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WHAT SHOULD HAVE HAPPENED AT SAGINAW IN 1959?

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Senior Church History

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### INTRODUCTION

The subject of this paper centers on the Thirty-fifth Convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States which was held at Michigan Lutheran Seminary, Saginaw, Michigan, on August 5th to the 12th, 1959. To simplify matters this synod's name will be shortened to the Wisconsin Synod as it is called today. The big question that this convention faced was, "Should we break fellowship with the Missouri Synod or not?" This was a tough question that caused problems and divisions in our synod that still do exist today. Did that convention act properly in coming to its decision, or should some other decision have been made?

Before really considering this question I would like to look at two examples. In the first example we have an impenitent man in one of our churches who has been admonished repeatedly. How soon should this man be excommunicated? Does he have to be excommunicated at the first possible voters' meeting, or would it be possible to wait until the next meeting? In the second example let us consider the history of Israel and Judah in the Old Testament. How long did our heavenly Father put up with their sinfulness before He broke off relations with them? When is the proper time to break ties with a church body? Is it really always going to be possible for us to be able to pinpoint an exact time? Scripture does not give us an exact time. Therefore, it is our duty to study the situation and do the best that we can to serve our God and

His kingdom.

## I. QUESTIONS BEFORE THE SYNOD

In dealing with this subject it is necessary for us to look back at the history of the problem that developed between the Wisconsin Synod and the Missouri Synod.

At the time of the Wisconsin Synod's organization, it was not confessionally strong. Missouri, on the other hand, started out stronger. Nelson (1980) says of the Wisconsin Synod:

The constitution for the new synod lacked a confessional paragraph. However, in its provisions for ordination the ministerial candidates were pledged to the confessions: "At the time of his ordination, each candidate shall be pledged to the Augsburg Confession and to the other confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church"(p. 184).

A confessional paragraph in the constitution would have shown better confessionalism in the Wisconsin Synod, but, at least, there was a confessional requirement made of the Synod's ministers before they could be ordained.

The Missouri Synod constitution started this synod off with a strong confessional stand. Nelson (1980) records their confessional paragraph:

Acceptance of Holy Scripture, both the Old and the New Testament, as the written Word of God and as the only rule and norm of faith and life.  
Acceptance of all the symbolical books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church (these are the three Ecumenical Symbols, the Unaltered Augsburg Confession, the Apology, the Smalcald Articles, the Large and Small Catechism of Luther, and the Formula of Concord) as the pure and unadulterated explanation and presentation of the Word of God (p. 180).

It is obvious from this statement that the Missouri Synod did indeed start out with a good foundation.

In July of 1872 the Synodical Conference was formed.

This was able to take place because the Missouri, Ohio, Nor-

wegian, Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Illinois synods found themselves in agreement. All of these synods did not remain in the Conference. Ohio left already in 1881, because of doctrinal reasons. But this Synodical Conference was a good confessional body. The Wisconsin Synod had strengthened her attachments to the confessions. At this time the Missouri Synod was the big synod in the Conference, and, because of that, she became similar to a big brother to the Wisconsin Synod. This point, of itself, will show us why there had been such a close relation between the synods, and why breaking with that big brother synod was not the easiest thing to do.

It is correct to say that the Missouri Synod helped the Wisconsin Synod in her stand for the truths of Scripture. Men in our synod looked up to Missouri because of that fact. Nelson (1980) records:

"Never," wrote a Wisconsin Synod editor about the Missouri Synod, "has the pure doctrine of God's Word been in uninterrupted control of one and the same church body for so long a time." Preservation, repetition, indoctrination of this truth, and its defense against all change was regarded as the church's primary task (p. 377).

In 1932, the Missouri Synod adopted a confession called the Brief Statement of the Doctrinal Position of the Missouri Synod. This was an excellent confession. As long as the synod adhered to this, she would be in good shape. Since the Wisconsin Synod broke with Missouri because of fellowship practises, I would like to quote the Brief Statement's position on church fellowship:

Since God ordained that His Word only, without the admixture of human doctrine, be taught and believed in the Christian Church, 1 Pet. 4,11; John 8,31.32; 1 Tim. 6,3.4, all Christians are required by God to

discriminate between orthodox and heterodox church-bodies, Matt. 7,15, to have church-fellowship only with orthodox church-bodies, and, in case they have strayed into heterodox church-bodies, to leave them, Rom. 16,17. We repudiate unionism, that is, church-fellowship with the adherents of false doctrine, as disobedience to God's command, as causing divisions in the Church, Rom. 16,17; 2 John 9,10, and as involving the constant danger of losing the Word of God entirely, 2 Tim. 2,17-21 (p. 14).

If the Missouri Synod had continued to adhere to this position, Wisconsin would not have had to break with them, at least not because of fellowship problems.

But a change did occur in Missouri. The Wisconsin Synod grew stronger, while Missouri weakened. Nelson (1980) says:

During the thirty years between 1932 and 1962 the Missouri Synod not only changed its name to "the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod" (1947) but its attitude toward other Lutherans. The change in attitude was accompanied by a partial relaxing of Missouri's doctrinal rigidity. The Brief Statement (1932), which had become its standard for measuring doctrinal orthodoxy and which had virtually been given confessional status in 1959, was subjected to increasing criticism by a number of theologians. The synodical convention of 1962, though disciplining one of the "guilty" theologians, recognized that it was unconstitutional to bind pastors and professors to anything but the Scriptures and the Lutheran confessions (p. 528).

The attitude change that hit Missouri was a desire to get closer to other Lutherans, Lutherans that formerly were considered heterodox. Nelson (1980) says:

Meanwhile, the Synodical Conference was experiencing difficulty because of the Missouri Synod's cautious but growing openness to other Lutherans. As noted earlier, World War II brought the Missouri Synod into numerous contacts with the churches of the National Lutheran Council. Though reluctant to enter into official cooperation, which according to Missouri required complete doctrinal agreement, there were several areas in which boards or agencies--not the synod itself--found it expedient to associate with others. Some of these contacts evolved into formal and official synodical relationships, such as Lutheran World Relief, the Lutheran Service Commission, Lutheran Immigration

Service, and Lutheran Church Productions, Inc., the latter being responsible for the highly successful film Martin Luther (pp. 527-528).

Of course, there is nothing wrong with getting together with other church bodies. For that matter, it is something to be strived for--just so long as there is doctrinal unity. After all, unity helps in doing mission work, pastor and teacher training, and other areas. It was not wrong for Missouri to try to find unity with other church bodies. But it is wrong to compromise the truths of Scripture in order to get that unity. In 1935, the United <sup>Lutheran</sup> Church in America (ULCA) and the American Lutheran Church (ALC) extended an invitation to the Missouri Synod to try to establish closer relations. Aaberg (1968) tells us what Missouri resolved concerning that invitation:

That we declare our willingness to confer with other Lutheran bodies on problems of Lutheran union with a view towards effecting true unity on the basis of the Word of God and the Lutheran Confessions;... (p. 136)

As long as this policy is followed, negotiations with other church bodies can be done properly.

The ALC and the Missouri Synod continued meeting, but there were problems to be dealt with. In 1944, the Missouri Synod held their convention at Saginaw. At this meeting there were two resolutions that clearly showed developing problems concerning Wisconsin's relationship to Missouri. The first of these problems concerned Missouri's stand that there is a difference between joint prayer and prayer fellowship. Aaberg states:

However, joint prayer 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 such prayer does not imply denial

of truth or support of error. Local conditions will determine the advisability of such prayer. Above all, the conscience of a brother must not be violated nor offense be given (p. 157).

The resolution of the Fort Wayne Convention warned against forcing the issue to join fellowship with the ALC by establishing any kind of outward fellowship, whether that be prayer, altar, or pulpit fellowship (Aaberg, 1968, p. 157). The Saginaw Convention got around this point by making an improper distinction between joint prayer and prayer fellowship. The second problem was that Missouri decided that the Boy Scouts weren't as bad as they thought--so the decision, as to whether or not to allow scouting, was up to the individual congregation. Of these two resolutions really the first was the most detrimental, because it did allow fellowship with church bodies without agreement, even though Missouri would deny that this actually is fellowship.

At the next Missouri Convention it was stated that the ALC's position was not that of Missouri. The Missouri Committee on Doctrinal Unity said:

Our Synod has insisted and still insists that fellowship must be based on unity in all doctrines clearly revealed in Holy Writ. If church bodies can do no more than pledge that each group be loyal to its own distinctive confession, they are not speaking the same thing, nor are they joined together in the same mind and judgment.

The present situation forbids us to propose that altar and pulpit fellowship be established with the American Lutheran Church (Aaberg, 1968, p. 166).

It is amazing that after this report the Missouri Synod still was involved in talks with the ALC. After all, there had been about ten years of talks between the two bodies, and this committee reported that the ALC still held to its heterodox position. The Missouri Synod was definitely in trouble.

At the 1948 Synodical Conference meeting the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS) reported that problems were showing up in the Missouri Synod churches, even though at the synod level matters were being taken care of. The ELS reported:

Some in the Missouri Synod have by their actions anticipated an agreement with the American Lutheran Church, which does not exist. They have held unionistic services, conducted joint prayer, have carried on joint church work, and have united in other brotherly associations with its members (Aaberg, 1968, p. 168).

Aaberg continues:

The ELS noted that the offenders had continued in good standing in the Missouri Synod, and that some had even been given greater responsibilities, while those protesting this state of affairs had been given little, if any comfort (p. 168).

During the year 1949 the ALC Commissioners and Missouri's Doctrinal Unity Committee worked <sup>at</sup> a document to state their common beliefs. This document was called the "Common Confession." It appears that Missouri was fairly pleased by this document. At its 1950 Milwaukee Convention it resolved:

That if the American Lutheran Church, in convention assembled, accepts it, the "Common Confession" shall be recognized as a statement of agreement on these doctrines (emphasis mine) between us and the American Lutheran Church (Aaberg, 1968, p. 172).

The "Common Confession" simply did not deal with all doctrines. It just dealt with those areas in which the two synods agreed.

It is amazing that the resolutions of the Missouri Convention said nothing of sharp doctrinal differences that separated the two synods in the past. The positive treatment of the "Common Confession" appears to show that these two synods really wanted to get together, and that doctrine might just have to be sacrificed in order to do that. Aaberg interprets the Missouri resolutions by saying:



That Missouri, on the basis of the fact that it found nothing in the "Common Confession" which contradicted the Scriptures, could declare that the document showed that agreement had been reached in those doctrines treated, shows an astounding indifference to doctrine. Applying the same principle, one could as well say that since there is nothing in the "Apostles' Creed" which contradicts the Scriptures, one is in agreement in the doctrines of which the creed speaks with all the Christian churches which confess this creed (p. 172-173).

It is obvious that there must have been areas in which the two synods did not agree. But what was left, since the "Common Confession" spoke of God, Man, Redemption, Election, Means of Grace, Justification, Conversion, Sanctification, The Church, The Ministry, and The Last Things?

The 1951 ELS Convention lists these errors in the "Common Confession":

- 1) The document does not reject the false doctrine which has been expressed in the American Lutheran Church, that some parts of Scripture are not divinely inspired.
- 2) The Common Confession does not definitely state that God has declared all mankind to be righteous in Christ.
- 3) The error of the American Lutheran Church, that some people are converted to Christ while others are not, because the converted offer only a natural resistance, while others offer willful resistance--this error is not rejected in the Common Confession.
- 4) The Common Confession does not reject the error taught in the American Lutheran Church that God elected His people to eternal life in view of their foreseen faith.
- 5) The Common Confession does not reject the error in the American Lutheran Church, that the Means of Grace belong to the essence of the Holy Christian Church.
- 6) The Common Confession does not wholly reject such errors in the doctrine of the Last Things as the American Lutheran Church is tolerating as, for example, that the Papacy may not be the Anti-christ until the last day; that an unusually large number of Jews will be converted to Christ in the future, and that there will be some kind of millennial reign of Christ (Aaberg, 1968, pp. 174-175).

The Wisconsin Synod rejected the "Common Confession" and made this resolution in 1951:

That we inform the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod that we not only find the Common Confession to be inadequate...but that we also hold that the adoption of the Common Confession by the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod involves an untruth and creates a basically untruthful situation, since this action has been officially interpreted as a settlement of past differences which are in fact not settled.

That we ask the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod to repudiate its stand that the Common Confession is a settlement of the doctrines treated by the two committees (Aaberg, 1968, pp. 175-176).

Even within the Missouri Synod this confession caused problems and dissensions. Because of this the Orthodox Lutheran Conference formed in 1951.

The 1952 Synodical Conference meeting found the "Common Confession" to be an inadequate confession. But Missouri announced that a Part II was being worked on for the confession to meet the objections to the first part. It was at this meeting that the Wisconsin Synod representatives announced their "protest" against the Missouri Synod. At its Milwaukee Recessed Convention in October 1953, this protest was approved by Wisconsin, and the convention officially declared:

That the Missouri Synod "...by reaffirming its acceptance of the Common Confession as a 'settlement of past differences which in fact are not settled,' ...and by its persistent adherence to its unionistic practices... has brought about the present break in relations that is now threatening the existence of the Synodical Conference and the continuation of our affiliation with the sister Synod"(Aaberg, 1968, p. 184).

The 1954 Synodical Conference meeting was to discuss all these problems, especially dealing with the "Common Confession." But because of Missouri's dominant size no resolutions concerning this confession could be made, so the convention recessed. At a recessed meeting the Synodical Conference resolved to ask the Missouri Synod "not to use the Common Confession as a functioning union document, without however, passing judgment pro

or con on the doctrinal content of the Common Confession by this convention"(Aaberg, 1968, p. 168). One item that may have appeared as a good sign was that at this time the negotiations between Missouri and the ALC had stopped, at least for a time, because of the ALC's steps to merge with other church bodies. If we want to look for another positive point, we can consider the fact that the Missouri Synod still held to the Brief Statement, even though in effect the article on Church Fellowship was not being followed as it should.

The 1955 Wisconsin Synod Convention had its work cut out for it. Many men of this synod felt that our dealings with Missouri were going on too long. Some were wondering if we also were guilty of unionism because we weren't breaking from Missouri. Everyone knew that there were problems--that the Missouri Synod was breaking up the Synodical Conference. But the question was what should be done about it? From the Book of Reports and Memorials for the Thirty-third Convention, in the Report of the President we read this plea:

We implore the Holy Spirit to guide and direct us as we try to decide in the face of all the reports whether the Lord would now have us apply His definite command "Avoid them!" or whether we still have an unpaid debt of love to those whose fellowship we have cherished so many years (p. 14).

The problem with Missouri was evident. The real issue before the Wisconsin Synod from this time on was deciding how our synod would best serve the Lord in His efforts to lead souls into His kingdom--by breaking with Missouri, or by using all opportunities in love to try to straighten out the problems. This convention, by a vote of about two to one, voted to take a wait and see attitude, to see what Missouri would do at her

1956 convention.

The 1956 Missouri Convention did some encouraging things. It dropped the "Common Confession" as a document to be used to try to establish doctrinal unity. The convention also resolved:

That we reject any and every interpretation of documents approved by Synod which would be in disagreement with the Holy Scriptures, the Lutheran Confessions, and the Brief Statement (Aaberg, 1968, p. 203).

Another resolution concerning intersynodical relations stated:

That we gratefully acknowledge every fraternal expression of concern and guidance in matters of doctrine and practice which has come to us in meekness and love from our brethren in the Synodical Conference, and make every effort to avoid that which is wrong and to become more firmly entrenched in that which is right;... (Aaberg, 1968, p. 203)

One more resolution stated that Missouri could not join the Lutheran World Federation because that would be unionism. These resolutions seemed to appear that Missouri was taking a turn for the better. In August of 1956, the Wisconsin Synod held a recessed convention. The Standing Committee on Matters of Church Union had sent men to the Missouri Convention. They saw these positive signs and reported that the committee:

Carried out its assignment and presented its report to the Districts of Synod and to this convention, and is of the conviction that our Synod ought not to close the door to further discussions at this time, but, while prayerfully awaiting the outcome of added efforts at attaining unity, hold the judgment of our Saginaw resolutions in abeyance (Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly, Vol. 53, 1956, p. 297).

At this point it appeared that the Wisconsin Synod could help Missouri better by staying in a protesting fellowship with them. It would be good to note at this time that the ELS had broken fellowship with Missouri in 1955. However, this was not done in a spirit of malice, but of love, hoping to regain

the stumbling synod. The fact that they broke fellowship did not mean that there was no further communication between these two synods. Perhaps, the ELS had better leverage with Missouri now because of that fact.

This whole problem was not a problem that could be solved easily. One big problem involved was that of communication. Questions always had to wait until the next convention of the other church body to be solved. Missouri held her conventions every third year. Wisconsin every other year. Then when there were conventions on the same year, Missouri's convention was held after Wisconsin's, so things just kept getting delayed, and really it was hard to always get the entire picture. What we will want to remember is that in looking back we can see things much more clearly and also we can see the results. This truly was a hard time for our brothers.

Should we break with Missouri or not? That again was the question in 1957 at the Wisconsin Convention at New Ulm, Minnesota. The Standing Committee in Matters of Church Union reported:

While we saw a hopeful sign in the excellent statement of Scriptural principles of church fellowship on which the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod in 1956 declined membership in the Lutheran World Federation, this hope has been dimmed by the fact that on an official basis the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod has since the 1956 convention in St. Paul involved itself in just such "cooperative programs in actual church work, e.g., joint educational endeavors," of which it said in its resolution that they would involve it "in a union in spiritual matters with groups not in doctrinal agreement with us" (WLQ, Vol. 54, 1957, p. 291).

The Committee resolved that we should suspend fellowship with Missouri, until the controversies are corrected; but that discussions should continue to try to reach that end. This action

was not to be taken as an excommunication of the Missouri Synod. Rather it was to try to show that synod the severity of the problem, and that steps must be taken to correct the situation. The WLQ records for us:

This floor committee report proposing a suspension of fellowship relations with the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod was voted down after about eight hours of debate. The official vote showed 77 delegates voting against, and 61 for the adoption of the report, with eight delegates abstaining from voting (Vol. 54, 1957, p. 292).

This vote did not show that most Wisconsin men thought that Missouri was okay. Instead, it showed that a larger amount of men thought that we could serve the Lord better in correcting the situation by dealing with the problem as one supposedly united body than as two separate synods. It is obvious that the sides for breaking fellowship and for remaining in a protesting fellowship were nearing equal strengths. The conflict within our own synod was multiplying.

The next meeting of importance is the Synodical Conference meeting of August 5-8, 1958. It appears from going over the Proceedings of this convention that the men gathered at Lakewood, Ohio, knew of the problem, and did want to do something about it. Yet, from this record it appears that nothing really happened to change the picture.

During the two years before the Saginaw Convention, President Naumann and eight members of the Standing Committee attended six meetings with the union committees of the synods of the Synodical Conference. At the January and April meetings in 1959, the subject of Church Fellowship was taken up. The Standing Committee gives us this report of those meetings:

On the whole most of the points of our presentation

were not only permitted to stand when they were individually discussed and elucidated but they were even highly commended as Scripturally sound and well expressed. Still at the end of the discussion the Missouri Synod representatives were not ready to acknowledge the Scriptural correctness of the basic point of our Wisconsin Synod presentation. The basic point is this that all joint expressions and demonstrations of a common Christian faith--call them Church Fellowship or by any other term--are essentially one, that they involve a unit concept, and that they are therefore all governed by one set of principles, namely on the one hand by the consideration of our debt of love toward the weak brother, and on the other hand by the Lord's clear injunction, also flowing out of love, to avoid persistent adherents of false doctrine and practice (Book of Reports and Memorials, 1959, pp. 71-72).

As had been the case in the past there were positive sides to this meeting, but there also were the negatives sides. It is really no wonder that the question, "What should we do?" did not have an easy answer.

## II. THE DECISION

In the previous section much space was used to present the history of the problem. The purpose of that was to show that a decision in this matter would have to be very complex. When we consider the close history that the two synods experienced for so long, a break would not be easy.

Also, in Missouri itself, the situation was not that clear. In a recent Senior Dogmatics class at the Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Professor Becker related his own feelings as one who belonged to the Missouri Synod at that time. He said that he was ready to leave the synod, but he asked one question at Missouri's San Francisco Convention, which was held June 17-27, 1959. He asked whether or not the synod still said that its pastors had to abide by the Brief Statement. The answer he received was yes. With that answer he decided to remain

in the Missouri Synod, even though he still felt uncomfortable. Let us remember that the Brief Statement had an excellent section on Church Fellowship. This answer by that convention would seem to offer some hope. If only Missouri's actual practice would follow the Brief Statement. (Note: Professor Becker also related to the class that two years later Missouri said that it was unconstitutional to hold its pastors to more than the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions. Because of that we see that the strong section on Church Fellowship that the Brief Statement included was no longer binding on the pastors.)

Before Wisconsin's 1959 convention, President Naumann received a letter from President Behnken of Missouri. In this letter he stated that there was basic agreement in the areas of pulpit and altar fellowship, but that there were some problems concerning prayer fellowship. Concerning this point he wrote:

We therefore plead for continued patient discussion and deliberation on the points of difference. We have been asked by our Convention "to continue to face all the issues confronting the members of the Synodical Conference, and, by God's grace, help resolve them" (Proceedings, 1959, p. 176).

This is a plea for patience. It also seems to indicate a desire to straighten the matter out.

The Report of Floor Committee No. 2 on Church Union (Proceedings, 1959, pp. 194-197) reflects the desire of President Behnken's letter to continue to work at correcting the problem. The Committee reported that Missouri was receptive to our testimony, that there was agreement in the "Statement on Scripture" and the "Statement on the Antichrist," that some disciplinary action was being taken against some errorists in the Missouri



Synod, and that the Joint Union Committees were discussing matters on Church Fellowship. It therefore resolved to keep working at seeking doctrinal unity. The Committee also noted that there was the problem of offense, and resolved to testify strongly against the offenses that still existed in the Missouri Synod. A special resolution was made because of the offense caused by Scouting. These resolutions and the Committee's entire report was adopted by the Convention.

The decision of this Convention was not to break fellowship with Missouri at this time. However, our fellowship with Missouri would remain a protesting fellowship. Many disagreed with this, and said that we should break with our sister synod. Was Wisconsin wrong in not breaking fellowship at this time? In considering this I would like to refer to the Senior Dogmatic Notes which say:

How long communion with an erring church, but struggling for the truth, may be kept up is a question of Christian wisdom and brotherly love (p. 161).

I am convinced that, in studying the record, the action our synod took at this convention was taken out of brotherly love for Missouri. I don't think that there was anyone who believed that Missouri's fellowship practices were correct, but all must have hoped and prayed that these practices would be corrected. These men must have been thinking of Romans 16:17; but they didn't forget Galatians 6:1-2:

Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.

Brotherly love influenced the Saginaw Convention to come to its decision, but, at the same time, this convention must have

realized that our synod needed to watch out, or it also would be tempted.

### III. HOW THIS DECISION RELATED TO EARLIER AND SUBSEQUENT DECISIONS

At Saginaw our synod moved closer to breaking with Missouri, even though the Proceedings don't directly say so. In 1961 the break took place. Up to the 1961, everyone seems to have been sorting out the problem. Some saw that we would have to break with Missouri sooner than others. In my opinion it might have been better for Wisconsin to break with Missouri sooner than it did. But it most certainly was not wrong for Wisconsin to continue in fellowship as long as it did. We will want to note that our synod recognized Missouri's problem and was dealing with it. Our synod never acted as if all things were "fine and dandy" in Missouri.

In 1961 Wisconsin broke fellowship with Missouri. Yet, our synod did not totally break with Missouri until 1963, when we left the Synodical Conference. In doing this we were still acting out of love for the erring synod by trying to impress upon Missouri the seriousness of its error.

Perhaps, the close relationship Wisconsin had had with Missouri meant that we stayed in fellowship as long as we did. After all, Missouri was there for us, when Wisconsin was the weaker brother. If Wisconsin had not been in fellowship with Missouri before the whole problem of unionism showed up, it is certain that our synod would not have entered into fellowship with Missouri, unless the problem cleared up.

In Wisconsin's relationship with Missouri we can see a

definite progression. It began with true fellowship. Then problems developed which led to a protesting fellowship, and then, finally, to a break in fellowship. Throughout this process Wisconsin did not want to have to break with Missouri. Our synod wanted the "Prodigal Son" to return. It was love for the souls of the Missouri Synod's congregations that led us to remain in fellowship, and it was that same love that finally led us to break with them.

#### IV. PERSONAL INTEREST IN THE MATTER

I became interested in this topic because the events surrounding the 1959 Saginaw Convention led to my grandfather Pastor Otto J. Eckert's removal from his pastorate at St. Paul's, Saginaw. Because this took place almost twenty-five years ago, I don't want to dig up old problems. Therefore, I will treat the matter briefly.

Pastor Eckert was one who recognized the problem we faced with Missouri rather early. Because of that fact he was quite active in encouraging the break with Missouri. In his congregation there was a conflict between my grandfather and the other pastor who was not ready to break with Missouri in 1959. This caused many internal problems in the congregation. If Wisconsin had broken with Missouri in 1959, Pastor Eckert probably would have stayed at his congregation. But he had stated his case against Missouri so strongly that there was a definite rift between the pastors. St. Paul's was just getting into a building program that was quite an undertaking. There were members who thought that the conflict between the two pastors would hurt this effort, so they tried to encourage Pastor Eckert to stop stating his case against Missouri, to

help out the building effort. Pastor Eckert held to his stand that Wisconsin should break with Missouri. At that time Pastor Eckert wanted to remain at St. Paul's in the Wisconsin Synod, waiting for the next convention to break fellowship with Missouri. But St. Paul's needed a unified front in its building project and opposing pastors didn't fit that need, so, in November of 1959, the congregation removed him from his position as its pastor. Thereafter, his district president reported that he was no longer part of the Wisconsin Synod. Actually, he was never officially removed from the synod.

After his removal from St. Paul's, a number of members, who were faithful to Pastor Eckert, left St. Paul's and called Pastor Eckert to be their pastor. This congregation ended up joining the Church of the Lutheran Confession. Even though his congregation was not and is not in fellowship with the Wisconsin Synod, I know that he preached the pure Gospel, and that through his preaching, the Holy Spirit continued to work. It's a shame that he didn't rejoin Wisconsin after our synod broke with Missouri, but it appears he did not want to go through the troubles that that could cause. My grandfather probably would have finished his ministry in the Wisconsin Synod if some parts of history were just a little different. But I'm sure he recalled Paul's words to the Romans (8:28):

"And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose." He knew that God was at work here, and he probably also remembered Acts 14:22: "We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God." This problem was my grandfather's "thorn in the flesh" to endure in his ministry.

## CONCLUSION

This paper has helped to open my eyes to what happened because of the Wisconsin Synod's problems with Missouri. There still are bad feelings that exist because of this. At the present time it seems that a solution to problems between the CLC and Wisconsin is a long way off, but it is something to work for, because in that synod there are souls who will be saved. But before a reconciliation can take place, the CLC will have to recognize that it is not easy to point out one particular time to break fellowship with an erring church body. When the proper time is is not clearly set. It does mean that much time needs to be spent in prayer for God's direction, and Christian love needs to be remembered in these matters. Looking back on history now, it appears as if we should have broken with Missouri in 1959, or even sooner. But we can see the whole picture in retrospect. Let us remember that, in 1959, motivated by Christian love, the Wisconsin Synod remained in protesting fellowship with Missouri. This conflict strengthened the Wisconsin Synod so that now it is a strong confessional, Scriptural church body. God help us to remain strong in the truth.

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Lutheran Synodical Conference Proceedings for conventions held August 2-5, 1960 and August 5-8, 1958.

Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States Proceedings for conventions held August 10-17, 1955, August 7-14, 1957, and August 5-12, 1959.

Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States Book of Reports and Memorials for conventions held August 10-17, 1955, August 7-14, 1957, and August 5-12, 1959.

Other Resources:

Letters and Correspondence of Pastor Otto J. Eckert.  
 Conversations with Pastor Paul G. Eckert, Professor Edward C. Fredrich, and Professor Siegbert W. Becker.  
 Senior Church History Class of April 2 and 6, 1984 with Professor Fredrich.  
 Senior Dogmatics Class of April 10, 1984 with Professor Becker.

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Final Comment: This paper may not have come up with information that is new to the professor, but it was a learning experience for the student to find out more of what actually surrounded the events of 1959.