

THE COST OF CONFSSIONALISM

A research paper tracing the developments of the five most significant years of the Election Controversy within the Synodical Conference.

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The Synodical conference lost two of her children before she was twelve years old. The optimism for an America-wide united Lutheran church was greatly calmed. Yet what had precipitated such an apparently sudden and drastic split, a split which had its effects not only on the Synodical conference, but also on 'state Synods' and local congregations?

Part of the problem lay in the fact that prior to the controversy, both sides had expressed themselves less than accurately on the issue of election. Earlier Missouri documents show a decided 'intuitu fidei' type language.

Theses prepared by Rev. Beyer, President of the Eastern District of the Missouri Synod for example said,

"Thesis V. God has only elected those of whom he saw before that they will believe unto the end. 2 Thess. 2:13 and Eph. 1:3-13." And later, "Thesis VIII. As no one is elected in whom God did not foresee this end (terminus), as God also looked for final faith in the elect, and is it (faith) is a condition sine qua non of election so is faith in a certain relation causa minus principalis of election."<sup>1</sup>

In another case, there was even a decided Calvinistic phraseology. "Further, although all men are in the same condemnation, and all by nature resist grace and can do nothing else but resist, God has nevertheless elected a portion of them and rejected the rest."<sup>2</sup> This unfortunate phrase was part of a conference sermon delivered by Prof. G. Schaller of Concordia Seminary.

The early dogmaticians of the Church, especially those of the 17th century, in strengthening their arguments against Calvinism, had often tended toward language that, at best, permitted an 'intuitu fidei' interpretation, and putting the worst construction on it, actually was a statement of this heresy. The Norwegian catechism, Pontoppidan's, as

as well as the Dietrich's catechism in use in Missouri (and Ohio), were steeped in the terminology of the 17th century fathers.

United under a common flag, but sitting on a doctrinal powderkeg, the Synodical conference was composed of men who had been trained by a variety of teachers without a consensus on this important doctrine.

In the controversy the answers to two questions divided the combatants. "What reigns supreme? Reason or God?" and "Who will interpret the Symbolical Books we hold in common? The Bible or the Fathers?" In the pages that follow I shall attempt to outline the alignments and alliances that were made or broken as a result of this controversy.

If one were to examine the three Synods joined with Missouri in the Synodical conference in 1880, with a view to determining how long each would last in this four-synod federation, the order of 'demise' might well have included the Wisconsin Synod and the Norwegian Synod running neck and neck for the honor of being first to go (with Wisconsin ahead by a nose), and Ohio the last on the list.

Wisconsin would have that dubious honor for a variety of reasons. The Wisconsin Synod had acted guardedly in the State Synod matter, refusing to get in with both feet until certain assurances concerning the ultimate development of that concept were made. Walther also had plans for a joint seminary. When Wisconsin rather unilaterally decided to open its own in Milwaukee, it was certainly not showing the kind of co-operation that Walther anticipated from one who shared his dream of one American Lutheran Church.

The Norwegians would occupy second place for several reasons. First of all, if for no other reason than the lack of a mutual mother tongue and nationality, the joint seminary program did not appeal to them.

For that reason they added their own "theoretical" department to the existing "practical" seminary in 1878.

Secondly, they had in their midst, since 1861 one F. A. Schmidt, a man who had been trained by Walther, and recommended by Walther to professorship at Luther College, a man who had from time to time come to the aid of Missouri's 'enemy,' Iowa. While Schmidt had not supported an early proposal for the Norwegians to withdraw from the Synodical conference, within the year that Prof. Asperheim made his proposal, Schmidt had gotten on the bandwagon to attack the very point that he had failed to support earlier, the charge that Walther was bordering on Calvinism in his teachings on election.

The Ohioans, on the other hand, appeared to be walking hand-in-hand with Walther in his great American dream. They had supported his state synod plans and joint seminary venture, for which they received the epithet, "my dear Ohioans" from Walther.

Yet, when all was said and done, the order of 'disappearance' was quite the opposite. Ohio was the first to go, followed by the Norwegians, with the Wisconsin Synod alone remaining shoulder to shoulder with her sister synod Missouri in the struggle for orthodoxy. Some from each of the other synods did, either by leaving or remaining within as a faithful bit of leaven, continue to try to defend the Scriptural position.

Analyzing this turn of events and charting the incidents that led up to them is a complex matter. Proceeding year by year we shall examine the activities of the four synods. The beginning point chosen is 1878. This date is somewhat arbitrary. Depending on whose side one is one will determine when he lists the starting point of the controversy. Rev. F. A. Schmidt would have said that it was in the early 1870's

(October 10, 1877 at the latest!). Others might date it as late as January 1880 when Schmidt came out with his polemical rag-sheet Altes und Neues. Dr. Walther would have probably agreed that the roots of the controversy extended back to pens of the 17th century dogmaticians, who in their zeal to silence Calvinistic voices at times overstepped the boundary of Scriptures with their assertions about the nature of divine election.

1878 is also a good place to start because it is here that the first serious rumblings of the impending strife were heard.

#### 1878

Starting off the year was an incident that for Walther was a presentiment of woe to come. The Seminary of the Joint Synod of Ohio had granted him an honorary degree of Doctor of Divinity "in recognition of his unique and valuable accomplishments in the field of theology."<sup>3</sup> Perhaps it was the word 'unique' that tipped Walther to the troubles to come. In any case, he wrote to a friend who had written to congratulate him on his degree, "The circle in which I have hitherto lived consists of this, that God now humbled, now exalted me, so that I always knew, when exaltation came, a deep humiliation would promptly follow."<sup>4</sup>

Yet the trouble that lay ahead was not initiated by Ohio. It was from men within the Norwegian Synod that the charges about Missouri's (crypto) Calvinism were first levelled. Rev. Prof. Ole Asperheim, one of the two seminary professors at Madison warned his colleagues of Missouriianism at that group's pastoral conference in Milwaukee, February 1878. In the same year he published a book, The Missouri Synod and the Norwegian Synod. Among other things, he accused Missouri of doctrinal perversions,

one of which was Missouri's "view of election which was dangerously poised between Calvinism and seventeenth-century Lutheran orthodoxy."<sup>5</sup> In this same book, he then called for a break with Missouri, a proposal which did not endear him to his Synod. As a result, he resigned his professorship.

A number of <sup>other</sup> incidents ought to be mentioned here. Soon after Asperheim's resignation the columns of the Lutheran Standard, edited by Matthias Loy, carried this statement which, in view of the eventual turn of events, must stand as an historical curiosity. "The report that Prof. Asperheim had been classed with 'free-thinkers' is sheer misrepresentation put on foot, so far as can be seen, by Prof. Fritschel, the unscrupulous manufacturer of evil reports about Missouri and its friends"<sup>6</sup>

Secondly, Asperheim's co-professor at this time was none other than F. A. Schmidt who had been conducting a running battle with Walther on the side of Iowa in the Conversion controversy. He had not supported Asperheim, but clearly, the seeds planted by Asperheim, (or was it the courage demonstrated by him in speaking his feelings publicly) finally bore fruit in Schmidt.

The third item to be noted in connection with Asperheim's resignation is the choice for his replacement. The first man called was none other than F. W. Stellhorn (Missouri Synod) who at that time was serving at the Fort Wayne seminary and did not. (fortunately) accept. He too, would play a role in the later developments of this controversy, a controversy toward which perhaps at this time he already had an inclination.

One other event that took place in 1878 might well go far to explain Prof. Schmidt's growing animosity toward Walther and all that he represented. An additional professor was to be called for the growing seminary

at St. Louis. Matthias Loy was called. Schmidt was bypassed. Loy declined. Franz Pieper was called, Schmidt was bypassed again. Not only was Schmidt not Missouri's first choice for the professorship, he was not their second choice either! Koehler maintains that there is documentary proof to support the fact that Schmidt did seek the professorship in 1878. At least, his willingness to serve was indicated on a card addressed to Pastor Wunder, May 7, 1878.<sup>7</sup> Nelson and Fevold, in their book The Lutheran Church Among Norwegian-Americans also claim, "Professor Johannes Ylvisaker, who joined Schmidt and Stub at Madison in 1879, is reported to have carried about with him copies of statements which Schmidt made relative to these matters."<sup>8</sup> Walther himself, in Lehre und Wehre, explains Schmidt's hostilities on the same basis. But there is another voice, that of C. A. Frank, editor of the The Lutheran Witness. He writes (some 4 years later),

"Among the names that were presented for nomination, was also that Prof. F. A. Schmidt, but he was not nominated because the Synod held it to be uncharitable to deprive the Norwegian Synod of his services ..... Now some one among his friends or enemies informed Prof. Schmidt that Dr. Walther had prevented his nomination by putting on such a face and shrugging up his shoulders in such a manner, when Prof. Schmidt's name was mentioned, as to indicate he would not like Schmidt as a colleague. Though there is not a word of truth in this, Schmidt took it for granted and - now comes the worst feature - took it also as an affronting challenge of his (Schmidt's) orthodoxy, which he was bound to avenge. This is what we (my emphasis) learned from his own lips at the next meeting of Synodical Conference at Columbus Ohil, (1879) at Prof. Loy's house, Rev. Adelberg and H. Sauer being present. We (my emphases) reasoned with him there, and not knowing the facts, we begged him for the sake of the Church, even if Walther should have done something out of the way, not to act in a rancorous spirit, but to consider that God had given him more knowledge and talent than others, to employ these in the maintenance of harmony and peace in the church, and not to destroy his own usefulness. ....but he had his mind fixed!"

This account by Frank does'nt seem to have been questioned, corrected or refuted in the Witness or any of the myriad 'theological' journals of the day. And judging from the usual hasty and often intemperate replies

over much lesser points, it is my feeling that the silence tends to substantiate what Frank has written.

The last significant event of the year happened at the 1978 meeting of the Synodical conference in Fort Wayne. There, a resolution was passed that must have later been a continual embarrassment of Missouri's opponents in the election controversy. At that meeting, the doctrinal contents of the Western District Report (Missouri Synod) for 1877 was approved. This report contained the essay by Walther that was to be one of the detractors' big pieces of evidence against him later in the controversy. C. A. Frank records some of the details of the meeting in the Lutheran

Witness:

"In the year 1877 (sic)...Prof. F. A. Schmidt, and the sainted Prof. F. W. Lehman, and Prof. M. Loy and Prof. W. Stellhorn (sic), together with the other members of the Conference, passed a resolution to endorse and to commend (my emphasis) to all the Churches in connection with the Conference, the doctrine of the Missouri Synod, presented in the report of 1877, as an edifying and blissful doctrine."<sup>10</sup>

Research indicates no dissent from the floor on this vote, which was undoubtedly by voice. Yet before long, there was to be less than unanimity on this document.

Schmidt, now convinced of the Calvinistic bent of Walther's treatise delivered at the 1877 meeting of the Western District of the Missouri Synod, continued, by means of letter and personal conversations, to try to make his points clear to his former teacher. On January 2, 1879 Schmidt registered a written protest concerning the Synodical Conference's approval of the Report of the Western District of the Missouri Synod. He said, "I can no longer go with you...I dare no longer keep silence."<sup>11</sup>

In July Schmidt and Walther met in Columbus, Ohio during the sessions of the Synodical Conference to try and reach an agreement or at least



an understanding. They could not. They did, however, agree not to air the matter any more in public until another meeting could be arranged.<sup>12</sup>

It was during this same conference that C. A. Frank recounts his meeting with Schmidt in the presence of Loy, Adelberg and Sauer. If the accounts of both meetings are true, we would like to know which of them was first. If that with Walther came first, it is unusual that Schmidt would vent his vindictiveness as Frank depicts him doing later in the week. However, it would seem most logical to assume that the meeting at the home of Matthias Loy was first. There is mention that at that meeting Schmidt spoke about feeling bound to vindicate his orthodoxy and would not be swayed to change his mind. This is hardly the spirit of a man who had agreed to hold his peace, at least publicly, until another meeting could be held. It was probably later, then, in that week, at the meeting with Walther that he agreed to that arrangement.

Significant to this interpretation of the truthfulness and chronology of the events is the reaction of Schmidt in the following year when he feels that Walther has not kept his part of the bargain.

The 1877 Report of the Western District where Walther presented the paper on Election had been available for all to read. The Wisconsin Synod, at its pastoral conference in Oct. 1879 also had a few questions about "some statements in Missouri publications that admitted of misinterpretation."<sup>13</sup> These questionable phrases and statements were to be pointed out to the Missouri Synod with a request that they be corrected. Koehler says, "President Schwan acknowledged receipt of the resolution in September (sic)." (Since this pastoral conference did not meet until October 14, 1879, their topic for discussion being "Election," it must be that November 1 (at the earliest), is the date Schwan received the

communication. Koehler, of course got this date from Missouri's own reply of October 1882. Unless the Wisconsin Synod had two Synodical Patoral Conferences that year dealing with election, "September" has to be wrong). But, for some reason, it would not be until October of 1882 that an official written answer would be given!

If the Wisconsin Synod thought Missouri was slow in writing, there was a least one person, Schmidt, who felt that Missouri, and particularly Walther, who had gone into print too fast. In July they had agreed not to publicly discuss the 'election question' until they had had a chance to sit down at another meeting. Yet Walther, perhaps not realizing what he had done, had, in Schmidt's eyes at least, violated that agreement by his presentation on 'Election' to the 1879 Western District Convention.

Two defenses are given for Walther's actions. First, this essay was part of a series that he had been delivering for some years to this convention. Secondly, it was pointed out, the agreement of Walther and Schmidt at Columbus was really just an agreement to follow the Synodical Conference rule which pledged its members to make no public attacks against each other until every means of adjusting doctrinal differences had been exhausted. 'Public' was interpreted to mean 'in periodicals' and so Walther's continuation of his series was not <sup>judged to be</sup> out of line.

Whatever the prompting or motive, justified or not, the fact remains that early in January war was officially declared! Schmidt, by means of a 16-page periodical called Altes und Neues, was going to present his side of the story in all its vivid details. The tone of the periodical was apparent from its first number which was circulated to every minister and teacher in the Synodical Conference. The charge of crypto-Calvinism was now hurled at the Missouri Synod and especially Dr. Walther.

Schmidt writes,

"In the publication of the Missouri Synod, a doctrine concerning election had been set forth and defended, which to our knowledge, is an anti-Scriptural and anti-Confessional Calvinizing error. In the recent reports of the Western district (1877 and 1879) this erroneous doctrine has fully ripened."<sup>14</sup>

The reception of this paper was hardly one of joy. The Lutheran Standard's editor Loy says, "The occasion of its appearance is one that causes sorrow rather than rejoicing. It forebodes trouble."<sup>15</sup> He adds, somewhat indicative of his feelings for the fledgling Synodical Conference, "That those who do not wish prosperity to the Synodical Conference will find this an occasion to glory over us (my emphasis) is natural."<sup>16</sup>

Other church bodies followed the Standard's condemnation of Altes und Neues. The Norwegian Synod paper Kirketidende:

"We believe that the misunderstanding might have been removed by private discussions, and therefore heartily regret that a new controversy has been thrown into the Church. Least of all can we approve that the new paper immediately (my emphasis) begins by accusing the other party of false doctrine."<sup>17</sup>

The Gemeinde Blatt, official organ of the Wisconsin and Minnesota Synods, has this typically guarded statement of disapproval.

"We believe that in this he goes too far. For although we are not disposed to defend or accept every expression or mistakable proposition in the documents controverted, we nevertheless have the conviction that the doctrine set forth is, on the whole, no other than that of the Scriptures and our Church, which we also confess."<sup>18</sup>

The General Synod's Lutheran Observer alone defended the renegade paper, taking this opportunity to talk about the tyranny and intolerance of the Missourians.

"Under the cover of a radical Congregationalism, it has exercised an absolute despotism.....Prof. Schmidt and those who think with him felt themselves constrained by this intolerant procedure, to take up the gauntlet thrown down to them, and accept the dire necessity of waging war against Missouri in the bounds of the Synodical Conference."<sup>19</sup>

During the period that followed, while Der Lutheraner and Lehre und Wehre were doing battle with Altes und Neues, the Gemeinde Blatt carried only a single doctrinal article on election. The Lutheran Standard was curiously neutral. It provided little, if any, controversial tidbits in its new column. It did begin to run a series on 'Election' but it was informational, rather than polemical. Its seven-part series by Rev. P. A. Peter contained some very refreshing language. "The causes of election are God's mercy and the merits of Christ....(and not) on account or because of their foreseen faith and their perseverance in the same as a cause or a meritorious condition of their election."<sup>20</sup> However, in commenting on this first installment, Editor Loy writes,

"So when we say that election took place in foresight of faith, we do not mean that faith is the meritorious cause.....but that the election embraces only those who are in Christ by faith, and who thus.....are brought to appreciate the merits of Christ."<sup>21</sup>

A similar 'expansion' of the two valid causes of election is again clearly made abundantly clear in the seventh and final part of Rev. Peter's essay. "Faith is not the meritorious cause of election, but only the prerequisite condition."<sup>22</sup>

The Wisconsin Synod at its convention in May at Manitowoc had no place on the agenda for this "burning issue," having taken that matter up at the previous years Pastoral Conference.. The decision to sort this matter out among trained Pastors at a special Conference instead of at a general Synod meeting among laymen was undoubtedly a good one.

The Standard, Ohio's official English paper, meanwhile, in a low-key manner, continued to try to educate its readers to the teachings of the Lutheran Church that they felt were the 'old way'. Later in the year, F. W. Stellinghorn began a series of articles to demonstrate this fact, by

pointing to the 16th and 17th century church fathers to support Ohio's teaching on election.

Yet throughout this period and well into the middle of the next year, no aspersions were cast upon the integrity of Missouri in the pages of the Standard. To the contrary, a number of articles complimentary to Missouri were run. When the Illinois Synod voted to merge with the Missouri Synod, the Standard called it "an occurrence at which our readers will rejoice...."<sup>23</sup>

In August there was an article praising the Missouri brethren for their work toward one large American Lutheran Church, apparently a dream shared also by Ohio, or at least Loy.

At the October 18th session of the Ohio Synodical Convention at Dayton, the assembled members proposed a very temperate resolution. At the next meeting of the joint Synod 1) the doctrine of predestination was to be discussed, 2) Rev. G. H. Treber was to furnish theses 'guided by the Solid Declaration,' 3) nothing was to be published concerning this controversy in the official organs of the synod until the body shall come to a decision on the subject.<sup>24</sup>

The resolution passed with some amendments. Instead of waiting for the next meeting of Synod, the delegates opted for a special pastoral conference. They also elected to remove the mandatory ban on publication of 'Election' materials by the official organs of the Church. They were cautioned, however, to use their good judgement. There was to be "no heresy hunting, no personal controversy and no burdening of consciences by promulgating in the name of the Synod doctrines for which some of the members are not willing to be held accountable."<sup>25</sup>

The Norwegian pastors who were meeting about this same time in La Crosse,

Wisconsin were finding how difficult it was to get through a long list of doctrinal theses on Election. Invariably, conferences and conventions that had tried this had found, to their disappointment, that only the surface was scratched, and no little disagreement erupted. Such was the case in La Crosse also.

Schmidt had made inroads into that body during the year, having turned to his anti-Missourian way of thinking the Minnesota District President B. J. Muus among others. But it is claimed that 12 months of publishing the Altes und Neues was a complete flop as far as public response to it went.<sup>26</sup> This seems to be somewhat of an exaggeration, but for the most part, the reaction of American Lutheranism to his approach was one of disgust at his methods and so it is understandable that they would hesitate to legitimize his bastard baby by even saying its name. But they were listening to its cries, admit it or not. The events that would unfold in the next year with almost lightning speed would have their beginnings ultimately traced to Schmidt.

1881

On January 5, the hope of many Lutheran brothers, a joint meeting of the theological leaguers of the Synodical Conference was held in Milwaukee. The meeting was long overdue. Each month that had passed caused additional intemperate words to be reckoned to the various combatant's accounts. The Lutheran Standard had called for this meeting in the same edition it announced the arrival of Schmidt's 'baby' a year earlier.<sup>27</sup> Walther, too, had pressed for a meeting the previous year. The sickness of Synodical Conference President Lehmann, coupled with his questions about the propriety of such a move brought about this stagna-

tion of needed communication.

For 5 days, the seminary professors and district presidents of the constituent synods discussed Romans 8:28-30 - or at least part of it - with no success. It was the general conviction voiced by Loy in the Standard when he said, "At present (my emphasis) no agreement is attainable between the dissenting parties."<sup>28</sup> The Ohio paper is quoted to show the continued optimism that this Church body showed throughout the controversy, nearly up to the hour of its demise.

Schmidt, on the other hand, was not open to the suggestion that the abortive discussions be renewed at an early date and polemics be suspended in the meantime. He had a command from God to prosecute this war to its conclusion, and he was not to be dissuaded. To this bellicose reply Walther thundered his own righteously indignant declaration, "So be it! Since you want war, you shall have war!"<sup>29</sup>

The sessions ended with fists pounding the tables, it would appear. It is not improbable then that it is correctly maintained by some that Missouri refused to close the session saying that they would not pray with heretics. It is further contended that all minutes and records of the meeting were then intentionally destroyed.<sup>30</sup>

And in a somewhat wishy-washy voice the Standard called faintly from the sidelines, "We are not inclined nor competent to say which of the two parties is most to be censured or specially to be charged with the responsibility of this unfortunate disturbance in the Church."<sup>31</sup> Ohio didn't want to rock the Synodical Conference boat. Great things were envisioned for it by Walther, its guiding light. Ohio wanted it to last - at all costs. To this end, the Standard in April, ran a splendid article by Walther on the danger, the most real and personal danger, in a

theological controversy. He explained that the most serious danger was not in perverting someone else, but in, through defending what one knows to be an untenable position, in rejecting the grace of God.<sup>32</sup>

All the constituent synods of the Synodical Conference would be meeting in Synodical Conventions in the next five months. F. W. Stellhorn, who had only recently resigned from Fort Wayne to accept a call to the seminary at Columbus (Ohio Synod), thoughtfully prepared a 'convention guide,' a pamphlet "in plain and popular style (setting) forth the question in dispute, and (showing) where the truth lies on the disputed points."<sup>33</sup>

The German edition appeared first, in time for the Missouri Convention in May. The Norwegian edition hit the streets the last week in June, about a month late to do any good at the Norwegian convention, while the English edition that appeared several weeks earlier would find readership in Ohio which was about to meet soon in districts and later in special synodical sessions.

Stellhorn had finally found his home. While still at Fort Wayne he had used the columns of the newly founded Columbus Theological Magazine to attack Walther. Now they had taken him under their wing as their second professor.

In Fort Wayne, Indiana, the Missouri Synod Convention was assembling. The purpose of this ten-day convention, among other things, was to demonstrate the unity of the Synod in the question of election. Walther's 13 Theses, which had been widely distributed and studied for some time before the convention, were to be the statement of that unity. They were read once more and voted on as a unit. The Ohio paper, the Lutheran Standard characterizes this as one big railroad job, adding that no dis-



discussion was allowed although "repeatedly and earnestly asked for." It further states that a great number, not yet being decided on the issue, abstained, while 5 recorded 'No' votes. They were H. A. Allwardt (Stellhorn's brother-in-law), J. H. Doermann, P. Eirich, H. Ernst, C. H. Rohe.<sup>34</sup>

Whether or not the discussion was allowed could not be definitely determined by the writer. Again the silence of the opposition (Missouri) to this printed charge, as well as their confirmation of the single reading of the lengthy document and the 'unit voting' indicates that the Standard's report was substantially correct. That there were a great number of abstentions can be argued.

But what the Standard must have seen, if the facts are true, is that Missouri had everything to gain and little or nothing to lose by such a tactic. The five who publicly dissented were undoubtedly those who had earlier asked "repeatedly and earnestly" for discussion. Then the conferences of the area had heard ad nauseum. This was a time for war! The troops are rallied by unity, not by dissension. It is said that the affirmative vote that followed the reading of the 13 Theses resonated in the assembly hall, so loud and determined it was. Such was the effect needed.

What followed, in the form of two instructions to the Synodical Conference delegates, was the actual turning point for Ohio's relationship with Missouri. Missouri said, "You are not to sit together and deliberate about church affairs with such as have publicly decried us as Calvinists." "You recognize no synod as a member of the Synodical Conference which as a synod has accused us of Calvinism."<sup>35</sup>

The Standard, now finally jolted off dead center by Missouri's

precipitous (to Ohio, at least) actions at Fort Wayne, stooped to that which it had refrained from for so many months. They concluded the article on the Missouri convention with a quote from Walther. "We condemn the doctrine of our opponents (the Standard here added 'Schmidt, Loy, Stellhorn, Schuette, Allwardt, Muus, Hein and others' missing the point that it was the doctrine, not the men that were being judged worthy of hell) to the lowest pit of hell!" Two weeks later, the damage, if any, done, the Standard retracted the name of Walther from the quote, substituting the name of one Rev. Rohrlack.

In the face of Missouri's instructions, Ohio which was meeting in districts at the end of June was caught between a rock and the hard place. Would the Missouri Synod Synodical Conference representatives refuse to sit with some or all of her delegates? Would the synod itself be adjudged by Missouri to be out of the fellowship of the Synodical Conference?

The Eastern District delegates of Ohio proposed these instructions for delegates if they attended. "Our delegates (are to) be instructed to stand together, so that if Ohio is not permitted to be represented by the men whom she chooses as her delegates, she shall not be represented at all." Some delegates would conceivably be seated since they were favorable to Missouri's position. Hence the 'all for one, one for all' spirit of the resolution.

The resolution regarding the 'unit rule' for the delegates was defeated, and in its place a decision to delay a decision until the tentative extra joint session of the Synod was held. This resolution passed by a two-thirds majority.

In the Western district it was business as usual, with delegates

to be sent to the next Synodical Conference <sup>meeting</sup>, as though nothing had happened.

About this same time, the triennial Joint session of the Norwegian Synod was being held in Spring Grove, Minnesota. There was a move afoot not to bring the topic of election to the floor of the convention, the argument being that the laity were not yet prepared for such a discussion. The majority won out and the decision was made to devote the morning sessions for the week to discussing this doctrine. With Missourians on one side of the argument and anti-Missourians on the other,

"Certain theses were then presented for debate, which stated both the points on which all were agreed (my emphasis) and the points on which they disagreed. But at this convention they progressed no farther than to the first thesis on which they were all supposed to be agreed."<sup>36</sup>

In Fond du Lac, the Wisconsin Synod's 152 delegates were considering that body's instructions to its delegates to the next Synodical Conference meeting. It was agreed

"that in case the doctrinal controversy that was broken out within the Synodical Conference, at the organization or in the course of the deliberations, threatens to hinder its organization or further existence, they are to consider their mandate as terminated; but that the withdrawal of our delegates in such a case will by no means signify the withdrawal of our Synod from the Synodical Conference or a decision in regard to doctrine."<sup>37</sup>

There seemed to be a reasonable amount of confusion as to just what the Wisconsin Synod intended to say by these instructions. Some interpreted as being a desire not to make a decision on doctrine; others, that Wisconsin simply didn't want it discussed in the Synodical conference; still others viewed it as a guarded statement to the effect that 'if Missouri walks out so will we.'

Missouri's plan when instructing its delegates was apparently not one of walking out if Ohio wanted to be seated, but rather 'to not sit

together' by expelling any and all who were of a divisive nature. This is borne out by Pieper's letter to Wisconsin's President Bading of the following year.

The next event on the summer calendar was the pastoral conference and special synod convention of the fourth member of the now shaky Synodical Conference. Before that special meeting, September 8-13, a number of shifts of alliance were to take place that were an omen of what was yet to come.

Following Missouri's Fort Wayne resolution, Ohio Pastors J. H. Werfelmann, C. Sallmann, H. Horst and C. A. Frank (first editor of the Lutheran Witness) resigned their pastorates. About the same time, the President of the Northwestern District of the Missouri Synod took the action of suspending Rev. A. H. Allward, Schmidt's brother-in-law, from his pastorate in Lebanon, Wisconsin. In Michigan, Missouri's Northern District president Rev. O. Fuerbringer announced a similar suspension of another of the men who had been vocal at Fort Wayne, Rev. C. H. Rohe. He was taken up by Ohio's northern district in November.

Matthias Loy, sensing the doctrinal seriousness which had been underscored by Missouri's display of unity and firm stand on breaking fellowship, both in theory at Fort Wayne, and in practice, writes in his pre-convention issue of the Standard, "Everything tends to point members of our Synod to the fact that our next meeting in Wheeling will be one of the most important in our history."<sup>38</sup>

Little did Ohio realize just how true Loy's prediction was to be. The action that Ohio would finally take at Wheeling would isolate it, without a permanent, dependable ally, for 37 years.

After six sessions devoted to an understanding of the doctrine of

election, the majority of the assembled delegates gave their hearts and vote to the following statement:

"We again herewith confess the doctrine of election as it is contained in the Formula of Concord, and also (my emphasis) as it has in accordance therewith been always taught on the whole by the great teachers of our church; especially do we hold the doctrine of our fathers, that the ordination of the elect to eternal life took place in view of faith, i.e., in view of the merits of Christ appropriated by faith, to be in accord with the Scriptures and our confession; Therefore, Resolved, That in the future as in the past the doctrine here anew confessed be alone authorized in our institutions, schools, publications, and churches."<sup>39</sup>

The vote was 142 in favor, 22 against.

A second resolution to withdraw from the Synodical Conference passed by an even greater margin. Ohio was alone. Losses and acquisitions, both of pastors and congregations would continue for almost a decade. Ohio would boast that she had gained more than Missouri when all the shouting was over. Missouri refuted that claim, especially on the basis of percentages. But when the second decade after the split drew to a close and Ohio was still a lonely stepchild, she was ready to agree that one of her gains in 1881, the acquisition of Rev. A. H. Allwardt (who was welcomed along with H. Ernst) was indeed an albatross about her neck. In the following year Ohio would take in yet another 'liability' in the cause of church union, but that is another story.

Just days after the Wheeling Declaration, the third of the most vocal critics of Fort Wayne, Rev. P. Eirich, withdrew from Missouri and joined Ohio. At the same time, in quick succession, four Ohio men withdrew and maintained independent status. One of these, Rev. F. Kuegele was later instrumental in organizing Missouri's English Conference, he himself being elected as its first president 7 years later.

The Wisconsin Synod Pastoral Conference which had become a regular

feature since 1979 again met to discuss the doctrine of election, this time on the basis of theses drawn up by Prof. Hoenecke at the direction of the Synod Convention. The Lutheran Standard, now a much more polemical and sarcastic church paper quoted Hoenecke's second thesis, "The eternal election of God is the cause of faith in the elect, but this election does not take place in view of the faith of the elect." It then comments that after long discussions there was no harmony among the brothers on this thesis. "There is now the policy in that synod to 'agree to disagree' and thus avoid separations."<sup>40</sup>

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The November 26th issue of the Gemeinde Blatt, however, asserts that such is not the case. They have not 'agreed to disagree.' The majority, in adopting the 'Missouri' doctrine has required the minority that it no longer give ear to the opponents, but, until the matter can be further discussed, to study the subject in light of God's Word.<sup>41</sup> So far no defections had taken place from the ranks of the Wisconsin Synod.

Missouri's most significant 'en masse' loss took place at the end of this year. Ten pastors and 3 churches and two teachers met at Blue Island, Illinois to form an opposition party called the "Evangelical Lutheran Conference." It would not be until the following year that they officially joined Ohio.

1882

When the above-mentioned "Evangelical Lutheran Conference" met on April 12 at Mt. Olive, Illinois, their numbers had grown from 10 pastors to 16, from 3 churches to 5, and <sup>from</sup> 2 teachers to 3. They resolved to apply for admission to the Ohio Synod as a new district - the Northwestern District. The president of this new group - J. H. Doermann, the last

of the five Missouri detractors at Fort Wayne to finally find his home.

But the Missouri dissidents were not the only ones who were meeting in 1882. On June 7, twelve of the pastors who had left Ohio following the Wheeling Declaration along with 6 congregational delegates met in Pittsburg to form the Concordia Synod of Pennsylvania and other States. Two pastors who were unable to attend applied for charter membership by letter.

Until the 7th of June these men had remained independent. It is for that reason that the Standard, in its June 3 edition could boast, "The Ohio Synod has gained more than it lost, and of those who separated from us there were very few that actually joined the Missouri Synod, though they were unwilling to accept the truth which Ohio confesses."<sup>42</sup> Within 4 days of this publication, the Concordia Synod not only met to organize, but at the same time apply for membership in the Synodical Conference, making the Standard eat its words. If not joined 'to' Missouri, Concordia's men were at least joined 'with' her in the bond of a common confession.

Concordia's newly acquired sister synods, Wisconsin and Minnesota, opened their joint convention the very next day, gathered at La Crosse, Wisconsin. The machinations of Rev. Klindworth (a former Iowan now turned Wisconsin Synod) to stir up support for his views on election precipitated a show of unity by the delegates assembled. The rising vote to approve the thesis on conversion made it necessary for each to let his feelings be known. On a rising vote, Klindworth couldn't get lost in the crowd. To his credit, Klindworth, true to his confession if not the Confessions, did not rise. Joining him in this protest were Pastors Siegrist and Vollmar of Minnesota, and Pastor Althof of

Wisconsin. . . They protested that since the body had 'decided in favor of Calvinism' they and their congregations would have to withdraw.

The final sister of the Synodical Conference, the Norwegian Synod was meeting during the month of June in three districts. Papers of the day reported that attendance was good "because it became known that a resolution would be introduced to withdraw from the Synodical Conference."<sup>43</sup> The resolution referred to was one that anti-Missourian P. A. Rasmussen and another prominent member of the synod had published.

When the Iowa District met during the first week in June they considered various phases of the doctrine of election and conversion. The two sides in the controversy came no closer to a consensus than they had at the joint synod meeting the year before. And on the resolution to withdraw from the Synodical Conference, the Iowa District's decision was that they were not ready to make a decision.

The Eastern District came to a similar conclusion. Only the Minnesota District was ready to speak out, and they flatly rejected the proposal to withdraw. At least one thing was clear. The Missourians in the Synod still were in control, but how firmly? The opposition appeared to be gaining ground by claiming a doublemindedness on the part of Norwegian leaders who insisted on such close relationship to the German Missourians.

Iowa, too, got into the 'election controversy' act in June when in its Synod meeting at Dubuque Prof. S. Fritschel, one of the synods founders, presented seven theses on the subject. Five of them were in direct contradiction to Missouri's position.<sup>44</sup>

Rev. Klindworth, who only several years earlier had gotten into trouble with his Iowa Synod during the 'merger' negotiations, had



joined the Wisconsin Synod only to find himself in disagreement with their election doctrine. Now in 1882 he applied for admission to Ohio, and was received without colloquy.<sup>45</sup> As mentioned earlier, their acceptance of him meant that they had a second 'albatross' around their necks' when it came to seeking fellowship with Iowa later on. Both he and Allwardt were to insist on complete doctrinal unity before merger. Iowa, on the other hand would protest that Ohio had taken him in without a colloquy and until something was done about it they could not think of merging. Indeed, as Loy had written earlier, the decision at Wheeling was indeed 'one of the most important' in Ohio's history.

The independent offshoot of Ohio, the Concordia Synod held its second meeting of 1882. On the roll were still the same 14 pastors, 1 teacher joined the group as well as two congregations, bringing that total to 8. The president of the Synod, Rev. P. Brand of Pittsburg addressed the conference on the topic, "Why we left Ohio."

The event toward which all attention was focused this year, however, was the October Synodical Conference meeting in Chicago. Schmidt and a few of his vocal friends were still members of the Synodical Conference, and Schmidt himself had gotten himself elected as a Norwegian delegate to the conference. Before the Conference met there was great concern as to what the various Synods would do when Schmidt demanded to be seated. The Wisconsin Synod had a resolution to withdraw on the books. Missouri was committed to unseating him or withdrawing. Pieper of Missouri sought assurance from Wisconsin that she would stay at Missouri's side if Missouri were to make a stand.

The Wisconsin Synod had apparently tried to cut off Schmidt before he ever got to the floor of the conference. Through Bading, the Synod

had filed an appeal with the president of Schmidt's synod, H. Preus. Bading charged that Schmidt and a former Missouri teacher named Gruber had conspired to split up the Oshkosh congregation of Pastor Dowidat.<sup>46</sup> It appears that if Preus had been able to prove the charge that Schmidt had meddled in Dowidat's congregation he might have suspended him. That Schmidt had gone there on his own accord and was not invited was not easy to prove. Time for Synodical Conference arrived before proof against Schmidt did, so the matter had to be handled in Chicago.

Predictably, the seating of Schmidt was protested. Cogent reasons were given as to why it would be counterproductive to seat him. Schmidt's followers argued that he ought to be seated and that the floor of the convention ought to be the place where Schmidt's teachings should get a hearing. The vote went against Schmidt. In tears he took his leave of the Conference.

Significant to the election controversy story was the reception of the fledgeling Concordia Synod into official membership at this meeting.

1883

The events at the Synodical Conference, as predictable as they were, spurred Schmidt and the anti-Missourians into action, agitating for a complete separation from the Conference. He pointed to the inconsistency of his fellow Norwegians at the Synodical Conference. They had voted not to seat him, yet publicly stated immediately afterward that this action must not be taken to mean that they had broken fellowship with him in their own synod.

Rasmussen, who in the previous year had introduced the proposal to

split the synod from the Synodical Conference took up the task with renewed vigor. Ylvisaker, in Grace for Grace makes mention of the fact that on Good Friday, "Dr. Schmidt retaliated by securing the deposition of President H. A. Preus and his son, Rev. C. K. Preus, from their congregations in Norway Grove, Wisconsin."<sup>47</sup> What this was intended to effect, and how it was accomplished is not mentioned, but Nelson-Fevold, in their book state, "In fact, so thoroughly was the climate of opinion altered that such staunch Missourians as H. A. Preus and U. V. Koren now began to advocate such a step (i.e., separation), saying that it would be good for the church."<sup>48</sup> Obviously, that statement by Preus was made after, not before he had his congregation taken away from him!

The resolution to break from the Conference passed the district synods in summer with little opposition. The Norwegians, now, were also home, and free to try to settle the controversy in their own midst and to effect alliances that some had long desired with Norwegian brethren.

The echos of the election controversy continued for many years in the synods that had made up the original Synodical Conference, but these first five years, 1878 - 1883 mark the period of the most significant activity. The controversy had sifted the truly confessional from the midst of Ohio and had produced the Concordia Synod. It had tested and strengthened the Wisconsin/Minnesota and Missouri Synods. But the Norwegian Synod's segregation from their confessional brothers as well as time decimated the ranks of the faithful in that Synod. Only a fragment of a fragment from the Norwegian Church would eventually return to the Conference, the rest of that body along with the Ohio Synod following a gradual downward course in terms of confessionalism.

Adherence to the Confessions had been costly. It had shattered the Synodical Conference, and with it Walther's great dream. How easy it would have been to compromise, to allow Reason to reign supreme, to let the seventeenth-century dogmaticians' utterances hold sway. But to the credit of Walther and all those who stood beside him in those crucial times, it must be said that their actions stand as a shining example of subjecting aspirations to Inspiration. The fondest dreams of men had been willingly subordinated to the Will and Word of God.

ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup>The Lutheran Standard, October 8, 1881, p. 318.
- <sup>2</sup>The Lutheran Witness, July 7, 1882, p. 26.
- <sup>3</sup>W. G. Polack, The Building of a Great Church (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1941), p. 148.
- <sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 149.
- <sup>5</sup>E. Clifford Nelson and Eugene L. Fevold, The Lutheran Church among Norwegian Americans (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1960) p. 258.
- <sup>6</sup>The Lutheran Standard, June 22, 1878, p. 197.
- <sup>7</sup>Walter A. Baepler, A Century of Grace (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1947) p. 199.
- <sup>8</sup>Nelson and Fevold, Op. cit., p. 260.
- <sup>9</sup>The Lutheran Witness, June 21, 1882, p.4.
- <sup>10</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>11</sup>Baepler, Op. cit., p. 200.
- <sup>12</sup>Roy A. Suelflow, Walking with Wise Men (Milwaukee: S. Wisconsin District of the L. C.-M. S., 1967), p. 117.
- <sup>13</sup>J. P. Koehler, History of the Wisconsin Synod (St. Cloud, Minnesota: Protestant Conference, 1970), p. 158.
- <sup>14</sup>The Lutheran Witness, June 21, 1882, p. 4.
- <sup>15</sup>The Lutheran Standard, January 17, 1880, p. 21.
- <sup>16</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>17</sup>The Lutheran Standard, February 28, 1880, p. 60.
- <sup>18</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>19</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>20</sup>The Lutheran Standard, April 17, 1880, p. 121-122.
- <sup>21</sup>Ibid., P. 125.

- <sup>22</sup>The Lutheran Standard, June 12, 1880, p. 186.
- <sup>23</sup>Ibid, p. 189.
- <sup>24</sup>The Lutheran Standard, October 30, 1880. p. 338.
- <sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 340.
- <sup>26</sup>S. C. Ylvisaker, ed., Grace for Grace (Mankato: Lutheran Synod Book Company, 1943), p. 170.
- <sup>27</sup>The Lutheran Standard, February 28, 1880, p. 61.
- <sup>28</sup>The Lutheran Standard, January 22, 1881, p. 29.
- <sup>29</sup>Koehler, Op. cit., p. 159.
- <sup>30</sup>Suelflow, Op. cit., p. 119.
- <sup>31</sup>The Lutheran Standard, February 12, 1881, p. 49.
- <sup>32</sup>The Lutheran Standard, April 30, 1881, p. 140.
- <sup>33</sup>The Lutheran Standard, May 21, 1881, p. 164.
- <sup>34</sup>The Lutheran Standard, June 4, 1881, p. 181.
- <sup>35</sup>Baepler, Op. cit., p. 202.
- <sup>36</sup>Ylvisaker, Op. cit., p. 171.
- <sup>37</sup>Koehler, Op. cit., p. 159.
- <sup>38</sup>The Lutheran Standard, August 27, 1881, p. 209.
- <sup>39</sup>Willard D. Allbeck, A Century of Lutherans in Ohio (Yellow Springs, Ohio: The Antioch Press, 1966) p. 217.
- <sup>40</sup>The Lutheran Standard, November 12, 1881, p. 356.
- <sup>41</sup>Gemeinde Blatt, November 26, 1881.
- <sup>42</sup>The Lutheran Standard, June 3, 1882, p. 173.
- <sup>43</sup>The Lutheran Standard, July 29, 1882, p. 232.
- <sup>44</sup>The Lutheran Witness, July 21, 1882, p. 37.
- <sup>45</sup>Allbeck, Op. cit., 267

<sup>46</sup>Koehler, Op. cit., 160.

<sup>47</sup>Ylvisaker, Op cit., p. 264.

<sup>48</sup>Nelson and Fevold, Op. cit., p. 264.