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WISCONSIN vs. MISSOURI
WHICH SIDE ADHERED TO THE ORIGINAL SYNODICAL CONFERENCE POSITION
IN REGARD TO CHURCH FELLOWSHIP?

A PAPER IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
CHURCH HISTORY 373
"Lutheranism in America"

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BRIEF OUTLINE

- I. The Introduction
- II. What the Synodical Conference taught regarding church fellowship.
 - A. The Constitution takes a stand.
 - B. Walther states his position.
 - C. F. Pieper elaborates on the position in a book.
 - D. The Missouri Synod supported this position wholeheartedly.
- III. Dark clouds form over the Synodical Conference.
 - A. A light shower appears in Missouri.
 - B. The shower turns into a downpour of unionism.
- IV. Wisconsin maintains the Synodical Conference position.
 - A. Concern turns to alarm.
 - B. Wisconsin finally breaks with Missouri to maintain its position.
- V. Conclusion.

APPENDIX I: THE NEW CONSTITUTION OF THE SYNODICAL CONFERENCE.

APPENDIX II: WISCONSIN AND MISSOURI STATEMENTS ON FELLOWSHIP from 1960.

In August of 1963 the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod withdrew from the Synodical Conference. Already in 1961 the Wisconsin Synod had voted to suspend fellowship with the largest member of the Synodical Conference. That member was the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod.

Why did the Wisconsin Synod sever a fruitful 91 year old relationship with the Synodical Conference and the Missouri Synod? The Wisconsin Synod claimed that the Missouri Synod was "no longer standing on the original confessional position upon which the Lutheran Synodical Conference was founded."¹ The point of contention was church fellowship. The LC-MS, however, claimed that there was nothing wrong with their teachings or practice and accused the Wisconsin Synod of being divisive for no "valid" reason. The Missouri Synod remained in the Synodical Conference, now minus WELS and ELS, for four more years.² In 1967 the LC-MS dissolved the Synodical Conference.

This paper will concern itself with this breakdown in the Synodical Conference. More specifically, we will take a close look at both the Wisconsin Synod's position and that of the Missouri Synod and answer the question... WHICH SIDE ADHERED TO THE ORIGINAL SYNODICAL CONFERENCE POSITION IN REGARD TO CHURCH FELLOWSHIP?

The Lutheran Synodical Conference was formed at Milwaukee, Wisconsin in 1872. The confessional position of its

1 "Resolution for withdrawel from the Lutheran Synodical Conference" made at the 37th Convention of the WELS at Milwaukee, Wis. August 7-14, 1963. WLW, vol.60 (Oct. 1963), p. 296-297.

membership was...

The Synodical Conference professes that the canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments (are) God's Word and the confession of the Evangelical Lutheran Church from 1580, known as 'Concordia,' as its own.³

Later "God's Word" was amended to "the verbally inspired Word of God." And in the 1944 English version another paragraph regarding membership was added. It states...

Membership may be acquired and held in the Synodical Conference of North America by such Lutheran bodies only as have accepted without reservation the doctrinal basis mentioned in article II above and uphold the same in practice.

This is what Dr. C.F.W. Walther had intended when he set out to unite Lutherans. In 1856 in an issue of Lehre und Wehre he published this invitation..⁴

The undersigned ministers of the Ev. Luth. Church in the United States, with the conviction that the unity and the well-being of our Lutheran Zion will be greatly advanced through the free expression of opinions regarding the various interests of our Church in this land by brethren who are united in faith, herewith extend an invitation to all members of the Ev. Luth. Church in the United States who hold the Unaltered Augsburg Confession to be a true presentation of the teachings of the Word of God to meet with them... in a free and brotherly conference concerning the status and needs of the Church in America (p.186) 5

Only those who were one in faith as expressed by the Unaltered Augsburg Confession were invited. Unity was sought only among those who were fundamentally united in their doctrine. Later we will look at several ^{theses} of Dr. Walther's

3 My translation of article II of the constitution as recorded in the 1872 Proceedings of the WELS. p.5.

4 Synodical Council Proceedings (1944) p.93. See Appendix number 1 for the full English version.

5 ---"Fellowship Then and Now," pamphlet published by the WELS Advisory Committee on Doctrinal Matters, (1961), p.8.

and see that his view of uniting with other "Lutherans" was not to be at the expense of pure doctrine.

In 1893 the Lutheran Publication Society published a small book entitled The Distinctive Doctrines and Usages of the General Bodies of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the United States. This helpful book presented in a concise form the teachings and practices of seven Lutheran bodies in the United States. Professor Francis Pieper wrote the article on the Synodical Conference.⁶ The following are three excerpts on fellowship from his article.

As ours is an age of indifference to doctrine, Christians must take special heed that the difference between orthodox and heterodox Churches be not obliterated. And it should be distinctly understood that the character of the Churches as to their orthodoxy, is determined by the doctrine which is ACTUALLY TAUGHT, not by the "officially acknowledged confession" kept perhaps in the archives only.

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Christians should never agree to disagree on any article of faith, but earnestly endeavor to bring about an agreement on all doctrines revealed in holy Scripture. ...An agreement on a more or less comprehensive collection of so-called "fundamental articles," selected by man, leaving a portion of the divinely revealed truth to the discretion of the dissenting parties, is a position wholly unbecoming to Christians.

...But is perfect agreement concerning doctrine possible? We most emphatically answer: it is, as the Scriptures are perfectly clear on all articles of faith, every article of faith being revealed at least somewhere in the Scriptures in plain and proper words. 8

(Regarding pulpit fellowship especially)...
All Christians are commanded to avoid those who teach doctrines contrary to the Scriptures (Am. 16:17);
(quote continues)

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- 6 We will note here rather than later that Prof. Pieper did not only represent the Synodical Conference but, as Walther's successor, he also represented the LC-MS.
- 7 ---The Distinctive Doctrines and Usages of the General Bodies of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the United States. (Philadelphia: Lutheran Publication Society, 1902) p.126.
- 8 Ibid., p.138.

teachers, therefore, who in any way proclaim false doctrines, are not to be admitted into but to be excluded from our pulpits. As this rule is taken from the Word of God, it admits of no exception, but applies to every case and occasion. The practice of pulpit-fellowship with errorists cannot be excused on the plea of its being demanded by love. For it is contrary to both the love toward God who bids us 'avoid' false teachers and not to invite them into our pulpits, and to the love toward our fellow-men, as it is our Christian duty to warn them against error, and not to confirm them in it. 9

The Synodical Conference position regarding fellowship was basically this: there must first be a union in doctrine and practice before an external union could be attempted. The stress was on unity of faith and doctrine first. (Such a position is Scriptural).¹⁰

For a long time the Synodical Conference practiced what it preached. If time permitted, we might look at the election controversy as well as the free conferences from 1903 to 1906. However, suffice it to say that the members of the Synodical Conference supported the position set down in the constitution in their practicing^{of} fellowship.

The Missouri Synod was an especially vocal spokesman in defense of the above position. In 1869 Walther wrote ten theses on open questions. We note numbers 8,9,10.

VIII. The Church must take steps against any deviation from the doctrine of the Word of God, whether this be done by teachers or by so-called laymen, by individuals or by entire church bodies.

IX. Such members as wilfully persist in deviating from the Word of God, no matter what question it may concern, must be excluded.

X. From the fact that the Church militant cannot attain a higher degree of unity than a fundamental one it does not follow that any error against the Word of God may be granted equal rights in the Church with the truth, nor

9 Ibid., p.128-129.

10 I Co. 1:10; Rm. 16:17-18; II Jn. 9-11.

that it may be tolerated. 11

In 1903 Dr. August Graebner, professor at Concordia Theological Seminary, St. Louis, stated in an essay: "From the outset prayer fellowship has been common worship of God, and where common worship cannot be practiced, Christians are not to carry on prayer fellowship."¹²

Dr. Bente in a 1904 issue of Lehre und Wehre defended the Synodical Conference position of not practicing prayer fellowship at the free conferences in the early 1900's by saying, "The prerequisite for prayer fellowship and church fellowship is unity of faith. God has expressly forbidden us to practice church fellowship with such with whom we are not united in the truth."¹³ In 1905 Dr. Bente commented on II John 11-12. "Clearly John here speaks of church fellowship and brotherly intercourse (and so also of prayer fellowship and fellowship in worship) with errorists.... He judges that Christians who engage in such church and brother fellowship with false teachers become partakers of their sins."¹⁴

Dr. Francis Pieper in an essay on Unionism delivered in 1924 said: "The Holy Scriptures very emphatically and in manifold ways teach that all fellowship with false doctrine is forbidden by God and is harmful to the Church."¹⁵

Dr. Theo. Engelder, a professor at the St. Louis Seminary, wrote:

The passages which prohibit pulpit fellowship and altar fellowship apply with equal force to prayer fellowship. Uniting with errorists in

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11. Carl Lawrenz, "Church Fellowship" Essay published in 1960 for discussion by the Joint Doctrinal Committees of the Synodical Conference. pp.26,31.
 12. --- "Fellowship Then and Now," p.18.
 13. Ibid., p.18
 14. Ibid., p.19.
 15. Ibid., p.20.

joint worship in general, and common prayer in particular, is not avoiding them, Rm.16:17, but recognizing their position as God-pleasing, II Jn. 10-11. Furthermore joint prayer like joint communion is the outward expression of inward fellowship... 16

In 1946 the president of the Missouri Synod, Dr. Behnke, said:

If such cooperation involves joint work in missions, in Christian education, in student welfare work, in joint services celebrating great events, then cooperation is just another name for pulpit, altar, and prayer fellowship. Without doctrinal agreement this smells compromise. It means yielding in doctrinal positions. Such fellowship will not stand in the light of Scripture." 17

These are very fine statements in defense of the Synodical Conference, and Scriptural, position. However, already in the late 1920's there were disturbing undercurrents. In an interview with Pastor Harold Warnke, an interesting incident was related to me. In 1929 Francis Pieper called a special faculty meeting at the Seminary in St. Louis. In that meeting Pieper interviewed each of the faculty members on doctrinal things including fellowship. At the end of his questioning, he turned to P.E. Kretzmann and said that they were the only two there who still held to the "old" Missouri beliefs.

In the 1930's Missouri began discussions with the American Lutheran Church, a church body with lax practice in fellowship and several differences in other doctrines.

The purpose of such meetings was recorded in the 1936

"Cleveland Resolutions."

16. Ibid., p.20.

17. Ibid., p.21. "Unfortunately, already then the Missouri Synod was making a distinction between prayer fellowship and joint prayer."

7. Resolved, that we declare our willingness to confer with other Lutheran bodies on problems of Lutheran union with a view towards effecting true unity on the basis of the Word of God and the Lutheran Confessions. 18

In reporting on the Cleveland Resolutions to the Wisconsin Synod, Professor Joh. Meyer of the Wisconsin Synod Seminary in Mequon showed concern:

By the foregoing synodical resolutions the committee meetings mentioned above were authorized to act as they did, the avowed aim of the discussions being the establishment of church union, "pulpit and altar fellowship", between the conferring bodies.

It may be a debatable question whether it is psychologically possible that the conferring committees, with the aim thus definitely stated, can still carry on their doctrinal discussions without bias, with a heart open to the truth unabridged. To our way of looking at it, church fellowship will take care of itself once the unity of faith and confession is reached; and to stress, even to mention union as the aim to be achieved cannot but have its detrimental repercussions. 19

Professor Meyer's concern was well founded. If your aim is union, you may not be as precise in wording documents so there can be no mistake in interpretation. But did Missouri err in this way and compromise herself in favor of union with the ALC?

Although some of the literature published by the LC-MS, both officially and unofficially, was in keeping with her earlier statements on fellowship (like those quoted above), a new trend was appearing. The idea of a united Lutheran front was gaining popularity. One periodical which advocated the union was the American Lutheran.²⁰

18. Joh. Meyer, "'Noble Souls' Knocking at our Doors." Article reporting the Cleveland Resolutions in the Church news section of WLQ (April, 1936), p.200-201.

19. Ibid., p.202.

20. This magazine had been published since 1917 and began supporting union with the ALC in the late 30's. -- Thomas Kuster, "The fellowship dispute in the LC-MS: a rhetorical study of ecumenical change." Doctoral Thesis (1969). p.18.

The American Lutheran claimed "The divisions among Lutherans are not caused by doctrine, hence are not divisive."²¹ Some of the alternative causes of division they listed were:

- nationalistic prejudice
- a tradition of non-cooperation
- fear of the unknown
- selfish organizational concerns
- inadequate mutual understanding
- an "isolationist mentality".

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Articles in the American Lutheran claimed that agreement on all points of teaching was not necessary for union and that agreement on a certain formulation of words was not necessary for union. This was quite a change in view of the hard line Missouri men had once set down regarding a true unity of faith and practice.²³

But the American Lutheran was an un-official publication of the LC-MS. What about the official Missouri stance? Well, one of the results of the free conferences with the ALC was that Missouri allowed her Brief Statement to be interpreted "in light of" the ALC's Doctrinal Declaration. (1938) Missouri and the ALC were moving 'closer to unity.' But having two documents with different wordings allowed room for differences of interpretation. Meanwhile, the ALC was claiming that "it is neither necessary nor possible to agree on all non-fundamental doctrines."²⁴

21. Kuster, op.cit., p.145.

22. Ibid., p.146.

23. See quotes #7 and #8 among others.

24. E.C. Fredrich, "The Great Debate with Missouri." WLQ vol.74. (April, 1977), p.158.

Missouri began making a distinction between prayer-fellowship and joint prayer. In the 1944 convention of the Missouri Synod this statement was made, "However, joint prayer at intersynodical conferences, asking God for His guidance and blessing upon the deliberations and discussions of His Word, does not militate against this resolution" (the resolution referred to said that Missouri and the ALC were not yet in Fellowship).²⁵ So while the Missouri Synod recognized that they were not yet in fellowship with the ALC, they still said that joint prayer could be practised under certain conditions.

In the 1940's the LC-MS became involved now and again with other Lutheran organizations such as the Lutheran World Relief and the National Lutheran Council.²⁶ More and more statements were being made in various publications defending union with other Lutherans. One incident of this is recorded in the WELS pamphlet "Fellowship Then and Now." It records an editorial appearing in the December 1958 issue of the American Lutheran, which by this time has become an influential voice in the Missouri Synod.

We are still wondering why some among us continue to insist that a Christian commits a sin against God if he unites in prayer with another Christian or a group of Christians with whom he is not in complete doctrinal agreement--- more specifically, that members of the LC*MS would be acting in violation of a divine commandment if they were to pray with representatives of National Lutheran Council churches even though the meeting which brought the two groups together had been called for the sole purpose of achieving doctrinal unity on the basis of the Holy Scriptures. (con't.)

25. --- "Fellowship Then and Now", p.22.

26. Carl Meyer, Moving Frontiers, (St. Louis: Concordia, 1964), p. 413.

(This same editorial then proceeds to condemn the position ~~of~~ the Synodical Conference took in regard to joint prayer at the intersynodical conferences in the early 1900's, ... We read, "The writer's first encounter with this strange principle of Christian fellowship occurred in 1906, when he observed it in action at the intersynodical conference at Ft. Wayne." The remainder of the full-page editorial expresses sharp criticism of the "strange principle" that was applied at these meetings.²⁷

So far we have looked at Missouri statements dealing mainly with prayer fellowship. But in 1944 Missouri also did something else in the area of "fellowship" that was a cause for concern. The Missouri Synod abandoned its position against Scouting (that it was unionistic, promoted syncretism, and deism).

One cannot help but notice a change in Missouri's attitude and position regarding fellowship. From the statements quoted earlier in this paper to the more recent ones there is a decided difference. Meanwhile, the Wisconsin Synod, which began with shaky fellowship principles until Missouri straightened her out, has maintained the old Synodical Conference position.

From the thirties on Quartalschrift/Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly articles, such as Joh. Meyer's²⁸, have shown marked concern for Missouri. Over the years the concern turned to warning and then to admonition. In 1951 Wisconsin Proceedings record the alarm at the LC-MS' acceptance of the Common Confession. A resolution reads:

That we inform the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod 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

27. --- "Fellowship Then and Now," p.26.

28. See footnote X quote 18.

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 are in fact not settled. 29

In 1953 and 1954 eleven tracts were published by the WELS which treated the issues in controversy with her sister synod. Professor Meyer and others continued to write about the deviations from Synodical Conference teaching.

Finally, in 1960 an impasse was reached between the Wisconsin Synod and the LC-MS. The pamphlet "Fellowship Then and Now" was prepared by the Wisconsin Synod to explain Wisconsin's position and point out that there indeed was a change in the Missouri Synod's position on fellowship.³⁰ It very clearly presents the Synodical Conference position also. The Wisconsin Synod Commission on Doctrinal Matters had prior to this time prepared an outline on their position concerning the fellowship issue. (See Appendix II) Professor Carl Lawrenz, a member of this committee, wrote and expanded explanation of the outline and both appear in pamphlet form. The basic premise of the Wisconsin Synod is that church fellowship is a unit concept "covering every joint expression, manifestation, and demonstration of a common faith."³¹ Like the original Synodical Conference position so states The Wisconsin Synod, "Without unity of doctrine and practice there can be no fellowship whatsoever."

It was a sad time indeed when the Wisconsin Synod felt constrained to sever the bond of fellowship with the church

29. Fredrich, op.cit., p.162.

30. Many quotes have been gleaned from this helpful tract.

31. See Appendix II, article 2, Missouri's position, entitled "The Theology of Fellowship" follows.

body which had led it out of the quicksand of unionism. Yet, a lesson must be learned from this dark period in American Lutheranism. As long as we believe and hold to the teachings of Scripture as expressed in the Lutheran Confessions as being pure and true, then we will not allow any compromise of it. However, if we allow doubt regarding our position on fellowship or any other doctrine to sprout and grow, we too, God forbid, will soon find ourselves in a state far worse than Missouri. For we will have had Missouri as a warning example.

May the Lord preserve us in the position of our Synodical Conference forefathers!

**NEW CONSTITUTION OF THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN
SYNODICAL CONFERENCE OF NORTH AMERICA**

Article 1. Name.—The name of this organization shall be
EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN SYNODICAL CONFERENCE OF NORTH AMERICA.

Article 2. Doctrinal Basis.—The Synodical Conference of
North America accepts without reservation the canonical Scriptures
of the Old and the New Testament as the verbally inspired Word
of God and the symbolical books of the Evangelical Lutheran
Church constituting the Book of Concord of 1580 as its confession
of faith.

Article 3. Membership.—Membership may be acquired and
held in the Synodical Conference of North America by such Lu-
theran bodies only as have accepted without reservation the doc-
trinal basis mentioned in Article 2 and uphold the same in practice.

Article 4. Purpose.—The purpose of the Synodical Conference
of North America shall be: to give outward expression to the
unity of spirit existing among the constituent synods; to encourage
and strengthen one another in faith and confession; to further unity
in doctrine and practice and to remove whatever might threaten
to disturb this unity; to co-operate in matters of mutual interest;
to strive for true unity in doctrine and practice among Lutheran
church bodies.

Article 5. Authority.—The Synodical Conference of North
America is only an advisory body with respect to all things con-
cerning which the constituent synods have not given it authorative
power. Without the consent of all the synods of the Synodical Con-
ference of North America none of its constituent synods shall be
permitted to enter into actual church fellowship with any other
church body.

Article 6. Conventions.

- a) Conventions shall be held as stipulated in the by-laws.
- b) Constituent synods shall be entitled to send delegates to
the convention of the Synodical Conference of North America in
such numbers as specified in the by-laws. The duly elected repre-
sentatives of the constituent synods shall have the right to vote at
the conventions of the Synodical Conference of North America.
However, advisory privileges may be granted to any person who
has advisory privilege in his own synod.

Article 7. Officers.—The officers of the Synodical Conference
of North America shall be: a President, one Vice-President from
each of the constituent synods, excepting the one from which the
President is elected, and a Secretary, all of whom shall be elected
from among the clergy, and such officers as the Synodical Confer-
ence of North America may from time to time determine.

The officers shall be elected by ballot at each regular conven-
tion and shall serve until their successors shall have been elected
and shall have qualified.

A vacancy occurring in any of the above-mentioned offices may
be filled by a majority of the remaining officers.

CHURCH FELLOWSHIP

The Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod

1. Church fellowship is every joint expression, manifestation, and demonstration of the common faith in which Christians on the basis of their confession find themselves to be united.

2. We may classify these joint expressions of faith in various ways: pulpit fellowship, altar fellowship, prayer fellowship in worship, fellowship in church work, in missions, in Christian education, in Christian charity. Yet insofar as they are joint expressions of faith they are all essentially one and the same thing . . . namely, church fellowship.

Church fellowship should therefore be treated as a unit concept, covering every joint expression, manifestation, and demonstration of a common faith. Hence Scripture can give the general admonition "avoid them" when church fellowship is to cease, Rom. 16:17. Hence Scripture sees an expression of church fellowship also in giving the right hand of fellowship, Gal. 2:9, and in greeting one another with the fraternal kiss, Rom. 16:16; on the other hand, it points out that a withholding of church fellowship may also be indicated by not extending a fraternal welcome to errorists and by not bidding them Godspeed, 2 John 10, 11.

3. In selecting specific individuals or groups for a joint expression of faith, we can do this only on the basis of their confession. 2 Tim. 2:19; Rom. 10:10; 1 John 4:1-3; 1 Sam. 16:7.

4. A Christian confession of faith is in principle always a confession to the entire Word of God. The denial, adulteration, or suppression of any word of God does not stem from faith but from unbelief. John 8:31; Matt. 5:19; 1 Peter 4:11; Jer. 23:28, 31; Deut. 4:2; Rev. 22:18, 19.

5. Weakness of faith is in itself not a reason for terminating church fellowship but rather an inducement for practicing it vigorously to help one another in overcoming our individual weaknesses. Gal. 6:1-3; Eph. 2:1-16; Matt. 18:15-17.

6. Persistent adherence to false doctrine and practice calls for termination of church fellowship.

We can no longer recognize and treat as Christian brethren those who in spite of patient admonition persistently adhere to an error in doctrine and practice, demand recognition for their error, and make propaganda for it. Gal. 1:8, 9; 5:9; Matt. 7:15-19; 16:6; 2 Tim. 2:17-19; 2 John 9-11; Rom. 16:17, 18. The "avoid them" of Rom. 16:17, 18 excludes any contact that would be an acknowledgment and manifestation of church fellowship; it calls for a cessation of every further joint expression of faith.

Those who practice church fellowship with persistent errorists are partakers of their evil deeds. 2 John 11.

From all this we see that in the exercise of church fellowship two Christian principles need to direct us: (1) the great debt of love which the Lord would have us pay to the weak brother, and (2) His clear injunction (also flowing out of love) to avoid those who adhere to false doctrine and practice and all who make themselves partakers of their evil deeds. Conscientious recognition of both principles will lead to an evangelical practice. . . .

We find it to be an untenable position:

A. To distinguish between joint prayer which is acknowledged to be an expression of church fellowship and an occasional joint prayer which purports to be something short of church fellowship;

B. To designate certain nonfundamental doctrines as not being divisive of church fellowship in their very nature;

C. To envision fellowship relations (in a congregation, in a church body, in a federation, in a church agency, in a co-operative church activity) like so many steps of a ladder, each requiring a gradual increasing or decreasing measure of unity in doctrine and practice.

Fruitful Fellowship

Welded together by a common doctrinal platform and by unity of practice (especially in their stand against anti-Christian fraternal organizations and religious fellowship with churches not in doctrine-and-practice agreement with the Conference), members of the federation maintained a free and widespread interchange of fellowship.

Congregations of the four synods combined for joint services, pastors and professors were called from one synod to another, and members were free to commune in other Conference churches or to transfer their membership from one Conference church to another.

Growing out of this close-knit fellowship were joint activities by Synodical Conference Lutherans at regional and local levels — elementary and high schools, hospitals, homes for the aged, mission projects, and radio programs. Bethesda Home, Watertown, Wis., is a joint undertaking of Synodical Conference Lutherans.

By authorization of the Conference an intersynodical committee produced *The Lutheran Hymnal* (1941). Members of the four synods still form a joint Commission on Worship, Liturgics, and Hymnology, and are working together on a projected revision of the hymnal and service books.

Soon after its organization the Conference launched its only official joint operation — mission work among religiously neglected Negroes in the South. Later this mission was extended to Northern cities and since 1936 to West Africa. Both arms of the work are under the Missionary Board of the Synodical Conference.

The Missionary Board also serves as the Conference's Board of Trustees, charged with responsibility for all jointly owned mission properties as well as for the two Conference-operated schools: Immanuel Lutheran College, Greensboro, N. C. (to be closed after the current term), and Alabama Lutheran Academy and College, Selma, Ala. (where a proposed campus relocation is under study). Both schools were established for the training of Negro pastors and teachers.

Negro mission work in North America is gradually being absorbed by the synods in their respective geographical areas. Even in the South, where efforts to integrate public schools meet resistance, they are making progress toward assuming responsibility for all mission work.

Problems

Doctrinal and theological problems troubled the Synodical Conference from the beginning. Missourians in early years had reason to level criticism at the Wisconsinites for nonconfessionalism and for harboring unionistic elements.

From the outset the two bodies disagreed on the doctrine of the church and the ministry. The Missouri Synod, largely because of sad experiences in its early history, stressed the human and voluntary character of synods and districts, insisting that the congregation is the one supreme and divine institution. Wisconsin theologians emphasized a divine factor also in the larger organizations.

This difference, however, did not lead to severance of fellowship relations since there was agreement on the principle that the ministry was divinely instituted. Even when the theological faculties of the two synods in recent years drew up theses to pinpoint divergences, they felt that the issue should not be considered divisive.

Disturbed relations between the Wisconsin and Norwegian Synods on one side, and the Missouri Synod on the other, date from 1935. In that year the Cleveland convention of the Missouri Synod authorized a Committee on Doctrinal Unity to confer with similar committees of the American Lutheran Church and the United Lutheran Church "with a view toward effecting true unity on the basis of the Word of God and the Lutheran Confessions."

Results of this action of Missouri, the Wisconsin and Norwegian Synods felt, conflicted with the "unity of spirit" aims of the Synodical Conference as detailed in its constitution.

Doctrinal statements were drawn up by the Missouri Synod's Committee on Doctrinal Unity and adopted by synodical conventions as a basis for future church fellowship with the American Lutheran Church (*Doctrinal Declaration* 1938; *Doctrinal Affirmation* 1944; *Common Confession* 1950). These statements were assailed by both the Norwegian and the Wisconsin Synod. They also faulted adoption of the documents as "creating a basically untruthful situation."

The *Common Confession*, which superseded the other statements as a basis for unity discussion between Missouri and the ALC, in 1956 was recognized by the Missouri Synod "as a statement

CONTINUED

CHURCH FELLOWSHIP

Synod of Evangelical Lutheran Churches (Slovak)

Church fellowship may be defined as an outward and visible expression of the inner conviction that a oneness exists between those comprising and exercising this fellowship. It is a public demonstration and confession that we are bound together by common interests which flow from a common faith in the Triune God and in Jesus Christ as the only Savior of mankind.

Though it presupposes and demands a unity of faith in doctrine and practice and a submission to the judgment of Scripture in all matters, it does not mean or demand a conformity in externals, no matter how desirable this would be. Mere outward conformity to externals is no assurance of fellowship, and neither is a lack of such conformity to be construed as a denial of fellowship. However, there can be no fellowship with such as teach or tolerate error, since truth and error cannot coexist. One destroys the other.

It is evident from Scripture that true fellowship can exist and be practiced only between such as possess a unity of faith rooted in Scripture and continue in the practical application of that faith in all phases of Christian living. The acceptance of a common faith must then be evidenced by a demonstration of obedience to the Word of God in life and practice. A toleration of error would be disruptive of this fellowship and eventually destroy it.

References: John 8:31, 32; 1 Cor. 1:10 b; 12:4-11; Ps. 133:1; 1 Cor. 12:14-31; Eph. 4:3, 15; 2 Cor. 13:8; Acts 4:32; 11:22-24; 15; Phil. 1:27 b; Gal. 2:9; 1 John 1:6, 7.

CHURCH FELLOWSHIP

The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod

The Biblical concept of fellowship centers in the Triune God and emphasizes the fact that spiritual fellowship consists fundamentally in communion with God. From this communion with God there is derived that unique Christian fellowship among men which expresses itself in all areas of their life and activity.

Pulpit and altar fellowship is a very important aspect of this fellowship but cannot simply be equated with it. Pulpit and altar fellowship, and the related problems of prayer fellowship and unionism, can be properly understood and evaluated only within the larger framework of Christian fellowship generally.

Part One of the Missouri Synod's statement on "The Theology of Fellowship" sets forth the basic Biblical teaching concerning the Christian's fellowship with God and his fellow Christians. . . . Christians exercise this fellowship with one another not only in joint worship but in every other way prompted by Christian love. Christians seek to extend this fellowship through the preaching of the Gospel to those who do not yet know it.

Part Two: I. Principles Governing the Exercise of Fellowship

The passages quoted to show the need for refusing to practice fellowship with certain people under certain circumstances are particularly the following: Matt. 7:15, 16; Gal. 1:6-9; Acts 19:8-10; 2 John 9-11; Rom. 16, 17, 18; 1 Tim. 1:19, 20; 1 Cor. 5:3-6; Matt. 18:15-18; Titus 3:10.

Gal. 1:6-9 was written against Judaizers who perverted the faith of Christians by teaching "another gospel." Acts 19:8-10 shows how Paul separated the disciples from stubborn unbelievers. 2 John 9-11 forbids fellowship with such as do not "abide" in the

"doctrine of Christ" and do not, when as teachers they come to the houses of Christians, "bring this doctrine." 1 Tim. 1:19, 20 shows that Paul excluded from the fellowship Hymenaeus and Alexander, who had blasphemed and by rejecting conscience had made shipwreck of their faith. In 1 Cor. 5:3-6 Paul commands the Christians in Corinth to exclude from the practice of fellowship a man who had married his father's wife.

Passages of a more general nature likewise forbid Christians to practice fellowship with certain people. In Matt. 7:15, 16 Jesus admonishes His followers to beware of false prophets. False prophets, according to the Biblical picture, are men who falsely claim to be prophets, that is, inspired spokesmen for God. Scripture brands them as deceivers, as "wolves in sheep's clothing."

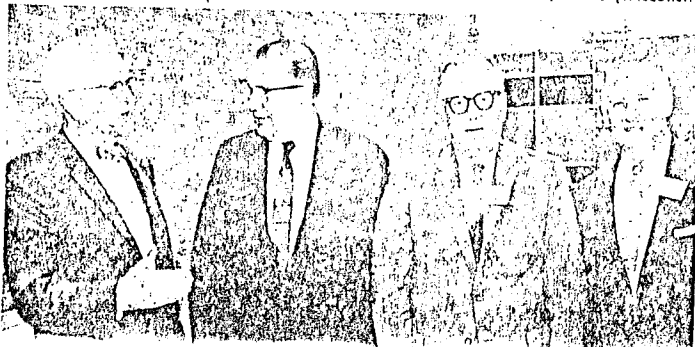
With respect to Rom. 16:17, 18 it is not possible to say with certainty whether or not the apostle had troublemakers in mind of whom he knew that they were already present in the church in Rome. The warning appears to be general, to mark and avoid those who "make [RSV: create] divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have been taught." It should be noted that Paul commands the church to mark and avoid makers of divisions and offenses, not their victims. The following should be noted also: doctrine, as Paul uses the word, is, to be sure, a comprehensive term and indicates the whole saving Gospel as it shapes the faith and life, creed and confession of the believer. It involves the Law and ultimately includes the whole counsel of God, but it cannot be simply equated with any formal system of doctrine. ?

The words of our Lord, Matt. 18:15-18, are a constant reminder that the intent of the church is always to seek, win, and restore the erring. Only when her efforts to win and restore have clearly failed, does the church face, and dare not evade, the holy necessity of excluding and avoiding the stubborn errorist. It is to such a situation that Paul speaks in Titus 3:10. He bids Titus reject, that is, to have nothing to do with, a man "that is an heretic," a man who creates factions (cf. RSV: "a man who is factious"). Such a man is not merely in error; he is *persisting* in error, is *making propaganda* for error, and is thus *creating a faction* in the church. He will not receive admonition but persists in his perversion. He stands condemned by his own actions, and the church must therefore condemn him. He is of the same kind as the makers of divisions and offenses of Rom. 16:17, 18 and must like these be avoided. . . . Titus 3:10 cannot be applied flatly and without qualification to all members of Christian denominations who live by the Gospel but cannot readily rid themselves of erroneous views to which tradition has habituated them.

While the church today must seek to live . . . in obedience to the apostolic Word, it cannot simply revive or reproduce the conditions of apostolic times. The apostolic indicatives and imperatives concerning the church cannot be automatically transferred to present-day confessional-organizational groupings.

When the church today is confronted by men who are like those described in the passages under discussion, then the passages with their imperatives "to mark and to avoid," and their con-

Synod Presidents (l. to r.): Dr. John W. Behnken, Missouri; Dr. Paul Rafaj, SELC (Slovak); Rev. Milton Twelt, ELS (Norwegian); Rev. Oscar Naumann, WELS (Wisconsin)



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in harmony with the Sacred Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions" but was declared as being no longer a "functioning union document." (The ALC had also moved into four-way merger negotiations, which culminated in the formation this year of a new body — The American Lutheran Church.)

Continuing discussions of the Wisconsin-Norwegian objections to these union documents, however, revealed a widening rift on the question of church fellowship. The Missouri Synod, it was charged, appeared to be growing liberal and to be showing a "growing tolerance of unionistic activities."

The charges were particularly directed at Missouri's position on the chaplaincy in the Armed Services, on Boy Scouting, and on "co-operation in externals" with Lutheran groups not in the Synodical Conference fellowship. In the Wisconsin Synod view, certification of chaplains salaried by the Government necessarily "pushes" the chaplain into unionistic practices in line of duty.

Missouri, which has always found in the military chaplaincy Gospel blessing and opportunity, insists that the chaplain's confessional position is fully safeguarded in all branches of the service by specific regulations. For example: "No chaplain is required to conduct any service or rite contrary to the regulations of his denomination." "No chaplain is required to officiate jointly in a religious service with a chaplain or a civilian clergyman of another denomination."

In the Boy Scout question the Wisconsin Synod contends that Missouri has veered away from a former stand opposing unscriptural phases of Scoutism (unionism, syncretism, Scout oath, deism) by giving the Boy Scouts official endorsement. The Missouri Synod replies that the Boy Scouts of America has eliminated its former insistence on union services, spiritual goals, and spiritual responsibility over local Scout troops, and therefore the Missouri Synod "may consider her interests sufficiently protected."

The Missouri Synod, it is also pointed out, does not sponsor or officially conduct a Scout program. However, recognizing that "there is no Boy Scout authority which supersedes the authority of the local pastor and the congregation in any phase of the program affecting the spiritual welfare of Lutheran men and boys in scouting," the Missouri Synod is convinced that local

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Problems CONTINUED

congregations having Scout troops can adequately safeguard their interests.

The Wisconsin and Norwegian Synods have also taken exception to Missouri's co-operation with the National Lutheran Council in maintaining service centers for military personnel; co-operation of welfare agencies with similar agencies of other Lutheran groups; negotiations with deistic organizations (lodges) to drop their rituals; the Bad Boll conferences; conversations with representatives of the National Lutheran Council; participation by Missouri Synod members in all-Lutheran youth and student activities, in the National Lutheran Editors and Managers Association, in free conferences of theological professors, in the intersynodical Catechism Committee, etc.

These conversations, negotiations, meetings, conferences, and activities, according to the Wisconsin and Norwegian position, take place "in a fellowship setting" and involve a "denial of faith" by those Missourians who take part.

Missouri has replied to the Wisconsin position by asserting that it goes beyond the scope of Scripture in labeling these activities "unionistic" and by affirming that there is a distinction between prayer fellowship and joint prayer. Joint prayer at intersynodical doctrinal conferences held for the purpose of restoring unity of faith on the basis of God's Word, Missourians say, is not to be condemned if the prayer does not imply denial of truth or support of error.

In an attempt to settle its internal differences, the Synodical Conference created a standing Committee on Intersynodical Relations to deal with individual cases of disagreement. The work of this committee became superfluous, however, when first Wisconsin, then Missouri published a series of monographs explaining and defending their positions.

To place the discussions on a new and more promising footing, the Conference in 1956 created a Joint Union Committee consisting of the standing committees on doctrinal unity of the four member synods. This Committee was instructed to specify the points under controversy, seek to reach agreement on these points, and draw up a common doctrinal statement to serve the Conference. After four years the Joint Union Committee has formulated statements on the Scriptures (approved by the Missouri Synod in 1959) and on the Antichrist (action slated for the 1962 convention).

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demnation of "wolves in sheep's clothing" and men who "serve not the Lord Jesus Christ but their own belly," must be applied in their full force. They must not, however, be applied mechanically to fellow Christians in a confessional-organizational fellowship other than one's own. It would be incongruous if a Christian who has the misfortune of being in a body afflicted with some doctrinal error would now have to be branded a wolf in sheep's clothing or a belly servant when in fact he is a beloved child of God.

Dangers

Two dangers beset the church in the area of the practice of fellowship today. The one is *separatism*, that is, the tendency to set up barriers to the exercise of fellowship where the Word of God sets none. The other is *unionism*, the tendency to ignore and overleap real barriers to the exercise of fellowship, barriers set up by the Word of God.

Separatists . . . treat their own confessional-organizational form as absolute. By setting up false standards for fellowship and by rigorously excluding all who do not conform to these standards, they conscientiously seek to create a *pure* church. The danger and the temptation are that they create a caricature of the pure church. This "pure" church has no room and no help for the weak in its own midst, nor can it exercise an effective ministry to the weak and erring outside its own organizational limits, because it shrinks from those contacts which would give an opportunity for such ministry.

While separatists usually seek to create a *pure* church, unionists usually seek to create a *strong* church. Since they mistakenly see the divisions in the church as a cause rather than as a result of the church's weakness, they ignore or at least minimize the genuine differences in confession which gave rise to the various confessional-organizational forms. By ignoring the necessity of facing confessional differences in the practice of fellowship, unionists either overtly deny some truths of God's Word or treat them as unimportant. This is the essential harm of unionism.

Christians . . . must have and use a basis for judgment which will enable them in given concrete cases to determine the point at which continuation of confessional fellowship becomes sinful unionism, and separatism becomes a sacred obligation. Gal. 2:14 provides such a criterion: "They walked not uprightly according to the truth of the Gospel."

This criterion does not admit of a false, unbiblical cleavage between doctrine and practice. *Doctrine* in the light of this word of St. Paul (Gal. 2:14) is seen as the New Testament Gospel in its transforming effect upon the whole life of man, and *practice* is seen as the life of man transformed and brought into harmony with the Gospel.

This criterion counteracts the fleshly tendency both of separatism and of unionism to construct a church according to the desires of men's hearts, "pure" or "strong," as the case may be, by keeping before men the New Testament view of the functioning, repenting church, which is able to bear with and help the weak and at the same time has the inner strength to confront and exclude the persistent errorist.

II. Application of the Principles

Confessional-organizational forms of fellowship are means rather than an end in themselves. Christian fellowship is not static but dynamic, outreaching, self-extending, in principle as universal as the Lordship of Christ. Therefore the matter of joint prayer between Christians not in the same confessional-organizational fellowship cannot be determined by a flat universal rule.

The criterion of walking uprightly according to the truth of the Gospel must be applied in each case; each case must be evaluated as it arises. This evaluation must consider the *situation* in

which such prayer is offered, the *character* of the prayer, its *purpose*, and its *probable effect* on those who unite in the prayer.

The situation in which joint prayer is to be offered must be carefully evaluated. Two questions should be asked in regard to each situation: (1) Is this a situation in which Christian prayer is appropriate? (2) Are the people involved such as can offer prayer in the Christian sense, that is, can they pray in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ? If the answer to both questions is "yes," then there is no objection to joint prayer on this score.

The *character* of the prayer offered is of great importance. Every genuinely Christian prayer offered in consciousness of its living context incorporates a confession and a witness to Christ; it needs therefore be no more unionistic in itself than any other form of witness.

The *purpose* of joint prayer also needs to be considered. A prayer which seeks to conceal or to smooth over real differences does not edify the body of Christ and is indefensible. A prayer which flows from the desire to build up the body of Christ and is an expression of that desire is a part of the hazard of love for which we need not tremble before the judgment seat of God.

The *probable effect* of such joint prayer must also be considered. Every conscientious Christian must be aware of the fact that his whole life . . . is a witness for or against his Lord. He will therefore deal carefully and in holy awe with the precious privilege of prayer and will not misuse, cheapen, or degrade prayer by using it for ends which are not his Lord's.

Application to Prayer on Civic Occasions

Public prayer at civic functions is justifiable as the public witness of the church's intercession for all sorts and conditions of men and of the Christians' readiness to participate in every work that promotes the weal of mankind. Such prayer must, of course, be an uncompromising witness of the hope that is in us.

Our national habit of utilizing prayer as a sort of ecclesiastical garnish to all manner of secular dishes ought to make the church circumspect in this form of witness. . . . To portray God, in prayer, as a good-natured old father accessible to all on any terms is to belie the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave His Son into death in order that we might come to Him as dear children to a dear Father. The monitions to weigh the purpose and effect of one's public prayers have special relevance in this area.

It is . . . of critical importance that brethren who enjoy the blessing of confessional-organizational fellowship in an orthodox body should maintain a sympathetic understanding of one another's problems in this area, that they remain in constant and candid communication with one another, admonish and strengthen one another. Above all, they should trust the unifying power of the Gospel as it is spoken and heard. Thus the differences in judgment which may be expected to arise will occasion, not a friction which irritates and drives asunder but a fruitful tension which will serve to draw brethren closer together.

Prayer for the Synodical Conference

We beseech Thee, almighty and all-wise God, overcome our weakness by Thine own great might, and undo our folly by Thy perfect wisdom. Restore the fellowship which we have endangered, and give us again the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Grant us Thy Spirit that Thy Son may dwell in us and be for us Thy wisdom and Thy power. Give diligence and prudence to our leaders as they seek Thy given gift of unity; give love and insight to our brethren from overseas as they counsel us; and give enlightened eyes of the heart to us all as we search Thy Word, that we may rightly read and readily obey it. We ask it in the name of Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord.

Problems CONTINUED

Meanwhile in 1955 the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (Norwegian) suspended fraternal relations with the Missouri Synod (though continuing membership in the Synodical Conference), and the Wisconsin Synod declared itself in a state of vigorously protesting fellowship with Missouri until it is evident that an impasse has been reached.

Theologians of overseas churches in fellowship with the Synodical Conference were brought together at Oakland (1959) and Thiensville (1960) to solidify the fellowship and also to work toward solution of intersynodical problems. At the 1960 convention of the Synodical Conference the Commission on Doctrinal Matters of the Wisconsin Synod stated that "the differences have not been resolved" by the theologians' conferences and that "an impasse has been reached."

The theologians of overseas sister churches were requested to analyze the fellowship statements of the four synods, test them for correct exegesis and argument, and in April 1961 discuss them with the doctrinal unity committees of the four synods.

Upon the Holy Spirit's blessing of these four meetings, their recommendations, and the subsequent action of the recessed Synodical Conference convention (May 17-19) the future of the Lutheran Synodical Conference now rests.



For much of the background material in this report the "Witness" is indebted to Dr. Herbert J. A. Bouman, whose eight years as a member of Synod's Committee on Doctrinal Unity, five years as secretary of the Synodical Conference, and six as chairman of the Conference Interim Committee place him among those most intimately informed on intersynodical developments.

A 1932 St. Louis seminary graduate, Dr. Bouman held pastorates at Canton and Geneva, Ohio; Decatur, Ind.; and Sheboygan, Wis., before assuming the chair of systematic theology (Lutheran Confessions, Doctrine) at the St. Louis seminary in 1954. For 14 years Dr. Bouman has also been a member of Synod's Board of Appeals.

The Springfield seminary last year conferred on him the doctorate of divinity "for theological leadership in the church."

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