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Changes in the Missouri Synod

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Have there been doctrinal changes in The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod? Few questions have disturbed that Synod more during the past quarter of a century. Both negative and affirmative answers have been staunchly maintained. "Missouri has not changed its doctrinal stand" was the repeated claim made by Theodore Graebner, though few men changed their doctrinal position as much as he did in so short a time.

WHAT IS DOCTRINE?

The answer to the question regarding doctrinal changes will largely depend on the meaning of doctrine. When doctrine is taken in its primary sense, that is, in its objective meaning, then doctrine, *doctrina divina,* is nothing less than Scripture itself. "The Christian Church has no doctrine of its own; it possesses, teaches, and confesses only Christ's doctrine." [1]

If doctrine is used in that sense it must be stoutly maintained that there has been no change in the Missouri Synod. Every pastor and professor must in his ordination vow, and again when he is installed into a teaching office or into another parish, accept without reservation the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament as the written Word of God and the only rule and norm of faith and practice; and all the Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church contained in the Book of Concord as a true and unadulterated statement and exposition of the Word of God.[2] In the Missouri Synod Scripture is still the sole governing norm of faith, the *norma normans.* No thesis is more heartily and sincerely affirmed than "Verbum Dei manet in aeternum." This is the sense in which Graebner contended, "Missouri has not changed." This is what is still meant when theologians assert that there has been no change.

But the term "doctrine" is widely used in a secondary or subjective sense. In this sense doctrine means the teaching that is drawn from Scripture. While every sound Lutheran attempts to draw his doctrine properly from Scripture so that his application of Scripture may in every sense be *doctrina divina,* it must be acknowledged that as soon as the human element enters into the interpretation of the *doctrina divina* there is a measure of subjectivity. This is true not merely of the doctrinal deduction or the formulation itself, but also of the manner in which it is applied to a given situation and the purpose for which it is used. The formulation of the doctrine or its application can therefore

[1] Franz Pieper, *Christliche Dogmatik* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1917—20), I, 111. English trans., I, 99.

[2] *Constitution,* Article II, Sections 1 and 2.

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not be equated with Scripture itself, no matter how faithful the Christian may have tried to be.

Even when the theologian merely "compiles the doctrinal statements contained in Scripture (in the text and context), groups them under proper heads, and arranges these in doctrines in the order of their relationships," the result cannot in the strictest sense be called objective theology, as Pieper and others have maintained.[3] The very manner in which they are grouped, the determination of the text and context, the unifying principle that governs the entire group pattern, are all a matter of judgment. The result is, therefore, no longer objective doctrine but subjective, or applied doctrine.

But it is in this latter sense that the church must operate with Scripture. It is given to us "for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work (2 Tim. 3: 16-17). It is in this secondary, subjective sense that doctrine is normally used. It was in this sense, too, that the faculties of the two synodical seminaries defined the term: "A doctrine is an article of faith which the church, in obedience to her Lord, and in response to her specific needs, derives according to sound principles of interpretation from Scripture as the sole source of doctrine and sets forth in a form adapted to teaching."[4] If we understand doctrine in that sense, then we will accept the fact that every formulation of doctrine is conditioned by its historic situation. Doctrine in the sense of a doctrinal formulation is conditioned also by the nature of the teaching situation for which it is intended, whether kerygmatic, pedagogic, polemic, or apologetic. The passage of time forces the church to face new problems and to find new ways of handling them. To meet this responsibility it becomes necessary for the church to restate or modify its doctrinal statements from time to time if it is to remain faithful to the Scriptures.

In this sense it is true that the Missouri Synod has experienced doctrinal changes during its 120 years of history. This grows out of its responsibilities. As long as the Missouri Synod remains a living, dynamic church body, it must address man in his need, in his society and culture, and in his time. If this were not so, the Synod could be satisfied with the sole use of any of the ancient creeds, whether it be simply "Jesus is Lord" (1 Cor. 12:3), the Apostles' Creed, or the Nicene Creed before the *filioque* was added. Modifications are brought about by changing conditions in the Synod itself, in the rest of the church which it proposes to address, in the world in which it finds itself, or in any combination of these.

"Publica Doctrina" in a Normative Sense

For this task the Missouri Synod has set up limits within which it must operate. It has drawn a circle, as it were, when it affirms what it is that makes one a Lutheran. With all Lutherans, it publicly confesses what its doctrine is in the Lutheran Confessions, the *norma normata* of its faith. These have been set forth by the Synod in its constitution and established as *publica doctrina.* In its constitutionally established *publica doctrina* there also has

[3] *Christliche Dogmatik,* I, 56. English trans., I, 52.

[4] *The Lutheran Witness,* LXXV (May 8, 1956), 178.

been no change, for all pastors and professors have solemnly promised in their vows to operate within the limits of the Lutheran Confessions.

As one reviews the history of doctrine within the Missouri Synod, one sees that it has at times operated within a circle that is smaller than its *publica doctrina.* At other times it may have gone beyond that circle. Wherever this is known to occur, it becomes the responsibility of faithful Lutherans to call the Synod's attention to this, in order that the clear voice of Lutheranism may not be lost. Such a "reformation" may at times be a delicate and difficult task, especially if the lines of the altered circle have been established by tradition or by a synodical resolution. Difficult or not, it nevertheless becomes the task of every generation to review the Synod's doctrine in the light of the Scriptures and the Confessions and to apply it faithfully to existing circumstances.

Practice an Expression of Doctrine

The problem of change in the Missouri Synod becomes more complex because the Synod holds that the church's practice must be in harmony with the confession of faith; that is, a church body must be judged both by its doctrine and by its practice, because practice is but the logical extension of what is meant by the doctrine professed. This principle was set forth by Wilhelm Sihler with all its rational demands in a series of theses on "Church Fellowship" during the early years of the Synodical Conference. In his statement to the conference Sihler set forth the proposition that not only was false doctrine divisive of church fellowship, but that the very function of the church's confession demanded that church practice be in accord with the Confessions.[5] He argued that one must either accept the deductions or deny the vehicle *(das Organ),* which God has given man to draw truths from truth, namely, reason.[6] Sihler's theses were accepted by the Synodical Conference, for they correctly reflected the view held by its constituents and were the working principles with which the Missouri Synod operated. The Missouri Synod has ever maintained that church practices contrary to the Scriptures and the Confessions were as divisive of church fellowship as false doctrine since such practices must be regarded as the "actualization" of the doctrine.[7] While it must be conceded that church practice should be in harmony with doctrine, it must be equally admitted that with the use of deductive reasoning an additional element enters in and with it the possible element of error or inadequacy. Therefore a need for change arises when later the error is discovered or when the practice is no longer adequate.

Where such logical deductions may lead a church body may be seen, for instance, in two of the deductions which Sihler and, with him, the entire Synodical Conference made. He affirmed that it was a flagrant contradiction of the Lutheran Confessions when a Lutheran church body failed to do everything possible to establish orthodox parish schools. He placed the emphasis on doing "everything possible." There must be an active concern and effort toward establishing them, he said. While he con-

[5] *Verhandlungen,* 4th convention, 1875, p. 7.

[6] *Verhandlungen,* 3d convention, 1874, p. 7.

[7] Cf. *Proceedings,* St. Louis convention, 1938, p. 232, No. 5; *Proceedings,* Fort Wayne convention, 1941, p. 303, No. 10; *Proceedings,* Milwaukee Convention, 1950, p. 586, No. 15.

ceded that the Confessions did not mention parish schools, he firmly insisted that such schools were within the spirit of the Confessions. Parents who did not send their children to such schools where they existed were therefore subject to church discipline.[8]

Another deduction set forth in Sihler's series, one which is of special interest in our day and which will be referred to later, was the thesis that any church body which permitted pastors to accept terminal calls was guilty of a practice that was divisive of church fellowship. According to the conference it was a serious sin both to issue a terminal call and for pastors to accept such calls.[9]

Some Causes for Change

What were some of the conditions which brought about changes in doctrine in the Missouri Synod? At the risk of oversimplifying, a few causes may be listed together with one or more illustrations for the changes involved. In giving illustrations we are not unmindful that in practically every instance the change may have been brought about by a pattern of causes. There may therefore be disagreement as to the actual cause behind the change. There cannot be disagreement, however, over the fact that there was a change.

Reaction to Conflict

One of the major causes of change was the introduction of new emphases called forth by new circumstances. This may be seen in Missouri's view of the doctrine of the church. The Synod was born out of conflict. Its leaders left Europe because of the Prussian Union and its disastrous effect. But when they came to the United States, they were faced with a similar spirit of unionism among neighboring Protestants and among large segments of the Lutheran Church which had imbibed the spirit of a hybrid "American Lutheranism." As a consequence, Missouri's emphasis on the doctrine of the church was highly individualistic in the midst of a life-and-death struggle for purity of doctrine. As time went on, it looked at the other Lutherans in America in only one dimension, namely in terms of doctrinal purity. Consequently the stress was placed on the errors they harbored. With the exception of stray remarks, little was said of the common faith which all Christians, and more particularly Lutherans, possessed in their fellowship with one another. The New Testament emphasis on the body of Christ, the oneness of all Christians, received scant attention. What was true of other Lutherans was even more true of Protestants and Roman Catholics. Even the term "brother" was reserved only for Missourians and later for members of the Synodical Conference. Until recently it was a real *faux pas* to speak of a member of the Iowa or the Ohio Synod and later of the American Lutheran Church as a brother. If we today smile patronizingly at the Roman Catholic Church, which now refers to other Christians as "separated brethren," we should not forget that Missourians would not have gone even that far with "separated Lutherans" less than 35 years ago. This accounts for the fact that even now with many Missourians the mildest form of ecumenism leaves them with an uncom-

[8] *Verhandlungen,* 6th convention, 1877, 8—23.

[9] *Verhandlungen,* 5th convention, 1876, pp. 25—44.

fortable feeling even though there has been a much greater New Testament emphasis on the reality of fellowship which Lutherans have, not only with one another but with all Christians.[10]

[10] For this broader and less individualistic concept of the church see F. E. Mayer, "The New Testament Concept of Fellowship," *Concordia Theological Monthly,* XXIII (Sept. 1952), pp. 632—44; Richard R. Caemmerer, *Christ Builds His Church* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1963); Richard R. Caemmerer and Erwin L. Lueker, *Church and Ministry in Transition* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1964); "Mission Affirmations," Res. 1-01 A-F (*Proceedings,* 1965), pp. 79—81. The doctrine of the church was modified considerably over the years. In his book, *Kirche und Amt* [Erlangen, 1852], pp. 70—72, (trans. in *Walther and the Church,* ed. Th. Engelder [St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1938], pp. 62—63), Walther proposed to furnish Scripture evidence for the Biblical use of the term "church" for situations in which also unbelievers and hypocrites are part of its outward form. This was later developed differently by Francis Pieper, who spoke of the local church as the *una sancta* there (*Christliche Dogmatik,* III, 483—484, English trans. 419—420). Pieper's one quotation from Walther in reference to this is from *Rechte Gestalt* (St. Louis: August Wiebusch u. Sohn, 1863), p. 1, where he contends that in the local congregation the church is simply the congregation of believers (III, 484). In the same footnote in which he quotes Walther, Pieper interprets the Augsburg Confession, VIII, to be affirming that hypocrites are not a component of the church, but only organs of it to the extent that they administer the Word and the Sacraments. In III, 485, Pieper quotes Matt. 18:17, not as an illustration of hypocrites being part of the church, but as a demand that it is the entire church's duty to exercise discipline upon its members. The chief contrast between Pieper and Walther is the former's development of the concept of the church "in the proper sense of the term" as being the local congregation; to that end Pieper takes seriously, not only the word *ekklesia* but also the term *hagioi* (e. g., 1 Cor. 1:2; Eph. 1:1). A similar change is noted in reference to "church" and "kingdom of God." Walther equated the kingdom of God with "the church in the proper sense" (*Kirche und Amt,* p. 72; English trans., pp. 62—63).

Socioeconomic Causes

Engagement

A change in doctrine or doctrinal practice may be caused by a change in the social life in which the church finds itself. Thus, for instance, in the culture in which the antecedents of the Missouri Synod found themselves, engagement for marriage was a highly structured practice and, in many instances, a legal step toward marriage or an essential part of the total marriage practice. Under such circumstances it was natural for the Missouri Synod to regard engagement as tantamount to marriage. As late as 1945 John H. C. Fritz set forth the traditional view when he stated in his *Pastoral Theology:*

> *The Binding Force of an Engagement.* — A pastor is not permitted to marry such as are already engaged to another party. — When two persons competent to marry have, with the consent of their parents, of their own free will and unconditionally, promised to marry each other, they are rightfully betrothed, or engaged, and before God and the Church are therefore husband and wife, Gen. 2:21-24; 29:21; Matt. 1:18-20. That engagement is equivalent to marriage is also learned from the fact that fornication with an epoused woman was punished even as fornication with a neighbor's wife was punished, Deut. 22:23-24; cf. vv. 22, 28-29.[11]

This view is reflected in the present synodical catechism under Questions 176 and 186. It differs somewhat from F. E. Mayer, "The Kingdom of God According to the New Testament" (*Proceedings* of the Texas District, 1942, p. 16), where he states that the kingdom of God in the New Testament "denotes primarily the authority and power to rule, the actual exercise of royal power, the performance of a king." See also Martin Franzmann, *Follow Me* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1961), p. 16.

[11] (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1945), pp. 168—169.

However, in the 20th-century American culture, engagement was not necessarily a legal or a social step toward marriage. Synod's doctrinal practice therefore no longer served its original intent. In the new setting it became necessary to restudy the doctrine of marriage on the basis of Scripture. Even at the time Fritz set down the traditional practice of the Synod, changes were already apparent in the practices of parishes. Disciplinary action for broken engagements was less prevalent and rarely treated as adultery. The change was noted in a faculty opinion rendered by Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, when on May 24, 1949, it adopted the following statement in response to a request from the field: "Our considered opinion is that this question [whether engagement is tantamount to marriage] must be answered in the negative." According to the opinion there was no indication in Scripture that God ordained betrothal or engagement, and that it was therefore of human origin. "Since the Church must not bind upon the consciences of her people that which the Lord does not Himself expressly demand, it is our opinion that betrothal, or engagement, must not be regarded as tantamount to marriage."

When the seminary's opinion was protested on doctrinal and Biblical grounds at the Milwaukee convention in 1950, the Synod discreetly answered the objection by pointing to the synodical catechism (question 61) and went no further than to say, "Marriage was instituted by God and is entered into by rightful betrothal, or engagement" (*Proceedings,* p. 659). The matter was further referred to both seminary faculties, which (on March 12, 1953) gave an explanation in a somewhat more cautious way than the original St. Louis opinion. It stated: "The breaking of this promise [engagement] was not the same as adultery, but rather a violation of the law of love and of the will of God regarding the sanctity of marriage." [12]

Interest

In the earlier history of the Missouri Synod a change had taken place in reference to taking interest or usury, as it was normally called. It is well known that Walther was very sharp in condemning the taking of interest. This became apparent, particularly in the mid 1860s. Because it had become a disturbing issue in Trinity Congregation in St. Louis in 1864, where Walther was head pastor, and continued to be so with little abatement for a long time thereafter, Walther wrote an essay entitled "Die Wucherfrage." In it he classified usury with such sins as theft, robbery, adultery, and idolatry, stating that "God Himself here [Ezekiel 18] denies eternal salvation to him who practices usury!" [13] That Walther was thinking not only of gross abuse in taking interest is seen in the statement, "Whether you understand this or not, the fact remains that whoever charges interest is a usurer, and usury is a damnable sin" (ibid, p. 10). That this was not a private opinion of Walther and his immediate colleagues may further be seen by the fact that his views

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[12] For other views differing with the fathers, see Paul G. Hansen, Oscar E. Feucht, Fred Kramer, and Erwin L. Lueker, *Engagement and Marriage* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959).

[13] (St. Louis: August Wiebusch u. Sohn, 1869), p. 32.

were accepted by the Synod as noted in the *Proceedings* of 1869.[14]

This viewpoint in reference to interest, so vehemently defended by the Synod, is in strong contrast to the present-day practice in which the Synod has authorized the pension fund and the recently established retirement and welfare plans, all based on the principle of interest. The failure to size up a changing situation, especially to a new socioeconomic problem, caused the Synod to come up with a pronouncement only to find it necessary publicly to change its view, or by common consent quietly to readjust its doctrinal views in the matter of paying or taking interest.

Life Insurance

Two other instances may be cited to illustrate doctrinal shifts in the Missouri Synod due to social or economic changes. When life insurance became a part of modern business practice, pastors in the Missouri Synod were strongly opposed to it. Three arguments were commonly heard against the purchase of life insurance. "In the first place," it was argued, "life insurance turned death, the Biblical wages of sin, into a matter for profitable speculation. In the second place, the business was founded wholly on selfish principles, not on genuine charity, for it advocated doing good only for the healthy rather than those most in need of aid. In the third place, life insurance was based on usurious practices." [15]

It has sometimes been said that the chief objection of the Synod to life insurance was prompted by the abuses currently found in the insurance business and that after the necessary reforms had taken place, the Synod no longer found life insurance to be wrong. This observation, however, is not borne out by the facts, for while abuses were sometimes scored, life insurance was decried because it was regarded as essentially contrary to Biblical principles.

In the matter of life insurance, Walther again was the chief critic, though he was ably assisted by other leaders as well.[16]

The unofficial monopoly under control of the leaders of the Synod which prevented anyone from defending life insurance in public print was finally broken by Ludwig Schulze in a conference essay, "Lebensversicherung," which was published at the request of the pastors of the Atlantic District. While the essay did not endorse life insurance, it attempted to show that life insurance in itself was not sinful. The essay was basically a criticism of Bente's article which had recently been issued and took up each of the points made by Bente. "The cupola for Schulze's argument was Bente's own last thesis, in which he had said life insurance could not be made a matter of church discipline. Thus Bente himself, pointed out Schulze, admitted that life insurance was not in itself a sin, otherwise church discipline would necessarily have to be practiced in all instances." [17] James Albers has summed up the situation

[14] Fort Wayne convention, 1869, p. 106. The translations are taken from *Moving Frontiers,* ed. Carl S. Meyer (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1964), pp. 345—47.

[15] *Moving Frontiers,* p. 347.

[16] *Der Lutheraner,* XXII (March 15, 1866), 110—111; XXII (April 1, 1866), 117; XXIII (June 1, 1867), 145—148; F. Bente, *Lehre und Wehre,* LIV (June 1908), 241—47; O. L. Hohenstein, *Lehre und Wehre,* XLV (Sept.—Oct. 1899), 261—270; 299—307.

[17] James Albers, "The Question of Life Insurance in The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod," p. 19, a seminar paper, Feb. 1965, citing Schulze's essay (n. p., n. d.), pp. 34—45.

saying, "With theological foundation established for the toleration of insurance, it was probably only a matter of time before antipathy was turned to toleration, and toleration to approval, though not necessarily blanket recommendation." [18]

As in the case of some of the other changes which have taken place in the doctrinal practices of the Missouri Synod, no mention is made in the authorized histories of the fact that life insurance was ever an issue in the Synod.[19]

Military Chaplains

Similarly, a decided change in a doctrinal practice is evidenced in the Synod's pronouncements concerning military chaplaincies. During World War I the Synod had no military chaplains, but attempted to serve the men in the armed forces through camp pastors, though some had hoped the Synod would work jointly with other Lutherans. Of such an attempt Theodore Graebner said:

> In 1918 Rev. Eissfeldt was sent East by Dr. Pfotenhauer, as his representative of Eastern Lutherans in connection with the work in the *Army* camps. An arrangement was proposed and was accepted by Pastor Eissfeldt, which in its most essential features was the arrangement which we have had since 1941 with the National Lutheran Council. When this agreement was reported to the president, he drew a line through it and announced a stand of absolute isolationism as the only Christian one for the Missouri Synod to take.[20]

It was about this time, too, Theodore Graebner writes, that Prof. E. Pardieck of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, "denounced chaplaincies with exactly the same arguments now employed by the Wisconsin Synod. We went ahead in World War II and called chaplains. We never admitted that in World War I our position had been a mistaken one." [21]

At the Cleveland convention of 1935 the Synod instructed the president to investigate thoroughly "the question of calling men into the service of chaplaincies in the Army and Navy and, if this could be done without violating Scriptural principles, to appoint also an Army and Navy Commission for Chaplains." [22] A study was made and the committee was impressed by the fact that "in offering our men for the chaplaincy there is no departure from the accepted Scriptural position of our Synod on the separation of State and Church." (Ibid., p. 335)

Change in Historic Judgment

Changes have taken place in the Missouri Synod also due to what may be called

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18 Ibid., p. 19. Much of the material in this section is based on Mr. Albers' seminar paper. Mr. Albers notes that, "Pockets of opposition remained well after 1927, but one may legitimately assume that 1908 to 1927 marked the turning of the tide," p. 20.

19 *Denkstein,* ed. G. Mezger (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1922); *Ebenezer,* ed. W. H. T. Dau (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1922); Walter A. Baepler, *A Century of Grace: A History of the Missouri Synod, 1847—1947* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1947). Even Paul W. Spaude's, *The Lutheran Church under American Influence* (Burlington, Iowa: The Lutheran Literary Board, 1943) makes no mention of the life insurance issue and its effect on the Lutheran church in America. Neither is it treated in the *Lutheran Cyclopedia,* ed. Erwin L. Lueker (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1954).

20 "For a Penitent Jubilee," a paper read before the New York Pastoral Conference (Missouri Synod), May 21, 1946, p. 8.

21 *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly,* XXXVIII (July 1965), 92.

22 Walter A. Baepler, *A Century of Grace,* p. 334.

an error of judgment or a deep-seated prejudice which failed to recognize that an identification made in history cannot be placed on the same level as a clear enunciation from the Holy Scriptures. This may be seen in the Synod's stand on the identification of the Antichrist. In addition to the statement of the Smalcald Articles (Part II, IV, 10), which identifies the pope as "the real Antichrist," and Article 43 of the *Brief Statement,* the literature of the Missouri Synod abounds with many references identifying the papacy as the Antichrist.[23]

In 1951 and 1956 the President's Advisory Committee on Doctrine and Practice reported on the teaching concerning the Antichrist. The occasion for the report was an investigation of Dr. Arndt's essay which had treated this question. The committee reported

> Scripture does not teach that the Pope is the Antichrist. It teaches that there will be an Antichrist (prophecy). We identify the Antichrist as the Papacy. This is an historical judgment based on Scripture. The early Christians could not have identified the Antichrist as we do. If it were clearly expressed teaching of Scripture, they must have been able to do so. Therefore, the quotation from Lehre und Wehre "goes too far." [24]

The committee's report further stated, "The conflict arises in holding that this identifying is a clearly expressed doctrine of Scripture, whereas it is not." (Ibid., p. 15)

The report of the advisory committee together with an explanation issued in May 1956 was approved by the Synod in convention at St. Paul.[25]

Other Changes

Holy Ministry

While the reasons suggested for some of the changes may be characterized as an oversimplification of the causes, it must again be emphasized, the changes themselves cannot be questioned. Without attempting to describe the causes, it may be of interest to note a few of the many other changes which have occurred during the history of the Synod. The Synod has experienced a cluster of changes about the doctrine of the holy ministry. For instance, Walther believed that public prayer was part of the public ministry and therefore only a pastor could open and close a congregational meeting with prayer. "In the event of his [the pastor's] absence someone shall be appointed, either a teacher or an elder, to read a prayer selected for such an occasion." [26] Before August 1842 Walther, though pastor, was not permitted to

[23] E. g., William Dallmann, "The Pope, the Anti-Christ," *The Lutheran Witness,* XXVII (Oct. 28, 1908), 172; Western District *Proceedings,* 1869, p. 37: "If we would not hold that the Pope is the very Antichrist, we would thereby deny a doctrine clearly set forth in Scripture"; and Francis Pieper, *Dogmatik,* III, 532; English translation, 467.

[24] Report of Aug. 15, 1951, p. 14. The reference to *Lehre und Wehre* is from an article by Georg Stoeckhardt, L (Nov. 1904), 492, "We confidently assert that it is a matter of accepting in faith or rejecting a clearly expressed doctrine of Scripture."

[25] *Proceedings,* 1956, p. 525. A "Statement on the Antichrist" was adopted by the Joint Committee of the Synodical Conference, Oct. 15, 1958, and submitted to the Synod in 1959 *(Reports and Memorials for the San Francisco Convention),* pp. 486—491. The statement reflected the more traditional viewpoint and was not acted upon since the Synodical Conference had no opportunity to consider it *(Proceedings,* San Francisco convention, 1959) pp. 189—90. No subsequent consideration has been given to it by the Synod.

[26] *Americanisch-Lutherische Pastoraltheologie* (St. Louis: Druckerei der Synode, 1872), p. 375.

attend the voters' meetings of Trinity, St. Louis. He therefore followed his own principle at the time by preparing the opening prayer in advance, which was then read by an elder.[27] Walther's view of the ministry in this respect was generally accepted by the Synod. Fritz was in full agreement with this concept of the ministry, "Since praying in public is teaching in public, only such should publicly offer *ex corde* prayers as have been called publicly to teach" (*Pastoral Theology,* p. 316). This aspect of the doctrine of the ministry is no longer held. Today pastors and congregations frequently encourage laymen to open meetings with prayer and on occasion even invite them to lead a prayer in a public service.

Reference has already been made to Sihler's conclusion that the issuance of a terminal call was a sinful practice and divisive of church fellowship, a view which the Synodical Conference officially accepted. Sihler's view was not unusual. It was enunciated by Walther in his *Pastoraltheologie* (p. 41) and reiterated by John H. C. Fritz in his *Pastoral Theology.* (P. 39)

The practice of issuing a call with a terminal date, once regarded as divisive of church fellowship, has been revised considerably in the Missouri Synod. The question came to the fore at the time when the Synod at its 1944 convention adopted a policy regarding the retirement of synodically called professors at the age of 70.[28] In setting a retirement date the Synod obviously made every call a terminal one. The action of the Synod was challenged in 1950 by the faculty of Concordia College, St. Paul, as a violation of the doctrine of the call,[29] citing Fritz's *Pastoral Theology* (p. 40) and Walther's *Brosamen.*[30] At this convention the Fort Wayne faculty voiced a similar complaint and in part based its concern as being "an impairment of the validity of the call." [31] However, the Synod refused to reverse itself in spite of the valid authority which both faculties cited. The Synod categorically rejected the charge that its new policy was a violation of the doctrine of the call.[32]

Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, has been extending calls with a terminal date for more than a dozen years. The synodical board of assignments now extends calls, limited in tenure, in accordance with a directive adopted by the 1962 Cleveland convention.[33] In fact candidates who receive such terminal calls to full-time service in the church may now be ordained. (*Handbook* 4.15)[34]

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27 August R. Suelflow, "Significant Contributions of Walther to Lutheranism in America," *Proceedings* of the Montana District, 1961, p. 33.

28 *Proceedings,* Saginaw convention, 1944, p. 112.

29 *Proceedings,* Milwaukee convention, 1950, pp. 330—31.

30 *Lutherische Brosamen* (St. Louis: M. C. Barthels, 1876), p. 350.

31 *Proceedings,* Milwaukee convention, 1950, pp. 331—34.

32 *Proceedings,* Milwaukee convention, 1950, p. 334; cf. also *Proceedings,* Chicago convention, 1947, p. 260.

33 *Proceedings,* Cleveland convention, 1962, p. 131. *Handbook* 4.15.

34 Other changes connected with the doctrine of the ministry could be cited (e. g., women as teachers; the establishment of the additional synodical offices, which was regarded as an infringement on the pastorate; the role of the laity; the status of parish school teachers; and the single form of the ministry, namely, the parish pastorate). Cf. also Richard R. Caemmerer and Erwin L. Lueker, *Church and Ministry in Transition,* especially pp. 60—62; Erwin L. Lueker, "Church and Ministry in the Thought and Policies of Lutherans in America" (St. Louis: n. p. [1965]), an essay prepared for the Commission

Sex and Marriage

A series of modifications in Missouri Synod's doctrine and practice have been made over the years in reference to sex and marriage. This is true, not only concerning engagement as noted above, but also concerning the marriage of one's brother-in-law or sister-in-law, which once called for drastic church discipline,[35] marriage and divorce,[36] birth control,[37] and dancing.[38]

Prayer Fellowship, a Complete Turnabout

One of the most interesting doctrinal changes within the Missouri Synod is seen in its present stand on church fellowship, especially as it is enunciated in reference to prayer fellowship. Here the Missouri Synod has made a complete circle. The confusion concerning prayer fellowship presently experienced within the Synod arises from the fact that many of those who oppose recent changes, on the grounds of unionism, especially since 1944, do not go back far enough in the history of the Synod when they appeal to the "fathers" for support.

Prayer Fellowship at Public Meetings

In the early days of the Synod there was little hesitation to pray publicly with other Lutherans who accepted the Lutheran Confessions. Walther and his contemporaries did not regard such practice as unionistic, even though they knew that there were points of difference among the various Lutheran bodies. It is well known that Walther and other "Missourians" participated in worship with other Lutherans at a series of free conferences which had been initiated by Walther. In his invitation to all Lutherans who subscribed to the Augsburg Confession, Walther indicated a readiness to discuss doctrine and to be corrected if he was in error, for he said, we are not among those "who believe that their understanding requires no development or correction. It is rather our constant, serious endeavor to make progress in the recognition of truth and with the help of God to free ourselves more and more from the errors which still cling to us."[39]

These free conferences met in Columbus, Ohio, Oct. 1—7, 1856; Pittsburgh, Pa., Oct. 29—Nov. 4, 1857; Cleveland, Ohio, Aug. 5—11, 1858; Fort Wayne, Ind., July

on Church and Ministry; "Later Developments in the Missouri Synod Doctrine of the Ministry, 1870—1900," a term paper prepared by Karl Wyneken, March 1963.

35 Cf. C. F. W. Walther's *Pastoraltheologie,* pp. 213—15; "Schwagerehe" in *Verhandlungen,* 7th convention of the Synodical Conference, 1878, pp. 5—53; A. L. Graebner, *Theological Quarterly,* VII (April 1903), 86—94; and John H. C. Fritz, *Pastoral Theology,* pp. 163—68, with the document prepared by the St. Louis-Springfield faculties (May 10, 1958) and which was transmitted to President J. W. Behnken, Feb. 25, 1959, in a letter signed by Alfred O. Fuerbringer and C. W. Spiegel, acting president of Concordia Theological Seminary, Springfield. In the faculties' document, the traditional view was rejected.

36 Cf. C. F. W. Walther's *Pastoraltheologie,* pp. 242—61; John H. C. Fritz, *Pastoral Theology,* pp. 180—84; *Sex and the Church,* ed. Oscar E. Feucht (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1961); and Harry G. Coiner, "Divorce and Remarriage," *Concordia Theological Monthly,* XXXIV (Sept. 1963), 541—54.

37 Cf. John H. C. Fritz, *Pastoral Theology,* pp. 176—79, with Alfred M. Rehwinkel, *Planned Parenthood* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959).

38 Cf. *Moving Frontiers,* pp. 350—51; John H. C. Fritz, *Pastoral Theology,* pp. 205—207, with just one of many of the "papers" on the subject and one adopted by the St. Louis Pastoral Conference, Sept. 8, 1958, in the *St. Louis Lutheran,* Sept. 20, 1958.

39 *Der Lutheraner,* XIII (Aug. 26, 1856), 1.

14—20, 1859. All sessions were opened with a hymn, prayer, and the Apostles' Creed, and closed in a similar manner.[40]

Though the relationship between the Buffalo Synod and the Missouri Synod had been tense and often very personal, nevertheless, the colloquy between the representatives of the two synods on Nov. 20 to Dec. 5, 1866, at Buffalo was opened with a hymn, a reading of Scripture, and a prayer from the *Agende* as well as the Lord's Prayer. Present, among others from Missouri, were C. F. W. Walther, H. Schwan, and Wm. Sihler.[41]

A few weeks after the colloquy on Dec. 11—13, 1866, there was a convention of Evangelical Lutheran synods at Reading, Pa. Representatives came from 15 different synods. The Rev. J. A. F. W. Mueller was present to represent the Missouri Synod. Walther and Sihler had also been appointed delegates, but could not be in attendance, since they were at the Buffalo colloquy. The Reading meeting had been called for the purpose of considering the organization of a council of Lutheran synods. The meeting was opened with a sermon by Prof. M. Loy (Ohio Synod).[42] Pastor Mueller presented an essay. He served also on a committee to review which of the essays were to be placed on the agenda for discussion.[43] Because of the general harmony that prevailed at this initial meeting the convention closed with "Now Thank We All Our God." (Ibid., p. 145)

The following year an invitation was issued by the Iowa Synod for a colloquy with Missouri, which subsequently was held at Milwaukee on Nov. 13—19, 1867. Walther was personally very reluctant to meet with the representatives of Iowa. In a letter to Pastor F. Lochner he said of its leaders, "They are dishonest, hypocritical, untrustworthy, and basically do not desire a unity of doctrine. They have apparently proposed a colloquy in order to give the appearance of being lovers of peace." Pastor O. Fuerbringer had been appointed delegate, but refused to go. His alternate, Pastor A. Huegli, managed to have an excuse.[44]

In spite of the strained relations, the colloquy was opened with a brief service conducted by Pastor Lochner. So were also the subsequent sessions. Selections of the 119th Psalm from the *Altenburger Bibel* were read at the opening devotions.[45]

A conference unique in the history of the Missouri Synod was held in Gravelton, Mo., Aug. 16—20, 1872. It involved discussions almost entirely in English and led eventually to the formation of the English

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[40] For an extensive study of these conferences, see Erwin L. Lueker, "Walther and the Free Lutheran Conferences of 1856—1859," *Concordia Theological Monthly,* XV (Aug. 1944), 529—63 and John H. Tietjen, *Which Way to Lutheran Unity?* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1966), pp. 59—62.

[41] *Der Lutheraner,* XXIII (Dec. 15, 1866), 58.

[42] *Lehre und Wehre,* XIII (Jan. 1867), 15 to 20.

[43] S. E. Ochsenford, *Documentary History of the General Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in North America* (Philadelphia: General Council Publication House, 1912), p. 135.

[44] Letter dated St. Louis, Oct. 15, 1867. *Briefe von C. F. W. Walther,* ed. L. Fuerbringer, II (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1916), 112.

[45] J. P. Beyer, *Stenographisch Aufgezeichnetes Colloquium der Vertreter der Synode von Illinois* [*sic* for Iowa] *und der von Missouri, Ohio u. a. St., gehalten vom 13—19. Nov. in Milwaukee, Wis.* (Chicago: Office of the Chicago Union, 1868), p. 1.

Conference. This conference developed into the English Missouri Synod, the forerunner of the present English District of The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod. The 1872 conference brought together pastors from the Tennessee, Holston, Missouri, and Norwegian synods for the purpose of discussing doctrine. The conference began with a service in English.[46] On Sunday, Walther preached in German and Ch. S. Kleppisch of Belleville, Ill., in English. Besides these two representatives of the Missouri Synod, Andrew Rader, of the Holston Synod, preached in English that evening. (Ibid., p. 183)

Some time after 1872 a controversy on the doctrine of election broke out in the Synodical Conference due to a difference between Prof. Gottfried Fritschel of the Iowa Synod and C. F. W. Walther. In defending his position in an essay in 1877 to the Western District of the Missouri Synod, the controversy spilled over to the Norwegian Synod due to the position taken by Prof. Friedrich A. Schmidt. Several of the Ohio Synod leaders came to the defense of Schmidt, and soon a bitter controversy broke out within the Synodical Conference. In a vain hope of preserving doctrinal unity within the Synodical Conference, a colloquy of faculty representatives was held at Milwaukee on Jan. 5—10, 1881. The faculties of the Lutheran seminaries at Springfield, St. Louis, Columbus (Ohio), Madison (Wisconsin), and Milwaukee were present, as well as the synodical district presidents of the synods within the Synodical Conference. Each of the 10 sessions, except the last, was opened with a brief devotion and the Lord's Prayer. By the time the last session arrived, matters had become so tense and bitter that a Missouri pastor made the motion that the meeting close simply with a silent prayer.[47] This was the first time that some form of public worship had been declined in the history of these participating synods.

Prayer Fellowship by Individuals

Missourians did not limit their fellowship with other Lutherans to colloquies or public meetings. There are frequent references to pastors participating in some form of worship with Lutherans not affiliated with the Missouri Synod or the Synodical Conference. During the short time that Prof. Ad. Fr. Theo. Biewend was teaching at the seminary in Fort Wayne (1849—50), he preached every two weeks in an English Lutheran congregation in Fort Wayne which was affiliated either with the Ohio Synod or the General Synod. When he left Fort Wayne to accept a call to the St. Louis seminary, he delivered a farewell sermon to this congregation.[48] Soon after this Dr. F. Sihler and Pastor Heid of the Missouri Synod attended a meeting of the Western District of the Ohio Synod in New Bremen, Ohio, May 24—29, 1850.[49]

Some time during the winter of 1855 to 56, while on the way to Rainham, Ont.,

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[46] *Der Lutheraner,* XXVIII (Sept. 1, 1872), 180.

[47] *Altes und Neues, II* (Jan. 1881), 26—67, cf. a review of the meeting in *Der Lutheraner,* XXXVII (Jan. 15, 1881), 9—10; John Tietjen, *Which Way to Lutheran Unity?* pp. 73—75, and *Moving Frontiers,* pp. 267—78.

[48] H. C. Wyneken, *Adolph Fr. Theo. Biewend* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1896), p. 62.

[49] P. A. Peter and William Schmidt, *Geschichte der Allgemeinen Evang.-Lutherischen Synode von Ohio und anderen Staaten* (Columbus, Ohio: Verlagshandlung der Synode, 1900), p. 119.

Walther stopped off at Buffalo, N.Y. There he attended services conducted by Pres. J. A. A. Grabau of the Buffalo Synod, with whom he had some very caustic controversies. During the public confession and absolution, Walther kneeled with the other worshipers to receive the absolution even though Grabau, having been notified of his presence, referred in his sermon to the enemies of Buffalo as rabble protectors. While the absolution was being spoken, Walther later said he thought, "Now you see, my old Grabau, you must now give me absolution for my sins even though you regard me a rabble protector."[50] Old-timers have often repeated this story with glee, little realizing what it implied of Walther's own position concerning prayer fellowship.

Walther's strong interest in establishing work among the English-speaking Lutherans led him to cooperate with Pastor Sidney L. Harkey, a member of the West Pennsylvania Synod (General Synod), who attempted to begin mission work in St. Louis some time prior to 1866, perhaps late in the 50s, during the time Harkey served congregations in Illinois. Walther arranged to have him preach in St. Louis. Of this occasion Harkey wrote,

> He [Walther] rented the Hall of the Sanitary Commission for the purpose and paid for it, published the notice in all the German churches of the Synod in St. Louis, took his own carriage and conducted me to some of the people privately who were supposed to be favorable to the enterprise, and finally accompanied me to the hall, taking me in his own private conveyance for the meeting. He went so far as to appoint a meeting on Monday night in one of their local schoolhouses for the purpose of definite action in the organization of an English Church.[51]

This interest in developing the English work as much as possible, even among other synods, may be seen in the action which took place during the synodical convention at Fort Wayne in 1857. On the two Sundays during the meeting, three of the pastors preached at the English Lutheran Church of the city, H. C. Schwan, C. J. A. Strasen, and J. P. Beyer.[52] This occurred again in 1863 when the Synod again convened in Fort Wayne. This time Pastor P. Eirich and Professor Schmidt preached in the English church of Fort Wayne on the 21st Sunday after Trinity.[53]

A somewhat unusual incident took place in Fort Wayne in 1866, when at a meeting of the General Synod it became apparent that the delegates from the Pennsylvania Ministerium planned to withdraw from the General Synod. Perhaps as an assurance of his sympathy toward their cause, Pastor Wm. Sihler of St. Paul Lutheran Church communed the delegates of the Ministerium in his congregation.[54]

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[50] Martin Günther, *Dr. C. F. W. Walther: Lebensbild* (St. Louis: Lutherischer Concordia-Verlag, 1890), p. 97.

[51] S. L. Harkey, "Personal Recollections of C. F. W. Walther," *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly,* XVII (Oct. 1944), 92—93, taken from *The Lutheran Observer,* cf. Martin S. Sommer, "Die Englische Arbeit in unserer Synode," in *Denkstein,* p. 185.

[52] *Proceedings,* Fort Wayne convention, 1857, p. 69; 2d ed., p. 370. The English congregations in Fort Wayne were affiliated either with the Ohio Synod or the General Synod.

[53] *Proceedings,* Fort Wayne convention, 1863, p. 103.

[54] Three of the delegates were from the faculty of the Lutheran Theological Seminary (Mount Airy) of Philadelphia, Profs. Charles Porterfield Krauth, Charles W. Schaeffer, and G. F. Krotel. The date was May 20, 1866. "Minutes of the Faculty," I, 118—19, cited by Theodore G. Tappert, "Intercommunion in

Because the Missouri Synod was interested in the Tennessee Synod, Pastors Theodore Brohm and A. Hoyer were appointed by the Synod to bring fraternal greetings to them. Due to distance they did not attend the 1853 meeting, but in a letter to the Tennessee Synod stated that they were authorized to invite delegates to attend the Synod of 1854, which would be held at St. Louis.[55] Pastor Brohm was present at the 1854 meeting of the Tennessee Synod and was received as a corresponding member. From the minutes it is apparent that the Tennessee Synod was not very well acquainted with Missouri and therefore received Pastor Brohm's assurance of confessionalism with gratitude.[56]

The Election Controversy Brings a Change

The attitude toward prayer fellowship with other Lutherans changed radically with the election controversy after the Milwaukee meeting. Charges and countercharges were freely made, each one adding to the hostility. The intense feeling within the Missouri Synod may be seen in the *Proceedings* of the synodical convention at Fort Wayne in 1881, soon after the Milwaukee meeting. Here the position of the Synod hardened against all those who disagreed with Missouri in reference to the doctrine of election. At the convention it was stated,

> We, too, are ready to tell anyone openly and honestly who professes another doctrine among us, in spite of the fact that he appeals to the Confessions of the Lutheran Church, "We do not belong to one another and we must walk our separate ways." With that we are not saying that we declare our opponents to be heretics, nor do we condemn them. We do not even say that concerning the Evangelicals and the

1866," *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly,* XL (April 1967), 42. The incident, without an identification of the delegates, is told in Henry Eyster Jacobs, *The History of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the United States* (New York: The Christian Literature Company, 1893), p. 471. [Hermann Harms,] "Prayer Fellowship or Joint Prayer," *A Fraternal Endeavor* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House [1954]), p. 46, says, "In 1874 Dr. Walther met with the General Council at Jamestown, New York; the meeting was opened with prayer." The authority for this statement is not given. While this would be in accord with Walther's action, no record has been found that he was present at this particular meeting.

[55] Socrates Henkel, *History of the Evangelical Lutheran Tennessee Synod* (New Market, Va.: Henkel & Co., 1890), pp. 138—39.

[56] *Minutes of the 34th Annual Meeting,* 1854, pp. 512—13. Interestingly enough, this Synod did not hesitate five years later to accept a German Reformed pastor (*Minutes of the 38th Annual Meeting,* Feb. 1859), p. 7, and a Presbyterian pastor as advisory delegates (*Minutes of the 39th Annual Meeting,* Sept. 1859), p. 9. G. Schaller was appointed a Missouri delegate to the Tennessee Synod in 1857 (*Proceedings,* Fort Wayne convention, 1857), p. 68. The previous year the Tennessee Synod declined to make any of Missouri's suggested changes in the administration of the Lord's Supper, stating that the custom of breaking the bread was in accord with Scripture and the Confessions (*Minutes of the 36th Annual Meeting),* p. 23. Somewhat atypical may have been the occasion when the Evangelical pastor G. Wall of St. Louis preached the funeral sermon at the grave of Otto Hermann Walther, first pastor of the Saxons in St. Louis, Jan. 24, 1841. Candidate J. Buenger also delivered a funeral address at the grave. The relationship between Evangelicals and the Saxon Lutherans was not without its suspicions on both sides. The funeral address of Wall is still extant in the archives of Eden Seminary, Webster Groves, Mo. A photocopy is found opposite p. 106 in Paul E. Schneider, *The German Church on the American Frontier* (St. Louis: Eden Publishing House, 1939). In connection with a brief biography of Otto Hermann Walther by his grandson Paul Walther, W. G. Polack in an editorial footnote makes reference to Wall's sermon, *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly,* XVIII (Jan. 1946), 118.

Reformed. With this we are merely saying, "We can no longer walk together. We can therefore no longer pray with one another." Because in that case, you would be praying for our change of heart and mind *{Bekehrung}*[57] and we for yours. Such praying together is an abomination before God. If you cannot in good conscience believe as we believe, it is not within our power to bring about a change — for the gift of spiritual insight *{Schenkung des Glaubens}*[58] is not within the power of man — but what we can, will, and must do, that we say to you, "Our ways henceforth go in different directions."[59]

Later in the convention the following instructions were adopted by the Synod for its elected delegates to the coming meeting of the Synodical Conference, at which time it was expected that members of the Ohio Synod and others who had had a hand in the controversy against Missouri would be present. The resolution reflects the intense feeling at the time.

One, you are not to sit together and deliberate about church affairs with such as have publicly decried us as Calvinists. Two, you recognize no synod as a member of the Synodical Conference which as a synod has accused us of Calvinism.[60]

Lines Harden

In view of the bitterness and name-calling on both sides, heightened by the clashes of personalities, it is small wonder that the Missouri Synod did not continue to practice prayer fellowship, especially with the members of the Ohio Synod and those who were sympathetic to their cause. The wounds of controversy were further kept open as the split within the Synodical Conference was felt not only across synodical lines, but within congregations and families. Both sides tended to harden their position so that prayer fellowship was hardly proper under the circumstances. Unfortunately, the refusal to pray with other Lutherans now became the norm, and a principle began to be formulated in defense of the position.

This hardening became evident when the matter of prayer fellowship came to the fore again at the occasion of a series of intersynodical conferences held between 1902 and 1906. While the Missouri Synod was not officially involved in some of these conferences, a number of them began to be initiated by pastors in Wisconsin. The first of these was held at Beloit, May 1902. The following year a larger number met at Watertown, Wis. A third was held at Milwaukee in September 1903. Some 500 persons registered, though apparently many more were in attendance. Over two thirds came from the Synodical Conference, 64 from Ohio, 16 from Iowa, and 13 from the Norwegian Synod.[61]

Apparently all these conferences were conducted without the benefit of public worship of any kind. It was at the fourth conference, held in Detroit, April 6—8, 1904, that the question of public worship was raised. The conference of more than 300 registrants had attracted 148 from the Synodical Conference, 97 from Ohio, 23

[57] It is evident from the context that the word is not used in the normal sense of "conversion," but means rather a change in conviction.

[58] The context makes it clear that the original does not mean the "gift of faith."

[59] *Proceedings,* Fort Wayne convention, 1881, pp. 30—31.

[60] Ibid., p. 45; trans. from Walter A. Baepler, *A Century of Grace,* p. 202.

[61] John Tietjen, *Which Way to Lutheran Unity?* p. 104.

from Iowa. Some pastors from the Buffalo Synod, the General Council, and the General Synod were also present. On the last day of the conference a resolution was offered to begin the conference hereafter with prayer. Members of the Synodical Conference objected because, it was argued, every participant would certainly pray privately for himself. Public corporate prayer was a sign and part of church fellowship. Such action would give rise to a false appearance as though all those who were assembled were one in faith and spirit and that the existing doctrinal differences were of no particular importance.[62]

The attitude of the Synodical Conference roused widespread disapproval both in the United States and Europe — so much so that F. Bente wrote a major article in *Lehre und Wehre* entitled, "Why We Cannot Arrange and Conduct Common Prayer Services with the Ohioans and Iowans." [63]

Bente on Prayer Fellowship

Since Bente's article has played such an important part in the recent discussion of prayer fellowship, some attention needs to be given to it at this point. It has since become the main source for all those who charge the Missouri Synod with unionism because it is presently participating in joint prayers with The American Lutheran Church and the Lutheran Church in America. Throughout his article Bente identified church fellowship with prayer fellowship (e.g., pp. 98, 103). With this as his assumption, he used some of the very Bible passages which Walther used against church fellowship with those who had rejected the Lutheran Confessions in whole or in part.[64] In saying this Bente did not want to deny that there were Christians among the Ohioans and Iowans, nor did he want to say that they could be denied the name "Lutheran" or that they were to be identified with the sects (p. 97). Their sin was that they denied a doctrine which was clearly taught in Scripture even though the Missourians had remonstrated with them. In fact, the Iowans and the Ohioans had accused the Missourians of Calvinism and had broken away from Missouri. Thus they could not be described as weak Christians, but as Christians who had denied doctrines clearly set forth. (Pp. 98—99)

Prayer fellowship under such circumstances would make the Missouri Synod delegates guilty of bearing false witness which would be contrary to the Eighth Commandment. In fact, Missouri would be guilty of giving offense and all the Bible passages which pertain to the giving of offense would then apply to the Missouri Synod should they participate in prayer fellowship with those not in doctrinal agreement with them. (Pp. 104—106)

One of the major arguments which Bente offered and which had already been heard at the synodical convention in 1881 was that in a joint prayer the Ohioans and the Missourians would not actually be coming before the Throne of Grace with a common prayer since they would, in fact, be praying against one another. "Not even the Lord's Prayer can be prayed by the Ohioans and the Missourians in one and the same sense. The Missourians attach an entirely different thought and desire to the

[62] *Lehre und Wehre,* L (April, 1904), 176, reported by G. St.

[63] LI (Feb.—March 1905), 49—53; 97—115.

[64] Cf. Bente, pp. 101—103, with Walther, *Die Evangelisch-Lutherische Kirche die wahre sichtbare Kirche Gottes auf Erden* (St. Louis: Lutherischer Concordia Verlag, 1891), pp. 146 to 147.

first three petitions of the Lord's Prayer than a truly consistent Ohioan would" (p. 109). It was further argued that for the sake of consistency the Missourians would then be required not only to have church and prayer fellowship but have common altar and pulpit fellowship. (Pp. 110—11)

While the essay was directed against Ohio and Iowa, Bente argued that the same fraternal fellowship offered to Ohio and Iowa in prayer and pulpit would logically have to be given to members of the General Council, the General Synod, and the sects as well, to say nothing about the German State Churches and all their members. (P. 111)

That Bente was consistent in his argument may be seen in that he applied the same principle of prayer fellowship to the burial of an Iowa Synod Lutheran who owned a burial plot in a cemetery of a Missouri Synod congregation. No such burial could be permitted, he stated.[65]

As already stated, Bente's essay now became the major proof against any and all prayer fellowship at intersynodical conferences, regardless of the circumstances. It was an officially accepted principle of the Missouri Synod that prayer fellowship presupposed fellowship in faith. Therefore none of the intersynodical meetings held between 1918 and 1923 were opened with prayer. So it continued for more than another decade. Theodore Graebner fairly well summarized the view prevalent during this period: "We hold it to be a self-evident truth, where there is no unity of faith, there ought to be no unity of worship. If the texts of Scripture which forbid unionism (e. g., Rom. 16:17; 1 Tim. 6:3 ff.) do not apply here, they are devoid of meaning." [66] Although Graebner was speaking of joint Lutheran Reformation services, the same argument was generally applied to prayer fellowship, since it was regarded as one element in the triad of altar, pulpit, prayer fellowship.

Return to the Synodical Fathers

A breakthrough came in 1941 during the floor discussion of the union document that was being prepared between the Missouri Synod and the American Lutheran Church. The commissioners of the Missouri Synod Committee on Lutheran Church Union stated they were not yet ready to accept the American Lutheran Church's view wherein they said, "We are still convinced that prayer fellowship is wider than church fellowship." To this the commissioners said, "Generally speaking, prayer fellowship involves church fellowship. There may be cases, however, where the question whether common prayer means fellowship belongs to the field of casuistry." [67] Upon the recommendation of the Committee on Lutheran Church Union, the Synod unanimously adopted the principle that true unity requires both doctrinal unity and agreement in practice and because this has not been achieved, no prayer fellowship has been established between the Missouri Synod and the American Lutheran Church. Therefore no action of this nature was to be taken by any pastor or congregation. (Ibid., p. 303)

Saginaw Resolutions

During the discussion, remarks from the floor seemed to interpret the resolution as

[65] *Lehre und Wehre,* LI (Aug. 1905), 375.

[66] *The Lutheran Witness,* XXXVI (Sept. 18, 1917), 292.

[67] *Proceedings,* Fort Wayne convention, 1941, p. 283.

not applying "to the offering of a prayer when intersynodical conferences would meet." Consequently, when the Synod met in 1944 at Saginaw, a memorial asked for clarification of the so-called 1941 Prayer Fellowship Resolution.[68]

As a result of this memorial and the growing uncertainty whether Lutherans should not pray together at intersynodical meetings expressly called to discuss doctrinal differences, the Synod differentiated now between joint prayer and prayer fellowship.

> Joint prayers at intersynodical conferences, asking God for His guidance and blessing upon the deliberations and discussions of His Word, does not militate against the resolution of the Fort Wayne Convention, provided that such prayer does not imply denial of truth or support of error. (Ibid., pp. 251—52)

As a consequence of this resolution, the Committee on Union and the Commission of the American Lutheran Church hereafter opened their meetings with prayer.[69]

The growing dissatisfaction with Synod's traditional stand became evident when in many areas of the Synod common prayers were held at intersynodical meetings. To cite one case, on Jan. 20, 1944, an inter-Lutheran conference was held for the Greater St. Louis area, at which some 50 persons were present. Pastors of the United Lutheran Church, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, and a Danish Lutheran pastor were present. The meeting was opened by a United Lutheran Church pastor and closed by a member of the Missouri Synod. Pastor Theodore Schroeder of the Missouri Synod read a paper on "Inspiration of the Scriptures." The common table prayer at the noon meal was led by the Danish pastor.[70]

As was to be expected, such a distinction between joint prayers and prayer fellowship brought a storm of protest, which culminated in a number of memorials presented to the Synod at Chicago in 1947. Most of the memorials regarded the distinction as false and continued to equate prayer fellowship with church fellowship. Many of the passages which Bente cited in 1905 began to appear in the protests.[71] However, the Synod would not permit itself to be forced to return to its traditional stand. The Saginaw resolutions were reaffirmed with the comment that they did not militate against the Fort Wayne resolutions, "provided such prayer does not imply the denial of truth and support of error (ibid., p. 517). However, in an effort to bring about unanimity, pastoral conferences were asked to restudy the matter "in order that the issues may be fully clarified and the term 'prayer fellowship' be more accurately defined and tested according to the norm of Holy Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions" (ibid., p. 518). This resulted in a set of "Theses on Fellowship" which were submitted to pastors and conferences for study.[72] The document was received with mixed feelings because it did not offer a tentative answer. (Cf. pp. 17—18, 23)

The next two conventions continued to

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[68] *Proceedings,* Saginaw convention, 1944, pp. 245—46.

[69] *Proceedings,* Cleveland convention, 1962, p. 110.

[70] *The Lutheran,* XXVI (Feb. 16, 1944), 30.

[71] *Proceedings,* Chicago convention, 1947, pp. 511, 514.

[72] Sent out with a covering letter, Feb. 15, 1949, by President J. W. Behnken.

reiterate the Saginaw resolutions in the face of persistent criticism.[73]

Theology of Fellowship

Strong protests against the Synod's stand on joint prayers were also heard from the Wisconsin Synod and the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (Norwegian Synod). Both synods took steps toward breaking fellowship with the Missouri Synod, listing the Synod's stand on joint prayers as one of the reasons.[74] As a result of the pressure from the Synodical Conference, the Synod at St. Paul asked its two theological seminaries to prepare an extensive study on the theology of fellowship.[75]

The two faculties now set out on the ambitious task of trying to study the entire question afresh. They adopted the first section of their study in 1958 and completed the document in 1960.[76]

The Synod at Cleveland, in 1962, was asked to repudiate this study since it went much farther on the question of fellowship than any recent action of the Synod. Instead, the Synod asked its newly organized Commission on Theology and Church Relations to review the document and come to the Synod with recommendations for action.[77]

While the commission was studying the document together with several other doctrinal issues facing the Synod, both the Wisconsin Synod and the Evangelical Lutheran Synod made good their threats and withdrew from the Synodical Conference. In many ways this action cleared the air and permitted the Missouri Synod to study the theology of fellowship unencumbered by the traditions of its former sister synods.

The commission completed its restudy of the seminary faculties' document in time for the next convention. The revised study appeared in three parts, the commission having added a middle section which was historical in nature. Part One remained unchanged. The old Part Two appeared as Part Three with only minor revisions. Since the Synod did not have time to give the necessary attention to the enlarged and revised document, it merely received the "Theology of Fellowship" for study and guidance and recommended it for adoption at the 1967 convention.[78]

As matters now stand, the practice of praying with other Lutherans who acknowledge the Augsburg Confession, once accepted by the Synod during the first three decades of its history, has again come into its own. Concurrent with this return to an earlier practice there are many pastors and laymen in the Synod who have adopted a much broader view of the doctrine of the church. They therefore do not regard praying with other Christians in and of itself a unionistic act. Taking a much more positive view of other Christians, they recog-

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73 *Proceedings,* Milwaukee convention, 1950, p. 659; *Proceedings,* Houston convention, 1953, p. 552. During this time another study document was issued, "Thoughts on Prayer Fellowship and Joint Prayer," which accompanied a letter by President J. W. Behnken, dated Jan. 1, 1951.

74 Richard C. Wolf, *Documents of Lutheran Unity in America* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), documents 169 and 170.

75 *Proceedings,* St. Paul convention, 1956, p. 550.

76 *Four Statements on Fellowship Presented by the Constituent Synods of the Synodical Conference for Study and Discussion* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1960), pp. 15—47.

77 *Proceedings,* Cleveland convention, 1962, pp. 109—11.

78 *Proceedings,* Detroit convention, 1965, p. 98.

nize that prayer may be a witness also of the fellowship which Lutherans have with other Christians and not necessarily a denial of the valid doctrinal differences that do exist.

No Change Midst Changes

There will always be some who deplore change. They fear that something precious may be lost in a new formulation of an old truth or when an old doctrine is given a new direction or emphasis. This fear should not be minimized. Progress and change both have their dark sides. Yet, in obedience to their Lord and Savior, Christians must take the risk under God. It must be remembered that the greatest change which may take place in a church body can occur when there is no change, when old formulas are used in connection with new situations and the Word becomes irrelevant for people in their need.

This brief account of some of the changes which have occurred in the Missouri Synod shows clearly that pastors and people do not wait for the Synod to pass resolutions before changes are accepted and practiced. Long before a doctrine or principle is adopted, it has already been taught and practiced within the Synod. Official acceptance always follows practice, even as form follows function. It is therefore not enough for the Synod to confess that Scripture and the Confessions constitute its *publica doctrina.* Every official decision of a church body must regularly be reviewed to determine whether it is in harmony with this its constitutional norm. In fact, as Pieper pointed out, our *publica doctrina* in practice must in all the Synod's professions be in harmony with the Scriptures and the Symbols.

> A church body is orthodox only if the true doctrine, as we have it in the Augsburg Confession and the other Lutheran Symbols, is actually taught in its pulpits and all its publications and not merely "officially" professed as its faith. Not the "official" doctrine but the actual teaching determines the character of a church body, because Christ enjoins that all things whatsoever He has commanded His disciples should actually be taught and not merely acknowledged in an "official document" as the correct doctrine.[79]

Publica doctrina in the sense of the Synod's profession which it sets forth by resolution and actual practice is not normative. Only the *publica doctrina* is normative which has been constitutionally established.[80]

In spite of all the changes that have taken place within the Missouri Synod, there has, nevertheless, been a wholehearted commitment to the Scriptures *(norma normans)* and the Lutheran Confessions *(publica doctrina).* This is still the hallmark of Missouri. In this commitment and profession there has been no change.

St. Louis, Mo.

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[79] *Christliche Dogmatik,* III, 487; English trans., p. 423.

[80] In this connection the following quotation from Walther is of interest: "The principal means, by which our opponents endeavor to support their doctrine, consists in continually quoting passages from the private writings of the fathers of our Church, published subsequently to the Formula of Concord. But whenever a controversy arises concerning the question of whether a doctrine is *Lutheran,* we must not ask: 'What does this or that *"father"* of the Lutheran Church teach in his private writings?' for he also may have fallen into error; on the contrary we must ask: 'What does the *public* CONFESSION *of the Lutheran Church* teach concerning the controverted point?' for in her confession our Church has recorded for all times, what she believes, teaches, and confesses, for the very reason, that no controversy may arise concerning the question what our Lutheran Church believes . . ." *The Controversy Concerning Predestination,* trans. Aug. Crull (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1881), p. 5.