

# **The History of the Controversy Between Wisconsin and Missouri on the Doctrine of the Church**

*By V.J. Weyland*

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The suspension of fellowship between our Synod and that of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod is now a matter of history. Consequently, on the surface it may seem like an unnecessary gesture and wasted effort to, as it were, “unbury” the hatchet and at this late date to refresh our memories with matters that now lie in the past. Such convenient reasoning would, however, be a denial of the spirit of “The Resolutions on Church Union Matters adopted by the 36<sup>th</sup> Biennial Convention of the Wisconsin Ev. Lutheran Synod Assembled at Wisconsin Lutheran High Schools Milwaukee, Wisconsin, August 8-17, 1961”. In our Introductory Statement to these resolutions we said; “In fear and love toward God, with a deep sense of the awesome responsibility resting upon us, with concern for the souls bought with the blood of Gods own Son and already given or yet to be given into our care, with a like concern for the spiritual health and welfare of our sister synod, the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, in the attitude of men who each Sunday publicly implore their God and Savior ‘Increase. . . in us true obedience to Thy Word,’ with hearts from which we have sought to banish the legalism which delights in sitting in judgment on others. . .”

Any one familiar with the Floor Committees entire report as it was adopted in 1961 will also know that this suspension of fellowship was occasioned not only by the fact that an impasse was mutually recognized, particularly in the area of Fellowship, (cf. Our Synod’s Thesis on Fellowship and Missouri’s “The Theology of Fellowship, Part II), -- Resolution No, 1 points to the fact that our Synod had lodged many admonitions and protests with the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod during the past twenty years (prior to 1961) to win her from the path that leads to liberalism in doctrine and practice (cf. Proceedings 1939, 104ff, 114ff; 1949, p. 114ff; 1951 p. 110ff; 1953, p. 95ff; ) and that our admonitions have largely gone unheeded and the issues have remained unsolved and many of the policies and practices which called forth our admonition were in the field of fellowship. Hence, in the body of the resolutions we found ourselves in the position that we were compelled to declare “that we now suspend fellowship with the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod on the basis of Romans 16: 17-19 with the hope and prayer to God that the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod will hear in the resolution an evangelical summons to ‘come to herself’ (Luke 15: 17) and to return to the side of the sister from whom she has estranged herself. . .” Bearing all of this in mind, we here might ask ourselves whether Missouri’s departure from its former path could be traced to its position on the Doctrine of the Church.

In view of the fact that we here are not entering into a discourse on the various points of disagreement such as the Boy Scout Movement, Military Chaplaincy, Prayer Fellowship, and the like, this essay will therefore confine itself to the topic: “The History of the Controversy between Missouri and Wisconsin on the Doctrine of the Church,” In doing so, it will only be fair and honest first of all to point out the area of agreement before proceeding to developing the history of the controversy. And, having done this, we shall also take note of some inconsistencies in both Synods in the area of the doctrine of the Church. From this, we may be able to reach certain conclusions.

## **Part I**

### **The Area of Agreement in Regard to the Doctrine of the Church**

In presenting the area of agreement in regard to the Doctrine of the Church it is not our intention to furnish a comprehensive and complete restatement of each and every aspect of this vital Scriptural Doctrine. Nevertheless, it is well for us to remember that there are certain areas in regard to this doctrine where full agreement has been the case throughout the history of both Wisconsin and Missouri.

Unanimity has existed in both Synods in the matter of what the Church is. It has never been a matter of dispute that there is one holy Christian Church (*una sancta*), the communion of saints; or, that this one holy Christian Church is the sole product of Gods Holy Spirit Who has created and Who preserves this Church by the Gospel in Word and Sacraments (the Means of Grace). Together with Missouri we believe and confess that this Church consists of all believers in Christ (Romans 12:5; “We being many, are one body in Christ.”); and that Christ is the Head of the Church (Col. 1, 18; “Christ is the head of the body, the Church.”). Neither has there ever been any controversy as to the fact that the Holy Ghost who by means of the one true faith which He creates also unites the believers; or that in reality the Doctrine of the Church is a matter of faith; for it is from God’s Word alone that we can be certain of the existence of this Church here on earth. (2 Tim. 2, 19: “The Lord alone knows them that are His”). And from such Scripture passages as Matt. 28, 18-20; Mark 16, 16; Is. 55, 10-11, we teach and confess that although the true members of the Church cannot be known of a certainty by man, yet that they are known to God, since He assures us that wherever and only there where His Word is taught and sacraments administered there He provides Himself with believers. In other words we as well as Missouri confess and teach that there is one true Church consisting of the saints above and the saints below and that it is to the saints below (the Church Militant) that he has entrusted the Ministry of the Keys, whereby penitent sinners are forgiven their sins and the sins of the impenitent are retained as long as they do not repent, Nor has it ever been a matter of controversy between Wisconsin and Missouri that the commission to make disciples of all nations by baptizing them in the Name of the Father and the Son and of the Holy Ghost and by teaching them to observe all things whatsoever He has commanded unto us has been given to each and every one of His disciples (followers, believers). Neither have we ever disputed the Scripturalness of the Public Ministry where groups of Christians in an orderly manner and in Jesus’ Name call certain persons to perform the public functions of the Ministry in the Church. (I Cor. 14, 40: “Let all things be done decently and in order.”); and that this by no means abrogates the priesthood of all believers (1 Peter 2, 9-10: “Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should show forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into His marvelous light. . .”); but simply takes into account the diversities of gifts distributed by the Holy Ghost (1 Cor. 12, 6) and utilizes them in an orderly manner to the glory of God and the edification and sanctification of the Church

Both Synods have, in view of all that has already been mentioned, recognized that in a certain sense the Church is visible and that as such the members of the same will be recognized as such who “continue in His Word” John 8, 31. Such groups that call themselves a church but teach or tolerate false doctrines are false churches whom the true Christians will avoid, Romans 16, 17.

With so much in which there is no controversy in the matter of the Doctrine of the Church, and so much that is so vital, we could ask: Just where is there a controversy?

## **Part II**

### **The Area and Nature of the Controversy – Historically Developed**

In the April issue of the *Quartalschrift* (Theological Quarterly) of 1921 the now sainted Professor August Pieper of our Seminary wrote a 15 page essay entitled: “Was lehren wir im Artikel von der Kirche and Ihrem Amt?” (verdolmetscht, or, translated: “What do we teach in the Article of the Church and her Ministry?”) In this essay he first of all points out what Missouri teaches concerning the Church and its Ministry and then what we teach concerning the same. In his presentation of the Wisconsin position, Prof. Pieper supports this position with Scripture throughout. Then, in a later issue (October, 1929) of the *Quartalschrift*, Prof. Pieper presented a still lengthier essay on this topic -- a 48 page essay entitled: Zur Lehre von der Kirche and ihrem Amt, mit besorderer Anwendung auf die Synode and ihre Zucht, no 202-249. Translated: “To the Doctrine of the Church and Its Ministry, with special application to the Synod and its discipline.” He briefly summarizes this essay as follows: “1. The Church in the New Testament Scriptures is never anything other than the communion of the saints; 2. To this Church as to the holy people the Lord has given the Keys, not to a churchly institute as such; 3, The Church is to be recognized with certainty by the proclamation of the Gospel; 4. The

Synod has the essential marks of the Church: A. Already the name Synod indicates this; B, Its constituent elements are the local congregations, represented first of all by Christians, C. it employs the Gospel in accordance with its divine purposes; D. it (Synod) originated not from the council of man but through the working of the Holy Ghost; 5. If the Synod is the Church in the true sense of the word, then it not only has the Keys but shall and must use them also on its members; 6. The Synod in the exercise of the authority of the Keys dare never and need never interfere with the authority of its member congregations. Synodical suspension, if performed in accordance with God's Word, an account of its representative character, is not invalid as a chastisement, but is valid before God; to this the orthodox Lutheran Church bears witness. Conclusion: If the Synod is the Church in the true sense of the word, then it has for its work the call, the power, and the command of God and all of the promises given to the Church. If the Synod is not Church, then the word of Psalm 50, 16 applies: "But unto the wicked God saith, What hast thou to do to declare my statutes, or that thou shouldest take my covenant in thy mouth? Seeing thou hatest instructions and castest my Words behind thee?"

In the above very briefly summarized, Prof. August Pieper was countering the position of the Missouri Synod, namely that the local congregation alone properly is called the Church and therefore alone has authority to exercise the Ministry of the Keys. Synods and Conferences, according to Missouri, are simply human arrangements and therefore neither Synods nor Conferences can excommunicate or suspend congregations or pastors.

For the sake of simplifying the issues we ask: Has it always been the position of the Wisconsin Synod that also the Synod and that also Conferences (representative bodies of local congregations) are just as surely the Church as are the local congregations? And, has it always been the position of the Missouri synod that in the true sense of the word only the local congregation is that body of whom the Lord was speaking when He said: "Tell it unto the Church.." Matthew 18, 17? And that therefore in the correct sense of the word only the local congregation can be that body which possesses the Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven? In dealing with this question historically one needs to inquire what prompted such Synod to take the position it did.

Missouri's position on the Doctrine of the Church could be traced to its own early career and valiant contention for truth against error. The first two decades of Missouri's history reveal several synodical and Intersynodical disputes in regard to church and ministry. High church ideas had been brought over from Prussia and Saxony. A certain pastor Martin Stephan within the Missouri Synod clung to Romanizing ideas of church and ministry. He was one of the expeditionary leaders from Saxony. Under his influence in the State of Missouri a Roman form of episcopacy was introduced. The validity of the church, according to this, depended on the office of the minister. His high-handed ministry, however, was cut short in the spring of 1839 by personal scandals. Those congregations which had been following his leadership were thrown into confusion by the resulting vacancy. Then came C. F. Walther, through whose emergence as champion of orthodox Lutheranism peace and order was restored. In the so-called Altenburger Disputation, a public debate in the year 1841, Walther laid down the principles which later were to become the position of the Missouri Synod. By the year 1852 these were expanded into the well-known treatise on Church and Ministry. (Koehler, "History of the Wisconsin Synod," Faith-Life XI, 11 p. 6, November 1938).

From an essay prepared for the Minnesota District Pastoral Conference held at Morgan, Minnesota, April 11-12, 1961, by Prof. Theo. Hartwig of our DMLC concerning "The Church and Ministry in the light of I Timothy 1, 3". The following historical portion is quoted with his permission:

"The other major controversy which helped fashion Missouri's position on church and ministry involved Walther in dispute with Pastor J. A. Grabau of Buffalo. Grabau was another Lutheran pioneer who had protested the Prussian Union of 1817, left his homeland in the late 1830's, and with a considerable following had settled at Buffalo. His views on church and ministry were more grossly papistic, aimed toward establishing a hierarchical church organization. Resorting to a pastoral letter that reached as far as St. Louis, Grabau circulated his views that church consisted of the organized clergy. Walther countered this Romish position in the *Lutheraner*, which he had founded in 1844 to proclaim orthodox Lutheranism. The principles of congregational sovereignty were enunciated. It was furthermore stated that the Lutheran Church as the church of the pure Word may consequently be called the true, visible church on earth. After the Missouri Synod was

organized in 1847 and the *Lutheraner* adopted as the official synodical organ, the controversy between Grabau and Walther assumed larger, geographical dimensions and even reached back to the motherland in Germany. On account of its congregational organization, Missouri was accused of catering to American ideals of democracy. Walther was criticized for moving into the direction of anabaptism, for taking a derogatory attitude toward the office of the pastor, and for positing a doctrine of church that was more Platonic than evangelical. (Pieper., "Die Stimme unserer Kirche, usw." *Quartalschrift*, January, 1912, p. 21ff; *Walther and the Church*, Engelder a. o., St. Louis, 1938, p. 47ff; Koehler, *Kirchengeschichte*, p. 264-270 i. k.)

"From these controversies and in rebuttal to the charges leveled against its leaders, Missouri, building on Walther's orthodox theology, developed the doctrine of church and ministry to which she holds. The local congregation is the one, true, visible form of the church; the parish pastorate the one divinely-instituted ministry; the evangelical Lutheran Church that teaches the Word of God in truth and purity the true, visible church on earth, and the Scripture passages cited in support of these articles, Matt. 18, Acts 20, and others, where the term church occurs in a localized sense.

"Wisconsin, in the meantime, was not greatly affected by the mid-nineteenth century controversies over church and ministry chiefly because of Wisconsin's antecedents in the western part of Germany where high churchism had not penetrated. But in the late 1870's and mid 80's at mixed conferences in the Watertown, Oshkosh, and, Sheboygan areas, Wisconsin participated in a study of church and ministry from a different angle than that which came to a head in the Cincinnati case (to which we shall refer later). These investigations concerned themselves with the office of parochial school teacher. The point of the debate was whether this office might be classified with the parish ministry as of divine origin or whether it existed by mere human arrangement. Several practical considerations lay behind the differing viewpoints. The one opinion, for example, which held the teachers office to be of mere human arrangement, was advocated by Herbartian-oriented pedagogues from Germany who took a dim view of the pastor's teaching ability. They did not care to be placed under his educational jurisdiction and regarded their work in the Christian school as a purely secular profession. Perhaps the most extreme public pronouncement in behalf of this idea was made in a paper read to a mixed conference of pastors and teachers in the Manitowoc area in the mid 1880's. The essayist, taking his cue from the doctrine of church and ministry that was current in the Synodical Conference, stated that the Christian school was little more than an extension of parental authority. Hence, the teacher's office was like any other secular calling and belonged into the same category of the Christian tailor and cobbler.

"Opposed to the opinion was another view which proceeded from other practical considerations. Was a teacher's call permanent like that of a pastor, or could teachers resign from office at will and go flitting from job to job? And what about the expediency of a teacher's taking other work outside of congregational responsibilities to supplement the chronically astringent salary? Although no ordinance relating to the Christian school could be found in Scripture, majority opinion inclined toward a higher valuation of the teachers call than a mere secular profession. This was supported from Scripture in a roundabout way. Since the parish pastorate continued to be regarded as the only divinely-instituted office in the church, the teacher's call might merit similar recognition if it could shine by the reflected glory of the pastorate... Acts 13, 1 and Eph. 4, 11 were cited as opening a way to the possible divine nature of a teacher's work, because these passages contain a word which in translation from the Greek *didaskaloi* sounds like the term that is presently employed for those who are charged with educating children in the Christian school. More apropos to the argument seemed to be Jesus's words in Matt. 19, 14 and in John 21, 15 which speak of the little ones and lambs. These passages taken together, it was said, show that children also belong to the pastors care. By virtue of attachment to and incorporation with the divinely-instituted pastorate, the teacher's call could therefore also be regarded as divine. A similar interpretation of the teacher's call was also expounded by the directors of our theological seminary at Wauwatosa in papers which they read before synodical and mixed pastoral groups in Milwaukee, the first paper in 1892 and the second as late as 1909. The divine character of the teacher's office was established by detouring it through the pastors office. (Koehler, "History of the Wisconsin Synod," *Faith-Life* XVI, 4, p. 7, April, 1943)

"Missing in all these methods of Bible interpretation was a study of Scripture in word and sentence according to the historical context and setting. The main interest seemed to be in the direction of setting up,

with appropriate proof passages, a dogma that would meet the requirements of an authoritative, doctrinal system. In the written records of the Wisconsin Synod, the new wine of theology which moved away from the traditional, dogmatic approach and therewith again brought to fight Luther's evangelical understanding of church and ministry showed itself at the mixed conference previously referred to, that was held in the Manitowoc area during the mid 1880's. Exception was there taken to the use of passages in Acts 13, Ephesians 4, Matthew 19, and John 21, which were cited to support the conviction that a teacher's call must be more than a secular profession. It was said that the first two passages, speaking of teachers in the apostolic church, had the sound but not necessarily the content of what they were being made to prove; and the other two passages, dealing with lambs and little ones, were spoken by Jesus for a reason entirely different from that for which they were being used and therefore were also not well chosen. It was suggested in a positive way that when the New Testament ministry is investigated, one must distinguish between office and service. When Scripture speaks of ministry in the New Testament, it refers to many, gifts which are created and which exist for the sake of that which is to be proclaimed. In the New Testament dispensation not the office but its purpose is important. (Koehler, *Faith-Life* V. 10, p. 1ff, October, 1932)

“At first, not much came of these views They were tolerantly received and were regarded as novel and worthy of careful study Then the Cincinnati Case broke. In the fall of 1899 a staunch member of the Missouri synod congregation at Cincinnati had withdrawn his 11 year old son from the Christian school with a plea that the boy was not learning English. The man proposed that after his son's deficiencies had been rectified in public school, he would be returned to the church school to complete his Christian education and confirmation instruction. These proposals were rejected by the congregation and its two pastors/and the father was declared self-excommunicate. This action of the congregation met with disapproval both among the Synodical District officials and in the theological faculty at St. Louis. When attempts at reconciliation failed and when other problems insinuated themselves to complicate the original issue, the congregation with its two pastors was suspended from the Synod. In 1904 the suspended congregation made application for membership in the Wisconsin Synod. In respect for Missouri Synod's suspension, Wisconsin took no action. During the next seven years there followed a series of meetings between praesidia, committees, and commissions of both Synods. Several controversial figures in both Synods, having meanwhile died, the Cincinnati Case was terminated in 1911 with the ousting of the surviving pastor and the re-admittance of the suspended congregation into the Missouri Synod. The father, whose action had precipitated the controversy, was reinstated with the understanding that the congregation's judgment against him had not been valid. (Koehler, “History of the Wisconsin Synod,” *Faith-Life* XVI, 5, May, 1943)”

The deeper issue around which the above-mentioned Cincinnati Case revolved was whether or not a synod had the authority to exercise church discipline. And, if, on the basis of human ordinances, the officers of a Synod-district could suspend a local congregation and its pastor from synodical fellowship, is the suspension exercised by a synod of the same quality with excommunication that is valid before God. It was argued that God had entrusted the Keys to His Church on earth and, according to the generally accepted views on church and ministry in both Wisconsin and Missouri, the only true, visible form of the church which could exercise this ministry was the local congregation. As the controversy developed, several paradoxes came to light. In the first place, the Missouri Synod participated in a disciplinary action which from the superficial view of things would not seem entirely consistent to its official position on the article of church and ministry. In the second place, there was an upsurge of protest against the Missouri action in prominent Wisconsin circles among the evidently anti-Missouri clergymen who took their stand on the only principle with which they were acquainted at the time -- Missouri's principle on the primacy of the local congregation to handle matters of church discipline. These Wisconsin men were thereby, in a sense, “out-Missouriing” Missouri. In the third place, two of Wisconsin's seminary professors (J. P. Koehler and August Pieper) stepped into the breach. They alerted our Wisconsin men to the danger of trying to settle a disputed point of doctrine by quoting the words of a prominent teacher of our church, which were biblically correct when spoken to controvert a specific error with which he then was concerned. They averred the basic unsoundness of a procedure which wants to prove a point of doctrine by quoting human authorities, even the Confessions and Luther. They reminded their fellow Lutherans to show

themselves true pupils of Luther by recognizing no other authority than the Holy Scriptures. They stressed the self-evident maxim, theoretically acknowledged but so often forgotten in practice, that we Christians must go to the only fountainhead and source of faith and knowledge, the well of living water, the Bible, as the norm by which all things in the Church, doctrine and life, must be judged. When Professor August Pieper in a series of articles appearing in the *Quartalschrift* maintained that a suspension of a congregation and its pastor(s) from Synod membership should be respected by the members of that Synod and of the sister Synods, his warning not to undermine the discipline of the sister synod was countered in Wisconsin circles with the statement that a cultivation of church fellowship with men under synodic discipline is justified on the ground that synod, after all is only a human arrangement, whereas the discipline of the divinely instituted local congregation must be respected. This dissensus in our own synod called for a thorough restudy of the doctrine of the Church. The theological faculty, then consisting of Professors J. Schaller, J. P. Koehler, and August Pieper, undertook this study; and after an examination of the Scripture passages referring to the subject, arrived at a full agreement in the matter. At first they met with opposition in our own synod. And while some Missouri men sided with them, the Missouri Synod as a whole and the faculty in St. Louis were dissenting. Through the years a number of conferences between the two faculties were held, but have not resulted in a full agreement to this day. (M. Lehninger, "The Development of the Doctrinal Position of the Wisconsin Synod During the Century of Its History," *Quartalschrift*, Vol. 47, 2, pp. 101-103, April, 1950).

In addition to the series of Conferences between the two faculties (St. Louis and Wauwatosa) this apparently pro-Missouri theology of our seminary faculty led to a special synod-wide convention, called, coincidentally, at Manitowoc in September of 1911. There the debate got around to the Bible passages commonly used to support what had become traditional, synodical conference doctrine of church and ministry. At this Manitowoc convention the new chord of Wisconsin theology was again sounded with a clear note. The gist of it was this:

Christ commissioned His disciples with the ministry of Word and Sacraments to the end that all believers will be saved. These believers are His Church, so named in Matthew 16, 18 and in Matthew 18, 17. In the first passage Christ speaks of His entire Church. In the second passage of a localized church of Christians directly concerned in the matter of a brother who has erred. That group may be a synod, or it may be a local congregation served by its pastor. Matt. 18, 17 refers to all believers who are affected by the sin under consideration inasmuch as the sin is an offense to them and they want to help the erring brother. As a matter of Christian tact and in pursuance of decency and order a larger Church group such as a synod, if it must exercise discipline on an individual, or a group, will not ride roughshod over the smaller church group, such as a local congregation, which is involved in further ties of fellowship with the erring. But this cannot mean that a righteous judgment pronounced by the larger church body is not honored in heaven until the smaller body had had its say. **It is the effectiveness in heaven around which Matthew 18 revolves, not the outward organization-membership here on earth.** The distinction between local congregation and synod has no place in the Lord's discourse in Matthew 18. The Savior nowhere indicates an interest in concrete forms of church organization. He is concerned about warning the individual who may either omit all possible means for bringing a sinner around or who by fellowshiping with the sinner may interfere in the efforts of his brethren.

The New Testament ministry must be understood in like fashion. It is the ministry and not the creation of a certain office attached to certain ordained persons about which the Savior is concerned, Christians are free to organize and carry on their ministry according to the best interests of Christian fellowship. (Koehler, "History of the Wisconsin Synod," *Faith-Life* XVI, 6, p. 9ff, June, 1943)

This seems to be the first clearcut and carefully-documented expression of a theology which (after much subsequent contention within our synod and without) would become the Wisconsin position on church and ministry. It should be added that the original thought and impetus for this approach to church and ministry came from Professor Koehler of our seminary. Its popularization through a series of articles in the *Quartalschrift* (to which earlier reference was made) was chiefly the work of Professor Pieper. Here we see, in the historical-exegetical approach to Scriptures, essentially the method and theology of Luther, hidden under a bushel not long after the Reformers death.

### PART III

#### Have Both Synods been Consistent in their Teaching and Practice Concerning the Doctrine of the Church?

It would, of course, be impossible to search out and examine every official and unofficial expression on the doctrine of the church as may have occurred since the days of those public expressions referred to earlier. And yet there are a number of such expressions which are sufficiently familiar that we might ask how consistent each synod has been and is in the position it has taken on the doctrine of the church.

##### A.) Communion Services At Conferences, Synods, et al.

As an expression of unity in doctrine and, practice and for the mutual strengthening of the faith it has been customary over the years that Conferences, Synods, and Synodical Conference sessions include a Communion service on their schedule of business. No one disputed the wholesomeness of this practice. And yet, one may ask, Why is it that in Missouri circles, in former mixed conferences, and even in most Wisconsin circles these Communion Services have been and are still being held in a local church -- even though the conference sessions are held at a college auditorium or at similar convenient places for a larger assembly? Is it only because each group prefers the more churchly atmosphere and finds it more convenient and practicable where an altar and communion vessels are readily available? Or is it because it is believed that the sacrament would not be valid unless it were under the auspices of the local congregation, which, as Missouri teaches, is the only correct and Scriptural form of the true visible church? In spite of the setting up of an altar with crucifix and all for the conducting of the daily opening and closing devotions; in spite of the willingness of a local congregation to lend its Communion vessels to the assembled synodical gathering; in spite of the problem of transportation for several hundred delegates and advisory delegates--have we not for the most part in our Synod been doing just that? To celebrate the Lord's Supper in a local church definitely is not wrong. It has much to say for it. But, when it is so consistently practiced, may one not ask whether we in the Wisconsin Synod are somewhat unsure of the position we have taken, that also the Synod is the Church? Or could it be that we are somewhat fearful of giving offence to a weaker brother?

##### B.) "Praeses ohne Amt" (President without a pastorate)

For more than a century we in our synod steered clear of having our Synodical president be a man who was not the pastor of a local congregation. If my memory serves me correctly, our argument ran something like this: Our Synod's constitution stipulates that the office of the president is to be held by a pastor. But in order to be a pastor, one not only has to be a seminary graduate but also have a call into the ministry from a congregation; for the call makes the pastor. Here there appears to have been an inconsistency -- one from which we have broken away only a very few years ago, when we called (as a synod) a full-time praeses, who then resigned as pastor of the congregation which he had been serving. As far as I know our Praeses is not even an assistant pastor in Milwaukee, although he is called upon to preach quite frequently. Under this same heading there is also the matter of the position of our professors at the seminary. At my time I distinctly recall that each

of the men on the faculty was at the same time a called assistant pastor of some individual congregation in or near Milwaukee. This may have been a mere coincidence evolving out of convenience and necessity. But it did leave the impression that we wanted to be sure that our seminary professors would not be considered to be outside of the ministry. The thought however, was never expressed in words. As far as Missouri is concerned in this matter of a president without a pastorate, it must be at least several decades since their synodical president was also a pastor of a local congregation. (Here, however, it must be admitted that the possibility exists that Missouri's praeses has been either an assistant or honorary assistant pastor of some local congregation—in order to fulfill their requirement of being of the clergy.)

### C.) Synodical Disciplinary Dealings

In the Cincinnati Case referred to earlier we have already taken note of inconsistencies on the part of both Wisconsin and Missouri. And, as we have already observed, it was our involvement in the case which brought to the open the position to which we in the course of time have clung. Synodical Proceedings of the mid-20's and early 30's contain the records of Conference, District, and Synod dealings with pastors and congregations, the so-called Protestants. In each case dealt with, Wisconsin recognized the validity of a suspension declared first by the district and later by the synod—though accused of being guilty of “officialdom” and hierarchy. But the surprising part is that in spite of its contrary position on the doctrine of the church, Missouri also respected the suspensions of the Wisconsin synod, but not consistently. For example, a former professor of our Northwestern College who joined the Protestants was denied membership in a Missouri Congregation in California, unless he would be able to procure a Peaceful release from his former Wisconsin Synod congregation. On the other hand, the Marshfield, Wisconsin, congregation under suspension in our synod was accepted into membership by Missouri. No doubt, more examples of such inconsistency in Missouri in relation to our Protestants could be mentioned. But the problem with each is that for lack of detailed information we can only speak of superficial or apparent inconsistencies.

## PART IV

### Some Conclusions

Because of divergent backgrounds, each Synod arrived at its own position on the doctrine of the church. In both Synods it was doctrinal controversy which led to the position it finally took. For Missouri, these controversies occurred already in the very early stages of its history. For Wisconsin, partly because of its long-time dependence on the German Missionary Societies and partly because the doctrine of the church had not been under question in our synod (until our Involvement in the Cincinnati Case), no official position came to be known until the first decade of this century,

Missouri's position on the doctrine of the church could not help but have a paralyzing effect on the Synod and its districts in the matter of carrying out supervision in doctrine and practice. For if only the local congregation is the church and synods are but human arrangements, then a local congregation and its pastor could carry on a practice (Boy Scouts, accepting into membership such who are under church discipline elsewhere, etc.) of which the synod as a whole did not approve. Such cases, no matter how multiplied they may become, could only be regarded as “local affairs.”

Wisconsin's practice on the doctrine of the church, much as the doctrine is in keeping with the spirit of the New Testament, is not altogether invulnerable. Since we have this treasure in earthen vessels (the Gospel Ministry) 2 Cor. 4, 7, we must daily be on our guard, lest we in our busy ministry yield to our flesh and depend more on the decisions of our elected leaders than on “what saith the Lord” to us in His Word. Ever being aware of the fact that we have the treasure of the Gospel Ministry “in earthen vessels” will also alert us to the danger of becoming high-handed in dealing with such who are of a lower station in the church. When our synod in 1947 took an official stand on the matter of Scoutism, our president then, the late Pastor John Brenner, very

distinctly warned the pastors and delegates somewhat on this fashion: “Now don’t go home and simply announce that this is the position and stand of the Wisconsin Synod and then let that be the end of all strife. **STUDY THE SCRIPTURES FOR YOURSELVES.**” On this note we shall close our humble effort to present the history of the controversy between Wisconsin and Missouri on the doctrine of the church.