

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE DOCTRINAL POSITION OF THE WISCONSIN SYNOD DURING THE CENTURY OF ITS HISTORY

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[ESSAY READ BEFORE THE CENTENNIAL CONVENTION OF THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN SYNOD OF WISCONSIN AND OTHER STATES, ASSEMBLED AT ST. LUCAS CHURCH, MILWAUKEE, WISCONSIN, FROM AUGUST 3 TO 9, 1949]

Having rounded out a full century of its existence it is only natural for us, the present members of Joint Synod, to mark this event by standing still, as it were, in contemplation of the manifold blessings God in His mercy has bestowed upon our fathers and us in spite of the many failings and shortcomings on our part.

There were congregations of two Lutheran synods in the field, the Buffalo and the Missouri synods, when on December 8, 1849, three pastors, J. Muehlhaeuser of Milwaukee, J. Weinmann of Oakwood, and W. Wrede of Granville, met in the hall of Grace Church in Milwaukee and organized the German Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Wisconsin. They consolidated this organization by adopting the constitution which, according to a resolution of the former meeting, Muehlhaeuser submitted on May 27, 1850. He had been charged with drafting a constitution in harmony with the Confessions. How he succeeded is evidenced by the following quotations (Prof. J. Koehler's *History of the Wisconsin Synod. Faith Life*, Vol. XII, No. 1, p. 11): "Everything (in the congregation) should be in keeping with the true Word of the Bible and the confessions of our Evangelical Lutheran Church." ... "At ordination every candidate is pledged to the Unaltered Augsburg Confession and the rest of the Evangelical Lutheran Church's confessions, upon submission of the following questions: 1. Do you believe that the fundamental doctrines of Holy Writ are essentially and correctly contained in the Articles of Faith of the Unaltered Augsburg Confession and the rest of the Evangelical Lutheran Confessions? 2. Are you firmly resolved to use these as the doctrinal norm in your high office and always to teach accordingly?"—A good foundation of a Lutheran church body was thus laid by the fathers of Synod one hundred years ago.

What, then, do we mean by heading this essay "The development of the doctrinal position of the Wisconsin Synod"?

To avoid any misunderstanding, we wish to state from the outset we do not side with the modernistic or liberal teachers in Christendom who advocate and advance the opinion that it is the task of the theologian to develop the Christian doctrine in order to bring it into harmony with the findings of scientists, to make it acceptable to the man of the present age and his educational standing. Any dogma formulated according to these standards is, whatever else it may be, certainly not the Christian doctrine, the doctrine of Christ and the apostles and prophets laid down in the Bible. "Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 3, 11). Of the Christians it is said: "Ye are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone ... in whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit" (Eph. 2, 19–22). Jesus practically identifies Himself with the Bible when He says to the unbelieving Jews: "Search the Scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of Me" (John 5, 39). Before Pilate He testifies: "To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice" (John 18, 37). And furthermore: "I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father, but by Me" (John 14, 6). In His great intercessory prayer He asks the Father: "Sanctify them through Thy truth: Thy word is truth" (John 17, 17). And of this Word of God the Savior says: "Blessed are they that hear the Word of God, and keep it" (Luke 11, 28).

Many theologians of our day and former days, yes, many scholars in the Lutheran Church, tell us, the Word of God is contained in the Bible, and it is the task of the theologian to ascertain by his research work what in the Bible is God's Word and what is the opinion of the writers of the various Biblical books, merely

representing the human knowledge which they held in common with their contemporaries, and therefore of no permanent value and in no sense authoritative for us. But the apostle Paul gives these wise men the lie when he claims for himself and others: “Which things also we speak, not in the words which man’s wisdom teaches, but which the Holy Ghost teaches” (1 Cor. 2, 13). He asserts the Bible not merely *contains* God’s Word mixed with words of fallible human beings, but it *is* God’s Word from beginning to end, hence infallible in every statement. “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God” (2 Tim. 3, 16). Therefore the Bible is the only safe guide for us who are seeking a way to heaven. “The Holy Scriptures ... are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim. 3, 15). And he commends the Christians at Thessalonika: “When ye received the Word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but, as it is in truth, the Word of God” (1 Thess. 2, 13). Peter agrees when he says: “Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost” (2 Pet. 1, 21).

Our founding fathers had nothing in common with the rationalists and liberalists of their day. They were men that wholeheartedly accepted the Bible as the inerrant Word of God and the infallible guide for faith and life. They stood with us for everything just said with regard to the Scriptures. Nothing could be farther from the minds of those men than the intention of developing the Christian doctrine beyond, and away from, that which the Bible teaches. They had pledged themselves to preach and teach in conformity with the Lutheran Confessions because of their conviction that these are nothing more or less than a clear exposition of the Word of God. And indeed, our Confessions speak with unmistakable clarity with regard to the Christian doctrine and condemn all aberrations from it. We read, for instance, in the Formula of Concord: “The Holy Scriptures alone remain the only judge, rule, and standard, according to which, as the only test-stone, all dogmas shall and must be discussed and judged, as to whether they are good or evil, right or wrong. But the other symbols and writings cited are not judges, as are the Holy Scriptures, but only a testimony and declaration of the faith, as to how at any time the Holy Scriptures have been understood and explained in the articles in controversy in the Church of God by those then living, and how the opposite dogma was rejected and condemned” (*Triglot*, p. 779, § 7, 8). And: “We receive and embrace with our whole heart the Prophetic and Apostolic Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the pure, clear fountain of Israel, which is *the only true standard by which all teachers and doctrines are to be judged*” (*Triglot*, p. 581, § 1). The Augsburg Confession in the article treating of Ecclesiastical Power speaks out against doctrinal development in these words: “Whence have the bishops the right to lay these traditions upon the Church for the ensnaring of consciences, when Peter, Acts 15, 10, forbids to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, and Paul says, 2 Cor. 13, 10, that the power given him was to edification, not to destruction?... Did the *Holy Ghost* in vain forewarn of these things?” (*Triglot*, p. 89, § 42; p. 91, § 49). In answer to the refutation of the Augsburg Confession of which the Roman adversaries boasted we quote the following pertinent remark in the Apology of the Augsburg Confession: “You have now, therefore, reader, our Apology, from which you will understand not only what the adversaries have judged (for we have reported in good faith), but also that they have condemned several articles contrary to the manifest Scripture of the Holy Ghost, so far are they from overthrowing our propositions by means of the Scriptures” (*Triglot*, p. 101, § 9).

When a Church once is cut loose from the safe moorings of God’s immutable Word, God is not its steersman anymore; man is at the helm. Let us beware. The Catholic Church and the Reformed Church are professing the Bible to be the Word of God. But the former has placed the voice of the Church in the unwritten traditions, the decretals of the Church Councils, and the pronouncements of the popes beside the Holy Scriptures as norm for faith and life. The latter teaches the Holy Ghost is not in need of the Bible as His vehicle. He operates independent from the Scriptures in conversion and sanctification. Both these Churches in effect dethrone the written Word of God. The Catholics consider the pope the inerrant, infallible interpreter of the Bible whose word is binding for all his adherents. The Reformed, since the time when Zwingli rejected the clear words of the institution of the Lord’s Supper because they are beyond rational understanding, have actually made the Word of the Bible the servant of human reason.

Rationalism, as this rule of reason is called, held also the Lutheran Church in thrall from the middle of the eighteenth to the beginning of the nineteenth century. When in the providence of God the time had come,

the proud temple of humanity, which rationalism had tried to erect on the ruins of the Christian Church, collapsed in the holocaust of the French Revolution and the catastrophe of the Napoleonic era. This debacle plunged many, especially among the cultured, into the abyss of atheism and materialism. The dominion of the rule of reason in the Church had come to an end—or so we are told by historians. And it is true, many in the forefront of the last century, bethought themselves of the long-discarded faith of their fathers. A resurgence of conservative Christianity set in. There was now, after man's effort to attain lasting happiness by the employment of his own reason had so dismally failed, a return to the Bible with its claim to be the revelation of the eternal God, in the hope of finding an answer to the questions which vexed men's souls. But rationalism was far from being dead; it had only gone under ground. For the renowned theologians and teachers in the Protestant churches did not then, and do not now, unquestionably bow to the authority of the Holy Bible as the only norm and source of the Christian doctrine, but substitute for it "Christian consciousness," "Christian experience," or the "regenerate heart," or the "sanctified ego" of the theologian. Whatever the phraseology may be, it means that not God and His Word, but man is the arbiter in matters of doctrine and faith.

The veiled or open denial of the central doctrine of Christianity, the justification of the sinner by grace alone through faith in the vicarious atonement of Christ, without the deeds of the Law, is the inevitable consequence. The slightest deviation from the Holy Scriptures leads to a rejection of the Gospel, directly or indirectly. However carefully it may be clothed with Biblical verbiage, how many passages may be adduced from Scripture, the Christian doctrine, that God is the author and finisher of our salvation, is annulled. Man is made to contribute something to his salvation in one way or another. He makes the final decision for or against his conversion and salvation by his attitude or conduct. But that is surely not the Gospel of Jesus Christ; no, it is the teaching of the law—the Law of God wrongfully applied, the Law which places all men under the curse of God, for all have sinned. This is not the Christian doctrine of salvation by grace, but the satanic doctrine of salvation by works.

The men assembled in Milwaukee on December 8, 1849, and at Granville on May 27, 1850, wanted to be, and actually were, Lutherans. Why did they found a new synod instead of joining the Missouri or the Buffalo Synod both of whom already had congregations and pastors in Wisconsin? Both were staunch and outspoken opponents not only of the Catholic Church but also of the Reformed Church and its several denominations, Presbyterians, Congregationalists, Methodists and the like, and held themselves strictly aloof from fellowshiping with their adherents in any manner. This attitude was not shared by our founding fathers.

They had been schooled in the mission institution of Barmen, and had been sent to America by the Langenberg Society. The members of this society, who financed the training of young men for pastoral work in America, belonged to the Evangelical Church, a union of Lutheran and Reformed churches. To gather their Protestant country men in America into congregations and to provide them with faithful shepherds was the avowed purpose of the "Langenberger Verein." Their emissaries were pledged to serve the German unchurched Protestants in this country, no matter whether they were Lutheran, or Reformed, or Evangelical. The congregations, so gathered by them, were at liberty to join a Lutheran, a Reformed, or an Evangelical church body, whichever might seem best.

Muehlhaeuser, the first president of the Wisconsin Synod, was born in Notzingen, Württemberg, in 1803. He learned the baker's trade. He was a Christian young man who later joined the Christian Young Men's Society (*Jünglingsverein*) in Basel. Here Christian Friedrich Spittler had founded the Basel mission society and school with the intention of carrying the Gospel to the heathen. He later started the *Pilgermission* (pilgrim mission) of St. Criscona near Basel. This man was not satisfied with sending missionaries into heathen lands while untold thousands at home were perishing. In his unfeigned, ardent love for Christ and his fellow men he conceived the idea of sending out lay missionaries, artisans and tradesmen, laboring men like the majority of the common people. They should, while working at their trade, by word and example influence the people with whom they were thus thrown together. They should work toward a rekindling of faith in them, many of whom were in spiritual darkness and Christians only in name. In furtherance of this purpose they were to distribute Christian tracts and other devotional literature also. Our Muehlhaeuser was the man whom Spittler chose to venture forth on a mission trip to Austria, where Evangelical Christians were living among the preponderantly

Catholic populace. He accepted the commission. Gaining his livelihood by working with his hands, he came in his travels as far as Hungary and Bohemia, testifying of the faith that was within him wherever a door was opened to him. With what success his untiring zeal for the cause of Christ's kingdom and the saving of souls was crowned we learn from a report of his journey, written by him at the insistence of Christian friends. In the city of Bruenn he not only met with the derision and mockery to which he had become accustomed, but his enemies hardening their hearts against his testimony of sin and grace, had him thrown into prison, accusing him of inciting the people to revolt against their government. Here he was incarcerated from March till October, 1832, when his innocence finally had been established. Two Jews were jailed with Muehlhaeuser to their eternal gain. For through his witness both were converted and accepted Jesus of Nazareth as the promised Messiah of the Old Testament. The police commissioner and one of the policemen who escorted him to the frontier after his release were won for Christ through his effort. He reached his home after an absence of three years and nine months.

In 1835 Muehlhaeuser entered the Barmen mission seminary. It seemed, however, questionable to his teachers if he at his age could readily overcome the difficulty of familiarizing himself with the languages which he would have to use in the foreign mission field. As there was an urgent need for men of his caliber among the German immigrants in North America, he was designated for this work. Consequently, he was sent to America and arrived here in 1837. He began his work in New York City by opening a Christian day school for German children and serving as lay missionary at the same time. He had proved his fitness for this type of work in his travels in Europe. During that time he had gained valuable experience in winning the strayed sheep of his own nationality and language back for Christ. After spending some time in New York he accepted, on the advice of the American Lutheran pastors with whom he had become acquainted, a call as pastor of a congregation in Rochester, N.Y., where he served for ten years. While here, he joined the New York Ministerium, one of the synods constituting the General Synod.

In New York Muehlhaeuser had come in contact with the "Old Lutherans" (*Altlutheraner*), so called in distinction to those Lutherans in Germany who chose to remain in the Evangelical Church, the recently formed union of the two great Protestant church bodies. There was, as may well be imagined, a good deal of animosity between the Lutherans within the union and those who rejected it. Muehlhaeuser shared the view of the Barmen men who felt conscience-bound to stand shoulder to shoulder with all who loved the Savior, regardless of doctrinal and confessional differences, against the powers of darkness. These men saw two enemies, tools of the old evil foe, against whom they had to contend. One was the Roman Catholic Church with the pope as its head, the other rationalistic unbelief which for so long a time had wrought such dreadful devastation throughout Protestant Christendom. They were especially geared to wield the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God, against Rationalism, that deadly foe that kept the starving sheep of Christ away from the green pastures and the still waters of the Gospel of the crucified Savior, and fed their hungry souls with the dry husks of legalistic morality instead. It is one thing—and indeed a grave danger to be beset by an enemy from the outside, and calls for constant vigilance on the part of the defenders. This typifies the position of the Catholics who, after all, were on the other side of the wall. But it is certainly quite another thing, is incomparably more serious, spells imminent death and destruction, when the foe has scaled the ramparts and is attacking from within the citadel. That was the case with Rationalism attacking the Protestant churches from within. In this desperate struggle, where it is a question of life or death, the defenders of Christianity had to close ranks if they were to overcome their common enemy. That was the situation as the men in Barmen, Muehlhaeuser and his early associates in America with him, saw it.

By a report from Wisconsin, a recently arrived Barmen emissary, Pastor Weinmann, who was in charge of a congregation in Oakwood Township to the south of Milwaukee, Muehlhaeuser was so deeply moved that he resigned at Rochester and came to Milwaukee in 1848. A candidate Wrede, also sent by the Langenberger Gesellschaft, arrived in Wisconsin at about the same time and served a congregation north of Milwaukee in the town of Granville. The Lutheran Muehlenberg, making visits from house to house, became acquainted with pastors of several Reformed congregations and soon had gained their friendship. They became so interested in his work that they encouraged, even helped him to gain a foothold and establish a German congregation of his

faith. This was highly displeasing to the Old Lutherans who were already on the ground. They considered Muehlenberg and his like-minded friends traitors to the cause of the Lutheran Church, and denied them recognition as fellow Lutherans. Their aloofness was deeply resented by the three Barren men who, in turn, looked upon the Buffalo and Missouri representatives as narrow-minded bigots. The relations between them were anything but pleasant. Reason enough for our three men not to intrude where they were not wanted and to establish a Lutheran synod of their own.

One hundred years have come and gone since those days. All the men of that generation of Lutheran pioneers, both the leaders of that period and their followers, have been summoned hence long ago. We, their successors in the work they have begun, should, in our retrospection over that stretch of time, be capable of judging objectively between right and wrong in the conduct of both parties. To do this fairly we must try to get an understanding of their divergent historical background, of the environment in which they had lived, and the motives which led to their emigration.

The Old Lutherans were people that had left their homes in Germany for reasons of conscience. The founders of the Buffalo Synod, because they objected to the union of the Lutheran and Reformed churches into the Evangelical Church. There seemed to be no other choice left to them than either to agree against their conviction and yield to the strong pressure brought to bear upon them, or to leave the country of their birth and seek a domicile elsewhere. The founders of the Missouri Synod, because their rationalistic church government was oppressing and persecuting them for their clinging to Lutheran doctrine and practice. The Buffalo people were led by Pastor J. A. A. Grabau, who tried to preserve the Lutheran Church by stressing the superiority of the church body (synod) and of the clergy, whom the congregations owed obedience. For this purpose Grabau made much of the old Lutheran Church Ordinances (*Kirchenordnungen*), which he tried to transplant to American soil. It goes without saying that these people were bitterly opposed to all unionistic endeavors, in consequence of which they left Germany. The Missouri men were still smarting under the terrible experience they had gone through some ten years ago in connection with the downfall of their bishop Stephan, at whose instigation they had emigrated and settled in Missouri. His exposure had engulfed them in such confusion that they seriously doubted whether they were still Christians and their pastors divinely called ministers of Christ or false prophets, wolves in sheep's clothing. After this storm of dissension and confusion had finally subsided, chiefly through the Scriptural counsel and sobriety of young Pastor C. F. W. Walther of St. Louis, they were firmly resolved to listen henceforth to no other voice than that of the Lutheran Confessions which they accepted as the true presentation of the Word of God. They were now more determined than ever to lay the foundation for an orthodox Lutheran Church in this land of religious liberty. Therefore they shunned all attempts at fraternization with people not of their own faith. For this not only the outspoken religious liberals and rank unbelievers heaped ridicule on them, but they were also harshly reproached by members of other Christian churches, from whom they remained separate, for their confessional staunchness and for their zeal to avert contamination with false doctrine.

The German background of the founders of the Wisconsin Synod was an altogether different one. They did *not* separate themselves from the Church of their fatherland when they left it. It was *not* for reasons of conscience and from the desire to establish a church of their choice and after their own heart, *not* because they had felt it impossible to live and confess their faith in their old environment, why they had left Germany. Their estimation regarding the situation in the churches there was not at all in accord with views the Old Lutherans held. No, far from severing the bonds, they kept in close touch with the Christians over there who fought so valiantly in defense of the cause of Christ against the encroachments of naked or hidden unbelief. Of this fight they had been witnesses, and one of them, Muehlhaeuser, had himself stood in the battle line. The love to their Christian fathers and brethren, combined with their sense of duty toward them as whose emissaries they had come to America, impelled them to heed the directions given them when they received their commission. Our founding fathers came from circles in which Lutheran and Reformed Christians had joined in the defense of Christianity against the prevailing rationalism in the pulpits of their churches, and in the effort to dispel the stark spiritual darkness and ignorance in the broad masses of the people. They had been trained by teachers who deemed it a sacred duty to confess the truths of the Word of God within the united Evangelical Church, and who

had inculcated their pupils with the same spirit. In view of this it should not be surprising that these fathers of our synod, although they had founded a Lutheran Synod, nevertheless ministered also to Reformed Christians until they were able to call a pastor of their own confession. They did so in all innocence and simplicity and could see no harm in it, as long as they were free to preach the Gospel according to their convictions. And still existing documents show they usually found no reason for complaint on that score. They were anxious to save their countrymen in this foreign land from falling into unbelief or from joining one of the many sects which spared no effort to gather them in. They had emigrated with this one purpose uppermost in their minds: to bring the straying sheep of Christ of German nationality back to the fold of the Good Shepherd by the preaching of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments.

So much for the historical background. Now which of these two groups of Lutherans antagonizing each other was right, which was wrong? The Old Lutherans, viz., Buffalo and Missouri, the champions of strictness in doctrine and practice, or our Wisconsin men, representatives of a "mild" Lutheranism, similar to that in vogue among the Lutherans in the eastern states? Before we enter upon an answer we would do well to inquire into the motivation behind the question. After all, these men have departed this life long ago and are beyond our reach. Surely then, if we tried to decide this question of right and wrong with any other thought in mind than to learn from their example and to profit by their mistakes, we would do better to drop the question. For we of today can neither bask in the sunshine of the virtues of the people of a century ago, nor can we blame ourselves, or be blamed by others, for any wrong our spiritual ancestors have done. In letting the history of the beginning of our synod pass in review before our eyes, in order to arrive at an answer to our question, we are struck by the thought, the Wisconsin Synod has certainly come a long way since then.

We are in agreement with the Old Lutherans of a century ago when they frowned upon the fraternal cooperation of the Wisconsin Synod pioneers with non-Lutherans not only in externals but also in spiritual matters: occasional pulpit, altar, and prayer fellowship. It is quite true, none of us is condoning such actions of the early Barmen men, when their leniency toward people of the Reformed and Evangelical branches of Christendom exceeded the Scriptural bounds and deteriorated into toleration of errors which they otherwise rejected, became in fact doctrinal laxity. We agree that thereby they laid themselves open to the charge of repudiating what they were confessing by word of mouth. Where we stand today, we are baffled by the glaring inconsistencies of which they were capable. Looking back over the chasm of a hundred years which lie between them and us we are tempted to doubt their assurances of loyalty to the Lutheran Confessions and the truth of Scripture which they expound. If we gave room to this doubt, we would be making the same mistake the Old Lutherans made at that time. Our fathers, like the Old Lutherans, attempted to build in this country the Lutheran Church they loved. They obviously could only do that with what convictions they had brought over from their home land. The Old Lutherans on their part naturally went at this task on the basis of their convictions regarding confessional Lutheranism for the sake of which they had suffered and had left the land of their fathers. They were steeled and had gained strength in their battle for confessional purity. On the other hand, the confessionalism of our fathers had not been tried and purified in the furnace of persecution. Hence their confessional consciousness was weak compared with that of the former. If the Old Lutherans would have shown more understanding for this different background, would have treated the Barmen men as fellow Lutherans, as brethren who were weak, but brethren nevertheless, in the spirit of the love the Savior displayed toward His weak and erring disciples, the weak would have probably sought and gladly accepted succor from the strong. Ugly denunciations hurled at them privately and publicly could have easily been avoided without in any way militating against a firm testimony to the truth and against the errors of our fathers in their practice. As it was, the almost contemptuous treatment they received at the hands of the Old Lutherans, the haughty condescension with which they met occasionally caused hurt and confusion, and kept them away from the synods already at work in Wisconsin. These early Wisconsin men certainly did not lay claim to being perfect; they were no angels, but neither were the Old Lutherans.

Right or wrong? Who are we to lay on the measuring stick to ascertain which is the winner? It rather behooves us to close this discussion with a word of St. Paul which our synodical fathers and the Old Lutherans alike readily applied to themselves: "There is no difference; for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of

God” (Rom. 3, 22. 23), and with David’s prayer: “Enter not into judgment with Thy servant; for in Thy sight shall no man living be justified” (Ps. 143, 2).

Before taking final leave from this chapter dealing with the founding of the Wisconsin Synod, another reason must be mentioned why the Barmen men did not join the Old Lutherans. Buffalo and Missouri, both laying claim to Lutheran orthodoxy, were in the midst of a bitter controversy. At the time of the founding of our synod, Buffalo congregations here in Wisconsin were strongly agitated by inner strife which too often ended in a split. The complaining groups, vainly protesting against priestly tyranny, were, after an investigation, accepted by the Missouri Synod and supplied with pastors. Which group of Old Lutherans should our fathers join? Both looked down upon them as Lutherans in name only. The conditions prevailing in the Old Lutheran camp were not of a nature to attract them and to induce them to join either one or the other of the embattled groups.

At the end of one hundred years of its history, what a change in its doctrinal position the Wisconsin Synod has undergone! And the same is true in regard to the church bodies then called Old Lutherans. Buffalo is merged with the former Iowa and Ohio Synods in the American Lutheran Church. This Church sees itself in the role of conciliator of the contending Lutheran factions in our country. It has extended an invitation to negotiate, for the purpose of attaining full cooperation, to the United Lutheran Church with which it is working together already in the National Lutheran Council, and also to the Synodical Conference. It frankly acknowledges that doctrinal differences exist, but holds they need not keep Lutherans apart any longer, need not prevent them from joining in the work the Lord has commissioned His Church on earth to do. It predicates these differences in doctrine are not divisive of church fellowship. It is no secret that in our sister synod of Missouri there are men today, among them such as by virtue of their prominence wield a powerful influence in their synod, who look with favor on this invitation and its motivation, and are ready to grasp the outstretched hand of fellowship held out to them. More, one incident after the other is reported in the secular press and in church periodicals which shows Missouri men in actual fellowship with Lutherans from whom Missouri has been separated for doctrinal reasons for a period of fifty to seventy-five years and longer.

Our synod had raised its voice in warning and protest against this anticipation of doctrinal unity before it has been actually established. Seemingly in vain! For no public reprimand has found its way into the press, while the unionistic activities have found the widest publicity and commendation. Grave confusion in the minds of Christians within and outside the Synodical Conference is the inevitable consequence. Many are seriously concerned about the course the Missouri Synod, this champion of Lutheran orthodoxy, is steering, while others shout gleeful approval. More and more the impression is gaining ground that the demeanor of the “liberals” is, if not sanctioned, at least condoned by the silence of the officials whom synod has entrusted with the exercise of doctrinal discipline.

II

For the first ten, fifteen years after its establishment the Wisconsin Synod drew its personnel of workers from Germany. Most of them came from Barmen, some from the Berlin mission school, a few from Basel. One appeal after the other was addressed by President Muehlhaeuser to the German friends for laborers in the fields “white already to harvest” (John 4, 35), waiting for faithful pastors. The Langenberg Society and a similar one in Berlin did all they could, which was never enough, to supply the demand. In 1853 came Johannes Bading, trained in Hermannsburg by Louis Harms and then in Barmen. After Muehlhaeuser’s insistent refusal of the presidency, Bading was elected president in 1860, a position he held for many years with brief interruptions. Other Barmen men taking up work in our synod, to name a few, were Philipp Koehler since 1854, Philipp Sprengling since 1856, C. Gausewitz since 1859. To these Barmen emissaries, more than to anyone else, belongs the credit for a stiffening in the attitude toward confessional Lutheranism in the young synod. Synod was, although many lapses occurred, striving to become what it was in name, a truly Lutheran Church. They had been under the tutelage of Inspector Johann Christian Wallmann, who was at the helm of the Barmen mission institution since 1849. He was an outspoken Lutheran and knew how to influence his students and to imbue them with his spirit. He remained there till 1857 when he moved to Berlin to become director of the

Berlin mission house, which has also furnished some pastors for our synod. It was conducted and financed by Lutherans in the Union, i.e., in the Evangelical Church. For a better understanding of the conduct of the affairs of our synod in those days we must remember that Wallmann and many Lutherans of that time had no objection to a combination of the two Protestant Churches in matters of administration. They considered a permanent organization for cooperation in externals, as the Union was proclaimed to be, feasible, something to which they could submit without violating their conscience. To what they were willing to agree was an administrative union. What they opposed was an absorptive union, i.e., a union in which the distinctive characteristics of their Lutheran Church were erased, and the doctrinal differences between the Lutheran and the Reformed Church treated as nonessential remnants of a former age. We may be sure the former pupils of Wallmann shared these views. What can we expect of these Barmen-trained pastors of our synod but that they regulated their conduct in relation to the Reformed Christians, with whom they had to deal in the pursuance of their work, after the pattern set by Wallmann!

How dangerous it is to combine men of different faith for cooperation in externals, the history of the past hundred years has made evident. The Evangelical Church of Prussia, conceived as a cooperative agency in matters of administration, has factually become a new Church, a substitute for the two separate Protestant Churches. The controversies which had formerly agitated the two Churches so much that, because of them, the frequent attempts of uniting them had failed, were definitely obviated as something belonging to the past, the sooner forgotten, the better. What is permissible in the Evangelical Church, is a discussion of different religious opinions. The Lutheran in the Union may, indeed, cling to his without, however, condemning the views of the Reformed as false doctrine. A recent demonstration of the trend toward anti-Scriptural unionism when Churches, not one in confession, create a standing agency for collaboration in matters which apparently have nothing whatever to do with Christian doctrine we have much closer at home, in the National Lutheran Council and its development. It was born out of the exigencies of the first World War. The spiritual care for our members in the armed forces and later the duty of love to minister to the needy in Europe, especially to those of our own faith, involved the Church in negotiations with the state. How much these negotiations could be expedited if one voice, instead of many, would speak in the name of all Lutherans in our land to the public authorities seemed quite obvious. So it developed that synods in more or less friendly relations with each other conceived the plan of organizing the National Lutheran Council for the aforementioned purpose. Although it was specifically stipulated that it was in no wise concerned with the unification of the Lutheran church bodies, but was only to serve as agent of the participating synods for cooperation in external matters, the synods of our Synodical Conference did not join in this endeavor, fearing the possible implications of such a step and the probably wrong impression created in the minds of Christians in the various camps. How right we then were in taking this stand has been abundantly proved by further developments. The National Lutheran Council has become a permanent organization through which the member synods are doing physical and spiritual welfare work abroad and at home. Through this agency they are not only feeding and clothing the needy in the war-torn countries, but are also aiding and supporting Lutheran Churches in building and repairing their houses of worship, by contributing to the salaries of their pastors, and by conducting for them the heathen mission work on foreign continents in the fields where the European Churches, as an aftermath of the late war, are not permitted to work for the present or are unable to do so for lack of man power.

Does it not seem almost unavoidable that Churches of a different confession which band together for the purpose of showing a united front to the unbelieving world or to the state and thus making a greater impact on the forces of evil, do so at the danger of degenerating into unionism, indifferentism, and unbelief? For when two contradictory tenets have equal standing in a Church, that spells spiritual bankruptcy; it spells a despair of ever coming to the knowledge of the truth; it means indifference toward the truth, dismissing the question: "What is truth?" with a shrug, as Pilate did. This despair of the possibility of knowing the truth goes under the name of agnosticism; in plain English it is unbelief.

How thankful we should be on the hundredth birthday of our Synod that God, by His patient guidance and forbearance, has taught our fathers and through them us, to cling firmly and consistently, regardless of any other consideration, to His Word and to resist all error whatever form it may take! In His Word alone we find

peace and security against the accusations of Satan and our own conscience. Because it assures us of the forgiveness of sins, and life and eternal salvation through the blood of the Lamb which was slain for us on Golgotha, we say with the Psalmist: "How sweet are Thy Words unto my taste! Yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth! Through Thy precepts I get understanding; therefore I hate every false way. Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path" (Ps. 119, 103. 104. 105). May we present members of the Wisconsin Synod, and the generations after us, if it pleases God to delay His day of Judgment, be mindful of this Word of Jesus: "If ye continue in My Word, then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8, 31. 32). Making common cause with men who are either adhering to false doctrine or are indifferent to the truth is itself a denial of the truth, leading into unbelief and ending in destruction. We, therefore, abhor with all our heart all unionism, and avoid those that cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine we have learned from the Word of God (Rom. 16, 17).

The editors of our church papers and the professors of our theological seminary have declined invitations to conferences with men holding similar positions in other Lutheran synods, outside of the Synodical Conference chiefly for two reasons: 1) an acceptance would have been misinterpreted, they feared, as signifying that former doctrinal differences are not in existence anymore, since their discussion was not the first or, at any rate, the foremost topic on the program; 2) because they feared that such friendly gatherings might tend to dull their testimony and to dim their eyes of perception against the lurking danger of a compromise. The promoters of these meetings want to serve the cause of Christ thereby; of this there can be no doubt. But do they? The press reports are usually full of praise for the cordiality of the participants, of the brotherly spirit in which the meetings were conducted. The probable effect such reports make on our brethren with whom we are one in confession, will be that they are not strengthened but weakened in their convictions regarding pure doctrine on one side and false doctrine on the other.

We are not forgetting for one moment, no, we are rejoicing, that there are many Christians, many believers, in the Churches with which we are not in doctrinal agreement, be they called Lutheran or by another name. They are the children of God through their faith in Christ Jesus, even as we, and are indeed our brethren. Again, we know very well, and regret it, that not every member in our Church is automatically through this outward membership a true believer and our brother in Christ. But it is not for us to judge the secret things of the heart. "Man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart" (1 Sam. 16, 7). "The Lord knoweth them that are His" (2 Tim. 2, 19). For the sake of the saving Gospel still heard in heterodox (false) churches we accept the word of a member of such a church at its face value that he is a Christian. Nevertheless we do not call him brother lest our warnings against the deadly poison of false doctrine in his Church lose its weight. We do not fellowship him, either at the altar or in the pulpit, or at prayer, in obedience to St. Paul's admonition to mark and avoid them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which we have learned (Rom. 16, 17).

By God's undeserved mercy we have been brought by Him to the knowledge of the truth which makes us free from fear of sin, death, and the devil. This most precious treasure is ours as long as we do not deviate from, but continue in His Word. Instead of sitting together with men with whom we are not in doctrinal unity in consultation about extraneous matters, like methods of teaching or the most effective way of bringing our message to the attention of our people, we would do well to learn how to walk circumspectly from the apostle John when he addresses the "elect lady and her children": "If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not in your house, neither bid him God speed; for he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds" (2 John 10. 11). And let us ponder, seriously ponder the question the Lord once put to His people through Amos, the ancient seer: "Can two walk together, except they be agreed?" (Amos 3, 3).

In their conduct toward and their intercourse with Christians in other Churches the early Wisconsin men reflected the attitude of the Lutherans in the Union. They showed plainly the influence of their environment and of the schools in Germany where they had received their training for the public ministry. And it took them a long time before they had shed their swaddling clothes and stood on their own feet. Why? Because of their deep and heartfelt gratitude toward their German friends in Langenberg, Berlin, and Barmen. Without their unselfish help they would not have succeeded in keeping the newly launched ship of the Wisconsin Synod above water.

The German societies were untiring in sending needed pastors and rendering financial assistance at a time when, due to their great poverty, the Wisconsin pioneer congregations were unable to furnish their pastors a simple livelihood. These friends did not cease to warn our synodical fathers against what they called the narrow-mindedness of the Old Lutherans. They urged them to keep on ministering to all the Protestants of German extraction who lived here without a church and were besieged by radical unbelievers and by sectarians. But the forces at work in the religious life of their surroundings were too strong to let them steer a middle-of-the-road course between unionism and an outspoken Lutheranism. In some instances the "mild" Lutheranism of our men seemed advantageous indeed, for some Christians who felt repelled by the uncompromising attitude of the Old Lutherans applied for pastors to our Synod. There were also cases where rigoristic Missouri men in misapplied zeal dealt with matters which the Formula of Concord calls *Adiaphora* or matters of indifference (*Mitteldinge*) because they are not decided in God's Word, e.g., the question of private or public confession (*Trig.*, pp. 829. 1052), in a legalistic manner, which led to a renunciation of the Missouri Synod and to an application for membership in our own. Apart from the question of right or wrong in such cases, by these happenings our synod was inevitably placed in opposition to Missouri, which did extensive work in the same territory as ours. In the heat of the ensuing strife vituperations were freely hurled from one side to the other. Our synod was publicly accused of un-Lutheran liberalism, and the pastors were called hypocrites who used the designation "Lutheran" as a pretense for the ulterior purpose of gathering innocent Lutheran Christians into an ungodly Union Church. This was certainly a most serious indictment. Could it be simply dismissed as a malicious and slanderous outburst of a hatred going far beyond the limits of common decency? Although the accusations of the Missouri men may frequently have overshot their mark, there was enough justification for them to make the Wisconsin men squirm, to make them keenly aware of their awkward position in trying to defend the vacillating course the synod had been steering. They had conscientious scruples by continuing on this course in practicing what they themselves now recognized as unionism and a denial of the truth. At the same time they had conscientious scruples in ignoring the express wish of their German benefactors, which finally took on the nature of a command when our men showed increasing reluctance to comply with it. A complete break of the association with the German societies and with the Evangelical Church of Germany, and all such a step would imply, could no longer be averted, it became imperative. After the Wisconsin Synod, in a resolution adopted in its convention of 1867, had pledged itself unequivocally to the Lutheran Confessions in doctrine and practice, and had unanimously declared that every union thus effected by men, as the Prussian union, is wrongful and sinful (*The History of the Wisconsin Synod* by Joh. Ph. Koehler—*Faith-Life*, Vol. XIII, No. 5, p. 7), the directory of the Evangelical society for the Protestant Germans in North America (*Vorstand der Evangelischen Gesellschaft fuer die protestantischen Deutschen in Nord-Amerika*) notified synod in a communication of April 22, 1868, that it could not support synod any longer.

Before the break with Germany a number of theological candidates who had completed their studies at German universities had come to America to join the ranks of the Wisconsin Synod. The Evangelical Supreme Council (*Der Evangelische Oberkirchenrat*) had approved the commissioning of candidates for work among the Evangelical Germans in America, and had promised the men volunteering for this work a call to a pastorate in the homeland after a number of years spent overseas. Among those presenting themselves was Adolf Hoenecke who through the prominence he attained in our synod deserves special mention. He was born at Brandenburg on February 25, 1835. After finishing the prescribed course in the gymnasium of the city of his birth, he studied theology at the university of Halle. He affiliated with synod in 1863, and became pastor of a rural parish at Farmington near Watertown. Soon thereafter he was called to a theological professorship at the newly founded seminary and college in Watertown. He also became editor of the *Gemeinde-Blatt*, which Synod published since September, 1865. In this two-fold capacity as professor and editor he was in an excellent position to make his voice heard in the councils of his synod and give publicity to his pertinent comments on events before the Church at large. His thorough scholarship, coupled with a keen intellect and the faculty to probe a subject to its very bottom, made him an influential and determining factor in the solving of the problems which were vexing synod. Hoenecke had been trained in the Evangelical Church of Prussia, had there learned Luther's Small Catechism, and considered himself a Lutheran. In his new environment the question of the Union and of the

correctness of pursuing a unionistic practice in a Lutheran church body was challenging him, and asked for an unambiguous answer. After delving into the Symbolical Books, the writings of Luther and of the dogmaticians of our Church; he renounced all hope for a return to Germany and a position in the Evangelical Church, and cast his lot with the small Wisconsin Synod which just then was in the midst of a struggle to clarify its stand. He strove with voice and pen and the employment of his God-given talents for making our Synod, what it had always intended to be since its founding, a truly Lutheran Church, in doctrine not only but also in practice. Having become thoroughly convinced that the Gospel of salvation in Christ Jesus is clearly and in simple language set forth in all its resplendent purity in the Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, he championed an uncompromising confessionalism. We find him from now on in the forefront, as a member of committees, dealing with other synods in an effort to establish a God-pleasing union on the basis of the Scriptures and the Confessions of our Church.

Wisconsin joined other Lutheran synods, which had severed their connection with the General Synod on account of the doctrinal indifferentism and liberalism of that body, in the founding of the General Council in Reading, Pennsylvania, 1866, and Fort Wayne, Indiana, 1867. However, when the Council remained evasive in regard to the so-called "Four Points": Altar Fellowship, Pulpit Fellowship, Lodges, Chiliasm, our Synod withdrew in 1868. During these years synod had entered into discussions with the Iowa Synod, which had likewise insisted at the convention of the General Council on a clearcut statement regarding the "Four Points," and had not joined at all when it was not forthcoming. But the outcome of the colloquium between Missouri and Iowa at Milwaukee in 1867, the obstinacy of the Iowa men in the matter of "Open Questions" seemed to make any further effort in that direction, toward arriving at an understanding, unprofitable for the time being. However private conversations between members of the synods of Missouri and Wisconsin were so fruitful that they culminated in a colloquium at Milwaukee on October 22, 1868. Of representatives of the Missouri Synod we name Professor Walther, then synod's president, Professor Brauer, Pastor Lochner; of Wisconsin's representatives, President Bading, Professor Hoenecke, Pastor Koehler. At the end a report was drafted, an important portion of which reads as follows: "The gathering deemed it necessary in its discussions first of all to enter on doctrine, and for this purpose, after the representatives of the Wisconsin Synod had told about its relation to the Union, the theses on open questions published in the October issue of *Lehre und Wehre* were read, and their discussion revealed complete unanimity of both parties to it. Then those doctrines of the doctrinal edifice of our Church were especially emphasized which are at the present time specially under debate and dispute in the Lutheran Church, namely the doctrine of the Church and the Ministry, Ordination, Inspiration, Millennium, Antichrist, and so forth. In all these doctrines all those present rejoiced to find such agreement that on its basis the following points were adopted as a token of the doctrinal unity of both synods and as the principles for the future mutual relation in the field of practical work." (Translated in *Faith-Life*, Vol. XIII, No. 8, p. 4: *The History of the Wisconsin Synod* by Joh. P. Koehler.) The Synod at its convention in 1869 endorsed the doctrinal report of its representatives.

To give outward expression to their unity of doctrine Missouri and Wisconsin together with the Ohio, Minnesota, and Norwegian Synods founded the Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America at St. John's Church in Milwaukee in 1872. The Synodical Conference is a federation, not a merger, of independent synods. The chief purpose of its founding is: "To express and confess the unity of the Spirit existing in the constituent synods; to give mutual aid and assistance towards the strengthening of their faith and confession; to promote and preserve, over against all disturbances, the unity in doctrine and practice; and to unite all Lutheran synods of America into one orthodox American Lutheran Church." The several synods "retain their full sovereignty, ... and pass finally on the admission of new members and the alliance with other bodies on the part of any of the constituent synods" (*Concordia Cyclopaedia*, p. 742).

When after the successful colloquium at Milwaukee in 1868 altar and pulpit fellowship between the synods of Missouri and Wisconsin had been proclaimed, the graduates of our Watertown college that were preparing for the ministry, in conformity with an agreement of the two synods, received their theological training since 1870 in Concordia Seminary at St. Louis. After 1872, the year of the founding of the Synodical Conference, a plan was proposed, and found much favor, to close all seminaries in the several synods and,

instead, have one common theological school for the whole Synodical Conference. It was discussed in the meetings of the individual synods as well as by their representatives at the conventions of the Synodical Conference. What made the execution of such a plan feasible, was the fact that the two larger synods, Missouri and Ohio, were sponsoring it. Wisconsin was hesitant to give the plan whole-hearted support, and finally opened its own seminary in Milwaukee in 1878. At the same time another plan, “advocated in a resolution of the Synodical Conference (in 1876), to dissolve the existing synods and form state synods,” was under consideration and was strongly supported by Missouri and Ohio. It “failed because Wisconsin did not agree for fear of losing its identity in the prospective merger, and was not willing to give up its independent status. Although this caused some friction and bitter feelings, it soon became manifest that the union between the two bodies (Missouri and Wisconsin) was resting on a more solid foundation than external church polity. The controversy concerning the doctrines of conversion and election found Wisconsin on the side of Missouri fighting shoulder to shoulder against the error which threatened to engulf the synods of the Synodical Conference” (*Lutheran Witness*, Vol. LIX, No. 15, p. 256: *Ninety Years of Wisconsin Synod* by M. Lehninger). This storm, which had been brewing for some time, broke out into the open in 1880 and swept the Ohio Synod out of the Synodical Conference. These events put a stop to any further negotiations relative to those before-mentioned plans.

Dr. Walther had read an essay on the doctrine of election (Gnadenwahl) before the Western District of his synod in 1877. His exposition of this doctrine was found highly objectionable by one of his former pupils, Professor A. F. Schmidt of the Norwegian Synod, who attacked his former teacher in a periodical which he published for this purpose. In this publication he accused him of Calvinism, i.e., of the error of Calvin that God has foreordained some men to salvation, others to damnation. Professor Hoenecke, director of our seminary and professor of dogmatics and homiletics, came immediately to the defense of Walther. He demonstrated at meetings and in the *Gemeinde-Blatt* that he was teaching nothing but what the Word of God and the Lutheran Confessions in the Formula of Concord predicate and affirm. By his sober and clear presentation he united our synod behind the Bible doctrine of conversion and election, which gives all glory to God alone as the beginner and finisher of our salvation. Thus, and thus alone, can a troubled sinner’s heart find peace. For here he is told that the gracious God for Jesus’ sake has chosen him from eternity unto salvation without any works of the Law that he should do, and therefore has here in time brought him to faith by the Gospel and will keep him in faith unto the end.

Ohio, because of its adverse stand in the doctrines of conversion and election, had seceded from the Synodical Conference in 1881. The Norwegian Synod withdrew also in 1883, due to difficulties in its own midst in the wake of the controversies about conversion and election, but wanted to maintain fraternal relations with the Conference. The hope was expressed that this step would help to quiet the turmoil aroused by the accusations which Prof. F. A. Schmidt was hurling against Dr. Walther and all who sided with him. The Iowa Synod, the General Council, and the General Synod arrayed themselves against him. A virtual deluge of scorn and slander poured down upon the remaining members of the Conference, Missouri, Wisconsin and Minnesota. All that bore the Lutheran name throughout the world condemned them as Cryptocalvinists and traitors to Lutheranism, whereas the Ohio men and those Missourians who had left their synod by reason of what they called the treachery of their former synodical brethren were hailed as defenders of the faith of the fathers. Reams of paper were used and much printers’ ink was spilled in the ensuing battle which was waged in the press for and against the doctrines of a sinner’s conversion and the eternal election of grace (Bekehrung und Gnadenwahl) as they were taught in the Synodical Conference. Over and above this, our synod came in for some extra flings by former friends as a lackey of Missouri, and was ridiculed as meekly repeating what Missouri taught. Who would doubt that such slurring, deprecatory remarks hurt our fathers to the quick! These men, just a decade or two before, had been at odds with Missouri and had bitterly resented the overbearing attitude and, at least in their opinion, often unjustified attacks of members of that synod. And now they stood unwaveringly at the side of that same Missouri, and willingly bore the vilifications and disgrace, heaped on them, with these their brethren. No stronger proof can be had that “this alliance was entirely the work of God the Holy Ghost, who by the power of the pure Word of God, the saving Gospel of Jesus Christ, brought these

church bodies together in the unity of faith, which found its outward expression in the organization of the Synodical Conference!” (*Lutheran Witness*, LIX, 15, p. 256.)

The more it was defamed, the more its members closed their ranks, the tighter they were welded together. They were strong then, because they trusted in no one and nothing but in God alone and the power of His Word, and for that reason they could and did trust each other. And this confidence in each other was not destroyed by the many tiffs they, being human, had with each other. No, even graver differences on the level of church government and congregational life could not destroy their mutual confidence. Satan has, as long as we are allied in the Synodical Conference with each other, often tried to disrupt our unity, ably assisted therein by our Old Adam, but so far always in vain. Why? We in both synods have been willing and ready to surrender our own judgment and bow under God’s holy Word, which we love because in it we have found peace for our souls. We have again and again found ourselves united in our obedience to Him when we hear in the Bible “Thus saith the Lord.” For that we are despised by men of other faiths. And no wonder, since their conscience convicts them of their unfaithfulness when and so long as the Synodical Conference is bearing witness in word and deed of its faithful adherence to the Word by proving everything in the light of the Word of God and by being guided thereby.

Had our Synod reached the climax of the development of its doctrinal position when it joined forces with others in the founding of the Synodical Conference, and fought for unconditional submission to every statement of the Word of God in the Scriptures? We cannot answer in the affirmative without hedging. There is no such thing as a state of perfection in comprehending God as He has revealed Himself in His Word. That is altogether beyond the reach of mortal man. The daily life in our congregations and our larger church bodies leaves no doubt about that. The weak brethren are always with us, weak not only in their lives but weak also in grasping the comforting truth of the Gospel and of their glorious state as priests and kings of the Most High. And in our daily self-examination we certainly become aware that we ourselves, yes, even strong Christians, are lacking in a perfect comprehension of the Gospel. The apostle Paul reminds us: “We know in part, and we prophesy in part” while we are on this earth (1 Cor. 13, 9). Hence we read that Paul prays for the Christians in Ephesus that they be strengthened by the Spirit that they may be able to comprehend and “know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge” (Eph. 3, 16. 18. 19). He does not cease to pray for the Christians at Colosse that they might be filled with the knowledge of His Will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding (Col. 1, 9). He thanks God for the Thessalonians because their “faith groweth exceedingly” (2 Thess. 1, 3). Peter exhorts: “Grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3, 18). He admonishes his Christian readers: “As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the Word, that ye may grow thereby” (1 Peter 2, 2).

Church history is replete with examples showing how dangerous it is for the Church to become satisfied with a stage it has reached at a given time in the development of its doctrinal position. Following the fierce struggle in the days of Luther and immediately thereafter in the Church called after his name, there came a period of slackness and relaxation, due to exhaustion and weariness from the strife in the time just passed. Had not the Formula of Concord settled all questions of doctrine for all time? Similarly, in the decades following the founding of the Synodical Conference and the controversies thereafter, a weariness in our Church began to manifest itself in a growing tendency to settle questions of doctrine by a reference to the Confessions or to the writings of Luther and old teachers of the Church, or of Walther, the champion of Lutheran orthodoxy in America.

It was after the turn of the century when an incident which called for a reorientation relative to the doctrine of the Church and the Ministry brought this home to us. Two men in our synod, J. P. Koehler and Aug. Pieper, professors of our theological seminary, were alerting us to the danger of trying to settle a disputed point of doctrine by quoting the words of a prominent teacher of our Church, which were biblically correct when spoken to controvert a specific error with which he then was concerned. They averred the basic unsoundness of a procedure which wants to prove a point of doctrine by quoting human authorities, even the Confessions and Luther. They reminded their fellow-Lutherans to show themselves true pupils of Luther by recognizing no other authority than the holy Scriptures. They stressed the self-evident maxim, theoretically acknowledged but so

often forgotten in practice, that we Christians must always go to the only fountainhead and source of faith and knowledge, the well of living water, the Bible as the norm by which all things in the Church, doctrine and life, must be judged.

The incident just referred to was this. In the beginning of this century two pastors and their congregation in Cincinnati had been suspended by the Central District of the Missouri Synod. In 1904 they applied for membership with the Wisconsin Synod. Wisconsin deferred action on this application because Missouri was still dealing with the applicants. Now a number of committee meetings ensued which delayed the settlement of the case till 1911. We are not concerned here with the outcome of the Cincinnati case. During the time when the suspension was in force some Wisconsin pastors fellowshipped the congregation and their pastors by appearing in their pulpit. Their action aroused a lively discussion in our Synod. This discussion brought to the surface a latent confusion in synod concerning the doctrine of the Church and the Ministry. Professor August Pieper in a series of articles appearing in the *Quartalschrift* maintained a suspension from synod membership should be respected by the members of that synod and of the sister synods. The warning not to undermine the discipline of the sister synod and keep hands off was met with the statement that a cultivation of church fellowship with men under synodic discipline is justified on the ground that synod, after all, is only a human arrangement, whereas the discipline of the divinely instituted local congregation (Ortsgemeinde) must indeed be respected. It lies on a different level and is in its effect a severing of church fellowship. This dissensus in our own synod called for a thorough restudy of the doctrine of the Church. The theological faculty, then consisting of Professors J. Schaller, J. P. Koehler, and August Pieper, undertook this study, and, after an examination of the Scripture passages referring to the subject, arrived at a full agreement in the matter. At first they met with opposition in our own synod. And while some Missouri men sided with them, the Missouri Synod as a whole and the faculty in St. Louis were dissenting. Through the years a number of conferences between the two faculties were held, but have not resulted in a full agreement to this day.

Both sides share in the profession of the Church as the communion of saints. The Church is the number of believers scattered throughout the world. Only the Lord knoweth His own; for us the Church is invisible. But what about the congregations and the larger church bodies here on earth which are certainly visible? All these groups are manifestations of the one true Church, for wherever the Gospel is proclaimed, there are also believers, children of God through faith in Christ Jesus and heirs of eternal salvation; there is the communion of saints which we profess in the third article of the Apostolic Creed.

What then is the issue between the contending parties? For the sake of brevity we are using the names of the two synods, although we are well aware that there is not complete unanimity in either of the synods.— Wisconsin teaches that every Christian is charged by his Lord with the high privilege of administering the office of the keys by means of the Gospel in Word and Sacrament—Matth. 16, 16–19; 18, 18–20; John 20, 21–23; also Matth. 28, 19. 20; Mark 16, 15. 16. This describes the ministry with which the Lord has endowed each believer and, therefore, any group of them (Cp 1 Peter 2, 9). The plea is not sound that only the local congregation (Ortsgemeinde) has the power of excommunicating an unrepentant sinner, because it is divinely instituted and has the express command to do this, while a synod, or under whichever name a larger group beyond the limits of a local congregation may be comprehended, is not even mentioned in Scripture. In proof of this objection our attention is called to Matth. 18, 17: “If he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church; but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.” This is really begging the question (*petitio principii*). It is an assumption at the outset of the discussion of something which is to be established in the course of the debate. The simple fact is, there was no “church” in the sense of the local congregation of later years (Ortsgemeinde) in existence when the Lord spoke these words. But there were Christians, groups of them, to which Jesus could and did refer. Whether we call these groups congregations, or synods, or by another name does not matter. The Lord is here interested in telling his disciples to leave no stone unturned in seeking the salvation of the erring brother. There is no word of institution of the local congregation, in the sense we speak of it today, in the Bible in contrast to other assemblies of Christians, like synods, conferences, mission societies, children’s friend societies, and so forth, whatever name may be given to Christians who are gathered for the furthering of God’s Kingdom on earth. But all these gatherings of Christians

are creations of God the Holy Ghost and are in that sense instituted by God. For by working faith in them He has made them members of the spiritual body of Christ. God Himself then has thus instituted His Church, and that holds good for every group of Christians gathered in His name to do His work, for the local congregation and the synod, and the like. Cp. Eph. 4, 5. 6.

Similarly, we look in vain in Holy Writ for a word of institution of the pastorate in a local congregation (Pfarramt in einer Ortsgemeinde) in contrast to other offices in a congregation or a synod, as teachers in Christian day schools and professors at Christian high schools, colleges, and seminaries. It came as a shock to some members in our synod and in Missouri when, e.g., Professor J. Schaller spoke of the historical development of the pastorate through the centuries into what it is in our congregation today. And yet it is true; and the admission of such a development is in no way contradictory to the divinity of the pastoral call, does not make the pastorate a merely human arrangement. Paul writes: The exalted Lord “gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ” (Eph. 4, 11. 12). That should effectively dispose of the idea that only local pastors have a divine call, other church officials in congregation or synod only in so far they perform some spiritual work as helpers to pastors of local congregations. Speaking of the Church as the body of Christ, the same apostle says: “And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healing, helps, governments, diversities of tongues” (1 Cor. 12, 28). When he makes his farewell with the elders of Ephesus he speaks to them of “the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God” (Acts 20, 28). Before categorically saying, the elders then are the pastors now, we should learn from the Jews in Berea, of whom it is reported, “they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so” (Acts 17, 11). Doing likewise, we overhear Paul exhorting Timothy: “Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially they who labor in the word and doctrine” (1 Tim. 5, 17). By what right can we vindicate the divine call of the local pastor and deny it to the teacher who also labors in the word and doctrine? More, we must admit that also those elders who do not work specially in the word and doctrine but are nevertheless serving in the building of the Kingdom in the government of the congregation or the synod are divinely called. God has made them overseers. He tells us in the Bible what the functions of an elder, bishop, shepherd (pastor), and teacher are, and leaves the rest, the ordering of the details in this frame, to the sanctified common sense of his Christians. Since God bestows these gifts to His Church, it goes without saying that they are not thrust upon the Christians against their will. Paul’s word applies here: “God is not the author of confusion, but of peace” (1 Cor. 14, 33), and the other one: “Let all things be done decently and in order” (1 Cor. 14, 40).

We are humbly thankful for the development of the doctrinal position of our Synod in these last fifty years even as in the first half of the century of its existence. It was brought about as a consequence of a controversy in our own synod, which forced us to a new evaluation of the spiritual priesthood of all believers, who as the elect Church of God, in the liberty that Christ has bought for us with His blood, receive and dispose of the gifts of their God in a way best suited to the needs of His Kingdom in their own midst.

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We dare not close without expressing our concern about the growing estrangement between our Synod and our sister synod of Missouri, which is torn by strife in its own midst. Of late, the men in authority in our sister synod are either unable or not willing to cope with certain of their own members who, under the guise of external cooperation, are actually practicing fellowship with men from whom the Synodical Conference has been divided on doctrinal grounds for many years. It is not just an isolated occurrence any more, but an ever growing number of them, which fill us with deep apprehension. We cannot see eye to eye anymore—to name one instance—on the Scriptural stand concerning the popular Boy Scout movement. In direct opposition to the Scriptural principles of education, the Boy Scouts of America are undertaking to train boys to become good citizens by applying the principles of the morality of natural man. This training cannot but result in self-

righteousness, irreconcilable with the righteousness of faith, the motivating power of sanctification, of which the civic righteousness of the Christian is an integral part.

May God with His power of grace grant our synod steadfastness in its testimony against all aberrations relative to doctrine and practice whether in our own synod, in our Synodical Conference, or anywhere! May His love, our Synod has so richly experienced in its history during the past century, kindle anew and keep aflame in our hearts true brotherly love toward those of our own household of faith, a love which will not waver, even if—God forbid!—it would mean separation from brethren with whom we are so closely knit together through long association, and often through family ties. Who are we to disagree with such a large body of men who have held aloft the banner of Lutheran orthodoxy for over a century, a synod, which by its example has strengthened us when we were weak, to which we are sincerely grateful, and for which we have great love in our hearts? We tremble in the consciousness of our unworthiness, our many weaknesses and failings. But for the sake of our own and the salvation of those coming after us we cannot do otherwise than witness the truth against all gainsayers, and be they nearest and dearest to us. “It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in man” (Ps. 118, 8). The fury of the old evil foe can not deter us. One little word can fell him. “What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?” (Rom. 8, 31). “We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose” (Rom. 8, 28). If only we cling unflinchingly to the Word of God, then, whatever may be our lot in this world, we confidently can say with Paul: “In all things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For neither death, nor life,” nor anything else, “shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 8, 37–39).

Lord, keep us steadfast in Thy Word;
Curb those who fain by craft and sword
Would wrest the Kingdom from Thy Son
And set at naught all He hath done.