

# Walther and Fellowship

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During the bicentennial celebration of C. F. W. Walther's birth an emphasis on Walther's biblically balanced doctrine of church and ministry would be an appropriate topic. With the possible exception of his lectures on law and gospel, an exposition of church and ministry is the doctrine most associated with his name. (Walther, of course, would have wanted a clear proclamation of justification to be the doctrine most associated with his name.) Another key theological contribution of Walther was his recovery of Luther's scriptural understanding of the distinction between church and state—a point that had been largely lost in European Lutheranism. But there is another area of doctrine in which Walther played a key role in laying a sound foundation for confessional Lutheranism in America, that is, in the restoration of sound biblical principles of church fellowship. This development was crucial to the realignment of Lutheranism that took place through the Synodical Conference of North America. This doctrine took on new importance during the disputes concerning prayer fellowship that divided the Synodical Conference in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. A recovery of this doctrine is important for the ongoing discussions about open communion and ecumenical prayer services that have been and are taking place in the Missouri Synod. Walther has been claimed by both sides in some of these disputes, so a restudy of the development of his position on church fellowship is a good project for this bicentennial year.

During the discussions that led up to the dissolution of the Synodical Conference in the 1960s a point of contention between representatives of the Wisconsin Synod and the Missouri Synod was whether Wisconsin's opposition to joint prayer with false teachers was an innovation or was, in fact, the original position of the whole Synodical Conference traceable back to Walther. Missouri's representatives claimed that their position and practice of allowing joint prayer with heterodox teachers with whom they were not in fellowship was the practice of Walther, although they did admit that some later Missourians held a position like that which Wisconsin was advocating. This issue was pretty thoroughly thrashed out during the 1950s and 60s but was largely forgotten in the intervening generation.

More recently the old issue of faithfulness to Walther has resurfaced in Missouri, in part, as a result of the fallout over the Yankee Stadium prayer service. In an essay published in the *Concordia Journal*, July 2003, Samuel H. Nafzger, executive secretary of the Missouri Synod's Commission on Theology and Church Relations, renewed the claim that the LCMS never held a unit concept of fellowship which included prayer on the same level as the means of grace as expressions of church fellowship, though he did grant that some in the LCMS may at times have had such a notion.<sup>1</sup>

The historical aspect of this debate has focused on three situations: the claim that the apostles practiced prayer fellowship with Jews with whom they were not in fellowship, the claim that early Lutherans practiced prayer fellowship with the Catholics and Reformed, and the claim that Walther practiced prayer fellowship without doctrinal agreement during early free conferences. The first two claims have been discussed elsewhere,<sup>2</sup> so we will focus here on the role of Walther and his contemporaries in the development of the principles of church fellowship that were the practice of the Synodical Conference in its heyday.

We recognize, of course, the danger that those who are looking to the past for evidence to support their present position are likely to find it, since it is easy to blur the record of the past by selective use of the historical evidence. Two sides, looking at the same events and texts, claim to find precedents for their position. We also emphasize that historical precedents are of only secondary importance in judging this dispute since it is Scripture alone that has the right to determine our principles.

## The Principles and Practice of Fellowship in Walther and in Early Missouri

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<sup>1</sup> Nafzger, p 245-246, 260.

<sup>2</sup> There is an overview treatment of these developments in Brug, John F., "The Synodical Conference and Prayer Fellowship," *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 102 (Winter 2005): p 26-57. That article is also available from the Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary online essay file and in the appendix of the longer online version of this article which can also be found in the online essay file.

Walther was the key figure in the development of the sound fellowship principles and practices which characterized the Synodical Conference. Beginning in the 1840s he and his associates and their counterparts in the Wisconsin Synod had to wrestle with a new situation which had not been previously encountered in Lutheranism—a confusing mix of orthodox and heterodox Lutheran church bodies side by side in the same territory. After the free conferences of the 1850s and the Election Controversy of the 1880s had drawn a clear dividing line through American Lutheranism, the churches of the Synodical Conference practiced the “unit concept” of fellowship—agreement in all doctrine is necessary for any practice of fellowship, including joint prayer. But how did they arrive at this point?

The fellowship issue, of course, came to the fore as a result of the government-mandated imposition of Union churches in Germany. Further dilemmas for Walther and his contemporaries resulted from the migration of union churches to America, the problem of continued relationships with unionistic mission societies back home in Germany, and the lingering question of how the confessional Lutheran churches of America should relate to those Lutheran territorial churches in Germany that were entangled by relationships to the Union.

### **The Crisis in Fellowship Raised by the Union**

At the time of the Reformation the Lutheran church had to confront the issue of church fellowship first in the break from Rome and then in the separation from the Reformed that began at Marburg in 1529. The issue was given clearer definition as a result of the ecumenical colloquy at Thorn, Poland in 1645.<sup>3</sup> Then, it seems that for a long time, as the Lutheran church settled too comfortably into the state church mode, there was not much attention to this issue. Problems of church fellowship came back to center stage for the Lutheran church with the imposition of the Prussian Union beginning in 1817.

In Prussia two Protestant churches had existed side by side ever since 1617 when Elector John Sigismund declared his conversion from Lutheranism to Calvinism in the *Confession of Sigismund*, which presented a compromise between Lutheranism and Calvinism. Most of the elector’s subjects remained Lutheran, but many Calvinist refugees were received into Prussia from other lands that were hostile to their faith. Their descendants made up the bulk of the Calvinists in Brandenburg. For almost two centuries this urge to unify the two faiths persisted, but with only moderate pressure toward an organizational fellowship of the two faiths.

The situation came to a head two centuries later with the reign of Frederick William III. Already in 1798, only one year after he had ascended to the throne as king of Prussia, Frederick William decreed that a new common service book would be published for use in both the Lutheran and Reformed congregations. Frederick William seems to have been a sincere religious soul with a Pietistic bent, who was distressed that he could not commune with his Lutheran wife nor with the majority of his subjects. The king’s strong desire for a fixed agenda was also due in part to his extreme irritation with the rationalistic pastors who departed from the traditional liturgy and substituted worship materials of their own choice and making, often on a moment’s whim, with little forethought or preparation. In spite of the king’s strong personal desire for union, there was no immediate pressure toward a formal union of the churches.

On September 27, 1817, Frederick William announced that the court and garrison congregations in Potsdam would unite into one Evangelical Christian congregation on the 300th anniversary of the Reformation

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<sup>3</sup> See Brug, “Prayer Fellowship,” p 34-37. Here we cite just three of the twelve points from Thorn which demonstrate that the Lutherans at Thorn had reached the same conclusions about prayer fellowship which early Missouri and Wisconsin shared in the Synodical Conference. 1). The apostle *forbids* that anyone should have *fellowship with darkness* and the spiritual Babylon (2 Cor. 6; Rev. 18). 2). There is *nothing* in the royal invitation *about joint prayers* and ceremonies, rather that those who had left Roman Catholicism should be *distinct and separate*. . . .4). The colloquy is to be charitable; but it is a contradiction of charity to forbid those who have equal rights to conduct prayers *with their fellows*, to take away from them the *liberty to pray in public*. If we were to condescend to pray with the Roman Catholic gentlemen, we should sin against charity, by which we should give offense to the weak (Rom. 16).

on October 31, 1817. The king expressed his desire that the other Lutheran and Reformed congregations around Prussia would follow this example and become Union congregations. At first this was a *suggestion* from the king, but as time passed government pressures for the Union were intensified. Both Calvinist and Lutheran churches were subject to state supervision, carried out by the newly created Ministry of Religious, Educational, and Medical Affairs. From 1820 onwards candidates for ministry were required to state whether they would be willing to join the Union. Before long, assignments in the military chaplaincy and positions on the theological faculty at Bonn were dependent on acceptance of the Union. In time for Christmas 1821, a common liturgical agenda was produced by the committee, with considerable personal involvement of Frederick William himself. In 1822 the Protestant congregations were directed to use only the newly formulated agenda for worship. This met with strong objections from Lutheran pastors around Prussia and in territories that had been annexed to Prussia, including parts of Saxony. The greatest objection to the agenda was that it compromised the wording of the words of institution to such a degree that the real presence of Christ's body and blood was not clearly proclaimed.

In June 1829, Frederick William ordered that all Protestant congregations and clergy in Prussia give up the names Lutheran or Reformed and take up the name Evangelical. In April 1830, Frederick William, in his instructions for the upcoming celebration of the 300th anniversary of the presentation of the Augsburg Confession, ordered all Protestant congregations in Prussia to celebrate the Lord's Supper using the new agenda. The king and top church officials insisted over and over again that the historic confessions were not being changed and that no individual or congregation was being forced to give up the traditional confessional beliefs. Nevertheless resistance was intense.

In an attempt at compromise with the strongest dissenters, who had now earned the name Old Lutherans, in 1834 Frederick William issued a decree which stated that Union would be only in governance and in the liturgical agenda, and that the respective congregations could retain their denominational identities. The king stated that the Union was intended only to be an expression of moderation and gentleness. It was emphasized that the Union was a matter of free choice. But the use of the new agenda would continue to be mandatory for all Protestant churches in Prussia. Protesting Lutherans were not to be permitted to form separate religious societies. Lutherans and Reformed were required to offer each other fellowship and participation in the Sacrament. Failure to follow the order would be dealt with severely.

In defiance of this decree, a number of Lutheran pastors and congregations, like that in Breslau, continued to use the old liturgical agenda and sacramental rites of the Lutheran church. When they became aware of this defiance, officials suspended and imprisoned pastors who defied the decree. Johann Scheibel, the most outspoken leader of the opposition, had to go into exile. By 1835 dissenting Old Lutheran groups were looking to emigration as a means to finding religious freedom. Some groups emigrated to Australia and the United States in the years leading up to 1840.<sup>4</sup>

With the death of Frederick William III in 1840, King Frederick William IV ascended to the throne. He released the pastors who had been imprisoned and allowed the dissenting groups to form religious organizations. Eventually, there would be Lutheran free churches in Germany.

### **Conditions in Saxony**

Conditions in Saxony, from which Walther emigrated, were somewhat different. Unlike Prussia which was strengthened by the outcome of the Napoleonic wars, Saxony was considerably diminished and weakened as a result of the wars. As a result the government adopted a defensive mode of conservatism and autocracy.

After 1817 and the proclamation of the Union in Prussia, there was a small number who advocated that Saxony likewise approve a merger of the Lutheran and Reformed churches and adopt a confessional statement

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<sup>4</sup> Westerhaus, Martin O., "The Confessional Lutheran Emigrations from Prussia and Saxony Around 1839." This appeared in six installments in the *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* from Fall of 1989 to Winter 1991. The most important installment for our purposes is the Fall 1989 installment, p 247-264.

that reflected that position. The state church of Saxony, however, still officially declared itself to be an Evangelical Lutheran Church. The king was Catholic, and there were almost no Reformed congregations in Saxony so there was little pressure for a Union. The creeds and confessions contained in the Book of Concord were still the official doctrinal position of the church according to which all preaching and teaching was to be done and all doctrine was to be judged. Although the rationalists in the church did not believe much of what is taught in the Lutheran Confessions, they never sought to have them altered or repealed.

Thus in Saxony rationalism and supernaturalism<sup>5</sup> were a greater threat to Lutheranism than pressure toward union with the Reformed. In 1812 a new agenda had been published, in which the various services and rites were altered in a way that either changed the doctrine involved or incorporated empty, meaningless phrases. To avoid controversy, however, in most instances, the service book offered several alternatives, at least one of which would offer a traditional orthodox Lutheran form. Hymnbooks, catechisms, and other religious books used in parish schools were changed to eliminate those Lutheran doctrines which the rationalists no longer accepted.

Resistance to rationalism was built up through small meetings outside the official services of the church. Resisters did what the Pietists once had done. Small groups met to read and to discuss the Bible, to pray, and to sing the traditional Christian hymns. These little groups established ties with each other by mail, encouraged each other, and shared what they gained from their study of the Word. They looked for and found here and there those few preachers who still preached the gospel, and they traveled many miles to hear them. They also informed other groups of like-minded believers about these preachers. It was largely from cells of these earnest, active Christians and from the pastors who served them that the Saxon emigration to America came about.

Years later, recalling his own experience in the Saxon church, Walther wrote that the religious oppressions which faithful Lutherans in Saxony suffered were most dreadful.<sup>6</sup> In that time, he says, the binding by oath to the Book of Concord was only an empty comedy, and the most important regulations of the established church were actual and open denials of the sworn confession of the church. Only upon the basis of Jesuitical moral principles could one claim that the established Church of Saxony was still a faithful Lutheran church on the grounds that the Lutheran Confessions still stood in its midst as a legal standard.

Walther enumerates various burdens of conscience endured by confessional pastors and people. Since 1812, an agenda had been in place which a pastor with genuine Lutheran beliefs could use only with a bad conscience, since it contained forms which openly denied divine truth and miserably watered down Christian doctrine. Although nobody asked or cared whether the rationalistic, unbelieving pastors to whom the agenda still sounded too Christian followed the agenda, a faithful Lutheran pastor did not dare in any wise to depart from it.<sup>7</sup> If he did and this came to the ears of his superiors, he was most severely called to account. When Walther himself had used an old form of absolution that was not contained in the approved agenda, his unbelieving schoolmaster accused him before their superintendent and before the consistory of the country. Walther was strictly forbidden to use the old form of absolution and condemned to bear all the accumulated costs of the proceedings against him. An even greater distress to the conscience of a confessional pastor was the requirement to read from his pulpit and to present to God the miserable prayers prepared by the consistory for special occasions. A “beyond all measure miserable” rationalistic hymnal was introduced. The school books in

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<sup>5</sup> *Rationalism* may be divided into *naturalism* (also called simple or pure deism) and *supernaturalism*. Naturalists deny supernatural revelation and intervention altogether. Supernaturalists allow for a supernatural revelation which possesses an authority above reason, though it was capable of being proved by reason. This revelation is not identical with Christian revelation but is in all religions. Above, *rationalism* refers more to the strict, skeptical naturalism, and *supernaturalism* to a compromising, less skeptical rationalism. Not all rationalists deny the possibility of any divine revelation, though in the end they all ignore it.

<sup>6</sup> This summary is based on Steffens, D. H., *Doctor Carl Ferdinand Wilhelm Walther*, Philadelphia, PA: The Lutheran Publication Society, 1917, p 78-91. This English biography was based on earlier German biographies. This section is based Walther's remembrances of his experiences which he recorded in 1882 in a biography of his colleague Buenger. This section is a paraphrase and modernization, but I have tried to keep the tone of Walther's comments.

<sup>7</sup> An aside from the text of Steffens (p 84): A dyed-in-the-wool rationalist is never satisfied to use an accepted church form for a ministerial act. With the most astounding self-sufficiency he is ever ready to cast it aside, and, upon the spur of the moment to substitute his own poetic twaddle (*Gewasch*) for words and prayers hallowed by centuries of use.

use were almost without exception completely leavened with rationalism. When Walther attempted to introduce a school book written in a Christian spirit, his godless schoolmaster immediately denounced him to his superintendent, who joined hands with the ignorant village school board and attempted to compel the immediate introduction of a miserable school book. The attempt failed because Walther appealed to Statesminister Detlev von Einsiedel, who intervened. Walther nevertheless was compelled to bear the by no means moderate costs of this legal action, but on the very day before his emigration to America, without him requesting it, the congregation refunded the amount to him with the statement that the action had been conducted only for the sake of the welfare of its children.

The highest degree of oppression to the consciences of faithful Lutheran pastors of the established Saxon Church was that they, in direct opposition to the word of God, were compelled by reason of their office in the established Church not only to maintain ecclesiastical, sacramental and fraternal relations with errorists but also to recognize them as their spiritual superiors, and they were compelled permit them to blaspheme divine truth and to spew out their doctrine of devils before the minister's own congregation. Finally, it caused a Lutheran-believing minister no little distress of conscience that the practice of announcement before communion, the suspension of impenitent people from the Lord's Supper, in short, every exercise of church discipline was prohibited to him.

Faithful Lutheran laymen in Saxony also suffered no less distress of conscience. They were required to recognize notorious false prophets as their shepherds and pastors. They were required to place their children in the charge of godless schoolmasters for their instruction in religion and their Christian training, and to purchase and to place into their children's hands godless school-books. Of the five forms for baptism contained in the official agenda only one was in some measure endurable. At that time there were also pastors in Saxony who did not even baptize according to the words of institution in the name of the Trinity. Walther summarized the plight of the people and pastors:

Hard as it was for many poor Lutheran-believing laymen to walk for miles and miles if they for once desired to hear a Lutheran sermon, this was the smallest thing they had to bear. Many of them, after having labored the whole week from early dawn until late at night in the sweat of their face to earn their meager daily bread for their own households, set out at the approach of Sunday soon after midnight in order to refresh their famished hearts with the preaching of the pure, alone-saving word of God in some distant church. When this was done, on Sunday evening they at once set out for the return with rejoicing, and on Monday, refreshed in soul, they again took up the weekly task which so meagerly supported them and their own. How gladly the Lutheran-believing ministers and laymen of those days would have given up everything if only they might have secured permission to unite in a Lutheran Free Church, separated from the deeply corrupted and fallen established Church! But there was at that time absolutely no thought of their receiving permission for such a purpose. Emigration to a country where religious liberty prevailed was, therefore, recognized as the only way of escape from the oppression of conscience, constantly growing more and more unbearable, which threatened to suffocate all life of faith in them.

On top of this came the warning example which the Lutherans of Saxony saw in the fate of the separated Lutherans of Prussia. For when many of them, after unsuccessful, faithful, and hot battle against union and the enduring of heavy persecutions, sought permission to emigrate, this prayer was flatly denied them at the instance of Minister von Altenstein, although a Prussian law of the year 1818 explicitly permitted emigration. The Lutherans of Saxony, not without reason, feared that the same fate threatened them. . . . Although in the established Church of Saxony the union of Lutherans and Reformed was not yet, as in Prussia, formally introduced by a special law, it was none the less long since actually united. To mention but one thing, such widely differing forms for official acts had been received by the Church of Saxony for this very reason: that unbelieving ministers just as well as the believing might officiate in them, and that unbelieving laymen just as well as the believing might find satisfaction in them; with this exception, that far more regard was had for the

former than for the latter. In short, the union of the Saxon established Church was, it is true, no union of Reformed and Lutherans, but a union of unbelievers and believers."<sup>8</sup>

In a letter to Theodor Julius Brohm, August 17, 1837, Walther says:

Fear of man does not move me in the least, but only the fear of unwise or illegal steps. If God's honor requires it, I am joyfully ready to invite the attack of superintendent, district school-board, consistory, and ministerium. If it were God's will, I would only rejoice if the burden of my office were taken from me, for it is very, very heavy; but I am also willing to bear it as long as I can do so in God's name and with the assurance that he is with me.<sup>9</sup>

These were the experiences that shaped the man who helped shape the doctrine of fellowship for a truly confessional Lutheran church in America.

The two major issues were: 1) what fellowship could there be with the union churches (here the answer was very simple—none whatsoever); 2) what kind of fellowship could there be with the loyal Lutherans who remained trapped in the Union or in nominally Lutheran churches (here, the answer was somewhat more complicated and is the subject of the next section).

### **Continued Relations with Lutheran State Churches**

The efforts of the men of early Missouri to sort out fellowship issues were complicated (or at least made emotionally more trying) by a number of issues. Like early Wisconsin, Missouri was in part dependent on financial and manpower support from their fellow Lutherans who remained in Germany. The immigrants had family, former colleagues, and former parishioners who had been left behind in those churches. They themselves had until very recently been members of such compromising churches. As part of the fallout from the Stephan affair the pastors in particular had experienced some second thoughts and inner turmoil about both the propriety and timing of their departure from their calls and their congregations in Germany.

A valuable resource for the early stages of this struggle, recently made available in English, is the extensive report of a trip which Walther and Wyneken made to Germany in 1851 to deal with financial and doctrinal matters.<sup>10</sup>

Missouri's strong supporter Wilhelm Loehe, who provided so many pastors for the synod, was a protesting member of the Bavarian state church. In 1848 the forced Union of Reformed and Lutheran congregations in Bavaria had been dissolved, but in 1849 Loehe and his supporters called for more: an end to control of the church by the head of the state, strict adherence to the confessions in the church, and the end of all communion fellowship with the Reformed. Their request was not granted, but there was sufficient progress that Loehe did not leave the state church. In 1851 Walther encouraged Loehe not to leave the state church, since Loehe was taking a strong stand against altar fellowship with the Reformed, and the efforts to suspend Loehe had failed. But even as Loehe and his associates remained in the state church, they would refuse all communion fellowship with the Reformed and with any Lutheran pastors or people that practiced it.<sup>11</sup> Walther had received encouragement from Dr. Harless and other high officials in the consistories of the churches of Saxony and Bavaria. As a result Walther had high hopes. Walther declared that he could no longer recognize the Germany he had left thirteen years earlier. He believed that in Germany morning would soon dawn, though under fog and

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<sup>8</sup> Steffens, p 86-88.

<sup>9</sup> Steffens, p 89 .

<sup>10</sup> Found in *At Home of the House of My Fathers*, Matthew Harrison, translator and compiler, St. Louis MO: Lutheran Legacy, 2009, p 19-108.

<sup>11</sup> Lest it be thought that Walther and Loehe limited church fellowship to communion fellowship, it should be noted that in his statements against false communion fellowship (Harrison, p107-112) Loehe had stated that "the Word of God, which forbids *any* fellowship with false doctrine and its persistent followers, thus *especially* forbids communion fellowship" ( p 108).

rain. In these circumstances when it seemed that victory for the confessional forces was at hand, Walther warned against premature departure from the Bavarian church.<sup>12</sup>

One of the purposes of Walther and Wynken for meeting with Bavarian church officials was to gain authorization to gather an offering for the benefit of the St. Louis seminary. During this process they learned that the church authorities had issued an ultimatum (not yet public) to Loehe and his supporters, demanding that they either cease their public criticism of communion with the Reformed or resign their offices in the church. Faced with this revelation, Walther and Wynken withdrew their request for the offering. They realized that to receive financial support from the Bavarian church under such circumstances would seem to support the actions against Loehe. Loehe and his associates rejected the ultimatum and refused either to mute their criticism or to resign, so the burden was back on the church authorities. Delitzsche and other leading theologians supported Loehe stating that they too would be forced out of the state church by the demands made on Loehe. So it seemed that the struggle for the Bavarian church would go on with reasonable prospects of success.<sup>13</sup>

In their travels Walther and Wynken made an effort to sound the alarm to pastors and people whom they believed were caught in union churches without fully realizing the evil of it. The principle which Walther enunciated was "What God has joined together man should certainly not separate, but what man has joined together though it does not belong together no man can keep together."<sup>14</sup> Patient instruction and the need to separate both were part of their program.

Once when Walther was asked to preach for a pastor who thought that he could continue to be a Lutheran in a Union church, Walther refused. When the man persisted, Walther said he could accept the invitation only if he was allowed to denounce the Union from the pulpit, thinking that this was an impossible condition. To Walther's shock and dismay the man agreed to these conditions, and Walther was stuck, so he preached an anti-Union sermon in a Union church.<sup>15</sup> This was a departure from the usual practice but not from the principle.

As much as Walther and Wynken supported Loehe in his struggle with the state church, their meetings with Loehe made it clear that a doctrinal difference was developing between them and Loehe which could not be fully resolved. They were not yet willing to say that it called for an immediate end of fellowship since conversations with Loehe had led to a different impression of his views than they had supposed from his writings.<sup>16</sup> The cordial but indecisive meetings in Germany which failed to bring about a reconciliation kept the door open to further talks, but the death of the Loehe's wife at an early age and his dedication to raising his young children, which made it impossible for him to come to America to see the situation first hand, and the anti-Missouri attitude of some of Loehe's agents in America hindered reconciliation efforts. Further efforts to resolve the difference ultimately failed, and this story had a sad outcome for Loehe since the majority of the men whom Loehe sent to serve in America accepted Walther's teaching on church and ministry and ended their working relationship with Loehe. A minority who sided with Loehe formed the Iowa Synod in 1854, in a territory where Missouri was not yet doing much work. The division in the 1850s was more a gradual parting of the ways than a sharp break. Later, however, Walther did write sharply against Loehe's views, and the breach became wider.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> See Harrison, p 24-27.

<sup>13</sup> See Harrison, p 78-83, p 91.

<sup>14</sup> See Harrison, p 96, 98.

<sup>15</sup> See Harrison, p 98.

<sup>16</sup> See Harrison, p 85-86.

<sup>17</sup> For example, in "The Congregation's Right to Choose its Pastor," *Der Lutheraner*, 17-3, September 18, 1860, p 17-19. "When Pastor Loehe wrote this eleven years ago and we read it, we were deeply alarmed. For with this he took away from the Christian congregations the most precious and important right, which they possess. The poor German congregations groan under the godless rule of thousands of unbelieving preachers who are foisted upon them, who have now for more than half a century robbed them of their orthodox agendas, catechisms, and hymnbooks. They have forced unbelieving books on them and preached to them the most wretched doctrine of men instead of the Word of God. Now instead of fighting so that the poor, shamelessly tyrannized congregations, which are cheated by their pastors out of their faith and salvation, might be freed from these their tyrants, Loehe rather fights for this, that the congregations only remained tamely in their chains, and praises it as the proper help for them, if the

In *The Duties of an Evangelical Lutheran Synod* (1879) Walther mourns that there can be no fellowship with the Iowa Synod, but says that such fellowship, which would deceive many, would be the greater evil.

We do not hold that when a congregation is heterodox all its members are wicked people. We know that also among them there are dear children of God. Our polemics in no way apply to them, but to those who lead them astray....We will have nothing to do with [the Iowa Synod], and because of what they are we must withdraw from many a dear person of whom we are convinced that he has the true faith. Because they are connected with false teachers we can have no brotherly fellowship with them but only bemoan to God the fact that there also a dear brother is captive. Then we besiege this prison in order to capture it and to rescue our beloved brothers and sisters from the claws of those who mislead them.<sup>18</sup>

In the same work Walther advises all real Lutherans to flee the state churches of Europe. He also cites Luther's refusal of fellowship to Zwingli after Marburg even though there were certainly Christians among the Reformed. He repeats Luther's advice that the sheep are to flee the wolves.<sup>19</sup> So in the 1850s Walther was not ready to cut off all fellowship with Loehe. In the 1870s he rejected any fellowship with Loehe's followers. In between it appears some limited expressions of fellowship were possible. What explains this pattern?

### **The Problem: When to Stay, When to Leave When to Hang On, When to Break**

We have already seen how Walther in the early 1850s encouraged Loehe to keep up the fight in the Bavarian church at a time when recent developments made the possibility of victory for the confessional cause plausible. Twenty years later Walther could still express a "fight don't run" outlook. Much has been made of two letters Walther wrote to a Bavarian seminarian in 1870 advising him to remain in the state church.<sup>20</sup> In recent years some in Missouri have advised people to remain in the Scandinavian state churches of today in part on the basis of Walther's advice.

In the twenty years that had passed since the battle in the Bavarian church precipitated by Loehe, some progress had been made under faithful confessors like Harless. Now seminarian Johann Fackler, who apparently had received advice to leave the Bavarian church from Friedrich Brunn (who within a decade was instrumental in founding the Saxon Free Church) sought the advice of Walther concerning his departure from the church and advice for faithful congregations that were unwilling to accept unionistic or rationalistic pastors that might be assigned to them by the state church.. Walther advises that a confessional congregation first attempt to call an orthodox pastor on their own authority and in this way to put the onus for the split on the church authorities who would have to expel them for insubordination. Walther compares the situation facing confessional Lutherans in the Bavarian church in 1870 to the situation facing Lutherans in their remaining tie to the Catholic church in 1530. The Lutheran confessors at Augsburg had forced the issue by making a bold confession which condemned the errors of the Roman church and refused to participate in them. The Lutherans were, in fact, by this time already acting as a de facto church. Walther was advocating similar defiance against the decrees of the Bavarian church, which would force the issue. In a second letter to Fackler Walther expresses his regret that he had not forced the Saxon church to expel him thirty years earlier. He recognizes that Christians have a clear obligation to leave every false church, but it is more difficult to decide when to leave a formerly orthodox church that is becoming heterodox. One should not immediately leave but should try to correct the wrongs. This however cannot go on indefinitely. The time when correction and reconciliation are possible may quickly come to an end. As evidence of this Walther points out the sharp difference in tone

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preachers also in the future retain all the power in their hands and the congregations remain in the old slavery." We see here how Walther's final reactions to Loehe were colored by Walther's bad fellowship experiences in the German churches.

<sup>18</sup> See Harrison, p 254-259.

<sup>19</sup> See Harrison, p 267, 278.

<sup>20</sup> See Harrison, p 176 -181.



between the Augsburg Confession in 1530 and the Smalcald Articles less than a decade later. It is hard to see any big difference between the dilemma that Luther wrestled with in the 1530s, Walther wrestled with in the 1830s and 1870s, and the dilemma that the Wisconsin Synod struggled with in the 1940s and 50s. In each case they dealt with their responsibility to give a clear witness. When that failed, they made a clear break.

The gist of Walther's advice was that Fackler and congregations that shared his convictions should not silently slink away into the night but should confront the error and force a public show-down. At any rate, Fackler did not accept Walther's advice for very long and was soon living in Walther's house in St. Louis. He served then as a Missouri Synod pastor.

If Walther was still in Augsburg Confession mode in 1870, he was in Smalcald Article mode by 1879. Less than a decade after his letters to Fackler Walther was giving remarkably different advice in regard to the state churches.<sup>21</sup> By then he vehemently advocated departure from the state churches.

Indeed, even the believing pastors now consider this an exceedingly difficult question to answer: Can one have fellowship with a state church that calls itself "Lutheran," if that church, only as a formality, pledges itself to the Lutheran symbols? Or must one rather separate oneself from such a church? Nevertheless, if Holy Scripture is really God's truthful and clear word – and that it is! – then even a good catechism student can doubtless answer no question more easily or with more certainty than this one.

It would be downright laughable to maintain that, in our age, even one of the so-called "Lutheran" state churches enjoys unity of faith and confession. ... Through their affiliation with the state church and their membership in it, the believing preachers stand in church, altar, and pulpit fellowship with these people. They recognize these people as their inspectors. And because of this, the same people must be allowed on occasion to teach, that is, to lead astray the souls who have been entrusted to the believing preachers.

To belong to such a state church, whether as a member or a minister, would be against God's word. That is lucid and clear. It's a riddle to us how a discriminating human being could dispute this or at all doubt it. Regarding false teachers, God's word often commands:

- "Keep away from them," Ro. 16:17;
- "Do not be yoked together with unbelievers," 2 Co. 6:14;
- "Come out from them and be separate," 2 Co. 6:17;
- "Stay away from such people," 1 Ti. 6:5;<sup>22</sup>
- "Have nothing to do with him," Ti. 3:10; and,
- "Do not take him into your house or welcome him," 2 Jn. 10.

God's word often gives these commands. In this way it often clearly and specifically calls people nowadays to detach themselves from fellowships like the so-called "Lutheran" state church.

Therefore, anyone who stays in the state church despite all this is disobedient to God's clear word. Everything one brings up to the contrary is sophistry, whether intentional or unintentional. When compared to God's word, their arguments dissolve like mist before the sun. They burn up like straw in the flame of contradictions.

It is nonsense to think that a church may be a true church so long as in it the pure doctrine is *doctrina publica*.... What does God care if an ecclesiastical fellowship still retains on paper the law that within its domain only the pure doctrine should count for anything, if in reality everyone in it teaches whatever pleases him, and the ruling church authorities, consistories, synods, and superintendents don't even give them a sour look? Yes, in most cases the leaders both install notoriously erring teachers and protect them against attack.

<sup>21</sup> Walther, C. F. W., "Forward to Volume 25 of *Lehre und Wehre*," (January, 1879, p 1-11). English translation by Christopher S. Doerr, *WLQ* 100-3, Summer 2003 p 192-202.

<sup>22</sup> Translator's note: This part of 1 Timothy 6:5 is not in the NIV. It is a variant reading: ἀφίστασο ἀπὸ τῶν τοιούτων. It is very well attested: Cyprian, Irenaeus, the ancient Lectionaries, and so on.

That the correct doctrine, in this way, is *doctrina publica* in a state church, only makes it all the more reprehensible....

Have we Lutherans, through the self-named “Lutheran” state churches become a laughing stock to our enemies! Pointing at the so-called state church, do the Jesuits and their like name the Lutheran church a “Babel,” whose downfall is near? Then we must either cast down our eyes ashamed or confess loudly that those state churches bear the name “Lutheran” in the same way that the Roman church bears the name “Catholic.” The enormous conventions and conferences, which meet here and there, are a crying shame. They should be showing the church of the Antichrist that ever still a church of the Reformation exists.

However, the correctly-believing teachers of our church have, in this connection, carried out in practice all that they have taught. Neither the mere name “Lutheran” nor a merely formal confession of the symbols of our church leads them astray. After Luther’s death, the Crypto-Calvinists, Synergists, Majorists, Adiaphorists, and others not only maintained with great determination that they should be called “Lutherans,” but also solemnly pronounced the Augsburg Confession, its Apology, the Smalcald Articles, and both of Luther’s Catechisms to be their confession, to which they adhered. At that time, those who believed correctly maintained no relations at all with these people, neither church nor altar nor pulpit fellowship.<sup>23</sup>

In the rest of this rather lengthy article Walther goes on to reject the arguments for delaying departure from the state churches of Germany. Christians are not to wait a special signal from God to depart from a church persisting in error, since we already have his clear command. In regard to departure from the state churches the time for exodus has long since come. We cannot remain in persistently erring churches for the sake of the weak. It is precisely for their sake that we must leave and provide for them a place to which they can flee with us.

However, when the believing pastors remain in the state church after it has fallen away and when they seek with all their might to keep this church together, through those actions without a doubt innumerable souls have already been lost, and even more will yet be lost. At the same time, the believing pastors could walk out. They could assemble a church freely founded according to God’s word, with the pure word and the unadulterated sacrament as well as an evangelical manner of teaching and living. Through that action the Lutheran church would then become a city on a high mountain again. And thousands upon thousands of those now asleep would wake up and be rescued.

Perhaps the believing pastors in the state churches point to the small size of the flock of those who have separated. Because of that they intend to detain their own members within the state churches. By this they only condemn themselves with their argument. For who bears the guilt for the free church being so small? Truly it isn’t only the believing lay people in the state church. Are they not listening to and serving these same pastors? We gladly believe it is not due to their bellies but out of weak faith that these lay people would rather remain in fellowship with Christ’s enemies than come in and hold fellowship with those who confess the truth. May God hear the outcry against these teachers!

Finally, however, what matters here above all is not the question, “What good will your struggle do?” but rather, “What advances God’s word?” If we have the answer to that, then what matters is that we obey. How much do we obey? – As much as God’s grace and our blessed end is dear to us. And we confidently entrust to God the results of our obedience. And if it seems that our obedience would cause the ruin not only of the world but also of the church, then we can and should cheerfully look on. God will make it well.<sup>24</sup>

This article which so strongly urges separation from the state church is remarkable in another respect. With three brief quotations Walther summarizes his position on all of the points that became a controversy within the Synodical Conference in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Walther says:

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<sup>23</sup> Especially from p 96-98.

<sup>24</sup> Especially p 199-200.

May it be permitted us to conclude our Foreword to this periodical's new volume with a threefold testimony that pertains to this topic: one from a heathen, one from the ancient church, and one from a correctly-believing Lutheran theologian:

Cicero writes, "*Aut undique religionem tolle, aut usquequaque conserva.*"<sup>25</sup>

The Synod of Laodicea stipulated "Ὅτι οὐ δεῖ αἰρετικοῖς ἢ σχισματιχοῖς συνεύχεσθαι"<sup>26</sup>

Dannhauer writes, "*Non est dicendum ave, quibus Deus cave!*"<sup>27</sup>

### **Principle 1: Agreement in all doctrine**

*"Aut undique religionem tolle, aut usquequaque conserva."*

"Either cancel the whole religion or maintain it in every point."

This briefly expresses that part of what WELS has called "the unit concept of fellowship" which states that agreement in *all* doctrine is necessary to God-pleasing church fellowship. On this point Missouri and Wisconsin always agreed.

### **Principle 2: Avoid all expression of fellowship with errorists.**

*"Non est dicendum ave, quibus Deus cave!"*

"One may not say, 'Be of good cheer!'  
to those of whom God says, 'Keep clear!'"

This summarizes the part of "the unit concept" which says that the same degree of unity is necessary for *any* expression of fellowship. Here in recent years the Missouri Synod has disagreed with Walther and WELS by limiting church fellowship to altar and pulpit fellowship and by specifically excluding prayer fellowship. For that reason it is all the more striking that in this very concise summary of the principles of fellowship in which Walther is not directly concerned with prayer fellowship, he specifically mentions prayer in a way which expresses agreement with the view later advocated by WELS .

### **Principle 3: Fellowship includes prayer fellowship.**

Ὅτι οὐ δεῖ αἰρετικοῖς ἢ σχισματιχοῖς συνεύχεσθαι

"That one should not pray with heretics or schismatics."

Let us see if this view of prayer fellowship which Walther held in the 1870s contradicts Walther's earlier practices.

### **Prayer at Free Conferences**

What light does the early history of Missouri shed on the issue of joint prayer? Throughout its early history the Missouri Synod rejected unionism of *every sort*. Walther's Thesis XXI in *The Evangelical Lutheran Church, the True Visible Church of God on Earth* (1866) concludes, "The Ev. Lutheran Church rejects *all* fraternal and churchly fellowship with those who reject its confessions in whole or in part." The LCMS

<sup>25</sup> Phil. II.

<sup>26</sup> Can. 33.

<sup>27</sup> *Liber conscientiae*, P. I., p.624.

constitution renounced “unionism and syncretism of *every description* such as ... participating in heterodox tract and missionary activities.” Nothing in these statements suggests that prayer is the exception to the rule. Is there anything in the early history which contradicts this conclusion?

The Wisconsin Synod and Missouri Synod have had quite different interpretations of the significance of the difference between Walther and the Missouri’s Synod’s actions during the free conferences in the mid-nineteenth century (when there were opening prayers) and those in the early years of the twentieth century (when there were not). From WELS’s point of view the difference of practice between the earlier and later sets of free conferences did not come about because Missouri had developed a different view about prayer fellowship during the decades between the two sets of free conferences. The difference was that the Missouri Synod recognized that in the two sets of conferences they were dealing with two different classes of people.

Walther was willing to extend his hand “to every person who honestly submits to the whole written Word of God, bears the true faith in our dear Lord Jesus Christ in his heart and confesses it before the world” and to “regard him as a fellow believer, as a brother in Christ, as a member of our church,” regardless “in which sect he may lie concealed and captive.”<sup>28</sup>

In the 1850s, Walther was dealing with men whom he could recognize as weak brothers (or maybe even some of them as strong brothers) searching for the truth. The free conferences in the 1850s were intended for sincere adherents of the Unaltered Augsburg Confession. By the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, after the leaders of the predecessor bodies of the ALC had publicly and persistently condemned Walther’s teaching of election, their leaders could no longer be considered weak brothers, and Missouri’s behavior toward them therefore changed. WELS did not disagree with this two-fold approach of Walther (prayer may be possible with weak brothers; no prayer is possible with persistent errorists). WELS had the same principle and had learned it, at least in part, from the Missouri Synod. In contrast, some in Missouri more recently have claimed that Walther did not oppose prayer with false teachers with whom discussions were being held, and that the later rejection of joint prayer at doctrinal meetings with those outside of fellowship was an unfortunate hardening of the Missouri position, which has since been corrected.<sup>29</sup>

We will examine some of the specific incidents in the series of conferences from the 1850s through the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century which illustrate how early Missouri practiced the same principles of fellowship in differing circumstances.<sup>30</sup>

### The Early Free Conferences

Free conferences of individuals who “subscribed to the Augsburg Confession without reservation” for the purpose of establishing unity of doctrine were held at Columbus, Ohio in 1856; at Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania in 1857; at Cleveland, Ohio in 1858; and at Fort Wayne, Indiana in 1859. Individual participants came from synods not yet in formal church fellowship. Some Wisconsin Synod men expressed interest in attending these meetings but were unable to do so. At this time they did not yet have direct contact with Walther.<sup>31</sup> These free conferences were opened and closed with prayer, and sometimes with a hymn and the Apostles Creed.<sup>32</sup>

What was the situation during these free conferences? In the 1850s a number of Lutheran synods were united in the General Synod, organized in 1820. The confessional stance of that body was, generally speaking, unionistic. In the General Synod’s constitution the Lutheran Confessions were not even mentioned. The

<sup>28</sup> Walther, C.F.W., “Concerning the name ‘Lutheran,’” *Der Lutheraner* 1 (September 7, 1844): p 3; translation in Lueker, “Walther and the Free Lutheran Conferences,” p 537, note 18.

<sup>29</sup> See Erwin Lueker, “Walther and the Free Lutheran Conferences,” *Concordia Theological Monthly*, XV, 8 (Aug., 1944), p 537 f. and Erwin Lueker, ed., *Lutheran Cyclopedia* (Saint Louis, 1954), s. v., “Free Conferences,” p 390.

<sup>30</sup> This section for the most part follows the account given in “Fellowship Then and Now,” p 353-57. Additions are noted in separate notes.

<sup>31</sup> Brenner, “The Wisconsin Synod’s Debt to C.F.W. Walther,” p 36.

<sup>32</sup> Lueker, *op cit.*, esp. *CTM*, p 543, 553, 556, 557, 559. References to the minutes as published in *Der Lutheraner* can be found in that article.

confessional position of the nominally Lutheran General Synod and of its constituent districts was, however, in flux and in confusion. Walther had sound reason for new-found optimism because many pastors in the General Synod had just rejected the Definite Platform, which would have effectively annulled the Augsburg Confession, and reaffirmed their adherence to that confession. For this reason, in 1856 Walther suggested the calling of free conferences of such Lutherans as subscribed to the Unaltered Augsburg Confession without reservation to discuss the situation and to pave the way for a doctrinally united, truly Lutheran Church in North America. Encouraged by numerous favorable replies, he published an invitation, signed by himself and four other men from St. Louis. This was not an act of the Missouri Synod. The invitation read:

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 *brothers 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.”<sup>33</sup>

Participation was based on a wholehearted acceptance of the Unaltered Augsburg Confession. Under the circumstances that then existed, wholehearted acceptance of the Unaltered Augsburg Confession showed a readiness to submit to the full truth of the Scriptures. The invitation was not extended to heterodox church bodies nor to representatives of those church bodies but was a general call for *individuals who had taken a public stand* as confessional Lutherans to step forth and to meet with their confessional brothers. As reported in *Der Lutheraner*:

This led to the question as to how we are to look upon those who indeed for themselves accept the Unaltered Augsburg Confession, but who belong to a church body that does not recognize the binding force of this confession as a symbol. ... This question was answered in this way, that we acknowledge such as brothers as long as they testify with vigor against the prevailing errors and for the truth. It was also stated that we consider it their duty to continue membership in their respective church bodies as long as there still is a basis for hope of improvement.”<sup>34</sup>

Thus the fellowship expressed at the free conferences was not with the unionistic General Synod, but with individuals who had stepped forward with a positive confession for the truth, in public opposition against the General Synod’s laxness. Since the free conferences consisted of men who confessed unreserved acceptance of the Unaltered Augsburg Confession, there was present a fundamental unity. Whatever errors one or the other may have held were a matter of weakness and not of persistence. To refuse opening prayer under such circumstances would, in Walther’s view, have been a violation of brotherhood. The situation in America was thus like that Walther had faced in Germany. The Lutheran church had been the orthodox visible church. Now it was becoming fragmented into orthodox and heterodox factions. The orthodox were struggling to find each other as they had done in the period from 1517 to 1537.

Walther explained his favorable impression of those from the General Synod who had come forward with a clear confession:

This constellation [that is, the united front of those who proclaimed allegiance to the U.A.C.] certainly fills all who love the Lutheran Zion of this land with great joy and also with hope for the future. It has become evident that the number of those who do not bow, nor wish in the future to bow, their knee to the Baal of the so-called “development” and the so-called “higher

<sup>33</sup> *Lehre und Wehre*, 1856, p 186-187 – emphasis added. “Fellowship Then and Now,” p 354.

<sup>34</sup> *Lutheraner*, 1856, p 50. “Fellowship Then and Now,” p 355.

enlightenment” of the 19<sup>th</sup> century is without doubt greater than our feeble faith or despair had believed.<sup>35</sup>

Walther also displayed his concern to provide patient instruction for weak brothers. In response to the suggestion that all attendees must immediately subscribe to the whole Book of Concord Walther said:

As church conditions have been here in the last decades, and to some extent still are, there may well be many a genuine Lutheran who is loyal from the heart to the Augsburg Confession yet does not have a clear knowledge rightly to subscribe to the whole Concordia.<sup>36</sup> Also such Lutherans are, without a doubt, our brothers. ... We believe that one of the most important duties of the conference would be just this, to remove the uncertainties from the minds of those brothers who still harbor scruples against the consequent unfolding of the doctrine confessed at Augsburg and by the grace of God to lead them to a blessed, happy conviction that the other symbols of our church are *implicite* contained in the Augustana, which they accept.<sup>37</sup>

It is apparent that some in Missouri thought Walther was being too accommodating. Walther admitted that there was some risk in his approach, but some risk must be taken to rescue people.

Would it not, however, be equally dangerous and divisive for members of those synods who embraced all the Lutheran Confessions to participate in a conference whose basis was the Augsburg Confession alone, as the invitation to the conference suggested? Could not Satan use this device to rob them of the great treasure that united them?

Walther admitted the danger was real. And his answer to the dilemma was forthright.

When an action does not injure the faith but is called for by love for the brothers as individuals and for the church as a whole, it would be an act of both unbelief and lovelessness to omit such an action because of the possible danger. Furthermore, if those who by God’s grace have come to recognize the glory of all our churchly confessions timidly withdraw from all those who have the same faith but not the same knowledge, an equally dreadful danger would threaten, namely that one part would become guilty of a pharisaic, carnal, spiritually proud, loveless insistence on its strict confessionalism, while the other part, instead of being filled with confidence and love for the continued building and further fortification of our confessional castle, would more and more be scared off as from a prison tower of the spirit and of faith.<sup>38</sup>

Missouri’s actions in the free conferences are also explained in part by their understanding of what a free conference was. Rightly or wrongly, Walther regarded free conferences as something quite different than contacts between churches. Later, Walther would not deal in any way with the more confessional but still compromising General Council. The Missouri Synod refused to allow even any unofficial participation in meetings with the General Council.<sup>39</sup> Individuals of the Missouri Synod would hold free conferences with individuals of other synods, but this was not regarded as dealings between the synods. The participants in the free conferences were regarded as members of the one church of the UAC, who were trying to find each other to join into confessional church bodies with defined boundaries. There are frequent references to “our church” in the documents concerning the conferences. Bluntly put, the free conferences were really subtle or maybe not so subtle invitations to confessional Lutherans to join the Missouri Synod. Nothing about the prayers at these conferences suggest that they were regarded as prayers with anyone who held to error.

<sup>35</sup> *Lehre und Wehre*, 1856, p 3-4. Lueker, p 533-534.

<sup>36</sup> There was, for example, no Norwegian Book of Concord available at this time.

<sup>37</sup> *Lehre und Wehre*, 1856, 84-86. Lueker, p 535-536.

<sup>38</sup> See Walther, *Editorials*, p 41.

<sup>39</sup> Meyer, *Moving Frontiers*, p 256-257.

The free conferences fizzled out after four meetings due to Walther's health which prevented his participation, the onset of the Civil War, and Ohio's declining enthusiasm. Ohio's waning interest may have been due as much to the realization that if the conferences were successful the goal would be the formation of "state synods" as to any doctrinal misgivings.

### Meetings With Buffalo and Iowa

Later, colloquies were held between members of the Missouri Synod and members of the Buffalo Synod at Buffalo, NY in 1866, and between members of the Missouri Synod and of the Iowa Synod in Milwaukee, WI in 1867. The reports of both colloquies make mention of the devotional services with which the meetings were opened. At the Milwaukee Colloquy sessions were opened with a liturgical service by the *pastor loci*.<sup>40</sup> These were not free conferences like the earlier meetings but meetings of confessional Lutheran church bodies trying to determine if they were in agreement and hence in fellowship.

The confessional position of these church bodies was in flux and confusion. Grabau, the opponent of Walther on church and ministry, who had once excommunicated the whole Missouri Synod, was no longer leading the Buffalo Synod, and the remnant was seeking reconciliation with Missouri. There was good reason to believe that the group from Buffalo did not hold the position Grabau had imposed on the church. The Buffalo Synod, now freed from Grabau's dictatorial ways, accepted the invitation of the Missouri Synod for a colloquy, stating that they wanted to do everything they could "with the gracious help of God to arrive at unity of doctrine and peace and reconciliation."<sup>41</sup> They were men whose doctrinal personal doctrinal position was somewhat uncertain, but who came looking for the truth and willing to bow to the Word of God. They shared the heritage of resistance to the Union. Some of them had opposed Grabau in Buffalo and now were free of his dictates. Under the circumstances, they were not considered to be men who were set or hardened in error. In this case, Missouri's reading of the situation was correct, and the result of the colloquy was complete doctrinal agreement and an extension of fellowship.

To understand the Missouri Synod's relationship toward the Iowa Synod at the colloquy of 1867, we must remember that in 1866 and 1867 the General Council had been organized. Since the General Synod had continued in its unionism, the General Council was established to provide a spiritual home for Lutherans who held faithfully to the Unaltered Augsburg Confession. However, the General Council also proved inadequate because it failed to take a clear and definite stand with regard to the so-called Four Points (Lodge Membership, Pulpit Fellowship, Altar Fellowship, Millennialism). The Wisconsin Synod had at first joined the General Council, but then left it when its testimony against doctrinal compromise was not heeded. Among the synods which for this reason had refused to join the General Council was the Iowa Synod. This was taken as evidence that the Iowa Synod was serious about its acceptance of the Unaltered Augsburg Confession. At this point of time, the dividing line separating the confessional from the non-confessional synods was the stand a body took with respect to the Unaltered Augsburg Confession. Thus, when representatives of the Missouri and of the Iowa Synods met for a colloquy, it seemed to the participants that the question was not, "Can unity be attained?" but, "Can unity, threatened by error, be preserved?" The aim was to overcome unclarity and to avert a breach. Since basic unity of confession, though threatened by error, was present between Missouri and Iowa, the session of the colloquy was opened with joint prayer. This was not thought to be joint prayer with representatives of bodies who were persistently adhering to an error. In this case, however, the Missouri Synod's reading proved wrong.

There was real reason to wonder if Iowa and Missouri were in doctrinal agreement. They had been in fellowship and there had not been a clear and proper termination of fellowship on doctrinal grounds. At the time of the breach between Loehe and Missouri there were unresolved doctrinal tensions, but these were never

<sup>40</sup> J. P. Beyer, *Stenographisch Ausgezeitliches Colloquium Vertreter der Synode*, 1868, p 1.

<sup>41</sup> *Lutheraner*, 1866, p 28. "Fellowship Then and Now," p 356.

really brought to a proper, orderly conclusion. The breach was largely the result of a feud about territorial jurisdictions.

The precipitating cause of the break between Loehe and Walther was a friction that had developed in Saginaw, Michigan. Two of the Loehe men in the area, Grossman and Deindoerfer, were involved in disputations with other Loehe men in the area who now held Walther's view of church and ministry, but this ongoing discussion was not the cause of the blowup.<sup>42</sup> In addition to the four Franken- colonies Loehe established a seminary in Saginaw in 1852. The Michigan seminary, unlike the Fort Wayne institution, was not handed over to the Missouri Synod. The Saginaw Valley congregations, acting through the synod and President Wyneken, requested that Loehe either place the new institution under control of the Missouri Synod or abandon the undertaking.<sup>43</sup> Pastor Loehe did neither. The Loehe loyalists determined that they would leave the area and head for the open mission frontier in Iowa. Loehe's parting rebuke to Missouri was for what Loehe identified as their "papistical territorialism."

Loehe's adherents, twenty-two in number, under the leadership of "Seminary Inspector" Grossman and Pastor Deindoerfer, journeyed to Iowa, where they founded the colony St. Sebald at the Spring, sixty miles north of Dubuque. In 1854 two other men sent by Loehe came over. These four organized the Iowa Synod. One of the men was Sigmund Fritschel. His brother, Gottlieb Fritschel, came over in 1857.

The doctrinal issues were real, but they were never resolved in a proper way. It certainly was a debatable question whether Missouri and Iowa were in doctrinal agreement or not.

The actual incidents in the Michigan colonies which led to the break with Missouri are shrouded in silence; the participants were loath to discuss the painful details and contented themselves with presenting generalities. Apparently no one single item led to the decision to leave Michigan; the final break was a result of hard feelings and dissatisfaction which had been building for years.<sup>44</sup>

Loehe did not intend to establish an opposition synod against Missouri, occupying the same territory and setting up altar against altar. With his ignorance of American conditions, he doubtless imagined that the two church bodies could work side by side in separate geographically divided territories. The result, however, was bitter opposition and controversy. An attempt to allay this was made by the holding of a colloquy between representatives of the two synods at Milwaukee in 1867. Unfortunately, it became clear that the desired unity of faith no longer existed. The Fritschels had made Iowa into a synod that deteriorated even from the views of Loehe. They became a "mediating synod" in a worse sense than Loehe would have hoped for.

When Walther and his associates had left Germany, they likely believed that in America a Lutheran church could emerge in which the only dividing lines would be linguistic and territorial. But it was becoming increasingly clear, that doctrinal differences would divide them even from those who had been their confessional brothers who had shared their suffering and their successes. They themselves were being shaped by circumstances in which one crises was followed by another. In these early years even as he grew in his understanding Walther was dealing with a situation in which scriptural principles of church fellowship were almost totally unknown among the German immigrants who were being gathered into the congregations of the Missouri Synod and like-minded synods. In some cases he counseled bearing with the weak for longer than we might advise today when confessional lines have been clearly drawn, and ignorance is less excusable.<sup>45</sup> With the benefit of hindsight, we might not agree with his specific advice in every case, but we agree with both his strict principles and with his patient evangelical practice.<sup>46</sup> Such patience, of course, at times leads to

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<sup>42</sup> Perhaps in some respects it could be compared to the disputes about church and ministry between Missouri and Wisconsin in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which never led to a break.

<sup>43</sup> The Missouri Synod was apparently enough in fellowship with Loehe to accept a seminary from him.

<sup>44</sup> Erich Heintzen, *Wilhelm Loehe and the Missouri Synod*, p 233.

<sup>45</sup> A somewhat comparable situation would be when long isolated churches were emerging as a result of the collapse of the Soviet Union.

<sup>46</sup> In the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century disagreement arose between WELS and the CLC over the meaning of phrases such as "until admonition is of no further avail." This is similar to Walther's "as long as there still is a basis for hope of improvement." It both



disappointment and maybe embarrassment in the end, as was the case with Luther's patience with Zwingli and Missouri's patience with Iowa. "When you are trying to pull people out of the ditch, you sometimes get mud splashed on you." While the free conferences among Lutherans who subscribed to the Augsburg Confession without reservation did not succeed in uniting all the individuals and synods who were represented at the free conferences, they were instrumental in clearing the way for the organization of the Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America in 1872.

To classify Walther as an advocate of joint prayer with persistent errorists is to misunderstand and to misrepresent him and his actions in the free conferences. There is a great difference between the Iowa Synod of 1867 and the ELCA or the state churches of today. In fact, there was a great difference between the Iowa Synod of 1867 and the Iowa Synod of 1887.

### **The 1880s: The Election Controversy**

By the 1880s Missouri refused to join in prayer with members of some of the same groups they had prayed with in the 1850s and 1860s. Why the difference? *Der Lutheraner* summarized the situation thus:

We say openly and honestly to everyone who brings different doctrine among us, even though he appeals to the confessions of the Lutheran church, "We do not belong together and so we must go our separate ways. By that we do not mean to say that our opponents are heretics nor do we anathematize them. We do not do that even of the Unionists and the Reformed. But this is what we say, "We can no longer walk together. We cannot pray with one another any longer. For you will pray for our conversion and we for yours. But such joint praying is an abomination in the sight of God."<sup>47</sup>

The debate during the Election Controversy made it clear that Missouri was no longer dealing with weak brothers but with persistent errorists. The lines had been drawn, and no fellowship was any longer possible. Note that this change took place during Walther's lifetime. The men in Missouri who gave more explicit expression to this view early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century had been Walther's colleagues and students and were simply continuing the conclusion he had reached.

As early as 1889 Missouri voiced a restrictive practice regarding prayer fellowship.<sup>48</sup> An 1895 essayist wrote, "People who join in prayer must be of one mind, one faith, one hope, for joint prayer is an expression of a common faith."<sup>49</sup> August Graebner maintained in 1903, "Where common worship cannot be practiced, Christians are not to carry on prayer fellowship."<sup>50</sup> A more detailed articulation of the principle was prompted by meetings with their former adversaries in the Election Controversy, which took place in early 1900s.

### **The Meetings with Ohio and Iowa In the Early 1900s**

During the early history of the Synodical Conference the Missouri Synod and the Wisconsin Synod agreed that unity of doctrine was a prerequisite for all forms of church fellowship, including joint prayer. They put this common conviction into practice at the free conferences held during the early 1900s to discuss doctrine

cases the explanations of the phrases made it clear that this did not imply acceptance of remaining in a church that was persisting in error, but to an effort to correct the emerging error before it became established in the church.

<sup>47</sup> *Lutheraner*, July 1881, p 100. Missouri Synod Proceedings 1881, p 30. Schuetze, *Synodical Conference*, p 97.

<sup>48</sup> F[rantz] P[ieper], "Ueber kirchliche Gemeinschaft mit Irrglaebigen," *Der Lutheraner* 45 (1889): p 161-62; cited by John F. Brug, "Can There Ever Be Exceptions To Our Regular Fellowship Practices That Do Not Violate Scripture's Fellowship Principles? Part II," *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 99 (Fall 2002): p 251.

<sup>49</sup> *Missouri Synod Southern District Proceedings*, 1895, p 97; cited in *Fellowship Then and Now: Concerning the Impasse in the Intersynodical Discussions on Church Fellowship* (Milwaukee: WELS Commission on Doctrinal Matters, 1961), p 364.

<sup>50</sup> *Missouri Synod Nebraska District Proceedings, 1903*; cited in *Fellowship Then and Now*, 364.

with representatives of the Ohio and Iowa Synods, which were not in fellowship with the Synodical Conference. At these meetings the Synodical Conference participants, including representatives of the Missouri Synod, objected to joint prayer. Their position is spelled out at length in Gerhard Bente's 1904 essay "Why Can't We Establish and Maintain Common Prayer Services With Iowa and Ohio?"<sup>51</sup>

The fact stands that the spokesmen of Ohio and Iowa cannot be considered as weak and needing our brotherly support. According to the Word of God we may differentiate carefully between the weak and those who may not be considered weak and therefore should not be treated as such. ... If someone errs through weakness or lack of insight, we would certainly not deny him all communion of faith and prayer. On the contrary—as long as an erring brother is obviously weak and recognizes himself as such, we would patiently support him and never deny him brotherly communion. ... But Iowans and Ohioans do not want to be considered as such weak brothers, and even if they did, we could not agree.<sup>52</sup>

To this one must add that logically the Synodical Conference could not have stopped at liturgical prayer services. ... Those who say "A" and conduct joint services must say "B" and institute joint sermons and the Lord's Supper. Whoever grants joint prayer to Ohio has given them the most intimate and deepest gift a Christian can give and cannot deny them any other form of brotherly relationship.<sup>53</sup>

Prayer fellowship and church fellowship have unity of faith as their prerequisite. ... Church fellowship in prayer and divine service should always follow unity of faith, never precede it. ... Prayer fellowship is church fellowship.<sup>54</sup>

What had changed since the 1850s was not the role of prayer or the doctrine of fellowship but the relationship of the participants. Now they were faced with a new situation, dealing with other Lutheran churches who had publicly and persistently rejected the doctrinal position of the Missouri Synod.

### 1904 Free Conferences with the Michigan Synod

A resolution adopted by the Cleveland convention of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod in 1962 stated: "In meeting with other Lutheran bodies (not in fellowship) for the purpose of discussing doctrine, joint prayer has been practiced in the early and in the present-day history of our Synod and of sister synods." Among the examples listed is a meeting with the Michigan Synod in 1904.

This is not a relevant example because the breach of fellowship between the Michigan Synod and the churches of the Synodical Conference was not a result of doctrinal differences but was due to disputes about the role of Michigan Lutheran Seminary and the resulting animosities.<sup>55</sup> Those participating in this free conference joined in worship only *after* the unanimous acceptance of the earnest admonition to reconciliation and *after* the conference essay had shown that all present were truly one in doctrine and practice.

At the Intersynodical Free Conference at Detroit during April 6–8, 1904, which was discussed in the preceding section, Synodical Conference participants had spoken out against opening the next free conference planned for Fort Wayne with joint prayer. They did so with the testimony that public joint prayer would be an expression of fellowship and thus would give the false impression that all present were united in a common faith and that the doctrinal differences which still obtained among the various participants were not of great significance.<sup>56</sup> The fact that Missouri Synod pastors closed the free conference at Jackson, Michigan with men of the Michigan Synod with a joint devotion, whereas the Missouri Synod pastors present at the conference with Ohio and Iowa in Detroit, Michigan opposed joint prayer does not reveal two contradictory views of prayer fellowship within the Missouri Synod. Both instances reveal a conscientious and responsible application of the

<sup>51</sup>English translation: Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary essay file. Original: *Lehre und Wehre*, Vol. 51, 1905, p 49-53, 97-115.

<sup>52</sup>Bente, p 8; *Lehre und Wehre* 51, p 97-98.

<sup>53</sup>Bente, p 25; *Lehre und Wehre* 51, p 110.

<sup>54</sup>"Anticipation der Kirchengemeinschaft," *Lehre und Wehre*, 50, p 223-235. Summarized in Eckart *Reallexicon*, p 973. Bente's view was echoed by A. Pieper in the *WLQ*, July 1904, p 176.

<sup>55</sup>For a brief summary see Fredrich, *The Wisconsin Synod Lutherans*, p 102-105.

<sup>56</sup>*Lehre und Wehre*, April 1904, p 176.

Synodical Conference's scriptural position on church fellowship, which bears with weak brothers but avoids persistent errorists. The Michigan men were recognized as weak brothers. The Ohio and Iowa men were not. In neither case was there a departure from the principles learned from Walther.

### Conclusion

There are four main components in a God-pleasing application of church fellowship: 1) agreement on the complementary biblical principles that we are to admonish weak brothers patiently and we are to separate from persistent errorists; 2) agreement that unity in all doctrine is necessary to church fellowship; 3) agreement that church fellowship is not limited to altar and pulpit fellowship but includes prayer; 4) concern that our actions will not cause offense, especially to the weak. We have found no significant differences between the understanding of these four points held by Walther, by both Missouri and Wisconsin until about 1940, and by Wisconsin since then. The main problem faced by early Missouri was sorting out the weak brothers from the persistent errorists and balancing the duty to admonish and the duty to separate. The main problem today is no different.

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## **Appendix: Some Earlier Precedents Concerning Fellowship Reformation and Post Reformation**

### **Luther**

The example of Luther at the Marburg meeting with Zwingli and Bucer is often cited as setting a precedent for praying without doctrinal agreement. But it must be remembered that at the beginning of the meetings the Lutheran and Reformed churches had not yet divided. Both sides were still “withdrawing Catholics.” As long as Luther still regarded Zwingli as a weak brother, there were both preaching services and prayers attended by all parties. Already at the fourth session Luther told Bucer that he would not be able to regard him as a brother if he persisted in rejecting Luther’s biblical teaching. Nevertheless, Luther left the meeting thinking that it was possible to reach brotherly harmony also on the remaining unresolved article on the Lord’s Supper, since he thought Zwingli had yielded so much already and seemed open to further correction.

Luther was soon disabused of this notion by Zwingli's adherence to his error.<sup>57</sup>

### The orthodox

The orthodox teachers who followed Luther held views very similar to Luther's. Friedrich Balduin (1575-1627), professor at Wittenberg, wrote:

We should not confirm errorists in their error, which we do if we take part in their service. For in this way we give them the hope that finally we will come to agreement with them also in the remaining points. They will look upon our participation in their services as a sign that we thereby confess that we have separated from them without cause, since we in action approve of their worship.<sup>58</sup>

Johannes Andreas Quenstedt, one of the leading Lutheran theologians of the 17th century, said,

An orthodox man should either abstain entirely from the sacred rites of unbelievers and heretics (especially the papists) or if he at one time or another wishes to attend or is required by official duties to attend, let him be careful not to give the appearance of secretly agreeing with them...but rather let him in some way, either by words or signs, make clear his disagreement.<sup>59</sup>

John Gerhard discusses the difference between persistent errorists (heretics) and weak brothers in the section of his dogmatics on "The Ecclesiastical Ministry":

Not all who err with respect to the faith or the interpretation of Scripture are immediately heretics. For all heretics err with respect to the faith, but not all who err are immediately heretics, which Augustine... writes: Err I may, a heretic I will not be. ... Augustine says, 1.18, *De Civitate Dei*, c. 51: "Those in the Church of Christ who savor anything morbid and depraved, and, on being corrected that they may savor what is wholesome and right, contumaciously resist, and will not mend their pestiferous and deadly dogmas, but persist in defending them, are heretics." On the other hand, as the same man writes (Epist. 162): "Those who maintain their own opinion, however false and perverted, without obstinate ill will, especially those who have not originated their own error by bold presumption, but received it from parents who had been led astray and had lapsed, those who seek truth with careful industry, ready to be corrected when they have found it, are by no means to be rated among heretics."<sup>60</sup>

### The Colloquy at Thorn

During doctrinal talks between Lutherans, Reformed, and Catholic theologians held at Thorn (Torun), Poland, in 1654, each group held their own separate services before the sessions. Although the Reformed delegation was willing to join with the Catholics in opening and closing prayers since there was nothing offensive about the content of the prayers, the Lutheran delegation led by Johann Hulsemann and Abraham Calov refused to participate in these joint prayers. Since this incident has played a prominent role in the historical debate in the Synodical Conference, we will devote special attention to it.

<sup>57</sup> Discussed in "Fellowship Then and Now," as contained in *Essays on Church Fellowship*, p 374-376 and in H. Sasse, *This Is My Body*, p 218-219, 239, 265, 272-275, 278, 288-293.

<sup>58</sup> *Tract on cases of conscience*, II, 6, 7. Brug, *Church Fellowship*, p 64.

<sup>59</sup> *Theologia Didactico-Polemica*, Pt 4, Ch 11, Sec 2, Qu 8, p 382-392, esp 383b. Quoted in Hoenecke's *Dogmatik*, III, p 441. Brug, *Church Fellowship*, p 64.

<sup>60</sup> *Loci Theologici* (ed. E. Preuss, Berlin, 1867), VI, p 261- 264.

In a recent issue of LOGIA (Easter 2004) Scott Murray claimed, “Our church fathers insisted on beginning with prayer when they participated in theological discussions with the Reformed and Roman Catholics in the seventeenth century. Only when the Catholics demanded to be the only ones to pray did the Lutheran party refuse to pray. More recently the so-called 10-10 meetings between ELCA and LCMS began with chapel in the respective national headquarters.”<sup>61</sup> Does Calov’s report of the colloquy permit such an interpretation? We will see that it does not.

But first, a brief summary of the conference. On August 28, 1645, the Polish king Ladislaus convened a religious conference at Thorn in the hope of bringing about religious unity in Poland. The meetings, optimistically called a “colloquium charitativum” (“loving consultation”) were attended by 26 Catholic, 28 Lutheran and 24 Calvinist theologians. Among the notables who attended were the Moravian educator John Amos Comenius and the Lutheran syncretist George Calixtus, who had already engaged in dialog with Catholics at Mainz. So strongly did Calixtus desire peace, that he was even willing to acknowledge that the pope was the supreme head of the church, as long as it was understood that his supremacy was the result of human arrangements, not a God-ordained appointment. The real Lutherans did not accept Calixtus as a member of their delegation. Like Calixtus, Ladislaus hoped for reunion of the church, but his wish was doomed to disappointment. Much of the colloquy consisted of separate caucuses of the groups. The Reformed entered upon separate meetings with the Catholics from which the Lutherans were excluded. Discussion continued until November, but by then it was apparent that no progress could be made. Reconciliation was out of the question.. On November 21, 1645, the negotiations ended in failure.<sup>62</sup>

At the Colloquy of Ratisbon (Regensburg) in 1601 Lutherans and Roman Catholics had taken turns providing the opening prayer.<sup>63</sup> It appears that the Lutherans expected that the same arrangement would be followed at Thorn. Upon arrival, however, they found that the Roman Catholics insisted that all opening services were to be conducted by Roman Catholics. The result was that the Lutherans refused to attend the opening service and prayed instead in a private meeting of their own. The LCMS interprets this as meaning that the Lutherans wanted to join in prayer with the Catholics but were refused. Calov’s explanation gives a very different picture. Among the reasons advanced by the Lutherans why they could not yield to the Roman Catholic demands in the matter of the prayers are the following:

1. The apostle *forbids* that anyone should have *fellowship with darkness* and the spiritual Babylon (2 Cor. 6; Rev. 18).
2. There is *nothing* in the royal invitation *about joint prayers* and ceremonies, rather that those who had left Roman Catholicism should be *distinct and separate*.
3. The royal invitation of Dec. 1, 1644, gives sacred guarantees that charity should be preserved among all. But parity is violated if we are hindered from reciting *our own prayers* and called, as it were, before a tribunal, with the prayers of the Roman Catholics thrust upon us.
4. The colloquy is to be charitable; but it is a contradiction of charity to forbid those who have equal rights to conduct prayers *with their fellows*, to take away from them the *liberty to pray in public*. If we were to condescend to pray with the Roman Catholic gentlemen, we should sin against charity, by which we should give offense to the weak (Rom. 16).

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<sup>61</sup> LOGIA, 13-2, p 8.

<sup>62</sup> For brief accounts see *Herzogs Realencyklopaedie für protestantische Theologie und Kirche* (Leipzig, 1907), XIX, x. v., “Thorn, Religionsgespräch.” *New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge* (Baker Reprint 1977), XI, p 432-434.

<sup>63</sup> On Ratisbon (Regensburg) see *LCMS Theology of Fellowship*, Part II, Page 22, Footnote 46. It appears that the correct reference should be to Jacob Heilbronner (not Heinbronner), *Acta Colloquii Ratisbonensis*, p 25-27, 71, 102, 131, 170, 224, 350f. Page numbers in the German edition are the same. It does not appear the alternation of service leaders was a matter of joint worship but of equal rights to conduct public worship, especially in view of the fact that the Catholics sometimes include the *Ave Maria* in their turn, which the Lutherans hardly could join.

5. Liberty has been granted three provinces of greater Prussia in the exercise of religion, according to the teachings of Holy Scripture and the Unaltered Augsburg Confession. Why should there not also be liberty of reciting prayers, as in our churches so also in a hall and in a public act of confession?
6. It militates against our protestation, in the preliminary conditions, which the Roman Catholic part has already confirmed.
7. It militates against our instructions, in which we are commanded to hold firmly and to *defend the equality of our side*.
8. It militates against our conscience, which forbids to harm the neighbor; our neighbor, who is related to our faith, *would be harmed if we were to pray together with Roman Catholics*.
9. We have been instructed to procure and do all things which could be conducive to avoiding schisms in our churches and to establish harmony instead, and to nourish harmony with the churches which are outside our realm with which we are joined in fellowship of faith. *But agreeing to pray jointly in public, will give cause for schism, disturb harmony, offend the other churches, who will be surprised that we should be willing to have the liberty of praying taken away from us.*
10. We confess Christ also in our prayers, therefore he who forbids us these, takes away from us the liberty of confessing Christ.
11. Our instructions prohibit us from accepting from the Roman Catholics even so much as the manner of conducting the colloquy; much less will it be right to accept from them the manner of praying.
12. A charitable colloquy ought not to have the power of a synod, or the power to compel. But to compel the party of the Augsburg Confession and to forbid them prayer in public, what, I ask, is this if not to exercise the power of a synod against it?

There follow additional reasons why the Lutherans believed they could not consent to pray with the Roman Catholic party. The Scriptures referred to are 2 Cor. 6:14-18, Rev. 18, and Romans 16:17, 18.<sup>64</sup> As the italicized words indicate, the Lutherans had no desire to pray with the Catholics but flatly rejected the idea. What they objected to about the opening devotions was that the Catholics were granted the right to hold public services, but the Lutherans were denied the right to hold equal but separate services. The LCMS “Theology of Fellowship” admits that the Lutheran confessors of Thorn had the same practice concerning prayer fellowship and used the same proof passages to support it which the WELS was using 300 years later. They tried to claim, however, that the practice at Thorn was a departure from the practice of Luther, just as they tried to claim that the WELS position was a departure from Walther:

These passages do not appear to have been used by Luther and his co-workers in the manner in which they have often been used in our time: to forbid all work and worship with men with whom they are not wholly in accord doctrinally; nor are they so used in the Lutheran Confessions. John Gerhard, the great orthodox Lutheran dogmatician, whose celebrated *Loci Theologici* was first issued in 1620, makes no such use of these passages. We find him quoting Matt. 7:15; Rom. 16:17; Gal. 1:9; 1 John 4:1; and 2 John 10 to show that the church must guard against false teachers, and that laymen are capable of judging doctrine. Beyond this he draws no deductions from these passages. According to the evidence from the history of the Lutheran Church these passages appear to have come into prominence, and to have been used much as they have been used in the history of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, about the time of the Colloquy of Thorn in Poland in 1645, when unsuccessful doctrinal discussions were conducted among Roman Catholics, Lutherans, and Reformed.<sup>65</sup>

<sup>64</sup> From Calov’s *Historia Syncretistica*. The translation, ironically, is from the LCMS, “Theology of Fellowship,” p 29, where the work is called *Historica Syncretistica*.

<sup>65</sup> “Theology of Fellowship,” p 23-24.



It is hard to understand how LCMS sources can claim that the Lutherans of the 17th century “insisted on praying with the Catholics” when their own documents, even those which reject the WELS position, admit that the Lutherans at Thorn held the same practice defended by the WELS and used the same passages to support it. The interpretation and application of Thorn which I present in this article, so far as I can tell, originated in the Missouri Synod, not in the Wisconsin Synod. In connection with Missouri’s rejection of joint prayer at the free conferences with Ohio and Iowa in the early 1900s *Der Lutheraner* offered this evaluation of the events at Thorn:

From this we can see: 1. That we are following the same practice as the faithful Lutherans in the year 1645; 2. That this demand for public prayer with errorists and heretics is a characteristic of the Reformed, but is foreign to the true Lutheran church.”<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> *Lutheraner*, 1908, p 111. Cited in “Fellowship Then and Now,” *Essays*, p 376. In references to *Der Lutheraner* and *Lehre und Wehre* and other German and Latin works I will give references to readily available English translations when possible. I have not always followed these available English translations verbatim.