

Forward In Christ: **Doctrinal Challenges And Language Change**

I. Church and Ministry **II. Transition from German to English** **III. The Dissolution of the Synodical Conference**

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God sometimes grants his church periods of peace and quiet. At other times he sees fit to place challenges before his people. Sometimes those challenges involve learning to adapt to changing times and cultural shifts. At other times certain teachings of the Bible come to the fore because of particular circumstances, trends, or errors vexing the church. Doctrinal controversy can prove to be particularly vexing and stressful. However, through both controversy and cultural change the Lord of the Church has guided and blessed our synod in spite of our human weaknesses and fears, as we will see in the three key events we will consider in this installment.

I. Church and Ministry

Lutherans in America have struggled with the doctrine of the church and ministry since colonial times. Much of this struggle was caused by the religious, social, and political conditions prevailing in America. Religious toleration in the colonial period became religious freedom guaranteed by the constitution in the new republic. People who had come out of state churches in Europe found that they no longer had the government determining for them the forms of the ministry or church polity. Lutherans had to establish qualifications for ordination because unfit pastors and pretenders often foisted themselves upon unsuspecting congregations.

Questions concerning the church and its ministry also arose within the Missouri Synod, the Synodical Conference, and the Wisconsin Synod. These questions have played an important role in our history.

Missouri vs. Buffalo and Iowa

The Saxons who emigrated with Martin Stephan (1777-1846) to Missouri found themselves in a spiritual quandary when accusations of impropriety caused them to depose the man they had made their bishop. The Saxons had given Stephan a pledge of complete submission to his "episcopal ordinances in all things." When Stephan proved himself unworthy, these deeply religious people began to be filled with doubts about their actions in coming to this country. Were they merely a mob or a sect or was the church still present among them? Pastors had resigned legitimate calls in Germany to follow Stephan. Did they still possess divine calls and the public ministry in America? Were the sacraments administered among them legitimate and efficacious? C. F. W. Walther (1811-1887) emerged as the theological leader among the Saxons and set to work to answer these troubling questions. In the Altenburg Debate (1841) Walther in a systematic way demonstrated first of all from Scripture, and then from the Lutheran Confessions, the orthodox Lutheran dogmaticians, and the early fathers that the church was present among these Saxon immigrants. They possessed the true sacraments and had the authority to call men into the public ministry. Because of their experience with Stephan and their study of Scripture the Saxons strongly emphasized the universal priesthood of believers and were very suspicious of any thought of a hierarchical view of the ministry or any organization that would impose its will on the local congregation.

John Grabau (1804-1879) in 1840 wrote a pastoral letter to the congregations under his spiritual care. He sent a copy to the Saxons in Missouri with whom he hoped to establish fraternal relations. Grabau stressed the need for ordination and insisted that the laying on of hands was essential to the rite. He believed that a layman

could administer a valid and efficacious sacrament only in emergencies. Grabau taught that the congregation owed obedience to their pastor in everything that is not contrary to God's Word. The Saxons in Missouri eventually responded to the letter by pointing out that Grabau confused the divine with the human and essentials with nonessentials. Ordination and installation are human arrangements and not divinely commanded. They contended that Grabau was curtailing Christian freedom and was ascribing more to the pastoral office than was proper. In 1850 the Missouri Synod asked Walther to compose a book on church and ministry in response to Grabau and the Buffalo Synod. In 1852 Walther published *The Voice of Our Church on the Question of Church and Ministry*. Walther's sixth thesis in that book states, "The ministry of the Word is transferred by God through the congregation as the possessor of all ecclesiastical power, or the power of the keys, by means of its call which God Himself has prescribed. The ordination of those called, with the laying on of hands, is not of divine institution but an apostolic ecclesiastical arrangement and only a solemn public confirmation of the call." In 1864 Walther contributed another volume, *The Proper Form of an Evangelical Lutheran Local Congregation Independent of the State*.

Wilhelm Loehe (1808-1872) of Neuendettelsau in Germany taught that the office of pastor/teacher¹ existed by divine right and did not derive its right and authority from the congregation. In distinction from Walther, Loehe taught that a congregation does not transfer its powers to the minister but merely serves as the instrument of Christ for conferring the ministry. The pastor/teacher not only has the authority to administer the means of grace, but to rule the congregation. According to Loehe ordination is absolutely necessary for the continuing office of the ministry. The majority of the men Loehe sent to serve in America agreed with Walther's teaching on church and ministry. The minority who sided with Loehe formed the Iowa Synod in 1854.

Early Questions in Wisconsin

Questions concerning the doctrine of the ministry seem to have first surfaced in the Wisconsin Synod in teachers' conferences in the late 1870s. At the time it was customary to speak of the pastoral office as the one divinely appointed form of the ministry. Lutheran elementary school teachers naturally wondered about their office and their call. Some theologians believed that the call of the teacher was derived from the call of the pastor. The pastor was merely delegating some of the duties of the pastor's divinely appointed office. Others believed that the office of teacher was derived from the command God had given parents to train their children. Parents were merely delegating some of their responsibility, and the distinct impression was given that teachers were not really in the public ministry at all.

Over the next thirty years or so the matter of the teacher's call and the public ministry were the subject of essays at pastoral conferences. The essays tended to repeat the thought that the pastoral office was the only divinely appointed form of the ministry. On more than one occasion John P. Koehler (1859-1951) challenged the reasoning and the exegesis of the essayist. In a conference in Milwaukee in 1892 Koehler asked the essayist, Adolph Hoenecke (1835-1908), "Why can't the teacher's divine call stand on its own feet?" Hoenecke thought that Koehler's question and comments were worthy of more study. In 1909 Koehler challenged the new director of the seminary, John Schaller (1859-1920), when Schaller presented an essay asserting the pastoral office as the divinely appointed form of the public ministry and that all other offices were auxiliary and derived from the pastoral office in Christian liberty.

The Cincinnati Case

In the fall of 1899 a Missouri Synod congregation excommunicated a member who had taken his eleven year old son out of the congregation's elementary school and sent him to the public school. The man wanted his son to improve his English skills and to receive the greater educational opportunities the public school offered. He intended to send the boy back to the parochial school after he had caught up on his English. The boy would

¹ Loehe believed that in the list of offices in Ephesians 4 pastors and teachers were identical and that this office existed by divine right.

then be confirmed at about age fifteen. When the man was called to account for his actions, he produced a written statement in which he explained the reasons for his actions and expressed his appreciation for the parochial school. However, he also pointed out the weaknesses in the parish school. His statement was seen as harsh and accusatory and unbecoming a Christian. When after a period of a few weeks he refused to abide by the congregation's directives, he was considered as "one who had excommunicated himself." The official reason for the discipline was his disregard for the congregation's policies concerning attendance at the parish school and confirmation and his sin against the eighth commandment.

The man appealed his excommunication to district and eventually to synodical officials who ruled against the congregation and its pastors. When the congregation and pastors would not budge, the district president suspended the pastors and the congregation withdrew from the synod. In 1904 the pastors and congregation applied for membership in the Wisconsin Synod. The committee appointed by the Wisconsin Synod to consider the application reported that the application for membership could not be considered because the Missouri Synod was still dealing with the matter. Meanwhile the two pastors (father and son) began to publish against the Missouri Synod officials. A later Wisconsin Synod committee apparently was sympathetic to the congregation and pastors and unsympathetic with the actions of the Missouri officials. By 1911 the matter was moot because one of the pastors had died, and the other had been deposed by the congregation. The gentleman who had been excommunicated appeared before the congregation and offered the same explanation of his actions and apology that he had originally offered. The congregation therefore lifted the excommunication. Pres. Pfothauer (1859-1939) of the Missouri Synod at the time pointed out that the resolution of the congregation did not claim that the excommunication had been proper, but merely that it had up till that time been legally in force.

The lengthy dealings in the Cincinnati case resulted in questions being raised concerning the doctrine of the church. What is the proper relationship between congregation and synod? Does each possess the keys? In what sense is each the church? How does suspension from synodical fellowship affect the fellowship of faith? The Wauwatosa seminary professors began to wrestle with these questions concerning the doctrine of the church as they also searched the Scriptures to find answers to questions concerning the doctrine of the ministry. The approach they took to the doctrinal questions of the day has become known as the Wauwatosa Theology.

The Wauwatosa Theology

The term "Wauwatosa Theology" or "Wauwatosa Gospel" was coined by the Protestants to describe the theological method that came to the fore at the Wauwatosa seminary in the work of professors John P. Koehler, August Pieper (1857-1946), and John Schaller. Unfortunately, the term is open to misunderstanding in an age when seminaries and theological schools often pride themselves on their well-known theologians who have developed and promoted their personal innovative theologies to which appropriate names are attached (e.g. Theology of Hope, Liberation Theology, Process Theology, Feminist Theology, etc.). The Wauwatosa Theology was not an innovation *per se*, but a re-emphasis of the Lutheran principle of *sola scriptura*. The Wauwatosa professors insisted that doctrinal controversies are to be settled and theological questions are to be answered by a thorough exegetical treatment of the portions of Scripture that deal with the particular doctrine under discussion. Their approach was not a rejection of the Lutheran Confessions nor a repudiation of the orthodox Lutheran dogmaticians of the 16th and 17th centuries, but an insistence on Scripture as our *norma normans*. They rejected the various critical approaches to Scripture and the critics' denial of the plenary and verbal inspiration of the Bible. The Wauwatosa men advocated the historical-grammatical approach and the necessity of the thorough and repeated study of Scripture as the Lutheran theologian's method and task.

This "Wauwatosa Theology" was evident in the way Koehler, Pieper, and Schaller undertook the study of the doctrines of church and ministry. The preliminary exegetical work had been pioneered by Koehler, but soon the three Wauwatosa theologians stood shoulder to shoulder.

Among the early works on church and ministry to come from the pens of these men were John Schaller's "The Origin and Development of the New Testament Ministry," which first appeared in the 1911-12 seminary

catalog, and August Pieper's "The Doctrine of the Church and Its Marks Applied to the Synod" in the *Theologische Quartalschrift*, vol 9, #2 (1912). In 1912 Pieper also wrote a review of Walther's *The Voice of Our Church, on the Question of Church and Ministry* for the *Theologische Quartalschrift*.

Controversy with Missouri

Theologians in the Missouri Synod took note of the work of the Wauwatosa men and expressed their disagreement at the 1914 convention of the Synodical Conference. The spokesmen for Missouri included Franz Pieper (1852-1931) and Ludwig Fuerbringer (1864-1947) of the seminary in St. Louis. The Missouri men later protested in writing some of the statements of the Wauwatosa professors. Other meetings followed. The Missouri men contended that the only divinely appointed form of the church was the local congregation which alone had authority to carry out discipline or excommunicate. They contended that the office of pastor was the divinely instituted form of the public ministry. The Wisconsin Synod men taught that it is God's will for Christians to gather, but that he has not instituted any particular form of the church. Wherever two or three come together in Christ's name the church is present. They taught that God has instituted the public ministry, but he has not instituted any particular form of the ministry. The church has the right to establish specific forms according to its needs and circumstances. The differences were not brought before the Synodical Conference at the time, nor did either side accuse the other of false doctrine.

An important attempt at resolving the issues took place in Thiensville in 1932. The St. Louis and Thiensville faculties along with the two synod presidents met to consider the differences in their teaching of church and ministry. The result of the meeting was the so-called "Thiensville Theses." These theses did not resolve all the differences, but represented the extent to which agreement had been reached at that time. The gathered theologians agreed on these four statements:

1. It is God's will and order, as we learn from the Scriptures, that Christians who live together also enter into outward associations, to perform jointly the duties of the spiritual priesthood.
2. Again, it is God's will and order, as we learn from the Scriptures, that such local congregations have shepherds and teachers to discharge the common task of the office of the Word in their midst.
3. It is also God's will and order, as we learn from the Scriptures, that local congregations manifest their fellowship of faith with other congregations and jointly with them perform the work of the Kingdom outside of their own circle too as that is done among us in the optional form of the synod.
4. Inasmuch as every Christian has title to the keys of the kingdom of heaven, judgment rendered in accordance with the Word of God by an individual Christian, or several, too in whatever grouping, is honored in heaven. However, as we learn from the Scriptures, God's will and order is that proceedings against an erring brother are not to be considered conclusive until his local congregation has taken action. The discipline of the local congregation and the discipline of a synod cannot properly come into conflict with each other because a local congregation expels from the local congregation, not from the synod, and the synod from the synod, not from the local congregation. Note: The expulsion performed by the local congregation is what we, according to ecclesiastical usage, call excommunication.

A number of circumstances prevented further discussions. In 1946 the Synodical Conference resolved to set up an Interim Committee to study the military chaplaincy issue and all other matters relating to the doctrines of the call, church, and ministry. In 1952 the committee issued its final report, but could not come to any greater

agreement than had been evident in 1932. The committee simply recommended the adoption of the Thiensville Theses. There was no real settlement of the issues involved in the controversy.

Why did the church and ministry issue continue for so long between sister synods without resolution? It should be noted that the disagreement was not only between the two synods, but also within the synods themselves. Each synod was grappling with the doctrine in its midst. In the same way the practice of each synod was not always indicative of the position officially taken. For instance, Missouri's actions in the Cincinnati case were in line with Wisconsin's teaching on the church. On the other hand, Wisconsin's rugged individualism often seemed to belie its understanding of synod as church. Many of the differences seemed to be differences in application rather than doctrine. Brothers in the faith wanted to work patiently to find agreement. By the end of the 1930s the church and ministry discussions yielded to larger disagreements between the synods of the Synodical Conference which were coming to the fore.

Meanwhile, during the 1920s and 1930s the Wisconsin Synod was also coming to grips with some other very practical matters affecting the life of the church. What language should be used in worship and the classroom, German or English? In hindsight the answer seems obvious, but one should not overlook the difficulties involved in the change to English.

II. The Transition from German to English

From colonial times on English has been the dominant language in the U.S.A. and Canada, and every immigrant group has eventually adopted the language of the land. The transition to English is often rapid in business and the market place, but much slower at home and in the church. For German Lutherans the language question was always critical. In the early 1800s English was associated with deism and rationalism. Lutherans who adopted English were much more prone to these errors than those who clung to the German and Luther's Small Catechism. In the mid 1800s English-speaking Lutherans were much more likely to adopt the techniques of revivalism and the errors of evangelical Protestantism in this country than were those who spoke German. On the other hand, throughout the history of America those who held on to German too long began to lose their young people to English-speaking churches and lost out on mission opportunities.

1850-1900

The Wisconsin Synod was founded in 1850 as a German Lutheran Church by German immigrants. Our synod did not become a predominantly English-speaking church body for about eighty years. It was not as though the synod was not aware that a change would eventually have to be made. Our fathers were also made aware of the responsibility of doing mission work in English among their American neighbors. Prof. Matthias Loy (1828-1915) of the Ohio Synod had reminded all the members of the Synodical Conference of their responsibility in the very first Synodical Conference convention. He had presented an essay entitled, "What Is Our Task toward the English-speaking People of Our Land?"

There were many reasons the synod changed to the English language so slowly. The rural nature of the synod together with the fact that many of our congregations were in German enclaves undoubtedly slowed the change to English. The continuing German immigration into the Upper Midwest necessitated the continued use of the German language. Immigrants in new and strange surroundings wanted to preserve their heritage and culture. There were also fears that Lutheranism would suffer because of the lack of solid, confessional Lutheran materials in English. There was a fear that the change to English might bring with it an accommodation to the Calvinistic or Arminian theology of American Protestantism.

Nevertheless the change to English was inevitable. The seeds of that change were apparent early on.

College and Seminary

In the first years of Northwestern's existence instruction was given exclusively in English. The college's first president, Adam Martin, had dreams of making Northwestern into a great American university. About 1869 classroom instruction in German began to predominate as the college was set up on the model of the German gymnasium, and its focus was centered on preparing men for entrance into the seminary. The very first college catalog appeared in 1869 and was printed in an English edition and a German edition (500 copies each). While most subjects were taught in German by 1870, the 1871-72 college catalog indicates that courses were required in English composition, English literature, and translation from German to English. For the next forty years or so all classes were taught in German except for English, mathematics, science, and American history.

In the spring of 1872 the first class was graduated from Northwestern. The class included John Bading, the son of the synod president; Franz Pieper (1852-1930), who would later serve as president of Concordia in St. Louis and as president of the Missouri Synod; Erdman Pankow (1849-1940); and Otto Hoyer (1849-1905), who later served as president of Dr. Martin Luther College, professor at Michigan Lutheran Seminary, and professor and inspector at Northwestern. The 1872 graduation began a long tradition of having three student orations, one in Latin, one in German, and one in English. That year Pieper gave the Latin oration, Bading the German, and Pankow the English.

The English oration required some proficiency and the annual ritual paid some dividends in the synod's eventual transition to English. For instance, the graduate who gave the English oration in 1893 later put his English skills to good use by tutoring older pastors in English early in his ministry, by serving as a co-founder of the *Northwestern Lutheran* and as a contributing editor for forty years, and by serving as president of the synod when English began to predominate in our church body.

Until 1897 instruction at the seminary seems to have been done entirely in German. In the early to mid 1890s seminary students seeing the need for English facility organized on their own an English theological debating society in the dormitory. At the monthly meetings a student would read an original essay on a theological topic and two teams would debate a theological problem. A general discussion rounded out the meeting. In this way the students familiarized themselves with English theological terminology. In 1897 the synod instructed the Seminary Board to provide for some English teaching. Reinhold Adelberg (1835-1911) was called for that purpose and served from 1897 to 1901.

The Bennett Law

In 1889 Pres. John Bading (1824-1913) called attention to a new danger facing the Wisconsin Synod and its Lutheran elementary schools. The Wisconsin State Legislature had passed a law sponsored by Michael Bennett which required, among other things, that parents send their children to a school within the district in which they lived, that instruction in certain core subjects (reading, writing, arithmetic, and United States history) be in the English language, and that there be school attendance of at least twelve weeks. Although these provisions might sound innocuous today, the law could have effectively closed many of the parish schools of our synod and greatly hindered the operation of others. Parish boundaries did not necessarily match public school districts. Some students would not be able to go outside of their district to attend their congregation's elementary school. Most instruction in these Lutheran elementary schools was still in the German language. There were too few pastors and teachers capable enough in English to carry out the provisions of the law in the synod's parish schools.

In other states similar laws seemed to have had the purpose of building up public schools by putting pressure on parochial schools or forcing them to be closed. According to Koehler, in Massachusetts the Boston Committee of One Hundred had been established by concerned Americans as inheritors of the faith "to preserve our public schools and defend American institutions." Nativism² with a strong anti-Catholic bias was very much evident in the movement out of which the Boston Committee grew. Whether the Wisconsin law was meant to hinder parochial schools is difficult to determine. Michael Bennett was a Roman Catholic. It is hard to imagine

² Nativism is a form of American nationalism that involves intense opposition to a minority in the country because of the minority's "foreign" connections or background.

that he would have wanted to close the parish schools supported by the great numbers of German Catholics in Wisconsin. The law was actually Wisconsin's first attempt at compulsory-education legislation. Nevertheless, the law seemed to be an example of the type of legislation being advocated and promoted by the Boston Committee. The Edwards Law in Illinois, identical to the Bennett Law in language, was another example of the influence of the movement. Many German and Scandinavian residents of the state saw the Bennett Law as a challenge to their religious freedom.

In response to the new law the Wisconsin Synod adopted resolutions stating that the members of the synod were not opposed to the public schools and would continue to pay their school taxes in addition to supporting their own parochial schools. The resolutions also contended that the law infringed on parental rights and demanded that parochial schools have their previous independence restored. A committee was appointed to head up the synod's efforts to overturn the law. Another committee was appointed to look into English textbooks in case the law was not overturned.

On December 28, 1889, a group of concerned citizens met at Bading's church, St. John's in Milwaukee, to form a united front against the Bennett Law. The group included members of the Wisconsin Synod and the Missouri Synod as well as Roman Catholics and others. Those attending the meeting decided to support only those candidates who were opposed to the Bennett Law. The political campaign not only resulted in favorable school elections in April 1890, but also an overwhelming victory for the Democratic Party in the state-wide elections in the fall of 1890. The Republican Governor William Hoard, promoter of Wisconsin's dairy industry and publisher of *Hoard's Dairyman*, had waged his campaign on the correctness of the Bennett Law. Hoard was voted out of office, the Democrats won control of the legislature, and the Bennett Law was repealed.

The Bennett Law had an impact on the synod. Not everyone was happy with the political involvement of the synod. J. P. Koehler for one thought that the more appropriate course of action would have been to challenge the law in the courts. He did not like the intrusion of politics and power into the life of the church. The law, however, served to emphasize the need for more instruction in the English language. For several years teachers had been discussing the best way to improve English instruction. In 1886 the synod's *Schulzeitung*³ had published eight articles in English, reflecting the interest in preparing for the eventual language change. The committee charged in 1889 with examining English textbooks also developed a plan for English instruction in our parish schools.

1900-1950

Publications

By the turn of the century many in the synod were recognizing the need for sound Lutheran materials in the English language. About 1905⁴ Northwestern Publishing House published an English hymnal entitled *Church Hymns for Lutheran Services*. The hymnal contained only text and included 115 hymns, an order for Morning Service, an order for Communion Service, and an order for Evening Service. The hymnal also included six antiphons and an alphabetical index of first lines of the hymns.

In 1910 the synod resolved to publish an English catechism and a new English hymnal. The new hymnal compiled by Pastor O. Hagedorn was published about 1917 and was entitled, *Book of Hymns*. The *Book of Hymns* also contained four-part musical notation for each hymn. The next year a smaller edition of the *Book of Hymns* without the musical notation was also printed. The Northwestern Publishing House report to the 1918 convention indicated that 14,200 German hymnals were published, 5,000 *Church Hymnals*, 7,000 *Book of Hymns* (words only), and 1,500 *Book of Hymns* (with music). Interest in providing materials for English worship was picking up.

³ The *Schulzeitung* was the professional journal for the synod's teachers.

⁴ The actual date of publication cannot be determined with certainty. According to an article written by Dr. Arnold Lehmann circumstantial evidence seems to point to 1905.

Already in 1907 the synod resolved to produce a new catechism in both German and English. In 1913 the project was taken out of the hands of the committee established to produce it and given to one man, Pastor Carl Gausewitz (1861-1928). Gausewitz's masterful exposition appeared in both languages in 1917 and was used to train generations of Wisconsin Synod children.

In 1913 the synod in convention resolved to begin publishing an English periodical. The first issue of the *Northwestern Lutheran* appeared on January 7, 1914. The editorial committee included Pastor John Jenny (1859-1939) of St. Jacobi, Milwaukee; Pastor Hans Koller Moussa (1883-1928) of St. John, Jefferson, Wis.; Pastor Fred Graeber (1870-1955) of Apostles, Milwaukee; and Pastor John W.O. Brenner (1874-1962) of St. John, Milwaukee. The introductory article on the first page of the first issue explained the reason for the new synodical periodical.

Although German is the leading language in nearly every congregation of our Synod and will continue to be so for some time to come, due to the efficient bilingual work that has hitherto been done in the parochial schools, we cannot deny that the language question is today insistently demanding our attention.

Even now our children are daily growing less familiar with the German language, and many of our young people use the English almost exclusively, conversing and thinking in this only, so that if anyone wishes to make himself understood by them, he must convey his thoughts to them in English. The result is that the rising generation, to a great extent, will ultimately be capable of reading and understanding the Word of God only through the medium of the English language.

Whether we note this change with or without regret, we fully realize that language, like other externals, can never be an essential factor in the make up of the Church of God. We are bidden to read the signs of the times. There is an urgent demand for an English parish paper in our Synod, and the time has come to act. We must supply the members of our churches with English Lutheran publications. They are now often reading un-Lutheran literature at the danger of becoming imbued with views incompatible with Lutheran principles. We believe, therefore, that true Lutheran publications in English are timely, indeed, and that we should use all efforts in fostering and circulating them.⁵

It took more than two decades for *The Northwestern Lutheran* to replace the synod's original periodical, the *Gemeinde-Blatt* in popularity. In 1938 subscriptions for the *Gemeinde-Blatt* totaled 4,179. Subscriptions for *The Northwestern Lutheran* totaled 3,760. In 1939 *The Northwestern Lutheran* ,finally overtook the *Gemeinde-Blatt* 4,111 to 3,822.

In 1919 Teacher Karl (Charles) Brenner (1871-1962) and Pastor Otto Hagedorn (1872-1932) founded the *Junior Northwestern*, a magazine in English for Wisconsin Synod children. The *Junior Northwestern* was produced until 1981 when it was discontinued because of synodical budgetary difficulties.

Prof. John Schaller of the Wauwatosa seminary began to supply the need for sound Lutheran theological books in English. In 1918 Concordia Publishing House published Schaller's *Book of Books: A Brief Introduction for Christian Teachers and Readers*.⁶ In 1919 Northwestern Publishing House published his *Biblical Christology: A Study in Lutheran Dogmatics*.⁷

In the preface to his *Biblical Christology* Schaller wrote, "Facing a future in which English will be the prevailing language of our own church organization, we must anticipate the coming demand for Lutheran literature in the English language." He continued by reminding his readers of the hostility of many toward

⁵ The article was signed J. J.—John Jenny. Jenny was the head of the editorial committee.

⁶ This work had been published in German about two decades prior to the English edition under the title *Kurze Bibelkunde*.

⁷ Schaller's *Christology* was intended to be the first in a series of volumes of dogmatics in English, but he was suddenly called to heaven before he could finish the work. He died in an influenza outbreak in 1920.

German Lutherans during World War I. He blamed that hostility on American ignorance of Lutheranism because so little Lutheran material was available in the English language. He wrote,

We owe it to such persons, as well as to the millions of our fellow citizens who have never even heard the gospel, to leave the comparative seclusion, resulting from our use of the German language, and to enter upon a wider field of missionary endeavor. Our Church has a message for all the people of our country, and to reach the multitudes who need it, we must publish it broadcast—in the American language.

World War I

Before the United States entered World War I most people in America wanted to stay out of the European conflict. People openly promoted isolationism and pacifism. When the United States entered the war, the spirit in America changed. Americans gave their wholehearted support to the war effort. The United States government and the American press demonized the German Kaiser and everything German. Nativism ran rampant. Those who spoke German were suspected of disloyalty to America. The word "German" soon disappeared from the names of many businesses and churches. German-speaking Americans suspected of being less than wholeheartedly behind the American war effort might have their homes egged or painted yellow by loyal Americans. German Americans were forced to buy war bonds in order to demonstrate their support of the American government.

State governments began to curtail the right to free speech. Some states passed laws forbidding German (or any foreign language) from being spoken in public gatherings. The superintendent of schools in Nebraska announced that credit would not be given for attendance at schools in which instruction was given in whole or in part in a foreign language. Students attending German language parochial schools were in violation of the law. Pastor John Gauss (1874-1949) of Jenera, Ohio, was accused of making pro-German statements and had to spend some time in jail before his congregation could raise bail for him. When his case finally was brought to court, the judge dismissed it and allowed the German-speaking pastor to go free.

Citizen committees received almost limitless power in some states to promote patriotism and to root out seditious activity. The president of Dr. Martin Luther College in New Ulm, Adolph Ackermann (1871-1950), felt the wrath of one such committee. At a public meeting in New Ulm before the United States had declared war on Germany Ackermann spoke against the anticipated declaration. Later he rather foolishly spoke at rallies in New Ulm and Gibbon which protested the draft. Ackermann encouraged petitioning the U.S. Congress to use only volunteers to fight in Europe. Since the "Sedition Law" of 1917 made it a crime to advocate resistance to the draft law in a public place or in a meeting where more than five people were assembled, those who spoke were in violation of the law. The Minnesota Commission of Public Safety saw to it that two of the men who spoke at the New Ulm rally were permanently removed from public office by the governor. When the same commission, as it was reported, threatened to close DMLC if Ackermann were not removed from office, Wisconsin Synod President Gustave Bergemann (1862-1954) asked for Ackermann's resignation. Ackermann obliged, and Pastor John Meyer (1873-1964) was called to succeed him as president.⁸

The anti-German spirit continued for some time after the war. John Schaller wrote an article in English for the April 1919 edition of the *Theologische Quartalschrift* entitled, "Religious Freedom Endangered." In the essay he expressed a number of concerns including the possible mandatory use of the English language in Lutheran elementary schools. The January 1919 edition of the *Quartalschrift* contained some shorter news article addressing the language question and the anti-German spirit in the country. One of these news articles contained this quote from Governor Harding of Iowa:

⁸ Ackermann later served as president of the Minnesota District of the Wisconsin Synod. First elected in 1936, he was re-elected five times.

English should and must be the only medium of instruction in public, private, denominational and other similar schools. Conversation in public places, on trains and over the telephone lines should be in the English language. All public addresses should be in the English language. Let those who cannot speak or understand the English language conduct their worship services in their homes.

There is little doubt that the anti-German spirit of World War I and its aftermath gave our synod more than a little nudge toward English and hastened our synod's transition to the language of our land.

Ministerial Education

Language changes came to Northwestern following the war. By about 1920 teaching in English became necessary in the lower classes because many students were no longer fluent in German. For many years there were parallel sections—the same course taught in German in one section and English in the other. The transition to English was complete by about 1938. Greek New Testament, Hebrew, and philosophy in the upper two classes were the last subjects to make the transition. In 1923 the minutes of faculty meetings began to be taken in English. About this time Prof. Karl Koehler (1885-1948) sought and received approval to teach all of his history classes in English. It was not surprising that permission was granted because English had also become the language most commonly heard in the faculty room.

The seminary catalog for 1907-08 indicates that each member of the two upper classes was required to preach an English sermon in front of the entire student body. The 1916-17 catalog indicates that beside preaching an English sermon students had to work out an English catechesis. By this time they were also receiving some of their dogmatics instruction in English. Beginning with the catalog for 1920-21 all subsequent seminary catalogs were printed in English. The 1920-21 catalog also contained this paragraph on language.

Both the German and the English languages are used as media of instruction. This is necessary because the pastor's duties in the greater number of our parishes still require him to use either language on demand. As the process of transition from German to the common language of our country proceeds very gradually in our congregations, it will be necessary for some time to come that the future pastors receive careful training in German as a medium of intercourse in the pursuance of their duties. Taking into account that our college graduates naturally are more proficient in English than in German, their proper preparation demands that the greater portion of our lectures serve to advance them in this direction by discussing theological subjects in German. At the same time, it has become imperative that every student graduating from the Seminary be competent to preach and teach the Gospel of salvation in idiomatic English. For this reason, a number of lectures are regularly given in this language.

In the 1940-41 catalog the last sentence of the language paragraph was modified in this way: "At the same time, since it is imperative that every student graduating from the Seminary be competent to preach and teach the Gospel of salvation in idiomatic English, the greater number of lectures are regularly given in this language." The language paragraph is no longer included after the 1946-47 catalog. However, for the next three decades the catalog stated that students who had the ability were encouraged to write some sermons in German. The last time such encouragement appeared in print was the catalog for school year 1976-77. For some time before its last appearance that encouragement had become anachronistic.⁹

Transition Complete

⁹ In recent years one vicar assignment has continued to require a seminarian to preach German.

The decades of the 1920s and 1930s saw a rapid increase in the change to English. In 1920 about half of the synod's congregations had periodic English services (from a few times a year to three times a month). Only about nine percent of the 719 congregations and preaching stations, however had English services every Sunday.¹⁰ Only eleven congregations and preaching stations conducted worship services exclusively in English, and five of those eleven were served by two pastors in the Pacific Northwest. The move to English progressed rapidly enough in the 1920s that some feared the loss of German ability among our pastors. A brief article by Prof. Max Lehninger (1872-1967) appeared in the April 1931 *Quartalschrift* entitled, "Is the Knowledge of German Necessary for Our Pastors?" Lehninger argued, "Instead of curtailing the study of German we should strive for bilingualism." Others encouraged producing more sound Lutheran material in English. In the October 1932 *Quartalschrift* an article by Prof. August Zich (1868-1939) entitled, "On the Need for More Lutheran Books in English," warned,

By this time it should be plain to all of us that the unique position of our Lutheran church among the numerous sects prevailing in the land places us under obligation to explain and defend our faith in English. We owe this as a duty not only to the number of our English-speaking children, but also to the masses, which are without any theological convictions or misled by the bold charlatans of theological thought. It is true that most of the theological books and treatises that so unceasingly roll off the American presses are bound by the chains of Reformed theology or are under the spell of the German modernistic and rationalistic theologians. But this very fact must act as a spur for us to actively combat this spurious theology.

By 1940 the synod's pastors reported that 72.8% of their work was done in English. The statistical report for 1950 lists 290 congregations still conducting some services in German and 537 congregations in which no German work was done at all.

The transition from German to English was slow and difficult. Fears that our synod might lose its Lutheran heritage as a result of the change to English have not proven true. Nevertheless, warnings about the paucity of sound Lutheran materials in English continue to be in place. Religious bookshelves in pastors' studies, teachers' offices, church libraries, and laymen's homes today probably more often than not contain greater numbers of non-Lutheran than Lutheran publications. Much has been done in recent years to produce sound Lutheran materials. Much more needs to be done in the future.

III. The Dissolution of the Synodical Conference

Treasured Fellowship

The Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America was a singular blessing for the Wisconsin Synod and the cause of confessional Lutheranism in America. Wisconsin benefited greatly from the mutual encouragement, joint publishing efforts like *The Lutheran Hymnal* (1941), involvement in mission efforts like the so called Negro Missions in the South and the Nigerian Mission, and the sharing of pulpits, classrooms, and altars under the banner of confessional Lutheranism. The breakup of the Synodical Conference was difficult and traumatic. It separated friends and divided families. In 1932 no one would ever have anticipated what was about to happen to the Synodical Conference.

1932-1938

In 1931 a committee of the Missouri Synod produced the "Brief Statement of the Doctrinal Position of the Missouri Synod." Dr. Franz Pieper was its main author. He was taken to heaven that same year. The

¹⁰ Of the 719 listed, 424 congregations were members of the synod, 192 were independent Lutheran congregations served by the synod's pastors, and 103 were preaching places.

Missouri Synod in convention adopted the "Brief Statement" in 1932. The document was recognized as a sound statement of the Lutheran faith by the other members of the Synodical Conference and, in fact, provided a doctrinal rallying point for those who wished to hold to Lutheran orthodoxy. But by the end of the decade the Missouri Synod was on a course at variance with the synod's historic confession and practice and that of the Wisconsin Synod.

Military Chaplaincy

In June 1934 the Atlantic District of the Missouri Synod drafted a memorial to the Synod to set up an Army and Navy Commission to recommend men to the United States government for service as military chaplains. The very next year the U.S. government made an official request to the Missouri Synod for chaplains. The 1935 convention of the Missouri Synod passed a resolution authorizing an Army and Navy Commission to investigate the assurances which had been given that Missouri's principles would be honored by the government. At the time the Missouri Synod met in convention only every three years. By the next convention in 1938 there were several Missouri Synod chaplains serving in the armed forces.

The Wisconsin Synod received the same request from the U.S. government, but took different action. The 1937 Wisconsin Synod Convention recommended appointing a committee to look into the issue and bring a report back to the 1939 convention. The 1939 convention decided not to recommend or commission Wisconsin Synod pastors for the chaplaincy service because the fundamental principle of separation of church and state is violated by such appointments and because it would become a practical impossibility for such chaplains to practice sound doctrine and confessional Lutheranism once they were in the military. The 1941 convention unanimously rejected participation once again, this time adding that appointments to the chaplaincy conflicted with the synod's doctrinal stand on the divinity of the call.

Missouri and the ALC

The United Lutheran Church in America (ULCA)¹¹ extended an invitation to the synods of the Synodical Conference to meet to consider closer relations. Upon receiving the invitation Pres. Brenner appointed a committee to bring a recommendation to the 1935 convention. This ad hoc committee became the Standing Committee on Church Union.¹² The president also requested a member of that committee, Edmund Reim (1892-1969), later president of the seminary, to deliver at the upcoming synod convention an essay he had previously read at a convention of the Northern Wisconsin District. The essay was entitled, "Church Fellowship and Its Implications." Reim added an additional section to the paper for the synod convention, "With Additional Notes on the Possibilities of Lutheran Union." Both the Wisconsin and Norwegian Synods declined the invitation of the ULCA. Missouri representatives met twice with ULCA representatives, but talks ended on a disagreement concerning inspiration.

Of greater concern, however, was Missouri's move toward fellowship with the American Lutheran Church (ALC).¹³ The ALC had extended an invitation to Missouri to meet for discussions on future fellowship. Neither the Norwegian Synod nor the Wisconsin Synod received this invitation. In 1938 the ALC declared at its Sandusky convention: "We are firmly convinced that it is neither necessary nor possible to agree in all non-fundamental doctrines" (doctrines revealed in Scripture but not absolutely necessary for saving faith). Earlier that year the Missouri convention resolved that its 1932 confessional declaration, the *Brief Statement*,

¹¹ The ULCA was a result of the 1918 merger of the synods of the General Synod, the United Synod-South, and the General Council.

¹² The Standing Committee on Church Union was the forerunner of the synod's Doctrinal Commission and today's Commission on Interchurch Relations.

¹³ The ALC was a result of the merger of the Ohio, Iowa, and Buffalo Synods. There were a number of doctrinal issues that had historically separated these synods from Missouri, including the various doctrines in contention during the Election Controversy and Iowa's historic position on "Open Questions."

together with the "Declaration of the Representatives of the American Lutheran Church" be regarded as the doctrinal basis for future church fellowship.

1939-1944

Both the Norwegian and the Wisconsin Synods reacted to Missouri's agreement with the ALC with concern. The Norwegian Synod declared that it could not regard the documents as an adequate basis for future church fellowship. The Wisconsin Synod held that the ALC's Sandusky Resolutions as well as the agreement between representatives of the ALC and ULCA at Pittsburgh earlier in 1939 made it evident that there was no real doctrinal agreement. The synod also declared, "Not two statements should be issued as a basis for agreement; a single joint statement, covering the contested doctrines thetically and antithetically...is imperative." Other confessional voices also raised concern. *The Crucible*, edited by Dr. William Oesch (1896-1982) and published in London, exposed the dangerous position into which the 1938 resolutions had placed Missouri.

In 1940 the Synodical Conference asked Missouri not to enter fellowship with the ALC and to consider the advisability of framing one document of agreement. That same year Pastor Paul Burgdorf of the Missouri Synod began publishing *The Confessional Lutheran* in response to the dangerous trends he saw developing in his synod.

Missouri's 1941 convention resolved to continue negotiations with the ALC, but recognized the desirability of having one document establishing doctrinal agreement. Missouri asked its sister synods to send representatives to the joint meetings of the committee to prepare this document. Both the Wisconsin and Norwegian Synods declined. Dr. J. Michael Reu (1869-1943) of the ALC in a published article intimated that the ALC might object to the inclusion of the Norwegian Synod (ELS)¹⁴ and the Wisconsin Synod in the discussions because his church body had not invited the other two synods previously for reasons of its own.

Prayer Fellowship and Cooperation in Externals

Relations in the Synodical Conference deteriorated even more in 1944. Missouri's Saginaw convention that year opened the door for congregational participation in Scouting and made a distinction between "joint prayer" and "prayer fellowship." Missouri claimed that "joint prayer" at intersynodical conferences, asking God for his guidance and blessing upon the deliberations and discussions of his Word, did not militate against its previous stand of no prayer fellowship with errorists, so long as such prayer did not imply denial of truth or support of error.

Another issue that had come to the fore by this time involved cooperative efforts between the Missouri Synod and synods outside its fellowship. Missouri called these joint efforts "cooperation in externals." Wisconsin believed that some of the things Missouri termed "externals" were not, and some things that were "externals" were leading Missouri's pastors and people into unionistic practices.

Pres. Brenner sent a letter to the Synodical Conference in 1944 protesting that "we have been seriously perturbed by numerous instances of an anticipation of a union not yet existing, or as it has been put, not yet declared." As a result of this letter the Synodical Conference established a Committee on Intersynodical Relations consisting of the presidents and two appointed men from each synod.

That same year Missouri and the ALC produced the joint document "Doctrinal Affirmation," an attempt to produce the single document that Wisconsin had earlier asked for to demonstrate that the previous doctrinal differences between the Synodical Conference and the ALC were now settled.

1945-1955

¹⁴ The Norwegian Synod became the ELS in 1958.

Both the Norwegian and the Wisconsin Synods saw the Doctrinal Affirmation as an improvement over using two documents for the resolution of doctrinal differences, but neither synod saw the document as a satisfactory statement or settlement of the historic differences between the ALC and Missouri. The Norwegian Synod believed that the Doctrinal Affirmation had weakened the Brief Statement. Wisconsin was not satisfied that all previous errors had been excluded. A Missouri Synod committee tried to meet the objections of the two sister synods and proposed some clarifications to the ALC committee. The ALC in convention failed to approve the Doctrinal Affirmation because the delegates believed that it failed to safeguard the ALC's position in certain articles. The Missouri Synod in 1947 consequently reaffirmed the Brief Statement and set aside the other union documents as a basis for fellowship with the ALC.

The Statement of the Forty-four

Meanwhile there was growing evidence of disunity within the Missouri Synod. A group of forty-four pastors and professors, including four district presidents, five members of the St. Louis faculty, and the editor of the *Concordia Theological Monthly* and the *Lutheran Witness*, met to discuss "a strange and pernicious spirit" that had invaded their synod. The result of the meeting was the issuance of "A Statement" which challenged the exegesis of Romans 16:17-18 and the historic fellowship practice of the Synodical Conference. President John W. Behnken (1884-1968) received a copy of "A Statement" in September of 1945, as he was about to leave on a foreign trip. He asked that it not be published until he had the opportunity to meet with the signers. The proponents of the "Statement of the Forty-four," as it came to be known, published it anyway. Behnken appointed a committee of ten to deal with "A Statement." The report of the Committee of Ten called for firm doctrinal discipline because the Statement espoused exegesis and practice that would disrupt the unity that had always characterized the Missouri Synod. Nevertheless Pres. Behnken eventually allowed the document to be withdrawn from consideration rather than retracted as containing error.

Continuing Concern

The Synodical Conference's Committee on Intersynodical Relations in 1946 noted Missouri's distinction between joint prayer and prayer fellowship and acknowledged incidents in Missouri that went beyond this. The Committee, however, also added, "The assurance was given that infractions have been and are being dealt with and will be dealt with further if the desired results are not forthcoming."

In 1948 the Norwegian Synod's overture to the Synodical Conference expressed its joy that Missouri had reaffirmed the Brief Statement, but called attention to the fact that some in Missouri were practicing fellowship with the ALC. The Norwegians expressed frustration that the offenders not only had not been dealt with, but had even been assigned to new offices and greater responsibilities. The Wisconsin Synod expressed similar frustration.

In 1949 the Wisconsin Synod convention through its president addressed six questions to the 1950 Missouri convention regarding specific violations and called for a direct answer that would clarify Missouri's position by public disavowal or removal of the offenses that had been given. Missouri's convention directed Behnken to draft a reply to Wisconsin's questions. The response politely rejected Wisconsin's claims that violations had been committed.

The Common Confession

A new joint ALC/Missouri document, the "Common Confession," was presented to both the Missouri and ALC conventions in 1950. Missouri accepted the confession as a statement of the disputed doctrines that was in harmony with the Scriptures. The Norwegian Synod pastoral conference meeting in November concluded that the Common Confession fell far short of its intended purpose. Some in the Norwegian Synod

(ELS) were already recommending an *in statu confessionis*¹⁵ declaration over against Missouri. The Wisconsin Synod meeting in convention in August 1951 declared that the Common Confession was unacceptable in its statements on justification, conversion, election, the means of grace, Scripture and inspiration.

Some concerned individuals now began to leave the Missouri Synod. In 1951 Prof. Paul Kretzmann, a professor at St. Louis and the author of the four volume *Popular Commentary of the Bible*, and a few others withdrew from Missouri and formed the Orthodox Lutheran Conference.

In 1952 the Norwegian Synod directed an overture to the Synodical Conference that sufficient time be allotted on the agenda for a through discussion of the Common Confession and the continued doctrinal negotiations between the Missouri Synod and the American Lutheran Church. The preamble of the Synodical Conference's floor committee's report concerning the Common Confession stated that the confession in its present form was inadequate as a settlement of differences and that the document had disturbed the unity of the Synodical Conference. The convention struck the preamble. A substitute motion was passed to postpone all further action on the subject until Part II of the Common Confession was available. The voting showed a deeply divided Synodical Conference with the Missouri and Slovak Synods on one side and the Norwegian and Wisconsin Synods on the other. Because of the size of their synod Missouri had the majority of delegates at the convention. That majority reacted vocally in approval or disapproval of those who spoke for or against the Common Confession. The Wisconsin delegation met privately and declared that they were *in statu confessionis* with the Missouri Synod.

In 1953 Pres. John W. O. Brenner announced that he would not stand for re-election. Pastor Oscar J. Naumann (1909-1979) was elected in his place. Under Naumann the Wisconsin Synod continued the patient admonition of Missouri and the careful presentation of the issues to its own members that had begun under Brenner

That same year Missouri and the ALC completed Part II of the Common Confession in an attempt to meet the objections to Part I that had been raised both within the Missouri Synod and outside it. Part II was published too late for consideration at Missouri's convention, so the discussion of it was postponed until 1956. Missouri in those years met in convention every three years. Wisconsin's convention met in August and again in October 1953. The convention adopted the recommendation "that we declare that the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod...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."

Missouri prepared a pamphlet entitled "A Fraternal Word" in order to explain its position on the issues in controversy. This publication began a pamphlet war between Missouri and Wisconsin. Wisconsin replied to "A Fraternal Word" with "A Fraternal Word Examined." Missouri followed with "Another Fraternal Endeavor." In early 1954 Wisconsin produced eleven tracts covering all of the main issues between the two synods. The tracts were published under the general theme, "Continuing in His Word." Most of them dealt with the Common Confession and Missouri's continuing negotiations with the ALC. President Behnken gave permission for these tracts to be sent also to every pastor in the Missouri Synod. Missouri then published a final pamphlet, "A Fraternal Reply."

The 1954 Synodical Conference convention gave all of its attention to seven essays on the issues in controversy.¹⁶ Three essays concerned the Common Confession. Two essays presented the military chaplaincy and scouting. Two essays covered various other issues related to fellowship. After hearing the essays a majority in the Synodical Conference passed a resolution requesting that the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod not use the Common Confession as a functioning union document without, however, passing judgment pro or con on the doctrinal content of the Common Confession. The resolution asking Missouri not to use the Common Confession as a functioning document was not an indication of any change in Missouri's position. The Common

¹⁵ An "in statu confessionis" declaration is a declaration that a group is in a state of protesting fellowship, the final step before declaring a break in fellowship.

¹⁶ Wisconsin Synod men presented three of the essays. Pastor Edward Fredrich presented "The Military Chaplaincy and Scouting." Pastor Ernst H. Wendland delivered, "The Inadequacy of the Common Confession as a Settlement of Past Differences." Prof E. E. Kowalke presented, "Unionism, the Communion Agreement, Negotiating with Lodges, and Joint Prayer."

Confession was passing from the scene anyway because the ALC was moving toward union with the other members of the American Lutheran Conference.¹⁷ Thirty delegates from the Norwegian and Wisconsin Synods asked that their negative votes be recorded. An additional twenty-three advisory delegates had their protest recorded. An overture presented earlier in the convention asking the Synodical Conference to reject the Common Confession because it did not define or safeguard the scriptural doctrine taught in the Brief Statement was signed by fifty-one Missouri Synod members. Missouri also was a house divided.

1955-Key Norwegian and Wisconsin Synod Conventions

By 1955 the controversy among the members of the Synodical Conference had come to a head. That year the Norwegian Synod suspended fellowship with the Missouri Synod, but remained in the Synodical Conference and in fellowship with the Wisconsin Synod. Wisconsin's floor committee brought to the convention floor a report whose preamble restated the 1953 declaration and pointed out that this was the kind of situation to which Romans 16:17,18 was applicable. The resolution stated, "that whereas the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod has created divisions and offenses by its official resolutions, policies, and practices not in accord with Scripture, we, in obedience to the command of our Lord in Romans 16:17,18, terminate our fellowship with the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod." The floor committee stated that final action on the resolution was to be taken at a recessed convention in 1956 after Missouri met so that the Missouri might have the opportunity to express itself on Wisconsin's 1953 admonition. The preamble passed unanimously. The resolution with its proposal of a year's delay was strongly debated and passed 94-47 (the negative votes cast because of the delay). Twenty-four voting delegates and nineteen advisory delegates recorded their names in protest of the delay. Prof. Reim issued a written statement declaring that he could continue in fellowship with his synod only under clear and public protest. He resigned as secretary of the Standing Committee on Church Union and placed his resignation as president and professor of the seminary before the synod and seminary board. The convention gave him a unanimous vote of confidence and asked that the seminary board not accept his resignation. Reim remained as president of the seminary.

1956-1961

The Missouri Synod convention in 1956 declared that the Common Confession would no longer function as a union document (although still viewing it as a statement in harmony with Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions) and gratefully acknowledged the concerns and admonitions that had been addressed to the synod. The Norwegian Synod thanked the Missouri Synod for consideration given to the causes of their suspension of fellowship, but stated that more time was needed to see whether the causes for the suspension of fellowship had been removed. Wisconsin's 1956 convention resolved to "hold in abeyance" the 1955 resolution to terminate fellowship, but to continue in rigorously protesting fellowship. The Synodical Conference met in December. The convention resolved that the Union Committees of the member synods were to meet jointly to draw up a list of problems stating clearly the *status controversiae* of each case, to set each synod's view properly expressed in thetical and antithetical form, and to discuss them throughout the various synods and present their evaluations to the 1958 convention. It also suggested a "conclave of theologians" of overseas brethren to assist in the solution of the unresolved doctrinal problems.

The Joint Union Committee began meeting in January and resolved that Scripture would be the final authority, that there must be a willingness to come to grips with all the issues, to condemn all matter contrary to the Word of God; and that a joint statement must aim at nothing less than full agreement [added later]. The problems to be considered were placed into three groups:

¹⁷ The American Lutheran Conference was a federation of the ALC, Augustana Synod, ELC (Norwegian), Lutheran Free Church, and UELC (Danish). The Conference was formed in 1930. In 1953 the Augustana Synod withdrew and in 1960 the remaining synods merged to become The American Lutheran Church.

1. Atonement, justification, and the dynamic, or motivating power for the Christian life, with practical application to the question of Scouting.
2. Scripture (revelation, principles of interpretation, open questions) and the practical application to the question of fulfillment of biblical prophecy in history, as, for example, in the doctrine of Antichrist.
3. Grace, conversion, election, and church and ministry, with practical application to questions of fellowship, unionism, separatism, church discipline, and the military chaplaincy.

The WELS floor committee recommended to the 1957 Wisconsin Synod convention that fellowship be terminated. The resolution was defeated 61 ayes to 77 noes. The convention resolved to continue vigorously protesting fellowship and urged a continuation of efforts to restore full unity. Prof. Reim resigned from the seminary. Two district presidents terminated fellowship with the synod.

The Norwegian Synod resolved to continue participation in the Joint Union Committee in spite of some protests from within the synod.

The Synodical Conference in convention in 1958 received a statement on Scripture. It was also reported that a statement on the Antichrist was nearing completion, and that extensive agreement respecting the principles underlying an evaluation of the Scout movement was brought to light. In October the Joint Committee adopted the final form of the statement on Scripture and on the Antichrist.

All four constituent synods of the Synodical Conference met in 1959. Missouri, Wisconsin, the ELS, and the Slovak Synod all adopted the statement on Scripture. Wisconsin also adopted the statement on the Antichrist. Missouri adopted the statement on Scripture but stated that it should not adopt the statement on the Antichrist until the Synodical Conference in convention had the opportunity to discuss it. Missouri devoted much time to the discussion of theological issues but also reaffirmed its 1944 statement on Scouting.

The conclave of theologians (from Australia, England, Germany, India, Argentina, Brazil, Canada, and Japan) met in Oakland, California, in 1959. The Conclave met again in Thiensville, Wisconsin, in 1960, but was not able to prevent the break that was soon to be declared.

For several years there had been a trickle of pastors, professors and congregations leaving the Wisconsin and Norwegian Synods. Those who left believed that a break with Missouri was overdue and that the Wisconsin and Norwegian Synods were becoming guilty of Missouri's unionism. In 1960 those pastors and congregations organized the Church of the Lutheran Confession.

The Wisconsin Synod had instructed its theologians on the Joint Committee to continue to work until agreement in doctrine and practice had been attained, or until an impasse was reached indicating that our testimony had been rejected. In May 1960 the Committee declared that such an impasse had been reached on the doctrine of fellowship. The Wisconsin Synod and the ELS produced statements in accord with the historic teaching of the Synodical Conference that no fellowship can be practiced without full doctrinal agreement. In opposition to this "unit concept" of fellowship the Slovak and Missouri Synods maintained a distinction between joint prayer and prayer fellowship and contended for a "growing edge" of fellowship toward those outside their synods. The 1960 Synodical Conference convention had been recessed until May 1961, but could not resolve the impasse on fellowship when the convention reconvened. The Wisconsin Synod in convention, having received the report of the impasse on fellowship, voted to terminate fellowship with the Missouri Synod by a vote of 124-49.

Aftermath

In 1962 both the ELS and the Wisconsin Synod asked the Synodical Conference to dissolve itself. When that did not happen both synods withdrew from Synodical Conference membership in 1963. The Synodical Conference met for the last time in 1966. The next year the Missouri Synod passed resolutions dissolving the

Conference and asked the Slovaks to do the same. Within a few years the Slovak Synod merged with the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.

The Wisconsin Synod had been able to become a founding member of the Synodical Conference in 1872 only because it had come to a correct understanding of the scriptural doctrine and practice of fellowship after its early years of confessional confusion. That understanding compelled the Wisconsin Synod to leave the Synodical Conference some ninety years later when Missouri departed from that same doctrine and practice of fellowship in spite of firm and patient admonition. It was only by God's grace that our synod came into the Conference, and it was only by his grace that our synod was preserved in the heat of that controversy that led to the Conference's dissolution.

This account of the dissolution of the Synodical Conference does not begin to address the difficulties and the heartaches experienced by members of the Wisconsin Synod. The struggles were long and often bitter and tiresome. A precious fellowship was lost. But with the struggles also came blessing as pastors and parishioners were forced into Scripture to find God-pleasing answers for the troubling questions of the day.

Some predicted that breaking with Missouri would be the end of the Wisconsin Synod. History tells a different story. After the break the synod entered on a period of rapid expansion on synodical campuses as young people presented themselves to be trained for the preaching and teaching ministry. The home and world mission program of our synod blossomed and bore fruit beyond all expectation. That story, however, will be the subject of our final installment.

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