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Seminec Fallout: Doing and Undoing Church Fellowship with the ALC

Cameron A. MacKenzie

All men may be created equal, but not all Lutherans are. They come not only in different shapes and sizes but also with different definitions. What is a Lutheran? A lot of our history has focused on answering that question—just what are we? What does it mean to be Lutheran? Although it was Luther’s opponents who first devised the label in order to dismiss the reformer and his followers, Luther himself embraced it—or at least allowed it—since his Romanist opponents were using it to dismiss the doctrine of Christ.¹ “The person [Luther] you can forget,” he wrote, “but the teaching you must confess.”² And with this, Luther pointed to the principal way that Lutherans still committed to historic Lutheranism want to use the term “Lutheran”—that is, as a reference to the *doctrine* that Luther taught or, even more precisely, to

¹ According to Alfred Goetze, “Lutherisch,” in *Zeitschrift für deutsche Wortforschung* 3, no. 3 (1902): 183–184, John Eck first employed “Luderisch” in September 1520 and “Lutherani” in October 1519. In *Decet Romanum Pontificem*, the bull that excommunicated Luther (January 3, 1520), Leo X also declared that Luther’s followers would “share his punishments and his name, by bearing with them everywhere the title ‘Lutheran’ and the punishments it incurs.” “Decet Romanum Pontificem: Papal Bull of Excommunication of Martin Luther and His Followers,” Papal Encyclicals Online, accessed July 4, 2020, <https://www.papalencyclicals.net/leo10/110decet.htm>. For the original Latin, see *Concilia Germaniae / quae celsissimi principis Joannis Mauritii, Archi-episcopi Pragensis . . . magna ex parte primum collegit* (Coloniae Augustae Agrippinensium: Typo viduae Joan. Wilhelmi Krakamp, et haeredum Christiani Simonis, bibliopolarum, 1759–1790), 179–182, 180.

According to the *Frühneuhochdeutsches Wörterbuch*, how “Lutherisch” was employed depended on the religious position of those using it. For some (presumably Catholics), it was used right along with other dismissive labels: “bösewicht, ketzer, unchristen, schelme, wiedertäufer, wölfe, zertrenner, zerstreuer; gängige Charakterisierungen sind ärgerlich, böse (Adj.); falsch, giftig, ketzerisch, teuflisch, verführerisch, unchristlich, calvinisch, schwenkfeldisch, zwinglisch, in Reihungen auch jüdisch, türkisch.” *Frühneuhochdeutsche Wörterbuch*, s.v. “lutherisch,” accessed December 8, 2023, <https://fwb-online.de/lemma/lutherisch.s.4adj>.

² Martin Luther, *Receiving Both Kinds in the Sacrament* (1522), in *Luther’s Works, American Edition*, vols. 1–30, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1955–1976), vols. 31–55, ed. Helmut Lehmann (Philadelphia/Minneapolis: Muhlenberg/Fortress, 1957–1986), vols. 56–82, ed. Christopher Boyd Brown and Benjamin T. G. Mayes (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2009–), 36:265–266 (hereafter cited as AE); *D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe [Schriften]*, 73 vols. (Weimar: Böhlau, 1883–2009), 10/2:40 (hereafter cited as WA). Luther’s first reaction was to reject “Lutheran” entirely. See *A Sincere Admonition by Martin Luther to All Christians to Guard Against Insurrection and Rebellion* (1522), in AE 45:70–71 (WA 8:685) and his *Letter of Consolation to the People of Miltenberg* (1522), in AE 43:112 (WA 5:78).

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the doctrine that is confessed in the Book of Concord. Others often use it phenomenologically—that is, for anyone who calls himself “Lutheran”—but most readers of this journal use it doctrinally, shorthand for a commitment to the Book of Concord. In The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS), at least, we call ourselves “Lutheran” because we adhere to the doctrine of the *Lutheran* Confessions.

When the Missouri Synod began in 1847, it called itself “Lutheran” (i.e., *Lutherisch*) and restricted membership to those who subscribed to the Book of Concord.³ For the new synod, the Lutheran label meant a *doctrinal* commitment. But not everyone who called himself Lutheran at that time shared Missouri’s definition. As the term was then used, “Lutheran” also included Samuel Simon Schmucker, leading theologian of the Evangelical Lutheran General Synod, who maintained that adherence to the fundamental articles of the Augsburg Confession was good enough, even though, for him, “fundamental” included neither baptismal regeneration nor the real presence of Christ’s body and blood in the sacrament.⁴ So, right from the start of Missouri’s history, there were significant differences on what it meant to be Lutheran in America.

There were others, besides the Missouri Synod, who took the Lutheran Confessions more seriously than Schmucker, and much of Missouri’s history in the first generation involved talking and meeting with these Lutherans in other synods to see whether they all understood confessional and biblical adherence in the same way. Sometimes they did, sometimes they did not; and when they did not, there were controversy and conflict.⁵

But things changed in the twentieth century. Among other factors, the move to English, celebrating the four hundredth anniversary of the Reformation, and antagonism from nativists during World War I and afterward all led to concerted efforts to undo nineteenth-century divisions.⁶ One result was that by 1918, all the major Lutheran church bodies were committed to the Lutheran Confessions, including the institutional descendants of Schmucker’s General Synod. Of course, that did not mean that all the churches understood confessional subscription in the same way.

³ *Die Deutsche Evangelisch-Lutherische Synode von Missouri, Ohio und andern Staaten* was the original name. For confessional subscription, see Article II.2 of the first constitution, available in English translation in “Our First Synodical Constitution,” *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly* 16, no. 1 (April 1943): 1–18.

⁴ See, for example, his suggested revisions to the Augsburg Confession in the *Definite Synodical Platform* of 1855, in *Documents of Lutheran Unity*, ed. Richard C. Wolf (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966), 100–104. For Schmucker’s theology in general, see E. Clifford Nelson, ed., *The Lutherans in North America* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975), 128–131.

⁵ Peter M. Prange has published three volumes on the doctrine and practice of fellowship in the Missouri Synod from before its founding until 1882: *Wielding the Sword of the Spirit*, 3 vols. (Wauwatosa, WI: Koehler, 2021–2022).

⁶ Nelson, *Lutherans in North America*, 333–334, 375–376, 391–404, 443–447.

They did not. Furthermore, Missouri had always insisted that Lutherans had to address the issues dividing them, first and foremost, *biblically* as well as confessionally.⁷ This became especially evident in the twentieth century when the churches began to confront a new issue in the church—and one that threatened not just Lutheranism but Christianity in America—namely, higher critical views of the Bible that undermined, for example, the doctrine of creation.⁸ Some American Lutherans started accommodating themselves to modernist views of the Scriptures; others did not.⁹ Through much of the century, therefore, the doctrine of the Scriptures was a central issue in determining relations between American Lutheran church bodies.

Initially, the Missouri Synod did not embrace higher criticism; but neither did some of synod's old foes from the nineteenth century like the Ohio Synod. So, when the Ohio, Iowa, and Buffalo Synods decided to merge in 1930 and become the American Lutheran Church (ALC), after agreeing to the Minneapolis Theses of 1925 with its ringing endorsement of “the divinely inspired, revealed and inerrant Word of God,” it was possible to imagine fellowship between the new church and Missouri.¹⁰

And it almost happened in 1938, but not quite.¹¹ So, the two synods—Missouri and the ALC—kept working at it through the '30s, the '40s, and the '50s, even though those efforts resulted first in alienating and then in ruining Missouri's fellowship with both the Wisconsin and Evangelical Lutheran Synods, sister synods in the Synodical Conference.¹² Ironically, what finally facilitated fellowship between the Missouri Synod and The American Lutheran Church (basically a merger of the first ALC and the big Norwegian Lutheran church in 1960) in 1969 was a growing capitulation

⁷ Prange, *Wielding the Sword*, 1:4–6.

⁸ To many Americans, the Scopes Monkey Trial of 1925 made this evident for the first time. Edward J. Larson, *Summer of the Gods: The Scopes Trial and America's Continuing Debate over Science and Religion* (New York: Basic Books, 1997).

⁹ According to Nelson, *Lutherans in North America*, 306, 383, Milton Valentine, president of Gettysburg College (then Pennsylvanian College) (1868–1884), tried hard to reconcile Christianity with Darwinism.

¹⁰ Nelson, *Lutherans in North America*, 381–385, 443–447, 462–471. For the history of the merger and the part played by the inerrancy question, see Fred W. Meuser, *The Formation of the American Lutheran Church* (Columbus, OH: Wartburg, 1958), especially 177–230.

¹¹ *Proceedings of the Thirty-Seventh Regular Convention of the Ev. Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1938). See also Wolf, *Documents*, 379–407.

¹² See my “Church Fellowship,” in *Rediscovering the Issues Surrounding the 1974 Concordia Seminary Walkout*, ed. Ken Schurb (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2023), 145–168. For the Synodical Conference specifically, see Armin W. Schuetze, *The Synodical Conference: Ecumenical Endeavor* (Milwaukee: Northwestern, 2000), 293–395. The definitive work on the break between the Missouri and Wisconsin Synods is Mark E. Braun, *A Tale of Two Synods: Events That Led to the Split between Wisconsin and Missouri* (Milwaukee: Northwestern, 2003). For the Evangelical Lutheran Synod and Missouri, see Theodore A. Aaberg, *A City Set on a Hill* (Mankato, MN: Board of Publications, Evangelical Lutheran Synod, 1968), 134–242.

in both church bodies to higher criticism.¹³ After all, it is hard to insist on absolute doctrinal unity if you no longer believe in the reliability of what the Scriptures teach in the first place.

So, in 1955, when the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS) suspended fellowship with the Missouri Synod, the principal concern was not the Bible but fellowship practices. “The time has come,” said the convention resolution, “when we must testify by action against the unionism which has become so common in the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod in recent years.” But by 1963, when the ELS left the Synodical Conference, it added to its concerns about fellowship practices in Missouri the latter’s “vacillating position on the doctrine of the Holy Scripture.”¹⁴

This was the year after Missouri’s synodical convention in Cleveland.¹⁵ At that meeting, the synod’s most public advocate of higher criticism, Martin Scharlemann, St. Louis faculty member, withdrew certain controversial essays, apologized for contributing to the unrest in the synod, and stated that the Scriptures were the “Word of God” and “utterly truthful, infallible, and completely without error.” That same convention also reaffirmed the synod’s “belief in the plenary, verbal inspiration of Scripture, the inerrancy of Scripture, and that Scripture is in all its words and parts the very Word of God.”¹⁶

Nonetheless—and this really is the main point for our purposes—that same convention resolved that it was unconstitutional to insist that its members abide by the doctrinal resolutions of the synod. The synod had said just the opposite in 1959, but the Committee on Constitutional Matters ruled that such resolutions amounted

¹³ From a somewhat different point of view, but with a similar assessment of the evidence for changing positions within the LCMS, see Norman J. Threinen, “Approaches to Fellowship,” *Consensus* 1, no. 1 (January 1984): 17–28. What Threinen sees as most significant is the shift in rhetoric from agreement in doctrine and practice to agreement in the gospel, evident, he maintains, in the *Common Confession*, part 2, agreed upon by the LCMS and ALC fellowship committees in 1953. True, the document does highlight the importance of agreement in the gospel, but it connects it immediately to agreement in *all* that the Scriptures teach: “A denial of any teaching of the Scriptures involves a mutilation of, and departure from, the complete Gospel, and it is for this reason that a full and common obedience to the Holy Scriptures is an indispensable requisite for church fellowship.” Moreover, the Scriptures, not the gospel, remain the standard by which all teachings are to be judged. See part 2 of *The Common Confession: Parts I and II* (n.p., [1953]), 22–25.

¹⁴ Both resolutions are available in Aaberg, *A City Set on a Hill*, 283–289.

¹⁵ For a description of synodical proceedings at Cleveland concerning higher criticism and the Bible, see Paul A. Zimmerman, *A Seminary in Crisis* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2007), 16–20.

¹⁶ *Proceedings of the Forty-Fifth Regular Convention of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, [1962]), 106–107, 104 (hereafter cited as 1962 LCMS Convention Proceedings).

to amending the constitution, and the 1962 convention agreed.¹⁷ Through the years there had been a host of resolutions that defined Missouri's understanding of what it meant to pledge faithfulness to the Bible and the Confessions—everything from *Theses on Church and Ministry* (1851) to the *Brief Statement* (1932) and even to that very resolution approved at that same convention regarding the Scriptures. None of them had been brought forward as constitutional amendments. So, none of them were binding on members of the synod. In 1962, therefore, the synod was reduced to “beseech[ing] all its members . . . to honor and uphold the doctrinal content of these synodically adopted statements.”¹⁸ The wheels were now off the bus, and the synod began sliding ever more rapidly toward the crisis of New Orleans (1973) and Seminex.¹⁹

Not insignificantly, the 1962 position that doctrinal resolutions amounted to changes or additions to members' commitment to the Bible and Confessions was similar to an approach to fellowship that the Lutheran Church in America employed²⁰ and that some in the Missouri Synod were also advocating. Kurt Marquart called this the “rabbit's foot” approach: “If one holds to the Confessions outwardly,

¹⁷ *Proceedings of the Forty-Fourth Regular Convention of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959), 191–192; *1962 LCMS Convention Proceedings*, 122–123, 187.

¹⁸ 1962 LCMS Convention Proceedings, 106. For the history of this issue and aftermath of Cleveland, see Raymond L. Hartwig, “Excursus: Doctrinal Resolutions and Statements,” in Schurb, *Rediscovering the Issues*, 99–104.

¹⁹ At its convention at New Orleans in July 1973, the LCMS adopted *A Statement of Scriptural and Confessional Principles* as an official statement that addressed the doctrinal issues troubling the synod and a resolution that identified the doctrinal position of the faculty majority at St. Louis as contrary to the Lutheran Confessions and the Bible. When the seminary's Board of Control suspended the seminary's president, John Tietjen, in January 1974, a majority of the students and faculty went on strike and then “walked out” in February. They created an alternative seminary, quickly nicknamed “Seminex” (Seminary in Exile). See Zimmerman, *Seminary in Crisis*, 99–128.

²⁰ See E. Clifford Nelson, “A Case Study in Lutheran Unity Efforts: ULCA Conversations with Missouri and the ALC, 1936–1940,” in *The Maturing of American Lutheranism*, ed. Herbert T. Neve and Benjamin A. Johnson (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1968), 202–204. As early as 1920, the LCA's predecessor body, the United Lutheran Church in America, had stated, “The ULCA recognizes no doctrinal reasons against complete co-operation and organic union with such bodies [that subscribe to the Lutheran Confessions].” “Washington Declaration,” in Wolf, *Documents*, 350. Similarly, the “Savannah Declaration” of 1934, in Wolf, *Documents*, 356. The LCA carried forward the same position. So, when the Synodical Conference was dissolving and, in 1965, Missouri invited the LCA to participate in theological discussions leading to fellowship (*Proceedings of the Forty-Sixth Regular Convention of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod* [St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, [1965]], 106 [hereafter cited as 1965 LCMS Convention Proceedings]), the next year, the LCA declined and said, “we extend our arms and our hearts to you as one with us . . . in faith and doctrine,” and added that the pastors and lay members of these churches (Missouri et al.) “are always welcome in our pulpits and at our altars.” Erik W. Modean, press release from LCUSA, June 17, 1968, box 2, folder 6, part 2, TALC 4/2/9, Archives of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Elk Grove Village, IL.

one is free to interpret them . . . more or less as one pleases.”²¹ Saying you were committed to the Confessions was enough even if you disagreed as to what that commitment meant. John Tietjen advocated this position in his 1966 book *Which Way to Lutheran Unity?*, and in 1969 he became president of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis.²² That was the same year in which Missouri declared fellowship with the ALC.

However, the debate and discussion that preceded Missouri’s 1969 declaration of fellowship showed that the Tietjen approach was not quite enough for many Missourians.²³ For them, there ought to be doctrinal agreement that was real, not nominal. Missouri’s decision was based not on the ALC’s formal adherence to the Confessions but on something more than that. The convention resolution establishing fellowship in 1969 referred to a 1967 convention resolution that asserted that “the Scriptural and confessional basis for altar and pulpit fellowship between LCMS and TALC exists.”²⁴ For proof of this, the 1967 resolution referred to the *Joint Statement and Declaration* of the representatives of the ALC and the LCMS, asserting that there was “consensus” between the two churches “in the preaching of the Gospel ‘in conformity with a pure understanding of it’ and in the administration of the sacraments

²¹ Kurt E. Marquart, *Anatomy of an Explosion: A Theological Analysis of the Missouri Synod Conflict* (1977; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978), 38.

²² “The Bible as the norm and standard of teaching” and “the Lutheran Confessions as the correct exposition of the Scriptures—that much and nothing more.” John H. Tietjen, *Which Way to Lutheran Unity?* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1966), 151 (italics added). Contrast Kurt Marquart, *Anatomy*, 72–82.

²³ Although it was for at least some of the synod’s members, as evidenced by a couple of overtures to the synod’s 1969 convention, including 3–246, submitted by the Campus Pastors Conference. *Proceedings of the Forty-Eighth Regular Convention of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod* (n.p., [1969]), 190 (hereafter cited as 1969 LCMS Convention Proceedings). However, in May 1966, President Oliver Harms of the LCMS had invited the LCA to participate in conversations with Missouri and the ALC designed to establish church fellowship “on a formal and clear statement of some issues which are not treated explicitly in the historic Lutheran Confessions” Nelson, “A Case Study,” 222–223.

However, it is also true that Missouri had adopted a new approach to fellowship questions in 1967 by formally approving a Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR) document, *Theology of Fellowship* ([St. Louis]: The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, [1965]), that used the “gospel” as the ultimate test for fellowship and raised significant questions about whether the Scriptures themselves forbade fellowship with heterodox churches. See my “Church Fellowship” in Schurb, *Rediscovering the Issues*, 145–168.

²⁴ 1969 LCMS Convention Proceedings, 98. According to the minutes of the 1967 convention, that resolution passed “with fewer than 10 dissenting votes.” *Proceedings of the Forty-Seventh Regular Convention of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod* (n.p., [1967]), 31, 102–103 (hereafter cited as 1967 LCMS Convention Proceedings). To distinguish the new ALC (1960) from the old ALC (1930), many documents used “TALC” for the 1960 church body and “ALC” for the 1930 church body. In the body of this paper, I have used “ALC” for both except when quoting documents that employ uppercase “T” for “The” ALC, the 1960 version.

‘in accordance with the divine Word’ (A.C. VII).”²⁵ In support of their claim of unity, the *Joint Statement* referred to three essays—one each on soteriology, Scripture, and ecclesiology—that were jointly prepared and agreed upon by representatives of the two church bodies. Then they had been submitted to each church for study and discussion. Neither side had raised official objections to any of the essays—hence the claim that consensus now existed.²⁶

Perhaps that was true at the “official” level (whatever that means), but certainly there was no consensus within the LCMS regarding that fellowship, given the almost two hundred overtures submitted to the synod that opposed it in 1969.²⁷ Nor would one use “consensus” to describe the actual vote. The 1969 LCMS convention approved ALC fellowship by a vote of 522 to 438.²⁸

How different from the ALC, which already had voted for fellowship with Missouri the year before (1968) and had done so unanimously. But whatever enthusiasm for reciprocal action on Missouri’s part such a vote engendered was perhaps

²⁵ 1967 LCMS Convention Proceedings, 102. *Joint Statement and Declaration of the Representatives of The American Lutheran Church, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, and the Synod of Evangelical Lutheran Churches to Their Respective Church Bodies* (n.p., 1967).

According to the minutes of a meeting between representatives of the ALC, LCMS, and SELC on January 23, 1967, in Schiller Park, Illinois, the *Joint Statement* was approved by the following representatives. For the ALC: Fredrik Schiötz, Charles S. Anderson, George Aus, E. C. Fendt, E. O. Gilbertson, William Larsen, Orlando W. Qualley, Alvin N. Rogness, W. H. Weiblen, Lester F. Heins, Gordon S. Huffman, Fred W. McLean, Fred Meuser, Lawrence Siersbeck, and Robert W. Pfennig. For the LCMS: Oliver R. Harms, Robert W. Bertram, Herbert J. A. Bouman, Alfred O. Fuerbringer, Carl A. Gaertner, Oswald C. J. Hoffmann, Richard P. Jungkuntz, Fred Kramer, Theodore F. Nickel, Jacob A. O. Preus, Ernst H. Stahlke, and Henry J. Eggold. For the SELC: John Kovac, John Daniel, Kenneth Ballas, John Kucera, Albert Marcis, Stephen G. Mazak, Samuel P. Mozolak, and Andrew Babchak. The minutes also say that the statement was accepted “unanimously.” Minutes of representatives of the ALC, LCMS, and SELC, January 23, 1967, box 2, folder 6, part 2, TALC 4/2/9.

²⁶ *Essays Adopted by the Commissioners of The American Lutheran Church and The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod* (St. Louis): [Concordia Publishing House], n.d.). See 1969 LCMS Convention Proceedings, 98, and 1967 LCMS Convention Proceedings, 102–103. *The Joint Statement and Declaration* and the three essays were reprinted in *Convention Workbook: Reports and Overtures; 47th Regular Convention [of] The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, [1967]), 421–422, 405–419 (hereafter cited as 1967 LCMS Convention Workbook). The authors of “What Commitment to the ‘Sola Gratia’ in the Lutheran Confessions Involves” were Richard R. Caemmerer, Edward C. Fendt, Martin H. Franzmann, and William H. Weiblen. The authors of “The Doctrine of the Church in the Lutheran Confessions” were Alvin Rogness, Fred Meuser, Fred Kramer, Stephen Mazak Sr., and Lorman Petersen.

²⁷ *Convention Workbook (Reports and Overtures): 48th Regular Convention [of] The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, [1969]), 109–189, includes 199 resolutions to decline, postpone, or make it more difficult to pass—e.g., subjecting ALC fellowship to a congregational referendum. There were twenty-two resolutions in favor of it (pp. 99–107) and two that advocated “selective fellowship” (p. 107).

²⁸ 1969 LCMS Convention Proceedings, 32–33, 96–99.

tempered by the ALC's action at the same convention, also by a unanimous vote, to declare fellowship with the Lutheran Church in America (LCA).²⁹

By this time it was clear that both the LCA and the ALC were operating with the Tietjen "Confessions only" approach to fellowship. In the LCA, this had been the case for a *long* time. Its predecessor body had adopted it officially in 1920. In the 1960s, it became characteristic of the ALC as well. At its constituting convention in 1960, the ALC seemed to affirm the traditional approach by expressing its "willingness to enter into discussions looking toward altar and pulpit fellowship with any and all Lutheran Churches" that were committed to the Bible and the Confessions. "Discussions" could mean looking for doctrinal agreement. However, that same convention added a new twist to fellowship concerns by encouraging "selective" fellowship when it urged its congregations to act on their own, apart from any official declaration: "wherever congregations of The American Lutheran Church are mutually agreed in confession and practice with congregations of other Lutheran Churches, they are encouraged to practice fellowship both in worship and work."³⁰

Furthermore, in 1964 when discussions with Missouri were about to begin, ALC president Fredrik Schiotez made yet another move away from complete agreement in doctrine and practice by reducing the confessional commitment itself to the Augsburg Confession, Article VII (agreement in the gospel and sacraments).³¹ Discussions with Missouri were not designed to exhibit doctrinal agreement. Instead, he explained to his constituency that while the ALC accepted the LCA's position regarding fellowship "in principle," they had entered into meetings with Missouri in order to dissipate "fears." "The American Lutheran Church," he said, "holds fast to the principle of Article VII of the Augsburg Confession [agreement in gospel and sacraments], but it seeks to be understanding of the problems of a sister church. And if discussions will help to remove the fears that prevent an investment of the principle of Article VII, then the discussions with The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod become an instrument of the Holy Spirit's leading." Schiotez also pointed out that in spite of there being no official declaration of fellowship with the LCA at that time (1964), in practice that fellowship already existed. "We have *de facto* pulpit and altar

²⁹ *The Lutheran Standard*, October 29, 1968, 21.

³⁰ Quoted in Resolution J64.6.73 (adopted by Resolution GC64.23.34 of the ALC 1964 convention), in *Reports and Actions of the Second General Convention of The American Lutheran Church*, ed. William Larsen (Minneapolis: Office of the Secretary, The American Lutheran Church, [1964]), 659–660.

³¹ Significantly, even in its 1967 *Theology of Fellowship*, 18, Missouri applied the language of FC SD X 31, "in the doctrine and all its articles," to AC VII by explaining agreement in the gospel this way: "The doctrine of the Gospel is not here to be understood as one doctrine among many, or as a bare recital of John 3:16, but rather as a doctrine composed of a number of articles of faith."

fellowship with the LCA,” he asserted. “There remains only the thin line of an official declaration.”³²

In the Missouri Synod, persistent approaches to fellowship with the old ALC had led to polarization, but fellowship issues did not precipitate the Seminex crisis. Instead, it was the battle for the Bible. By the time he became synodical president, J. A. O. Preus realized that higher criticism was the chief threat to Missouri’s brand of Lutheranism. In fact, during the debate over ALC fellowship at the 1969 convention, then President-elect Preus asked the synod to postpone a declaration of fellowship because of “a concern for the doctrine of the Word of God.” That question should be resolved first.³³

A few years later, in his report to the synod regarding the St. Louis seminary, President Preus did list “Fellowship and Intercommunion” as a topic about which his “Fact Finding Committee” had discovered faculty positions at variance with the synod’s.³⁴ He summarized the aberrant views of some faculty members this way: “Complete agreement in doctrine is not necessary for the practice of church fellowship, so long as there is agreement in the essential aspects of the Gospel. Because the Eucharist is a means for the achievement of the unity of faith, non-Lutherans may be communed at our altars if they profess faith in Christ and recognize His presence in the Lord’s Supper.”³⁵

Nevertheless, when Preus prepared *A Statement of Scriptural and Confessional Principles* to help the seminary board deal with false doctrine in the faculty, he did not include a section on fellowship. As the title itself indicates, *A Statement* took Missouri back to its origins as a fellowship of those committed to the Bible and the Confessions. In adopting *A Statement* at its 1973 New Orleans convention, the synod was once again maintaining that “Lutheran” meant adherence to Lutheran doctrine because it was taught in the Scriptures, but it did not speak to the consequences of that commitment for fellowship with the ALC.

³² Fredrik A. Schiotez, Report of the President, in *Reports and Actions of the Second General Convention of The American Lutheran Church*, 80–81.

³³ 1969 LCMS Convention Proceedings, 32. The quoted remarks are the secretary’s summary of Preus’ statement. A copy of the Preus statement is in box 2, folder 6, part 2, TALC 4/2/9.

³⁴ *Report of the Synodical President to The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod* (n.p., 1972). See Zimmerman, *Seminary in Crisis*, 81–90. In May 1970, Preus appointed a Fact Finding Committee to conduct an investigation of what was being taught at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis about the Bible and confessional subscription along with other issues. The findings of this committee became the basis for the synod’s subsequent actions at the 1973 New Orleans convention and the decisions of the seminary’s Board of Control that led to the Seminex walkout in February 1974. For the importance of the Fact Finding Committee, see Zimmerman’s *Seminary in Crisis*, subtitled *The Inside Story of the Preus Fact Finding Committee*.

³⁵ *Report of the Synodical President to The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod*, 30–31.

Of course, while the New Orleans convention was the climax of efforts to reclaim the Missouri Synod for the Lutheranism of its past, it was hardly the completion. Much more had to be done or undone, as the case may be. There were all kinds of cooperative relationships with other Lutherans that had to be considered—for example, the Lutheran Council in the United States of America (LCUSA)³⁶ and the Inter-Lutheran Commission on Worship (ILCW)—and they were indeed considered.³⁷ But what about church fellowship? Did Missouri have to end fellowship with the ALC?³⁸ What about healing the breach with Wisconsin and the ELS? To this day, of course, the latter has proved extremely difficult, perhaps not impossible but quite

³⁶ In 1966, Missouri participated in the founding of LCUSA, an inter-synodical body consisting of the LCA, ALC, LCMS, and the Synod of Evangelical Lutheran Churches (formerly the Slovak Synod, it merged with the LCMS in 1970). LCUSA coordinated work in mission planning, campus ministry, and military chaplains. It also facilitated theological discussions, studies, and dialogues. *Encyclopedia Britannica Online*, s.v. “Lutheran Council in the United States of America,” accessed November 21, 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Lutheran-Council-in-the-United-States-of-America>. See also Social Networks and Archival Context, s.v. “Lutheran Council in the USA,” accessed November 21, 2021, <http://n2t.net/ark:/99166/w65q9m9h>.

The 1977 report of the CTCR includes a lengthy report on LCUSA in response to synodical directives in 1975 that all boards and commissions evaluate Missouri’s participation in LCUSA’s various programs on the basis of the synod’s doctrinal position and fellowship principles along with other criteria. The CTCR report also recorded action of the synodical Board of Directors in 1975, stating that for the LCMS, LCUSA’s prime purpose was theological discussion, and insisting that the synod’s doctrinal position not be compromised. *Convention Workbook (Reports and Overtures): 52nd Regular Convention [of] The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, [1977]), 63–69 (hereafter cited as 1977 LCMS Convention Workbook). The 1977 convention voted to continue Missouri’s “selective” participation in LCUSA. *Convention Proceedings: 52nd Regular Convention [of] The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod* (n.p., [1977]), 126–127 (hereafter cited as 1977 LCMS Convention Proceedings).

³⁷ The ILCW consisted of the LCMS, the ALC, the LCA, and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Canada (ELCC). The LCMS entered into fellowship with the ALC and the ELCC in 1969 but not with the LCA. Nonetheless, together the four church bodies produced the *Lutheran Book of Worship* (1978). “Inter-Lutheran Commission on Worship,” Concordia University Chicago, accessed November 21, 2021, <https://www.cuchicago.edu/academics/centers-of-excellence/center-for-church-music/hymnal-collection-index/inter-lutheran-commission-on-worship/>.

Citing theological concerns about the still unpublished *Lutheran Book of Worship* (LBW), the Missouri Synod appointed a “blue ribbon” committee to review LBW. 1977 LCMS Convention Proceedings, 127. In the wake of that review, changes were made to LBW, and the 1979 convention adopted the edited version as an official synodical hymnal. *Convention Proceedings: 53rd Regular Convention [of] The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod* (n.p., [1979]), 113–117 (hereafter cited as 1979 LCMS Convention Proceedings). In 1982, it was published as *Lutheran Worship*.

³⁸ Already at the New Orleans convention (1973), Floor Committee 2 (Church Relations) brought to the floor Resolution 2–40 to “suspend fellowship” with the ALC, but instead of voting on it, the convention tabled it. *Proceedings of the Fiftieth Regular Convention of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod* (n.p., [1973]), 122–123 (hereafter cited as 1973 LCMS Convention Proceedings). Missouri’s President Preus reported to the ALC’s President Preus that the motion failed because it lacked “official” (his?) support. See David Preus, “recollections” of the September 12, 1973, meeting of the Intersynodical Fellowship Committee, box 1, folder 5, TALC 4/4/1.

unlikely. But reassessing its relationship with the ALC proved to be slightly less problematic, and fellowship was terminated in 1981. But why was that?

For one thing, about a year and a half after Missouri's decision *for* fellowship, the ALC did something that proved to Missouri's conservatives what they had been saying all along—that fellowship was a big mistake. On December 22, 1970, the ALC ordained its first female pastor.³⁹ Of course, in 1970 it was not at all clear that the Missouri Synod would not follow the ALC precedent. However, even though Missouri had granted women the franchise the year before at its 1969 convention, it was on record twice in the '60s as opposed to female pastors—once in 1965 (the convention that some still think of today as the high point of modernism in Missouri) and then again in 1969, the same convention that had declared ALC fellowship.⁴⁰ In the resolution that affirmed women's suffrage, the synod had also declared that "Those statements of Scripture which direct women to keep silent in the church and which prohibit them to teach and to exercise authority over men, we understand to mean that women ought not to hold the pastoral office or serve in any other capacity involving the distinctive functions of this office."⁴¹

Even so, this was hardly the end of the matter, and, for more than a decade thereafter, subsequent conventions fielded overtures both for and against women's ordination as well as calls just to study the issue,⁴² while the ALC responded that the

³⁹ "Barbara Andrews," Fifty Years On: A Half Century of Ordaining Lutheran Women, accessed December 22, 2023, <https://pages.stolaf.edu/lutheranwomensordination/barbara-andrews-2/>.

⁴⁰ 1965 LCMS Convention Proceedings, 103.

⁴¹ 1969 LCMS Convention Proceedings, 88.

⁴² *Convention Workbook (Reports and Overtures): 49th Regular Convention [of] The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, [1971]), 92–94 (hereafter cited as 1971 LCMS Convention Workbook); *Convention Workbook (Reports and Overtures): 50th Regular Convention [of] The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, [1973]), 60–65 (hereafter cited as 1973 LCMS Convention Workbook); *Convention Workbook (Reports and Overtures): 51st Regular Convention [of] The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, [1975]), 106–107 (hereafter cited as 1975 LCMS Convention Workbook); and 1977 LCMS Convention Workbook, 91–93. In the 1979 LCMS convention workbook, there were only two overtures on this topic, and both of them opposed ordaining women. *Convention Workbook (Reports and Overtures): 53rd Regular Convention [of] The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, [1979]), 99 (hereafter cited as 1979 LCMS Convention Workbook). In the 1981 LCMS convention workbook, a resolution from the English District called for additional study since, in the "whereases," they stated there were both those opposed and those not opposed to the ordination of women. *Convention Workbook: Reports and Overtures; 54th Regular Convention [of] The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, [1981]), 168 (hereafter cited as 1981 LCMS Convention Workbook). Of course, in all these convention workbooks there were other overtures dealing with women's suffrage and women's service in the church.

New Testament did not at all preclude women from the pastoral office.⁴³ Nonetheless, during the twelve years of ALC fellowship (1969–1981), Missouri officially rejected women’s ordination twice more—in 1971 and 1977⁴⁴—and routinely raised it in ongoing discussions with the ALC.⁴⁵ By 1981, it had firmly become a nail in the coffin of ALC fellowship.

The resolution that had declared fellowship in 1969 also called for “the creation of an intersynodical commission to assist in the proper understanding and practice of fellowship.”⁴⁶ This commission met regularly in the years of fellowship, and Missouri’s representatives reported to the synod at each convention. In every synodical report from 1971 to 1981 they mentioned women’s ordination as a problem for the relationship between the churches.⁴⁷ Already then in its 1971 convention, Missouri expressed “strong regret” over the ALC’s decision, asked them to reconsider and to delay implementation of that decision, and counseled its own members to “defer new implementation” of fellowship with the ALC.⁴⁸

The ALC took Missouri’s 1971 resolution seriously. By way of reconsidering their action, ALC president Kent Knutson requested each of the three ALC seminaries to answer two questions: (1) Do you find that the Scriptures forbid the ordination or service of women in the ministry of word and sacrament? And (2) Do you find in the Scriptures orders of creation that enunciate a principle of women being subordinate to men, which then pertains directly to the role women should serve in the ministry? All three responded no to each question and supported their answers with documentation and analysis that extended over twenty-two pages in the

⁴³ Resolution GC72.9.122, in *1972 Reports and Actions: Sixth General Convention of The American Lutheran Church, Part 3*, ed. Arnold R. Mickelson (Minneapolis: Office of the General Secretary, The American Lutheran Church, [1972]), 928.

⁴⁴ *Proceedings of the Forty-Ninth Regular Convention of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod* (n.p., [1971]), 114–115 (hereafter cited as 1971 LCMS Convention Proceedings) (by a vote of 674 to 194); and 1977 LCMS Convention Proceedings, 134.

⁴⁵ In his first convention report to the synod (1971), Preus described the synod’s efforts *prior* to the ALC’s decision to keep them from an action that would place “a heavy strain” on fellowship between the two churches. 1971 LCMS Convention Proceedings, 58–59.

⁴⁶ In a memo (dated October 2, 1969) from Fredrik A. Schioltz to those whom he was asking to serve—viz., Drs. E. C. Fendt, Kent Knutson, William Larsen, C. K. Preus, and John Stensvaag—the ALC president reported on his conversation with President Preus about the nature and personnel of the fellowship committee and indicated the names of the Missouri men: “The representatives from LC-MS will be Drs. Ralph Bohlmann of St. Louis, W. Harry Krieger of Los Angeles, Rev. Philip Lochaas of Manchester, Missouri, Dr. Theodore F. Nickel of Chicago, and Professor Richard J. Schultz of Springfield, Illinois. The two presidents will serve *ex officio*.” Box 2, folder 6, part 1, TALC 4/2/9.

⁴⁷ 1971 LCMS Convention Workbook, 147; 1973 LCMS Convention Workbook, 48; 1975 LCMS Convention Workbook, 66; 1977 LCMS Convention Workbook, 70; 1979 LCMS Convention Workbook, 83; 1979 LCMS Convention Proceedings, 192; and 1981 LCMS Convention Workbook, 160.

⁴⁸ 1971 LCMS Convention Proceedings, 136–138.

Convention Report of the Standing Committee on Inter-church Relations.⁴⁹ Moreover, the ALC continued to insist that the differences regarding this issue were not divisive of fellowship. Over the next decade, the ALC did not change its mind,⁵⁰ but neither did Missouri.⁵¹

In 1977, when the LCMS declared itself to be in “a state of ‘fellowship in protest’” with the ALC, the ordination of women to the pastoral office was listed as one of the points of doctrinal difference.⁵² The synod repeated this charge in 1979.⁵³ Finally, in 1981, when the synod ended its fellowship with the ALC, the ordination of women once more made the list of issues and problems that divided the two church bodies.⁵⁴

Not surprisingly, however, in their first report to the synod (1971), Missouri’s representatives subsumed women’s ordination under the biblical question. “We believe,” they wrote, “that the authority of Holy Scripture is involved in this serious theological difference.”⁵⁵ What each church body taught about the nature and authority of the Bible was really at the center of their disagreements, and that too was mentioned in every synodical report. But, of course, that was true only because of the change of leadership in the LCMS in 1969, for J. A. O. (Jacob Aall Ottesen) Preus II and his associates were now representing the Missouri Synod in fellowship discussions.⁵⁶

⁴⁹ Report of the Standing Committee on Inter-church Relations, exhibits B–F, in *1972 Reports and Actions: Sixth General Convention of The American Lutheran Church, Part 2*, ed. Arnold R. Mickelson (Minneapolis: Office of the General Secretary, The American Lutheran Church, [1972]), 465–486.

⁵⁰ Report of the Standing Committee on Inter-church Relations, 460. Resolution GC72.9.122, 927–928. David W. Preus, Report of the General President, in *1980 Reports and Actions: Tenth General Convention of The American Lutheran Church, Part 3*, ed. Arnold R. Mickelson (Minneapolis: Office of the General Secretary, The American Lutheran Church, [1980]), 918.

⁵¹ Interestingly, the former St. Louis faculty who staffed Seminex quickly joined their voices to others already supporting women’s ordination with their document “For the Ordination of Women,” *Currents in Theology and Mission* 6 (June 1979): 132–143.

⁵² 1977 LCMS Convention Proceedings, 126.

⁵³ 1979 LCMS Convention Proceedings, 118.

⁵⁴ *Convention Proceedings: 54th Regular Convention [of] The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod* (n.p., [1981]), 153 (hereafter cited as 1981 LCMS Convention Proceedings). The vote to terminate fellowship in 1981 was 590 to 494.

⁵⁵ 1971 LCMS Convention Workbook, 147.

⁵⁶ President Preus appointed Ralph Bohlmann, W. Harry Krieger, Theodore Nickel, and Richard J. Schultz. 1971 LCMS Convention Proceedings, 147. By 1981, when the LCMS broke fellowship, its representatives on the Commission on Fellowship—besides Preus—were Ralph Bohlmann, Kurt Marquart, Samuel Nafzger, Karl Barth, and Lloyd Behnken. 1981 LCMS Convention Workbook, 159.

In terms of personnel, it is also important to note that Preus engineered the departure of Richard Jungkuntz as executive secretary in January 1970. See James C. Burkee, *Power, Politics, and the Missouri Synod: A Conflict that Changed American Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2011), 110–111. Ralph Bohlmann then supervised the work of the commission on a part-time basis. On

Perhaps the issue of women's ordination made it easier to convince laypeople in Missouri that ALC fellowship was a mistake, but it was not the most important point of contention between the two church bodies. During the twelve years of ALC fellowship, the Missouri Synod was battling internally for its soul. Would it remain Lutheran as defined by its founders 125 years earlier, or would it surrender its traditional adherence to the Bible and the Lutheran Confessions to become more like Lutherans in the ALC and LCA and, eventually, participate with them in creating the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) in 1988? From that perspective, the issue of ALC fellowship was simply a second front in Missouri's civil war.

From the outset, the ALC seminaries made it clear that their sympathies were with the St. Louis seminary faculty majority and their supporters in the synod. So, for example, the presidents and deans of the ALC seminaries sent a letter in January 1974 to the St. Louis Board of Control, in which they not only encouraged the faculty and administration but also responded to the charges against them by the Preus administration and the synod itself in convention at New Orleans (1973).⁵⁷ The "scholarly methods" employed at the St. Louis seminary to study the Bible, said the ALC men, did not result in "any infidelity to the God of the Scriptures." Those methods had their "origin in the Reformation revival of the listening approach to God's written Word." The St. Louis faculty was also correct in rejecting any extra-confessional standard of orthodoxy, since this was the position of the Confessions themselves. Unwarranted accusations had resulted in the "persecution of faithful men."⁵⁸

Initially, however, David Preus, at that time president of the ALC, and his executive team urged ALC entities not to involve themselves in Missouri's internal battles, but later that year after the "walkout" and the formation of Seminex, Preus published an open letter in the ALC's *The Lutheran Standard* (April 16, 1974) to the members of the LCMS. While denying any intention on the part of the ALC to become "partisans" in Missouri's internal controversy, Preus maintained that "differences in theological approach" did not require "divisiveness or new tests of orthodoxy." In fact, he was "distressed" at Missouri's use of *A Statement of Scriptural and Confessional Principles* as "the only valid interpretation" of the doctrinal issues. Doing this, he argued, narrowed legitimate Lutheran teaching and threatened the basis

leave from Concordia Seminary, he became full-time executive secretary of the CTCR in March 1972. See Report of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations, in 1973 LCMS Convention Workbook, 29.

⁵⁷ 1973 LCMS Convention Proceedings, 133–139.

⁵⁸ William H. Weiblen (chairman, Seminary Presidents and Deans) to Board of Control, Concordia Seminary, January 14, 1974, repr. in Report of the Church Council, in *1974 Reports and Actions: Seventh General Convention of The American Lutheran Church, Part 2*, ed. Arnold R. Mickelson (Minneapolis: Office of the General Secretary, The American Lutheran Church, [1974]), 537–538.

upon which the two church bodies enjoyed fellowship.⁵⁹ Later when Seminex formed and congregations that left Missouri organized the Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches (AELC), the ALC continued to express its support for the dissidents.⁶⁰

As was the case within the Missouri Synod, so it was also true between Missouri and the ALC in these twelve years that the principal doctrinal issue was the nature of the Bible. Prior to the Preus presidency, in 1967, Missouri had signed off on an essay regarding the Scriptures, “The Lutheran Confessions and ‘Sola Scriptura,’” as an important witness to “consensus” between the two church bodies on this crucial issue.⁶¹ A committee of four—two from each church—had prepared it. The Missouri Synod men were Robert Bertram and Herbert Bouman.⁶²

Bouman joined the St. Louis faculty in 1954, walked out in 1974, taught for a year at Seminex, and then retired.⁶³ Bertram taught at Valparaiso University for fifteen years before joining the St. Louis faculty in 1963. He too walked out and taught for Seminex until 1983. Then when the Seminex faculty was deployed to other schools, Bertram taught for another eight years at the Lutheran School of Theology

⁵⁹ “A Letter to Missouri,” *The Lutheran Standard*, April 16, 1974, 13.

⁶⁰ In 1976, the executive committee of the Church Council suggested forming a district in the ALC for congregations that wanted to leave Missouri. Report of the Church Council, in *1976 Reports and Actions: Eighth General Convention of The American Lutheran Church, Part 2*, ed. Arnold R. Mickelson (Minneapolis: Office of the General Secretary, The American Lutheran Church, [1976]), 561. In that same year, ALC President Preus indicated that the ALC would establish fellowship with the AELC and “offer appropriate assistance” but remain in fellowship with the LCMS. David W. Preus, Report of the General President, in *1976 Reports and Actions: Eighth General Convention of The American Lutheran Church, Part 3*, ed. Arnold R. Mickelson (Minneapolis: Office of the General Secretary, The American Lutheran Church, [1976]), 895. In 1978, ALC President Preus renewed the suggestion that the AELC join the ALC as a non-geographical district and intimated that Missouri’s “state of protest” was not supported by a majority of Missouri’s members. David W. Preus, Report of the General President, in *1978 Reports and Actions: Ninth General Convention of The American Lutheran Church, Part 3*, ed. Arnold R. Mickelson (Minneapolis: Office of the General Secretary, The American Lutheran Church, [1978]), 996. By 1980, the ALC, AELC, and LCA all belonged to a Committee on Lutheran Unity and were considering possible organizational forms for the three church bodies. See Edgar R. Trexler, *Anatomy of a Merger: People, Dynamics, and Decisions that Shaped the ELCA* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1991), 7–25.

⁶¹ Charles S. Anderson, George Aus, Robert W. Bertram, and Herbert J. A. Bouman, “The Lutheran Confessions and ‘Sola Scriptura,’” in *Essays Adopted by the Commissioners*, 3.

⁶² The ALC men were Charles S. Anderson (church history professor at Luther Theological Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota, at that time and later president of Augsburg College) and George Aus (professor of systematics also at Luther Theological Seminary). Not insignificantly, ALC president Fredrik A. Schiøtz in his autobiography, *One Man’s Story* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1980), 149, includes an anecdote from the late 1950s about George Aus’ announcement to a joint meeting of Evangelical Lutheran Church district presidents and Luther Theological Seminary faculty in which Aus explained how he had given up the textual inerrancy of the Bible while studying in Norway.

⁶³ “Rev. Herbert Bouman Funeral in Milwaukee,” *St. Louis Post Dispatch*, December 1, 1981, <https://www.newspapers.com/article/st-louis-post-dispatch-obituary-for-her/72785652/>.

at Chicago.⁶⁴ Both men endorsed *Faithful to Our Calling[,] Faithful to Our Lord, Part I*,⁶⁵ the faculty majority response to *A Statement of Scriptural and Confessional Principles*, and then submitted personal confessions in *Part II*.⁶⁶ So, what about their consensus-demonstrating essay of 1964–1965?

It is difficult to say precisely how a typical Missouri Synod clergyman would have understood “The Lutheran Confessions and ‘Sola Scriptura’” when it first appeared, but today we can readily see a new approach to the Bible at work. At least some saw it already at that time. In January 1969, Concordia Theological Seminary (at that time still in Springfield, Illinois) dedicated the first issue of *The Springfielder* that year to the three essays being used to promote fellowship. These included the one on the Scriptures. Eugene Klug’s review was very critical.⁶⁷

Not insignificantly, in another essay—this one unpublished—Klug described a “consultation” of ALC and LCMS seminary professors several months before.⁶⁸ This one was assembled in Chicago, March 22–23, 1968, for the purpose of discussing the topics treated in the three unifying essays. Klug was assigned “sola Scriptura.” As in the article published later, he pointed to what he considered defects in the essay. But when it came time for discussion, he later wrote, only the St. Louis men pushed back against him while the ALC men “fell into virtually total silence.”⁶⁹

So, how did the essay on “The Lutheran Confessions and ‘Sola Scriptura’” depart from Missouri’s traditional approach? Most obvious today is the essay’s failure to address the questions that were roiling the synod regarding verbal inspiration and inerrancy or even the facticity of biblical narratives in either the Old or New Testaments. Did Israel really walk through the Red Sea? Did Jesus really walk on the

⁶⁴ Ed Schroeder, “The Reverend Dr. Robert W. Bertram International Lutheran Theologian, Interpreter of Seminex,” *Crossings*, March 20, 2003, <https://crossings.org/the-reverend-dr-robert-w-bertram-international-lutheran-theologian-interpreter-of-seminex-by-ed-schroeder/>.

⁶⁵ Faculty of Concordia Seminary, *Faithful to Our Calling[,] Faithful to Our Lord, Part I: A Witness to Our Faith; A Joint Statement and Discussion of Issues* (n.p., [1973]), 10. In March 1973, Missouri’s CTCR issued a statement regarding *Faithful, Part I* that found it in error regarding inspiration, inerrancy, and biblical authority. 1973 LCMS Convention Workbook, 39–40. See Zimmerman, *Seminary in Crisis*, 92–98.

⁶⁶ Faculty of Concordia Seminary, *Faithful to Our Calling[,] Faithful to Our Lord, Part II: I Believe; Personal Confessions of Faith and Discussion of Issues* (n.p., [1973]), 19–22, 22–25.

⁶⁷ Eugene F. Klug, “Comment on ‘The Lutheran Confessions and ‘Sola Scriptura,’” *The Springfielder* 33, no. 1 (Spring 1969): 12–22.

⁶⁸ The Schiotz papers include a list of participants as well as a schedule for both days of meetings of faculty members from ALC seminaries (Wartburg Theological in Dubuque, Iowa, Luther Theological in St. Paul, Minnesota, and Evangelical Lutheran Theological in Columbus, Ohio) and from the LCMS (St. Louis and Springfield, including one from the SELC). Box 2, folder 6, part 2, TALC 4/2/9.

⁶⁹ [Eugene F. A. Klug], “What Price Fellowship,” file 263, Wayne and Barbara Kroemer Library, Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Indiana. The library catalog describes it as “Address presented at the Shawano, Wis., Pastoral Conference, Feb. 11, 1969, by Eugene F. Klug.”

water? The essay in question did not address these issues, but Klug cited several ALC theologians who questioned or denied the historical accuracy of the Bible and even of the Gospels.⁷⁰

There was also ambiguity in the essay about calling the Bible “the Word of God.” “The Scriptures are the Word or address of God,” the document stated, “to sinful man for the purpose of revealing His grace in His Son, Jesus Christ.”⁷¹ So, the Scriptures have a divine purpose. That is true, but what about their origin? Did God inspire the exact words and phrases—and if he did, did he include any errors of fact?

Notice too this particular phrasing: “The Scriptures *as the Word of God* are the sole authority in the Church.”⁷² Note well: They are not authoritative *because* they are the word of God but *as* they are.⁷³ That takes the reader back to the previous statement that identified the Scriptures with the word of God in its purpose to save sinners. One way of reading this is to say that *in their purpose* the Scriptures are the source and norm of the church’s message—that is, the church that is faithful to the word of God must be about the *task* of making disciples through word and sacraments—but the statement leaves open the question of whether the Scriptures are authoritative in their content. Consider this statement too from the essay: “the Scriptures as the Word of God provide the church with the adequate, reliable, and efficacious means for her work among her members and for her mission to the world.”⁷⁴ Once again the emphasis is on what the Scriptures *as* the word of God do and not on what they say.⁷⁵

So, the church can preach the word with confidence that it will do its job, but can Christians be confident that what it says about God’s actions in space and time, preeminently in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, really took place? Of course, one might object that no one was raising questions about the resurrection of Jesus in the ALC or LCMS in 1969. Maybe not—but they certainly were less than a decade later at the time of the Seminex walkout.⁷⁶

⁷⁰ Klug, “Comment,” 17–18. Starting with Schiötz himself, Klug goes on to cite Harris Kaasa, Gerhard Forde, Ronald Hals, Wilfred Bunge, Warren Quanbeck, and Philip Quanbeck.

⁷¹ Anderson et al., “The Lutheran Confessions and ‘Sola Scriptura,’” in *Essays Adopted by the Commissioners*, 5, repr. in 1967 LCMS Convention Workbook, 409.

⁷² Anderson et al., “The Lutheran Confessions and ‘Sola Scriptura,’” in *Essays Adopted by the Commissioners*, 6, repr. in 1967 LCMS Convention Workbook, 410.

⁷³ That is Klug’s first point. “Comment,” 13. “Lutherans need to restate for our times that the Holy Scriptures *are* the Word of God, not merely in a manner of speaking, but in fact.”

⁷⁴ Anderson et al., “The Lutheran Confessions and ‘Sola Scriptura,’” in *Essays Adopted by the Commissioners*, 7, repr. in 1967 LCMS Convention Workbook, 411.

⁷⁵ Klug, “Comment,” 15.

⁷⁶ See the *Report of the Synodical President to The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod*, sec. 5f,5, “Permissiveness: The Physical Resurrection,” 105–112, and Timothy Maschke, Richard Noack, Gary Boye, Bruce Linderman, and Ted Mayes, in “Memories of the Walkout from Concordia Seminary St. Louis, MO., February 1974,” ed. Ted Mayes (unpublished manuscript, 2021), 30, 41–42,

Whatever its deficiencies in Klug's mind or anyone else's, however, in 1969, "The Lutheran Confessions and 'Sola Scriptura'" proved useful in demonstrating "consensus" between Missouri and the ALC. But what happened after the election of J. A. O. Preus in that same year? The consensus disappeared. As Preus himself suggested it would at the 1969 convention in his caveat concerning fellowship,⁷⁷ the doctrine of the word became a central issue in the doctrinal discussions of the Inter-synodical Commission on Fellowship. At the beginning, even before the commission had met for the first time, President Preus wrote to President Schioltz about his expectation that the commission would consider theological issues, "such as the Doctrine of Scripture."⁷⁸ Then at the end of fellowship, in the preamble to the 1981 LCMS resolution that declared the two church bodies *not* in fellowship, the first doctrinal difference mentioned was "the inspiration, inerrancy, and authority of Holy Scriptures."⁷⁹

During the first four years of fellowship (1969–1973), the Missouri Synod was dealing internally with the doctrine of the word—what it was and whether the St. Louis faculty was teaching it faithfully. The LCMS settled that issue at the New Orleans convention (1973) with the adoption of *A Statement of Scriptural and Confessional Principles*.⁸⁰ This then was also the position that Missouri's men on the Fellowship Commission had advocated for twelve years. Gone was any ambiguity in Missouri's position, or in that of the ALC, for that matter. Even though the latter continually contended that differences regarding the word ought not to affect fellowship, they did not deny the differences.⁸¹

What was especially poignant about these conversations regarding inerrancy in particular was that this was an issue that had brought the two groups together in the 1920s, but by the 1960s it had begun to divide them. In the ALC, not only had "inerrancy" found a place in the founding documents of the first ALC (1930), but also it was still a part of the constitution of the new ALC of 1960. In fact, its first article,

62, 84, 89, Wayne and Barbara Kroemer Library, Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Indiana.

⁷⁷ 1969 LCMS Convention Proceedings, 32. A copy of the entire Preus statement is in box 2, folder 6, part 2, TALC 4/2/9.

⁷⁸ J. A. O. Preus to Fredrik Schioltz, November 25, 1969, box 2, folder 6, part 1, TALC 4/2/9.

⁷⁹ 1981 LCMS Convention Proceedings, 153.

⁸⁰ 1973 LCMS Convention Proceedings, 127–128.

⁸¹ Even in their last appeal to Missouri before the latter ended fellowship, on June 24, 1981, the ALC Church Council wrote to President Preus of the Missouri Synod that confessional subscription "does not require uniformity in all matters. . . . The disagreements [between the two church bodies] come in areas not directly addressed by the Confessions and . . . take on the character of added requirements imposed by LCMS. . . . Agreement on matters directly addressed in the common Confessional documents is sufficient to support altar and pulpit fellowship." "Resolution of The American Lutheran Church Council," in 1981 LCMS Convention Workbook, 81.

“Confession of Faith,” committed the church to the Bible “as the divinely inspired, revealed, and *inerrant* Word of God.”⁸²

However, by the time of the fellowship talks in the 1960s and then fellowship itself in the 1970s, the two churches were using the term “inerrancy” very differently. The first president of the new ALC, Fredrik Schiøtz, was already qualifying the term in 1966 when he wrote that “The ALC holds that the inerrancy referred to [in the constitution] does not apply to the text but to the truths revealed for our faith, doctrine and life.”⁸³ Meanwhile, just days after his election to the synodical presidency in 1969, J. A. O. Preus explained inerrancy as “the essential truthfulness and reliability of Scripture. . . . The inerrancy of Scripture pertains to all of Scripture, not only those portions which deal with theological matters but also those portions that touch upon history or the things of nature.”⁸⁴ By 1979, Harold Ditmanson could observe that “It is generally agreed within the ALC that the term *inerrant* [in the constitution] means ‘truthful’ and the term *infallible* means ‘reliable.’ The terms refer to the message and power of Scripture, not to its text.”⁸⁵ As the years of fellowship passed, the differences regarding inerrancy became clearer and others emerged as well.

⁸² Constitution [of the American Lutheran Church], in Wolf, *Documents*, 532–533 (my emphasis). See p. 492 for background. It is also worth noting that the “Articles of Agreement” (in Wolf, *Documents*, 527–530) between the three churches that came together in 1960 likewise affirmed inerrancy as well as committing themselves to the Minneapolis Theses (1925) (in Wolf, *Documents*, 340–342) and *United Testimony on Faith and Life* (1952) (in Wolf, *Documents*, 498–511), both of which also affirmed inerrancy.

According to Nelson, *Lutherans in North America*, 461–462, 468–470, through the ’30s and ’40s, inerrancy had been a roadblock to fellowship between the ALC and the ULCA. It was no accident, therefore, that it appeared in the constitution of the 1960 ALC.

Although acknowledging that for many in the ALC, “inerrancy” meant the Bible was an errorless book, David W. Preus, *Two Trajectories: J. A. O. Preus and David W. Preus* (Minneapolis: Lutheran Univ. Press, 2015), 57, contends that already early in the twentieth century, some Norwegian Lutherans used “inerrant” in a qualified sense that excluded historical and scientific information.

⁸³ Schiøtz includes a chapter “On Interpreting Scripture” in *One Man’s Story*, 143–54, in which he maintains that ALC members are “free from fear of historical criticism” basically because inerrancy in the ALC documents means only that the Bible is “a dependable source for Christian doctrine and life,” and not that the biblical text is free from errors. In his autobiography, he is repeating the argument of his 1966 address to two district conventions, “The Church’s Confessional Stand Relative to the Scriptures” (published by the Church Council of the ALC and distributed to its pastors). He argues on behalf of a doctrine of the Scriptures that accommodates modern “science” and finds errors of fact in the historical narratives.

What Schiøtz did not acknowledge, however, in 1966 or his autobiography was that in an earlier period, the 1920s through 1940s, the ALC was using the term to insist that the text of the Bible was without error or contradiction just as Missouri did. See Nelson, “A Case Study,” 207–223.

⁸⁴ Statement by Dr. J. A. O. Preus, re: Inerrancy of Scripture, July 15, 1969, box 2, folder 6, part 2, TALC 4/2/9.

⁸⁵ Harold H. Ditmanson, “Perspectives on the Hermeneutics Debate,” in *Studies in Lutheran Hermeneutics*, ed. John Reumann (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 82. The book itself was a project

So, in preparation for the 1981 synodical convention, which would declare the two churches no longer in fellowship, Missouri's members on the Intersynodical Commission prepared a summary statement of doctrinal differences between the two churches in three areas. First came the authority and interpretation of the Bible, followed by confessional subscription, and then church fellowship. Descriptions of the differences were set forth by means of quotations from an earlier study, basically a neutral source, *The Function of Doctrine and Theology in Light of the Unity of the Church*, published in 1978 by LCUSA.⁸⁶

Regarding the Scriptures, the central issue was the legitimacy of the historical-critical method. The ALC defended using the method even if it resulted in positing different theologies and apparent contradictions in the Bible. The LCMS rejected it because any attempt to read the Bible like other ancient literature diminished its "revelatory" character as the word of God and frequently resulted in challenging the authority, truthfulness, and unity of the Scriptures.

Regarding confessional subscription, the ALC, while insisting on its commitment to the gospel as witnessed to by the Confessions, was open to dissenting from confessional positions not directly related to the gospel, such as the fall into sin and the nature and interpretation of the Bible. The LCMS insisted that the entire doctrinal content of the Confessions was binding because it was a faithful exposition of the Scriptures, the word of God. That included the implications of confessional statements regarding the nature and interpretation of the Scriptures.

Finally, regarding fellowship, both sides agreed with Article VII of the Augsburg Confession that unity was based on agreement in the gospel but disagreed about what agreement in the gospel meant. For the ALC, it was the gospel in the narrow sense, the promise of forgiveness for the sake of Jesus. For the LCMS, while the gospel in the narrow sense was fundamental and was the "chief article," it was not the only article. For fellowship, it was necessary to establish agreement in the doctrine and in all its articles.

of the Division of Theological Studies of LCUSA, designed to exhibit both differences and similarities regarding hermeneutics in connection with ongoing efforts to achieve theological consensus. Ditmanson was an ALC professor of religion at St. Olaf College.

Alvin N. Rogness, writing in *The Lutheran Standard* ("One Chapter in a Peculiar History," October 28, 1980, 5), stated that interpreting "inerrant" has caused problems for all the churches that use it and that in the ALC interpretations ranged from taking the Bible "literally" to treating Gen 1 as "a great poem" and Job as "a drama" while limiting inerrancy to the Scriptures as a "guide" for all matters of faith and life.

⁸⁶ *The Function of Doctrine and Theology in Light of the Unity of the Church: A Report Plus 15 Papers from an Official Study Conducted by the Division of Theological Studies, Lutheran Council in the USA During 1972-77* (n.p.: Lutheran Council in the USA, 1978). This is an excellent—thorough and honest—treatment of the theological similarities and differences characterizing the three main Lutheran churches at that time: LCA, ALC, and LCMS.

Furthermore, for the LCMS an insufficient commitment to the Scriptures—any uncertainty regarding their truthfulness, any hesitancy or disagreement about some of their contents—would put at risk the gospel by raising the question of whether we are confessing the Christ of the Bible or another Christ constructed according to some human standard.⁸⁷

In this summary of the differences, the LCMS commissioners also included as an appendix a statement by the ALC members of the commission regarding the differences, as they saw them, that kept the two churches apart.⁸⁸ Theirs were not exactly the same as the Missouri men's, but like Missouri they did recognize significant differences in the areas of authority, Scriptures, gospel, and hermeneutics. Interestingly, the ALC commissioners included two additional points on why there were differences. The first was the observation that the LCMS men represented a much more homogeneous church than their own, in that the Missouri Synod had developed a strong synodical consciousness over 125 years. The ALC was a merger of churches from different ethnicities and with different ecclesiastical and confessional backgrounds. "Synodical loyalties," they said, "are seen in light of wider ecumenical possibilities."⁸⁹

The last difference in the ALC list had to do with the ministry. From their perspective, Missouri drew a more rigid distinction between clergy and laity and accordingly manifested more of a "priestly caste, concern, and mentality" than one would find in the ALC.⁹⁰ But they did not explain very clearly how such clericalism resulted in doctrinal differences.

⁸⁷ The previous paragraphs are a paraphrase of statements in *The American Lutheran Church and The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod: A Statement of Doctrinal Differences* (n.p., 1980), repr. in 1981 LCMS Convention Workbook, 397–401, prepared by the LCMS members of the "intersynodical commission"—viz., J. A. O. Preus, Ralph Bohlmann, Kurt Marquart, Samuel Nafzger, Karl Barth, and Lloyd Behnken.

⁸⁸ Besides appearing in the 1981 LCMS Convention Workbook, the ALC commissioners' analysis was reprinted in Craig L. Nesson, ed., *"The Air I Breathe is Wartburg Air": The Legacy of William H. Weiblen* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2003), 172–181. Its inclusion among "theological articles and papers" from Weiblen's career suggests that he was the principal author of this statement, summarizing the differences as the ALC commissioners saw them in 1980. Weiblen was president of Wartburg Theological Seminary from 1971 to 1983. See "William Weiblen, Former President of Lutheran Seminary, Dies," *Evangelical Lutheran Church in America*, April 20, 2004, <https://www.elca.org/News-and-Events/5179>.

Also included in the same volume was Weiblen's "Reflections on the Theological Basis for Church Fellowship" that he presented to the joint Commission on Fellowship in 1972. He was a longtime ALC representative on the commission. According to the 1980 report of the LCMS members of the commission, the ALC members for 1979–1981 were John Halverson, Rolf Hanson, Roy Harrisville, David Preus, William Weiblen, and Walter Wietzke. *Convention Workbook: Reports and Overtures; 54th Regular Convention [of] The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, [1981]), 159 (hereafter cited as 1981 LCMS Convention Workbook).

⁸⁹ 1981 LCMS Convention Workbook, 401.

⁹⁰ 1981 LCMS Convention Workbook, 402.

However, just weeks before Missouri's 1981 convention, the ALC Church Council wrote to express their "dismay" at the proposed ending of fellowship. Furthermore, recommendations regarding fellowship deserved "more direct participation from people in the congregations." In the Fellowship Commission there were no laity and only one parish pastor. So, the ALC Church Council suggested that the two church bodies encourage regional and local consultations to discuss the matter before Missouri took any action to end fellowship.

In that same appeal, the ALC Church Council repeated its basic argument that confessional subscription "does not require uniformity in all matters. . . . The disagreements [between the two church bodies] come in areas not directly addressed by the Confessions and . . . take on the character of added requirements imposed by LCMS. . . . Agreement on matters directly addressed in the common Confessional documents is sufficient to support altar and pulpit fellowship."⁹¹

But why were the ALC men so insistent on rejecting the binding character of such statements, ostensibly drawn from the Scriptures themselves? Perhaps this explains it: In their summary of the differences with Missouri, the ALC representatives to the Fellowship Commission maintained that Missouri's root problem was a failure of will or capacity to be self-critical and warned that even Christian doctrine could become "the occasion for idolatry. Our trust is in God," they said, "not in human formulations about Him." Then they added the following: "ALC people are not seeking . . . to destroy the truth, they only want to say that all human formulations have a tentativeness within them."⁹²

But with that word "tentativeness," applied to "all human formulations," they were placing a big question mark not only over Missouri's *A Statement of Scriptural and Confessional Principles* but also over Lutheranism's Augsburg Confession, Christendom's Nicene Creed, and maybe even the Bible itself—which is what the whole Seminex controversy was about in the first place.⁹³ Has God really revealed

⁹¹ "Resolution of The American Lutheran Church Council," adopted by the ALC Church Council, June 24, 1981, repr. as appendix A to J. A. O. Preus, President's Report, in 1981 LCMS Convention Proceedings, 81.

⁹² "Toward Understanding One Another" (1980), repr. in *Statement of Doctrinal Differences*, 22, repr. in 1981 LCMS Convention Workbook, 402. Of course, this was nothing new in the ALC. According to Schiotz, *One Man's Story*, 151–153, already at its 1966 convention, the ALC had passed *A Statement on Doctrinal Concerns* in which it had declared that because a believer still lives "with the limitations of the Old Adam," "his best efforts to formulate a theology in terms of propositions and statements will fall short. To assure that the Church can arrive at human concepts or expressions that are in every respect correct is . . . an expression of pride."

⁹³ Especially since earlier in that same report, the ALC commissioners had stressed the human side of the Bible: "The A.L.C. looks upon the Holy Scriptures as the Word of God of divine origin, but likewise the Scriptures are human documents. . . . [They] are to be studied, translated, and interpreted as divinely inspired, as well as historically written records and testimony of God's living,

himself truthfully—propositionally—in the words of Holy Writ, and can we ever be sure about it?

Of course, this 1980 *Statement of Doctrinal Differences*, including the ALC appendix, developed and documented these positions in greater detail than is presented in this brief summary. Of course, too, we cannot know today whether delegates to Missouri's 1981 convention even read it, but when the vote was finally taken to declare ALC fellowship at an end, it passed, but not by much—590 to 494 (54 percent to 46 percent)—just about the same as the vote in 1969 that established fellowship in the first place.⁹⁴

A couple of days after the vote, David Preus, now “presiding bishop” of the ALC, had an opportunity to greet the convention, and in his remarks, he addressed the fellowship issue.⁹⁵ For him, Missouri's decision was a “denial of the God-pleasing unity that God has given us . . . and a step backward.” Once again, he insisted that sharing a commitment to the Lutheran Confessions ought to be enough and that Missouri's insistence on agreement in the “Gospel and all its articles” was simply Missouri's method of demanding agreement on its formulation of whatever doctrine was being discussed. Preus insisted, however, that when new issues arose that “require serious, open theological debate” they should be debated, but he also maintained that “history . . . indicates that such controversial articles gradually find solutions.” Given enough time, he believed, Lutherans would arrive at a consensus regarding inerrancy, women's ordination, and membership in ecumenical organizations.⁹⁶ In a sense, a consensus on these issues was already emerging in two-thirds of American Lutherans, but, as it turned out, it did not include the Missouri Synod.

So, in 1981, ALC fellowship was over—or was it? Maybe not, since the resolution supposedly ending it made many concessions to those in favor of maintaining the relationship. The first resolve, for example, declared the end of fellowship between the two church bodies, but the second and third resolves addressed “joint

revealed Word.” “Toward Understanding One Another,” repr. in *Statement of Doctrinal Differences*, repr. in 1981 LCMS Convention Workbook, 401–402.

⁹⁴ 1981 LCMS Convention Proceedings, 153–155.

⁹⁵ The 1980 convention of the ALC changed the nomenclature of its general president and district presidents to “bishop.” “With a New Song: Go and Tell the Story,” *The Lutheran Standard*, October 12, 1980, 14.

⁹⁶ For Bishop Preus' remarks, see 1981 LCMS Convention Proceedings, 118–119. Bishop Preus spoke during the morning session of July 8; the ALC fellowship vote had occurred in the afternoon session of July 5. 1981 LCMS Convention Proceedings, 28, 42. In his *Two Trajectories*, written more than thirty years later, Preus devoted an entire chapter to Missouri's reasons for withdrawing from ALC fellowship. His position had not changed. He still thought it wrong to break fellowship over matters not addressed explicitly in the Augsburg Confession. However, he did include an interesting explanation for why J. A. O. Preus did not agree with him and their multiple Preus relatives in the ALC—and that was J. A. O.'s Missouri Synod pastor (pp. 15–16)!

fellowship efforts” at the local level between pastors and congregations. These resolves did not call explicitly for ending such relationships but rather to “reexamine” them and to pledge both to LCMS and to ALC members “their mutual trust and understanding in resolving such cases with both patience and love.” Then, in a third section, the resolution called upon the synod “to recognize that its congregations and pastors, as circumstances warrant, may provide pastoral care [including Holy Communion] to individuals of the ALC.” In fact, O. H. Cloeter, chairman of the floor committee responsible for formulating this resolution, had included in his introduction to putting it on the convention floor the statement that it did not refer to “grandpa and grandma from the ALC who come to visit their children and wish to commune with them.”⁹⁷ Finally, the resolution called for further “doctrinal discussions . . . to enable both church bodies to reach agreement in doctrine and practice” as a precondition for “God-pleasing” church fellowship.⁹⁸

Clearly, the 1981 resolution left a lot of room for discussion and disagreement in the LCMS about just what it meant practically that the two churches were not in fellowship. Indicative of the uncertainty that remained was the statement by President-elect Ralph Bohlmann about a need for “new types of inter-Christian relationships that correspond to [whatever level of] agreement we have and that frankly recognize greater flexibility of application at the local level.”⁹⁹ It is no surprise, therefore, that fellowship with other Lutherans in America continued to be a matter of concern, interest, and sometimes controversy in the Missouri Synod.

Subsequent conventions of the Missouri Synod in the '80s considered memorials favorable to resuming ALC fellowship and then to cooperating with the new Lutheran church that was coming into existence, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.¹⁰⁰ The synod's Commission on Theology and Church Relations issued

⁹⁷ 1981 LCMS Convention Proceedings, 122. President J. A. O. Preus had used similar language in his report to the synod when raising questions about what constituted “church fellowship” in the synod's current context (66).

⁹⁸ 1981 LCMS Convention Proceedings, 153–155. President J. A. O. Preus had attached a set of guidelines for implementing the suspension of fellowship with the ALC to his convention report, but these were not acted on by the convention. 1981 LCMS Convention Proceedings, 82–83. In January 1982, three representatives from each church body met as an ALC/LCMS Coordinating Committee to plan doctrinal discussions. *Convention Workbook: Reports and Overtures; 55th Regular Convention [of] The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, [1983]), 97–98 (hereafter cited as 1983 LCMS Convention Workbook).

⁹⁹ Quoted in “Missouri Synod Breaks Fellowship; Bohlmann Calls Decision ‘Action of Love,’” *The Lutheran Standard*, August 7, 1981, 16. Moreover, in expressing these sentiments, Bohlmann was echoing what LCMS President Preus had said in his president's report to the synod. 1981 LCMS Convention Proceedings, 65–66.

¹⁰⁰ Memorials supporting the resumption of fellowship with the ALC are present in 1983 LCMS Convention Workbook, 114–115; subsequently, there were resolutions favorable to the “new” Lutheran church (the ELCA) and working with other Lutherans generally in 1986 (*Convention Workbook: Reports and Overtures; 56th Regular Convention [of] The Lutheran Church—*

documents and reports on fellowship in 1981, 1991, 2000, and 2004.¹⁰¹ Since 1981, Missouri has entered into church fellowship with one American church and numerous overseas churches¹⁰² and has terminated fellowship with one of the latter.¹⁰³ And in 2001, there was a major controversy in the synod regarding fellowship on account of the participation of a district president in an ecumenical “Prayer for America” in the wake of the 2001 terrorist attacks on New York City and Washington, DC.¹⁰⁴ So, clearly, the 1981 fellowship decision regarding the ALC did not bring fellowship questions to an end in the Missouri Synod.

Nevertheless, it turned out that David Preus was correct at least about the ALC fellowship issue. History did provide the solution. For that question finally disappeared from Missouri’s agenda in 1988 when the ALC itself disappeared. It merged with the LCA and the AELC to form the ELCA. Then, as the ELCA continued to move away from traditional Lutheranism and into the American Protestant mainstream, it became even easier for the LCMS to stay apart.¹⁰⁵ Finally, the ELCA’s full embrace of the homosexual movement demonstrated quite clearly that the LCMS

Missouri Synod [St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, [1986]], 113–116) and 1989 (*Convention Workbook: Reports and Overtures; 57th Regular Convention [of] The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod* [St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, [1989]], 180–181).

¹⁰¹ Commission on Theology and Church Relations of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, *The Nature and Implications of the Concept of Fellowship* (n.p., 1981); Commission on Theology and Church Relations of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, *Inter-Christian Relationships: An Instrument for Study* (n.p., 1991); Office of the President and Commission on Theology and Church Relations of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, *The Lutheran Understanding of Church Fellowship: Study Materials* (n.p., 2000); and Commission on Theology and Church Relations of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, *Guidelines for Participation in Civic Events* (n.p., 2004).

¹⁰² In 2007 with the American Association of Lutheran Churches (*Convention Proceedings 2007: 63rd Regular Convention [of] The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod* [n.p., [2007]], 120); in 2016 with confessional Lutheran churches in Norway and Uruguay (*Convention Proceedings 2016: 66th Regular Convention [of] The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod* [n.p., [2016]], 150–153); in 2019 with churches in Belgium, Portugal, South Africa, and Denmark (*Convention Proceedings 2019: 67th Regular Convention [of] The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod* [n.p., [2019]], 144–152); and in 2023 with churches in Sudan, South Sudan, Uganda, Sri Lanka, and Finland (*Convention Proceedings 2023: 68th Regular Convention [of] The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod* [n.p., [2023]], 141–149).

¹⁰³ With the Japan Lutheran Church. *Convention Proceedings 2023*, 150–152.

¹⁰⁴ *Convention Proceedings 2004: 62nd Regular Convention [of] The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod* (n.p., [2004]), 57–58, 64–66, 76–78.

¹⁰⁵ According to Trexler, *Anatomy of a Merger*, 240, the ELCA joined both the National Council of Churches and the World Council of Churches at its first convention (1988). According to its website, the ELCA entered into full fellowship with the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the Reformed Church in America, and the United Church of Christ in 1997, with The Episcopal Church and the Moravian Church in 1999, and with The United Methodist Church in 2009. “History,” Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, accessed August 28, 2021, <https://www.elca.org/Faith/Ecumenical-and-Inter-Religious-Relations/Full-Communion/History>.

represented a very different kind of Lutheranism—indeed, a very different kind of Christianity.¹⁰⁶

Since early in the twentieth century, therefore, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod had been working its way through fellowship questions, especially regarding its relations with other American Lutherans. For many years, it was focused especially on relations with the American Lutheran Church in an attempt to undo divisions that developed in the nineteenth century; but eventually those efforts collided with twentieth-century issues like women's ordination and biblical authority and interpretation. Missouri went one way, the ALC another, and fellowship was the casualty.

In a sense, therefore, we have come full circle. The issues are certainly different. But just as it was in 1847, there are still two kinds of Lutheranism in America—traditional and exclusive confessionalism in the Missouri Synod on one hand, and in the ELCA, on the other, a new version of “American” Lutheranism, allied closely with mainstream Protestantism. It turns out once again that fellowship issues have been an important way in which the church defines what it means by “Lutheran.” Synodical discussions, resolutions, and debates about fellowship bring to the fore those issues that are current and deemed important at that time. In the '60s, '70s, and '80s, the central issue was the Bible. Does it tell us the truth about what God really did to save sinners? ALC–LCMS fellowship showed us that only when we answer that question can we figure out what it truly means to be Lutheran.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶ In 2009, the ELCA adopted *Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust* and recognized full acceptance of homosexual couples and clergy as a legitimate Christian position. It provides wedding liturgies for homosexual couples and ordains homosexual clergy. See “Resources for the LGBTQIA+ Community,” Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, accessed January 3, 2024, <https://www.elca.org/lgbtq>.

¹⁰⁷ I am indebted for access to ALC resources to the ELCA archives, and especially to archivist Catherine Lundeen, who assisted me so graciously by fulfilling my numerous requests for documents related to fellowship between the ALC and the LCMS.