus. As the extensive correspondence has since shown, and as you yourself with your Commission on Inter-Church Relations have set this forth in your resolutions of March 15, 1975, and in the communication of November 20, 1975, there are weighty theological questions between our churches which have not really been solved as yet. To this belongs the doctrine of the inerrancy and of the outward clarity of the Holy Scriptures with special reference to the Creation days, and furthermore the doctrine of the church and of church fellowship. The Commission of the Wisconsin Synod had itself dispensed with a thoroughgoing clarification of the ecclesiological questions. Apart from these differing opinions concerning subject matter, the resolutions of Mequon are also quite obviously appraised very differently as to their character and their function. The Wisconsin Synod obviously proceeds from the viewpoint that these resolutions include doctrinal disciplines. Our commission, on the other hand, had expressly excluded such use of any eventual doctrinal agreements. Actually, the Wisconsin Synod has now critically measured all statements of SELK according to the resolutions of Mequon; also in instances when the statements were made in an altogether different context, as e.g., the SELK-Informationen or the "Consensus-Declaration of Confessing Lutheran Pastors."

We cannot withhold from you, venerable President Naumann, that it appears very strange to us, when our publications are obviously read by you, first of all, from the viewpoint of doctrinal review and doctrinal discipline and you always draw confirmation thereby for the conviction that church fellowship with SELK is not possible for a true Lutheran church. We, on the other hand, had believed, and were also willing to act accordingly, that in Mequon a basis of confidence was to be established, on which the churches involved, in

their unswerving commitment to Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions, were now to practice church fellowship with one another in the freedom and with the responsibility which the Gospel bestows. Thereby it was very far from our thought to want to impose specific forms of theological thinking upon you as they have developed in our German situation. I believe our readiness to forego pressing for the final formal agreement in the question of ecclesiology has proved this sufficiently. On the other hand, we, too, had not thought that we had to take over a specific form of theological thinking which according to our insights we cannot refrain from considering to be historically and geographically conditioned.

Perhaps we can be thankful that the misunderstandings and unclarities, which were inherent in Mequon, still became evident in time. The SELK would, venerable President Naumann, also not be any different if the resolutions of Mequon had been accepted by both churches without any difficulty. The "Consensus-Declaration of Confessing Lutheran Pastors," for example, would certainly not have had any other wording, and also our decision over against the Missouri Synod would not have been any different. To the present day we are of the opinion that we dare not weaken the conservative majority around President Preus by terminating church fellowship with it. We believe that the recent development concerning the deposing of four district presidents has substantiated our evaluation of the situation. If we were now in church fellowship, venerable President Naumann, you would undoubtedly, consistent with your principles, again have to terminate it very soon. The harm would then certainly have been much greater.

In spite of these deplorable realities which in themselves grieve us the most, we continue to consider it to be our duty to interpose for the unity of those churches who like we know themselves committed to the Holy Scriptures as the inerrant Word of God and to the Lutheran Confessions as its true and therefore binding exposition. Thus we would on our part like to confirm that we are very much intent upon the continuation of the doctrinal discussions with the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod. Of course, we will need much patience and intensive work for these doctrinal discussions, as we have set this forth in our mutual correspondence. The theological basis thus far for binding doctrinal agreements has obviously not been broad enough. In our opinion, the whole doctrine of the Holy Scriptures and the foundation for a true biblical hermeneutic must be placed under discussion anew. We believe that such a planned long-range discussion can only then be undertaken fruitfully if it is removed from the pressure of church political decisions. Therefore, for the time being the pertinent labors on our part will also not be undertaken by the Kirchenleitung or the College of Superintendents but rather will be transferred to our theological commission. We have already charged our commission to devote itself preeminently to questions of biblical hermeneutic. Of course, not only the viewpoints which have presented themselves through the discussions with the Wisconsin Synod are to stand in the foreground, but at the same time also those questions which are emphatically placed before us through our German theological and ecclesiastical situation. Under these circumstances the procedural forms in which the inter-church discussions between the Commission of the Wisconsin Synod and of SELK can be pursued further will first of all have to be developed. As soon as something has been produced by our theological commission which can serve as a basis for continued discussions we will make it available to your Commission for Inter-Church Relations.

We are of one mind with you, venerable President Naumann, that full believing obedience over against the Word of God must be the basis of the church, of its faith, of its confession, and of its testimony. Thus amidst all of our efforts this will be the most vital thing that we pray God the Holy Ghost incessantly that according to the promise of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ He lead us into all truth. He alone is the creator of the church and the guarantor of its unity. Yet the Lord Christ Himself has promised His own, that the heavenly Father will give the Holy Spirit to them who ask Him. Though at first glance it may therefore appear as though the situation between our churches could give cause for despondency, let us nevertheless trust the Creator-Spirit that He will overcome all of our impotence with His omnipotence. In this confidence of faith let us therefore pursue our future course with each other.

In the bond of faith in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ we therefore greet you, venerable President Naumann, and the members of your Commission on Inter-Church Relations the Kirchenleitung of the Independent Evangelical Lutheran Church, Dr. Gerhard Rost, Bishop.

At its recent meeting on September 24-25, 1976, our Commission on Inter-Church Relations deliberated on a proper reply to this most recent communication from SELK. Since it is to receive its final form at the January Commission meeting, we refrain from reporting on it.

This, much we are willing to say, that also in this reply, as in all the efforts on which we have reported in this paper, our Commission will be acting in accordance with convictions which our Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod already expressed in 1945, as it stated:

We realize clearly and deeply deplore the harm that is being done by the division in the Lutheran Church, but we are firmly convinced that the welfare of our Lutheran Church and of the Christian Church as a whole will be truly served only when we frankly acknowledge these differences in doctrine and practice as actually existing and as being divisive of fellowship, and when we then by a prayerful searching of the Holy Scriptures endeavor to arrive at the unity that is the work of the Holy Ghost. You will always find us most willing to take part in doctrinal discussions which have this purpose.