

Historical Background of the Present Issues Between the Missouri and Wisconsin Synods

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Behind the issues which are disturbing the fraternal relations between the Missouri Synod and our Wisconsin Synod we of the Wisconsin Synod see a very dangerous unionistic trend on the part of the Missouri Synod, not necessarily a conscious one but one that is evident nevertheless. And this unionistic trend has led the two Synods to a sharp disagreement in a number of issues—disagreement which, in spite of numerous and lengthy negotiations, we have been unable to settle—so that we are today faced with a situation in which we must seriously consider whether we are not under obligation to the Word of our God to make a very clear confession by action.

The disagreement between the Missouri Synod and our Wisconsin Synod pertains to issues that are not a matter of Christian judgment but issues which in our conviction are decided by the Word of God. And thus the disagreement that exists between Missouri and us cannot simply be recognized and allowed to go on and on, permitting fraternal relations to continue undisturbed. If we would content ourselves with that kind of a solution, namely to agree to disagree, then we would be guilty of unionism—we would be disobedient to the will of our God. It is therefore the disagreement on these specific issues, not the unionistic trend of the Missouri Synod, that faces us today with the consideration of whether the time isn't here for us to make a clear confession by action. It is, however, the unionistic tendency which has brought on the issues—it is that unionistic tendency that dims the hope for many that further negotiations could still change the situation.

Let us apply this analysis first of all to the Common Confession. The Common Confession, as you all know, was a confession drawn up since 1947 by official representatives of the Missouri Synod and of the American Lutheran Church as a settlement of the doctrinal differences which have separated these two church bodies for at least 70 years. To have the full picture before us we need to keep in mind that this Common Confession was not the first effort to settle these doctrinal controversies of the past. Such efforts began at the very beginning of this century. We shall consider only the efforts after 1929.

In 1929 official representatives of the Iowa, Ohio, and Buffalo Synods (which a few years later merged and became known as the American Lutheran Church), together with representatives of the Missouri Synod and also of our own Wisconsin Synod, after lengthy discussions, had drawn up the so-called Chicago Theses, covering the doctrines of election, conversion, justification, and other points of controversy. The Missouri Synod, however, in its convention of 1929 rejected the Chicago Theses because it was convinced that these theses were not sufficiently clear, did not properly set forth the old points of controversy, and did not expressly reject the former false teachings; and since these church bodies (Ohio, Iowa, and Buffalo) were at that time negotiating with farther Lutheran bodies which even more recently had espoused similar false doctrines, the Missouri Synod broke off further negotiations with them.

In the year 1932 the Missouri Synod accepted the Brief Statement, a doctrinal treatment in which the Missouri Synod clearly set forth in a positive and in a negative way what its confession was on all those controversial doctrines.

In 1935 the Iowa, Ohio, and Buffalo Synods (which in the meantime had merged and become known as the American Lutheran Church) extended an invitation to the Missouri Synod to enter upon renewed negotiations for church fellowship. Our own Synod did not receive such an invitation. The Missouri Synod naturally offered the Brief Statement as its confession on the pertinent doctrines which could be a basis of agreement and which through mutual acceptances could be a basis for church fellowship, provided also that some further differences in practice, particularly concerning lodge membership and relationship to other church bodies, could be satisfactorily settled. The American Lutheran Church had already joined with the other bodies of the erroristic American Lutheran Conference (Evangelical Lutheran Church, Norwegian; United Evangelical Lutheran Church, Danish; Lutheran Free Church, another Norwegian body; and the Augustana Synod, Swedish). The American Lutheran Church was not ready, however, for an unconditional subscription to the Brief Statement but drew up a document called A Doctrinal Declaration in which the American Lutheran Church made some separate statements on the old controversial doctrines and then at its next convention adopted the Brief Statement in the light of that Declaration.

In 1938 the Missouri Synod passed a resolution by which it declared that the Brief Statement, together with the Declaration and a set of further resolutions with some added stipulations, which in substance stated that certain doctrines of the Holy Scriptures are not divisive—that is, that there need not necessarily be agreement on these doctrines in order to have church fellowship with the American Lutheran Church—in 1938 these three documents were declared by the Missouri Synod to be a basis of future fellowship with the American Lutheran Church. Concerning the third document in which Missouri declared that there were certain *doctrines* that were not divisive—that position was something entirely new in the orthodox Lutheran church. It was contrary to the Scriptures and to the teachings of the Synodical Conference Fathers and had contradicted directly the Missouri Synod's own declaration of 1929.

In 1939 our Synod declared that these three documents certainly did not form a satisfactory basis for establishing doctrinal unity with the American Lutheran Church, but pointed out that this would call for a single document. At the same time our Synod took note of the fact that the American Lutheran Church in its convention at Sandusky had in the meantime declared that it was neither possible nor necessary to agree on all non-fundamental doctrines. Hence we declared that the basis for doctrinal discussions between the American Lutheran Church and the Missouri Synod—namely, agreement in this that full doctrinal unity was necessary for church fellowship—was not present and could only lead to confusion and disturbance in the church, and we therefore asked the Missouri Synod to cease the negotiations with the American Lutheran Church until this proper basis would be established. Another thing that played a part in this request of ours was the fact that the American Lutheran Church had definitely stated that it was not willing to give up fellowship with the other bodies of the American Lutheran Conference, and it had also made a very unsatisfactory agreement on the doctrine of inspiration with the very liberal United Lutheran Church, all of which revealed that the American Lutheran Church was exceedingly unionistic. Many people in the Missouri Synod itself agreed with our admonitions and likewise expressed them. An attempt was now made to fuse the Brief Statement and the Declaration into one document which was called the Doctrinal Affirmation. This document in its final revisions was not satisfactory to the American Lutheran Church.

In 1947, at its Centennial Convention in Chicago, the Missouri Synod set its 1938 resolutions on union with the American Lutheran Church aside as a basis for negotiations,

though it was carefully pointed out that those resolutions were not rescinded. It was then that the Commissioners of the American Lutheran Church extended a new invitation to the Doctrinal Unity Committee of the Missouri Synod for renewed negotiations toward establishing church fellowship. They did this in the so-called Friendly Invitation in which they at the same time expressed the principle that there was an area of wholesome and allowable latitude of theological opinion on the basis of the teachings of the Word of God, which merely confirmed what the American Lutheran Church had said in convention at Sandusky and which it had never repudiated namely, that it was neither necessary nor possible to agree in all non-fundamental doctrines. Here we got right back to the teachings of open questions which the Iowa Synod expressed 100 years before and which the Missouri Synod at that time vehemently opposed.

Naturally our Synod through its Union Committee warned the Missouri Synod against re-establishing negotiations without making this false principle the first subject of discussion and asking the American Lutheran Church to repudiate it. Thereby we repeated what we had already said in 1939. The Missouri Synod's Doctrinal Unity Committee, however, did not heed this earnest exhortation and met with the commissioners of the American Lutheran Church and drew up the Common Confession. That document the Missouri Synod accepted in 1950 as a settlement of the past differences which had existed between the Missouri Synod and the American Lutheran Church in the doctrines treated in this Confession. At the Synodical Conference meeting of the same year this Common Confession was formally submitted through President Behnken of the Missouri Synod to all the synods of the Synodical Conference for their study and approval. Thus not upon our own initiative but by this formal request of this sister Synod did our Synod undertake its careful study of the Common Confession. The request of the Missouri Synod required a very frank, forthright and speedy answer on our part. We took great pains in understanding correctly all of the 1950 resolutions of the Missouri Synod concerning the Common Confession so that we might have the proper basis for our study. We received in writing the official interpretation of the Doctrinal Unity Committee of the Missouri Synod which clearly stated that the Common Confession had been accepted as a *settlement*, as a *complete* settlement, of the past differences between the American Lutheran Church and the Missouri Synod in the doctrines treated therein. From this point of view we then studied the Common Confession in our conferences and in special district meetings. All of our districts came to the conclusion that the wording of the Common Confession was not adequate to settle the past points of controversy so that the true Scriptural teaching in these doctrines would be safeguarded and the past errors taught by the American Lutheran Church would be clearly repudiated.

Then our Synodical Convention at New Ulm, in 1951, once more repeated this careful study. We had six different essayist present papers on each one of the controversial doctrines setting forth the true Scriptural doctrines, the past errors of the American Lutheran Church concerning these doctrines, and then an analysis of the Common Confession as a settlement of the differences.

All of the essayists agreed that not all of the points of difference were clearly settled. Furthermore, the Floor Committee was almost continuously in session during our New Ulm convention, giving everyone present at the convention an opportunity to express himself and to gather information. At these Floor Committee meetings also two members of the Doctrinal Unity Committee of the Missouri Synod were present and given an opportunity to present everything that they wished to present in defense of the Common Confession.

As a result of this final careful study of our Synod, our delegates in convention *unanimously* declared "That we not only find the Common Confession to be inadequate in the

points noted (cf. Review of the Common Confession), but that we also hold that the adoption of the Common Confession by the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod involves an untruth and creates a basically untruthful situation since this action has been officially interpreted as a settlement of past differences which in fact are not settled.” At the same time we asked the Missouri Synod to repudiate its stand that the Common Confession is a proper settlement. We also repeated the request that the Missouri Synod suspend its negotiations with the American Lutheran Church until such a time when the American Lutheran Church would repudiate the principle expressed in the Friendly Invitation—that is, until it would recognize the need for complete doctrinal unity for the establishing of church fellowship. All of these resolutions were transmitted to the Missouri Synod in the earnest desire that this issue which was disturbing our fraternal relations might be removed.

Subsequently the Missouri Synods Doctrinal Unity Committee and the Fellowship Committee of the American Lutheran Church met and began to prepare a Part 2 of the Common Confession dealing with the subject *The Church in the World*. Under its various subdivisions such as the Church’s Mission, the Church’s Resources, the Church and its Ministrations, the Church and the Home, the Church and Vocation, the Church in Education, the Church in Government, the Church and Church Fellowship, the Church and Anti-Christian Organizations, the Church and the World to Come—under these various subdivisions *incidental* doctrinal statements were wound in here and there with which the Doctrinal Unity Committee of the Missouri Synod hoped to satisfy the objections which we had raised against the Common Confession and to supply what we had found lacking. For example, a statement touching upon inspiration occurs in the article on the Church in Education; one touching on election, in the article on the Church in the World to Come; one on willful resistance in the article on the Church’s Mission. Thus we see that these clarifying statements are scattered throughout Part 2 and without any specific reference whatsoever to an article of Part 1 and can be found only through use of the index appended to the final draft of Part 2. (“Theological hide and seek”). This Part 2 went through four revisions all of which were submitted to our Synod’s Standing Committee on Church Union by Missouri’s Doctrinal Unity Committee, and in each case our Standing Committee submitted its comments.

By the time of the 1952 convention of the Synodical Conference the second draft of Part 2 of the Common Confession was at hand, though it was really known only to the Standing Committee of our Synod. The Floor Committee at the Synodical Conference, made up of members of all the Synods, also of the Missouri Synod, to which the issue of the Common Confession had been submitted, unanimously submitted a report to the Convention—a report which in its preamble declared that the Common Confession was inadequate. Through the votes, particularly of the Missouri Synod delegates, this preamble was stricken, and the entire report of the floor Committee was set aside in favor of a resolution that the Synodical Conference postpone all further action with reference to the Common Confession until said Part 2 had been completed and presented to the various synods of the Synodical Conference and to the American Lutheran Church.

Since this resolution said nothing at all about the untruthful situation created by the Missouri Synod resolution of 1950 which declared the Common Confession to be a settlement of the controversies, it was passed over the nay votes of all of our delegates. As a result of that, our delegates, after the convention, unanimously arranged for the publication of a declaration in our church papers announcing their protest in the form of a declaration of a state of confession on their part. Since the St. Paul convention of the Synodical Conference had done nothing to resolve

the issue of the Common Confession President Brenner, in the name of our Synod, addressed a letter to the Missouri Synod convention which on June of this year was held in Houston, Texas. In this letter he once more called attention to our resolution on the Common Confession and asked the Missouri Synod to rescind its 1950 resolutions concerning the Common Confession. At the same time this letter of President Brenner also repeated specific requests concerning the other issues which have been disturbing our fraternal relations. These will be discussed later on. At the same time this letter expressed willingness on the part of our Standing Committee on Church Union to send personal representatives to the Houston Convention to speak on these issues (Professors E. Reim and C. Lawrenz).

The Missouri Synod at its convention in Houston decided to postpone action on Part 2 and asked also our Synod for purpose of study to treat Part 1 and Part 2 of the Common Confession as one document with the understanding that Part 2 has not as yet been accepted and that the Missouri Synod would not reach a decision on it until 1956. Now what does this resolution mean for us? First of all, it means that the 1950 resolutions which declared the Common Confession Part 1 as a settlement of the past doctrinal differences between the Missouri Synod and the American Lutheran Church remains in full force. Secondly, it means that we have received no answer on the careful study of the Common Confession which we made upon the Missouri Synod's own request—received no satisfactory answer to our adverse findings—but are simply asked to satisfy our conscientious objections by means of Part 2 which the Missouri Synod itself was not ready to accept and which our own Standing Committee has likewise found inadequate for settling all the doctrinal differences which Part 1 was already declared to *have* settled. Thirdly, Part 2 is indeed spoken of as a supplement to Part 1. It is likewise stated that Part 1 and Part 2 are henceforth to be considered as one document at least for the purpose of study. At the same time it is also stressed that it must be borne in mind that only Part 1 has been adopted. It is surely evident that the Houston delegate was correct who pointed out that this resolution was trying to do the impossible in declaring an adopted part and an unadopted part to form one confessional document. Upon direct question by President Gullerud of the Norwegian Synod whether the declaration that Part 2 was to be considered a supplement of Part 1 then meant that the adoption of Part 1 as a settlement of the doctrinal differences was thereby reopened, the official answer was given that this was by no means true—that the Common Confession Part 1 *was* and still *is* considered by the Missouri Synod as a satisfactory settlement of the controversies—that Part 2 is merely offered to show that the misgivings of the Wisconsin and the Norwegian Synods and of the scattered nay votes in their own Synod were unfounded. Hence we may sum it all up by stating that the basically untruthful situation of which we spoke in our 1951 New Ulm Convention resolutions has been perpetuated at the Missouri Synod Houston convention—has in fact been officially confirmed by the Missouri Synod—namely, the untruthful situation that the adopted Common Confession now called Part 1 has again been declared a settlement of past doctrinal controversies which in fact are not settled. Our Synod considered this untruthful situation dangerous and one for which we may not share responsibility inasmuch as it will undermine the confessional stand of the Synodical Conference both in our own midst and over against those who are outside of our fellowship.

To show what this means may be exemplified by two observations relative to the Houston convention. 1. How this untruthful situation brought about by the Common Confession would weaken the doctrinal position in our *own* midst if permitted to stand can be seen from the discussions on the Anti-Christ which took place at the Houston convention. A certain memorial asked that the Missouri Synod give its members the assurance “That Synod still holds that the

doctrine of the Anti-Christ (Smalcald Articles) is an article of faith”. In a lengthy discussion the Missouri Synod pastoral delegates spoke for and against the adoption of this memorial. Strangely enough even those who were unwilling to adopt the declaration that it was a Scriptural doctrine that the Pope in Rome is the very Anti-Christ appealed to the Brief Statement to support their contention. The ultimate resolution was noncommittal, since it merely confirmed the wording of the Brief Statement, even though both sides of the debate had appealed to it for support.

Now why this unwillingness to affirm the doctrine of the Anti-Christ which the Missouri Synod has always clearly taught in the past? We believe that the editor of the United Lutheran Church publication, *The Lutheran*, is correct in leading this unwillingness back to the weak statement on the Anti-Christ which the Missouri Synod accepted in the Common Confession. That weak statement is this: “We believe that the distinguishing features of the Anti-Christ, as portrayed in Holy Scriptures, are still clearly discernible in the Roman Papacy.” (In other words, there may be a time yet in this world when we can make a different identification of the Anti-Christ.) The editor in *The Lutheran* (July 8, 1953) pointed out that one point that the Missourians had held to be essential for doctrinal unity was that the Anti-Christ predicted in Scriptures is the Roman Pope and that in a doctrinal statement of the Missouri Synod in 1932 it had clearly asserted this. (Brief Statement) *The Lutheran* goes on to say: “But in 1950 the Missouri Synod and the American Lutheran Church agreed to a milder doctrinal statement, asserting that ‘among the signs of Christ’s approaching return for judgment, the distinguishing features of the Anti-Christ, as portrayed in Holy Scriptures, are still clearly discernible in the Roman Papacy’”. “At Houston in June ...”, the editor of *The Lutheran* goes on, “a resolution to identify the Pope as the Anti-Christ was defeated”. Thus, in the opinion of this editor it was the adoption of the Common Confession, reaffirmed at Houston, which had brought about a weakening of the Missouri Synod’s own confessional stand on the doctrine of the Anti-Christ. *Will the adoption of the inadequate common confession not inevitably do the very same thing concerning the other doctrines which are not adequately expressed in the common confession?* For example, the statement that God’s election is an election of specific individuals to eternal salvation (Personenwahl)—the very point that was so offensive to the Ohio Synod theologians in the past and decried by them as Calvinism—this statement received no mention in the Common Confession. Now will this not have the effect of keeping this point out of future presentations of the doctrine of election, vital though it is in the truth of election? May it not mislead many in the Missouri Synod to be silent about it with the possible feeling that the Synodical Conference fathers may after all have gone too far in asserting it and teaching it, inasmuch as the Common Confession which was supposed to settle the controversies says nothing about it?

Let us consider also a point which exemplifies how the untruthful situation which the adoption of the Common Confession has brought about, and which would be perpetuated if the Common Confession is left to stand, would also undermine the Missouri Synod’s and ultimately our Synodical Conference’s testimony over against those people who are outside our fellowship. In one of the resolutions made at the Houston Convention it was reported that the Missouri Synod’s Committee on Doctrinal Unity was planning to discuss with the Fellowship Committee of the American Lutheran Church the document entitled *United Testimony on Faith and Life*. This is a document which is to form the doctrinal basis for the proposed merging of the American Lutheran Church and three Lutheran bodies of the doctrinally unsound American Lutheran Conference. The Doctrinal Unity Committee of the Missouri Synod intimated that it was not satisfied with this document. But with the Common Confession in effect, the Missouri Synod’s criticisms of this United Testimony and its suggestions for improving it could never rise

above the level of the inadequate Common Confession; for how could the Missouri Synod possibly hold out for a clearer statement on conversion, on objective justification, and on eternal election than that which it has declared satisfactory in the Common Confession. This untruthful situation would work on even if this merger takes place and the present American Lutheran Church would cease to exist as a church body. For the president of the Missouri Synod intimated that then doctrinal discussions would be taken up with the new church body. But even then the Missouri Synod would not be in a position to ask for anything more than what is found in the Common Confession to which it is committed but which we have found inadequate.

From all that we have now heard, what—we ask—can explain the Missouri Synod's tenacious clinging to its 1950 resolutions on the Common Confessions, when two sister synods in the Synodical Conference and people in their own midst take conscientious objections to it and they themselves find it necessary to offer a Part 2 to defend its adequacy? Furthermore, what can account for those confusing resolutions of the Missouri Synod which try to make one document out of an adopted part and an unadopted part—which speak of a supplement to the Common Confession and yet strangely enough contend that this supplement does not reopen the declaration that that which it is to supplement was already a full agreement? These statements are all found in resolutions which on the one hand seek to satisfy the so-called conservatives who have been greatly disturbed by the Common Confession and on the other hand wish to safeguard further negotiations with the American Lutheran Church, and yet do justice to the expressed principles of neither of the two groups. Isn't that a unionistic trend when you try to hold together people with various and divergent convictions by measures which are unclear, ambiguous, and confusing? Would that the Missouri Synod would go back to that clear and unequivocal stand which it took in 1929 when, heeding the objections raised by its own members and by its convention committee, it completely rejected the Chicago Theses because they were not clear, did not set forth properly the old points of controversy and did not expressly reject the former false teachings of the Iowa Synod and when the Missouri Synod also resolved not to deal any further with Iowa because that Synod, by negotiating with other false Lutheran bodies, just as the American Lutheran Church is doing today, showed that it was unionistic in spirit. In view of all of our repeated and fruitless dealings with Missouri during the past 15 years—in view of all of our earnest but rejected pleas that it go back to its former stand—in view of the ever multiplying instances of joint church work with various heterodox Lutheran bodies, we now need clear assurances on the part of the Missouri Synod to justify a further postponement in making our testimony clear through action.

In President Brenner's letter to the Houston convention in which he brought all the issues which are threatening our continued fraternal relations into sharp focus, he also voiced the request that the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod suspend doctrinal discussions with the American Lutheran Church until the American Lutheran Church has clearly and unequivocally declared itself against unionism as defined in the Missouri Synod's Brief Statement, and has begun to put this principle into practice. In its Houston convention the Missouri Synod denied this request by a resolution which approved *continued* negotiations. We feel that this issue needs no further clarification since we have already treated it in our previous comments on the issue of the Common Confession. We would just point out once more that this request which our Synod had addressed to the Missouri Synod as early as 1939 and thereafter continuously repeated does not mean that we are opposed to doctrinal negotiations with other church bodies in principle (that would be the position of a separatist), but that our request is based on this one fact that by word and deed the American Lutheran Church has made it clear that it has not entered upon

negotiations with the Missouri Synod on the basis that full doctrinal unity is necessary for establishing church fellowship. And thus we are asking the Missouri Synod to suspend further negotiations until such a time that the proper basis for doctrinal discussions will be present. That the American Lutheran Church is not providing this basis for negotiations, namely, a candid recognition of all doctrinal differences that exist and also the recognition that they must all be settled before there can be any church fellowship—that the American Lutheran Church is not providing this Scriptural basis for negotiations but is holding out for an area of latitude must be evident to everyone not merely by the fact that it has never rescinded the official pronouncements which it has made in this direction, but also by the fact that it has used this principle as a *working* principle when during the course of its negotiations with Missouri it has at the same time entered upon new affiliations such as full membership in the very liberal Lutheran World Federation and the World Council of Churches.

Let us note that this, our verdict, is also the verdict of the Missouri Synod, because the Missouri Synod also cannot reconcile these affiliations on the part of their own Synod with confessional faithfulness. The Missouri Synod showed this very clearly when at the Houston Convention it accepted a doctrinal essay in which these bodies, the Lutheran World Federation and the World Council of Churches, were declared as unionistic. That the Missouri Synod in the fact of that essay should at that very same convention still make some kind of a membership in the Lutheran World Federation a subject for *study* is again another matter, a puzzling matter, and must appear to us as a very dangerous toying with unionistic tendencies.

A third request which President Brenner voiced in his official communication to the Houston Convention in the name of our Synod was this that the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod reconsider its resolution on joint prayer. The Houston Convention also denied this request by reaffirming what it had already said in its convention in Saginaw in 1944 whereby this matter of joint prayer at inter-synodical meetings became an issue between our Synods.

Since 1944 the Missouri Synod has officially made a distinction between prayer fellowship and an occasional joint prayer—a distinction for which we can find no Scriptural support. Whenever Christians join together in a joint prayer, that is always an expression of fellowship. In its resolution at Saginaw, now re-affirmed for the second time, namely at Chicago and at Houston, the Missouri Synod, however, applies its distinction between prayer fellowship and joint prayer to the specific occasion of inter-synodical conferences, namely, conferences between Lutheran Synods which are not as yet in full doctrinal unity and hence not in fellowship. They contend that when such conferences are held for the purpose of discussing doctrine with the hope of reaching doctrinal unity joint prayer may be held, namely, a joint prayer which they want to distinguish from prayer fellowship. It is our conviction on the basis of Scripture that a joint prayer would be God-pleasing only where it would also be proper as prayer fellowship, namely, in a situation in which the groups coming together to discuss doctrine would not yet be confirmed in their own convictions and really sought to come to clarity by mutual study or in a situation where their individual confessional stand would not yet be known to one another and was meant to be discovered by this interchange of expressions. We believe that this was the situation of those inter-synodical conferences which were held in the middle of the past century between Dr. Walther and other fathers of the Synodical Conference with other Lutheran groups.

Later on, however, particularly since the pre-destinarian conferences of the 1880's when the confessional position of the various Lutheran synods had crystallized and were fully known, and known to be in opposition to one another, and each group was intent upon defending its own position and in winning others over to it, then the Missouri Synod, as well as the entire Synodical

Conference, found joint prayer impossible—impossible because prayer fellowship was impossible. When in the first part of this century, around 1905, inter-synodical free conferences were once more promoted, then the Missouri Synod leaders, together with the Synodical Conference, opposed joint prayer. They opposed joint prayer in such conferences in the very same manner in which we oppose it today. For evidence thereof we have many articles on this point in a Missouri Synod theological publication of that time which is known as *Lehre und Wehre*. In those articles the Missouri Synod theologians of that day showed that they opposed the very kind of prayer which was envisioned and approved in the Houston convention, namely a prayer which implores “God from whom true unity in the Spirit must come, for His blessing, in order that unity may be achieved in those things where it is lacking.” The Missouri Synod writers of those articles in 1905 pointed out that in taking part in those free inter-synodical conferences, promoted at that time, the Missouri Synod representatives could not pray such a prayer together with representatives of heterodox synods, for the representatives of the Missouri Synod would be attending those free conferences as people who have been convinced by Scripture that their confessional stand on the doctrines under discussion is correct and Biblical and that it was the Lord’s will that they *be* thus convinced through His Word. Hence the only thing that *they* could pray for was that the Lord *enlighten* those who are still enmeshed in error. Yet it was also evident to them that the representatives of the other Synods would not be praying this prayer in *that* sense, for *they* would be intent upon winning the Missouri Synod members over to *their* convictions to which they were bound by *their* consciences, although misguided. Thus the joint prayer for enlightenment of God’s Holy Spirit, understood and meant by the various individuals with *opposing meanings*, would be anything but a joint prayer in the true sense; for to join in prayer means to come together before God’s throne in a common plea, whereas these so-called joint prayers would be creating the untruthful situation of using an outwardly accepted wording to hide the reality that two groups are asking opposite things of the Lord and *asking* them *against* each other. And since this untruthful situation would not only be known to God and offensive in His sight, but would also be felt by many of those who voiced the prayers or who witnessed them, it would confirm many in the delusion that doctrinal unity is after all not such a vital thing, or at least lead to the thought that it is quite impossible to be fully convinced of the doctrinal correction of your own confession. And that is the very thought upon which unionism thrives. It is the very thought with which it always defends itself.

In summing up the issues which disturb the fraternal relations between Missouri and Wisconsin, President Brenner in his official letter to the Houston convention repeated our Synod’s request that the Missouri Synod reverse its resolutions on scouting. We asked that in 1950 and also in 1947. In our resolution made at the New Ulm convention in 1951 we took note of the fact that at its 1950 convention the Missouri Synod had reaffirmed its 1944 resolution on scouting which had given scouting a clean bill of health by stating that the “matter of scouting should be left to the individual congregation to decide and that under the circumstances Synod may consider her interest sufficiently protected.” We deplored the fact that this re-affirmation was arrived at without their convention delegates being informed concerning the objections to scouting which the representatives of our Synod had voiced in the discussions which had gone on during the previous three years between a Missouri and Wisconsin Synod committee. We saw in all of this a continuation of the effective censorship which had already been in effect at the 1947 Missouri Synod convention where the Missouri Synod delegates were not informed concerning the extensive study on Boy Scoutism which our Synod had adopted at the Watertown

convention. in 1947 and which our Union Committee had submitted to the Missouri Synod convention in the form of an unprinted memorial.

At our New Ulm convention in 1951 we were however faced with the fact that the Synodical Conference had in the meantime again committed the issue of scouting to a committee of its own, made up of representatives of all of its constituent synods, and that this committee would not finish its work until the 1952 convention of the Synodical Conference. Thus we resolved at New Ulm in 1951 that we insist that the final report of this committee of the Synodical Conference be heard and acted upon at the next convention of the Synodical Conference. This committee reported at the St. Paul convention of the Synodical Conference in 1952—the report, however, was a divided one. The Norwegian and the Wisconsin Synod members of this committee stated that in some of the fundamental features of the scout program, in other words, in the *unchangeable* parts of the scout program there are religious elements with which a Christian cannot identify himself without offending against the Word of God—namely, in the mandatory scout oath and law scouting endeavors to lead boys to do their duty to God without conversion. By means of its mandatory scout oath and law, scouting endeavors to train character without the motivation of the Gospel. The scout oath or promise is an oath condemned by the Word of God. The twelfth scout law is basically unionistic since it obligates every scout, whether he is Christian, Jewish or Mohammedan, to faithfulness in his religious duties without defining these duties or the God whom he is to serve.

The Wisconsin and Norwegian representatives also pointed out that these objectionable features have not, been removed by any *changes* that have been made in the organization and program of scouting. This statement was made after taking note of every such change which the Missouri Synod representatives pointed out to us. The Wisconsin and Norwegian Synod representatives furthermore pointed out that the objectionable features of scouting are still not excluded by the provisions which this organization has made for operating scout troops under the control of Lutheran pastors and congregations; for such troops, nevertheless, remain an integral part of the National Organization. and with such membership in the National Scout Organization Lutheran troops undermine the testimony to sin and grace which the Christian Church owes to the world.

The Missouri Synod and the Slovak Synod representatives on this committee, on the other hand, brought in a parallel report which in substance asserted that scouting in itself was not a matter of conscience for them and thus could be left to the judgment of the individual congregations.

These divided conclusions were in substance and in points of argumentation the same divided conclusions in which the discussions on scouting had ended in the two previous inter-synodical committees. (Inter-Synodical Relations Committee, 1944-48—Missouri-Wisconsin Synod Committee, 1948-50.) In other words, three official committees, after many and lengthy discussions had come to the same divided conclusions; and a situation was at hand concerning which it could no longer be said that the material had not been thoroughly studied by both sides, or that the objections raised by those who opposed scouting and the manner of defense presented by those who condoned scouting were not mutually very clearly understood.

The Floor Committee at the Synodical Conference of 1952 was at a loss as to what to recommend concerning this deadlocked issue and thus contented itself with bringing the recommendation to the floor that the issue be discussed on the convention floor. This discussion was broken off by a resolution proposed by a Slovak Synod delegate that the Synodical Conference authorize a joint study of natural law, natural knowledge of God, and civic

righteousness by all the Seminary faculties of the Synodical Conference. Here we need to bear in mind that this did not offer any new solution whatsoever! These doctrines in their bearing on scouting had been under thorough discussion in all of the previous committees at which also representatives of all the theological faculties had been present with the exception of the Springfield faculty. This resolution was passed but, like the Synodical Conference resolution on the Common Confession, also this one was passed over the nay votes of all the Wisconsin and Norwegian Synod delegates. We could see no hope in the work of a further committee on an issue in which the points of controversy, as well as the argumentation on both sides, had already been made clear and in fact had crystallized through the activity of three previous committees whose work had ended in identical results. Hence, a situation had come about in this issue where a confession to either stand was called for rather than a further study. On the other hand we realized that a committing of the issue to further study would be unfavorable to our stand of opposition to scouting. Under these circumstances the promotion of scouting in the congregations of our sister Synod would continue and present a vexing problem to ever more of our own congregations in whose community this promotion of scouting on the part of the Missouri Synod would take place. At the same time our own people might readily come to feel that there must be something inherently weak—something exceedingly complicated—in a stand which is committed to even further committees for study and thus lose sight of the fact that our objections to scouting involve *simple, basic scriptural* truths which every child in confirmation instruction can grasp and on which it is able to judge scouting.

While representatives of our theological faculty met with the representatives of the other seminaries in the one meeting that was held in March of this year in Chicago in compliance to this Synodical Conference resolution, these representatives of ours did so with the understanding that our Synod's action at its forthcoming convention, also in the issue of scouting, would not be dependent upon the completion of this committee's work, which had really been undertaken upon our protest. Our representatives were merely ready to repeat their testimony also here until the issue would be brought to a conclusion in some form or manner. Thus also President Brenner, as stated in the beginning of our discussion on this point, in his letter to the Houston convention repeated the request that the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod reverse its resolution on scouting.

What answer did we receive at Houston? This was the one point among the specific requests addressed to the Houston convention which received no direct answer at all. No reference whatsoever was made to it in any convention resolution, though our two representatives were invited to sum up our Synods objections to scouting before the floor committee to which President Brenner's communication had been referred. At this Floor Committee meeting two representatives from the conventions floor committee on scouting and lodges were also present. Since the Floor Committee had stated that it did not consider it a part of its work to *debate* any issues with our representatives, the brief testimony of our representatives was presented without discussion and there the matter ended. A Missouri Synod congregation from Milwaukee, however, had presented a memorial on the matter of scouting in which it asked its Synod to clarify its resolution on scouting. The point on which the congregation desired to be clarified was in substance this: How was it feasible in a practical way to leave the decision on scouting to the individual congregation when one congregation might consider it a matter against conscience to receive into communicant membership young boys who after patient admonition retained their scout membership, while another congregation might tolerate or promote scouting in its midst.

In its resolution on this memorial the Houston convention reaffirmed its 1944 resolution which leaves it to each congregation to establish its own policy, as pastoral wisdom on the part of the congregation and the ministry in its own particular situation dictates; and the convention recommended to this particular Milwaukee congregation the services of its official Committee on Fraternal Organizations and then urged all of its congregations to avoid extremes in either direction in the matter of scoutism, lest consciences be burdened. Before the vote was taken which adopted this resolution, one pastoral delegate put the question to the chairman, President Behnken: "What is the matter with scouting?"—leaving the impression that he could not understand why so much of Synod's time should be taken up by a memorial on this particular subject. The chairman, President Behnken, then referred this question to Pastor Acker, the representative of the afore-mentioned Committee on Fraternal Organizations in whose field the matter of scouting lies. Pastor Acker gave this brief answer: "It was once deistic, but that has been removed. It is now simply a secular boys' organization." No further answer was given. No mention was made of the years of controversy on this issue between the various synods of the Synodical Conference. No mention was made that even before *this* convention there was an official request of the Wisconsin Synod that the Missouri Synod reverse its position on scouting. There was not even a mention of the committee of theological faculties inaugurated by the last Synodical Conference which was discussing the matter so that their unfinished work might have been urged as a reason for giving no answer to the Wisconsin Synod's request. No, there was only the brief answer that there was simply nothing wrong with scouting in itself and thus, as an indifferent thing, should be handled as a matter of individual judgment.

When on the second last day of the Houston convention all further resolutions that would still come before the convention were in the hands of all the delegates and visitors and none of those resolutions made any reference to our questions on scouting, our representatives privately called this to the attention of President Behnken and also to representatives of the pertinent floor committee. None of these official parties, however, felt moved to initiate any action on the matter. It is this action of the Houston convention of last June that has led our Standing Committee on Church Union to the conviction that *their* efforts to negotiate on this issue have come to a conclusion. Even the committee of the theological faculties is of no avail if its activity or even its existence is not reported to the Missouri Synod and that Synod simply reaffirms its previous stand without any reference to any objections or negotiations.

We also want to note that the Houston convention reported absolutely nothing about the activities of the previous Synodical Conference Boy Scout Committee which had likewise been at work since the last Missouri Synod convention and which had brought a divided report which showed complete division on the issue. In the Congress of our U. S. putting something into the hands of a committee and never permitting that committee to report its findings is the accepted means of avoiding an issue or of killing an issue. And even though it lies beyond our sphere to say that the Missouri Synod's failure to ask for the committee's report on the Boy Scout issue was their intentional way of avoiding or killing the Boy Scout issue, nevertheless, the effect is the very same.

Now in this matter of scouting, we want always to bear in mind that whenever we have asked the Missouri Synod to reverse its decision on scouting we have always done that with the conviction that we are merely asking them to return to a stand on scouting which we once held in common with them. We know, of course, from our negotiations that that also is a point which the Missouri Synod representatives in these negotiations have not been ready to concede. Nevertheless, we are convinced that this is in keeping with actual facts. We know, of course, that

even in the past there wasn't always full uniformity of practice in this matter—that there were individuals who took a lax stand on scouting in general and that there were those who considered some form of scouting under Lutheran leadership and separate Lutheran troops possible. But that was not a stand which the Missouri Synod expressed and defended in its official pamphlets, books and periodicals. Even as late as 1938 the Missouri Synod in convention declared of scouting itself that it had naturalistic and unionistic tendencies which made membership in general scout troops impossible, and this had been clearly set forth in Dr. Graebner's widely disseminated pamphlet on Boy Scout and Y.M.C.A. morality, and also in his edition of the book entitled *Secret Empire* which was published on the approval of synodically-appointed censors. In this literature Boy Scoutism was condemned upon those very same unchangeable aspects of scouting upon which we still condemn it today. In his 1929 edition of the *Secret Empire* Dr. Graebner did, of course, begin to toy with the possibility of separate Lutheran troops and with the thought of reforming scoutism by entering upon negotiations with it. This latter thought was really inconsistent since his main objections to it were based on elements in scouting which belonged to its fundamental principles and which the organization could not give up without committing suicide. Hence, whatever changes were brought about in Boy Scout handbooks through negotiations either gave place to other expressions of the same erroneous principles or to expressions in which these principles were more vaguely expressed and hence had become an even more dangerous snare. If the fact that there was no absolute uniformity of practice in the matter of scouting within the Missouri Synod is to prove that it never had a definite position on scouting, then the well-known fact that there has been no absolute uniformity in lodge practice might be used with the same force to prove that the Missouri Synod has never had an official stand on communing lodge members, if it should ever think of letting down the bars in that direction, which God may prevent.

When those who deny that we once had a common stand on scouting want to base that on the fact that there were no Missouri Synod resolutions passed on the matter during the period of unanimity which we have in mind, then we will frankly say that we know of no such resolutions on the part of our Synod either at that time. When we did take up the matter in convention in 1947 and made it the subject of resolutions, it was not with the thought of taking a stand that we had heretofore not taken but of publicly and clearly confessing this stand in the face of the *changed* stand of the Missouri Synod as expressed in its 1944 resolutions.

What has troubled us considerably in our Boy Scout negotiations with the Missouri Synod is this that much is made of the argument that only by condoning Boy Scouts can we gain and hold a religious audience among our American youth which is so deeply wrapped up in scouting. If no concession to Scriptural principles is to be advocated by this argument, then there is no call whatsoever for voicing this argument; for it should certainly be understood that we have no interest whatsoever in unnecessarily estranging our youth by condemning scouting. If, on the other hand, that argument is meant to make us willing to compromise our clear testimony over against false religious principles, expressed in the Boy Scout movement, why then—then we are dealing with another unionistic tendency.

The final issue which was made the subject of a definite request on the part of our Synod in its communication through President Brenner to the Missouri Synod convention of last June was its praesidium's (the president of the Missouri Synod and its four vice-presidents) unsatisfactory answer to the six questions which in our 1949 letter we had directed to the Missouri Synod. Our Synod asked the Missouri Synod to reconsider its answer to those six questions. In those six questions we had asked (1) whether the Missouri Synod approved of the

participation of its pastors in the programs and in the joint worship of inter-synodical laymen's organizations, specifically the Lutheran Men of America—(2) whether the Missouri Synod approved of the co-operation of some of its welfare organizations with Lutherans with whom it is otherwise not in fellowship, in view of the fact that such welfare work is inseparably associated with spiritual implications—(3) whether the Missouri Synod approved of the co-operation of its representatives with the National Lutheran Council (all Lutheran bodies in America with the exception of Synodical Conference bodies) in matters which are admittedly no longer in the field of externals (e.g. building a new Lutheranism in Great Britain)—(4) whether the Missouri Synod approved of the position taken by its representatives at the first Bad Boll (a gathering of representatives of various Lutheran and Evangelical church groups in Bad Boll, Germany) with regard to the program for devotion and worship (they shared devotions with other church bodies at that time with whom they were not in fellowship)—(5) whether the Missouri Synod approved of the arrangement whereby prominent members of its official committees are serving with representatives of heterodox Lutheran bodies as committees sponsors of the book, "Scouting in the Lutheran Church," published by the National Scout Organization, in other words, a joint program of sanctification—and finally (6) whether the Missouri Synod still holds to its former position that Rom. 16, 17 applies to all errorists whether Lutheran or not—that passage in which the Apostle Paul says to us: "Now I beseech you, brethren mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them."

In these six questions our Synod pointed to just a few of the publicly and widely-known acts of unionism, committed by members of the Missouri Synod, which had been made the subject of prolonged discussions in the meetings of the Inter-Synodical Relations Committee (a committee appointed by the Synodical Conference to settle all the issues that were disturbing our fraternal relations—appointed in 1944). These acts of unionism, just because they were so widely known and so widely publicized, created a general offense—an offense which was never removed by equally public disavowals. Thus we asked in each case: What will the Missouri Synod do to remove this offense if it really disapproves of these things? In its Milwaukee convention in 1950 the Missouri Synod referred these questions to its praesidium for answering. When our 1951 convention at New Ulm received its answer from the praesidium of the Missouri Synod, it not only found that answer unsatisfactory, but it also pointed out that the praesidium of the Missouri Synod was hardly qualified to give a satisfactory answer since a number of the six questions pertained to actions in which members of the praesidium had themselves been involved and which faced us with a situation in which the accused were at the same time made the judges—with a situation in which those whom we considered guilty were asked to sit in judgment over their own misdeeds.

The Houston convention resolution on this same matter of our six questions did not bring us any closer to a solution of this issue, since the entire matter was referred once more to the praesidium for further negotiations, even though our representatives at Houston rose to the floor and pointed out that the Missouri Synod convention was committing the matter to those who were now even *more unqualified*—for they had not only themselves been *involved* in some of the matters but were now asked to *review* their own *answer* to us which we had found unsatisfactory and concerning which we had asked the *convention* to take a stand. That would be like the situation in which someone objected to something in President Siegler's address in one of our District meetings—a presidential address which had the full approval of the two vice-presidents before it was presented—and then the District would ask the president and the two vice-presidents to serve as a committee to sit in judgment over the matter.

The inevitable result of this run-around which the Milwaukee and the Houston Missouri Synod conventions gave us is this that those in the Missouri Synod who are inclined to unionistic practices are encouraged in those unionistic practices, for they know that they can do so without much danger of any action against them arising through the protest of the members of the Wisconsin Synod. And therefore, also in this request, the response of the Houston convention was in substance a refusal to give to us what in our opinion was necessary to restore our fraternal relations and to assure them for the future. Just think, here were overt acts of unionism on the part of the Missouri Synod which made it evident that we are definitely not walking together in Christian practice. We hoped that the offense created by them could be removed by a public disavowal. Here again we have an issue that is not removed, and the action that has been taken by the Missouri Synod dims the hope that it will be removed.

All of these expositions just presented to us give to us the necessary background for an understanding of the report of our Standing Committee on Church Union which has had to carry on these negotiations for us and which, after a brief review of its unsuccessful efforts in settling all of these issues, reaches the conclusion that it knows of nothing more that it can do in the way of negotiation through the channels at its disposal and is thus forced to state that the Missouri Synod has broken the bond of the Synodical Conference, though it leaves it to the Synod itself to appoint a Floor Committee to review its work and its findings and thereupon to recommend appropriate action. May the Lord God through His Word direct and guide our Wisconsin Synod so that it may obediently do those things that God's Holy Word enjoins upon it.

Note: Since this paper was delivered, further developments have taken place. Just because the facts set forth in this paper, in addition to many others, were clearly and unequivocally brought out at the special Synodical Convention at Milwaukee both in its floor discussions and in its final resolutions, President Behnken and other representatives of the Missouri Synod who were present at our special convention were made aware of the critical state of the fraternal relations between the Wisconsin and Missouri Synods. It was this awareness that prompted President Behnken to come with the offer that the praesidium of the Wisconsin Synod and its district presidents meet with the praesidium of the Missouri Synod and an equal number of district presidents from the areas in which both Synods are active for the purpose of finding a God-pleasing solution of the break in relations of which our Synod spoke in Point 1¹ of our resolutions. And this in turn led to Point 6² of our Synodical resolutions.

¹ That we declare that the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod a) by reaffirming its acceptance of the Common Confession as a settlement of past differences which are in fact not settled (Proceedings, 1950, p. 147), and b) by its persistent adherence to its unionistic practices (Common Confession, Joint Prayer, Scouting, Chaplaincy, Communion Agreement with the National Lutheran Council; co-operation with unorthodox church bodies in matters clearly not in the field of externals; negotiating with lodges and the Boy Scouts of America with the plea that this gives opportunity to bear witness; under the same plea taking part in unionistic religious programs and in the activities of unionistic church federations; negotiating for purposes of union with a church body whose official position it is that it is neither possible nor necessary to agree in all matters of doctrine, and which contends for an allowable and wholesome latitude of theological opinion on the basis of the teachings of the Word of God), has brought about the present break in relations that is threatening the existence of the Synodical Conference and the continuance of our affiliation with the sister Synod.

² While during the period up to the next meeting of the Synodical Conference we, in view of President Behnken's offer, still anxiously and prayerfully await an indication that the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod will not persist in its present stand as set forth in Point 1, we remain in a state of confession.