

Prayer Fellowship in the  
Missouri Synod:

A Study of Missouri's Change in Position  
and its Preponderate Cause.

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Thomas C. Fischer

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The subject of fellowship and unionism is a vast one. To date many books, tracts, and conference papers have been written on this subject as well as on specific areas of this general subject. And this is good, for fellowship is a subject which is of great concern for all Christians. On the one side, as Christians, we have to be careful not to deny fellowship with those who are in agreement with us and thus become separatists. But on the other side, we have to be equally cautious that we don't become guilty of practicing fellowship where it shouldn't be practiced, thus becoming guilty of unionism. The "middle" position, if I may be permitted to call it that, is the position we must strive for and hold to. And the only guide and rule we have to determine this proper position is the Bible. It clearly sets down certain principles in the matter of fellowship which if we are going to be His disciples we must abide by out of love for our Savior and loyalty to His Word. "If ye continue in My Word, then are ye My disciples indeed" (Jn 8,31).

In recent years the matter of fellowship is one which has received a great deal of attention. It has stirred numerous controversies - some of which ended sadly in the compromise of scriptural truth. And now though the raging controversies have subsided, a proper understanding of fellowship principles as set down in Scripture is still a matter of utmost concern for us as pastors and future pastors. If we don't have a proper understanding of the principles set forth in God's Word, our Synod too could well stray from the clear truth of God's Word.

A sad example of this straying is seen in the case of the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod. Whereas Missouri once held

with us the pure scriptural doctrine in regard to fellowship, they have forsaken the precious fellowship we once knew and departed from Scripture's clear teachings on fellowship.

While the error in the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod first raised its ugly head in the area of prayer fellowship and joint prayer, it quickly spread to other areas of fellowship and continued its infiltration until it had infected various other biblical doctrines.

It is my hope that by reviewing the change that took place in the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod in the matter of prayer fellowship, I will be better aware of the traps which satan lays for the Christian Church and will be led to a better understanding of the principles involved in prayer fellowship, of fellowship in general. Also that I may be able to better withstand the attacks of satan and guide the people who will soon be entrusted to my care in understanding and practicing the principles involved in fellowship.

In studying the events which lead to Missouri's change in her doctrine of prayer fellowship we shall divide the history into five segments: 1) The Principles are Laid; 2) The Principles are Applied, ( a look at the early history of prayer fellowship); 3) The Principles are Challenged, ( a look at the early challenges to the scriptural doctrine of prayer fellowship); 4) The Principles are Subjected to Further Questioning, ( a look at the changing feelings within the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod); and 5) The Principles are Cast Aside, ( a look at the new doctrinal position of the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod ).

While this by no means is an exhaustive study of the change in prayer fellowship doctrine and practice within the Missouri Synod, I hope this paper will provide an overview of the subject and point out the main steps along the way with special emphasis on how each questioning of the Synod's policy was handled. For the poor way in which the dissenters were dealt with would seem to be a major factor which lead to Missouri's unfortunate turn-about in her doctrine of fellowship, especially prayer fellowship.

I.

The Principles are Laid

The foundation on which Missouri's former doctrinal position regarding prayer fellowship was founded was God's revealed Word. And as long as she based her fellowship doctrine on the proper interpretation of the Scriptures she held to the biblical teachings applying to prayer fellowship. The claim "so far as direct Scripture teaching on prayer fellowship is concerned, there is no passage so far as we know, that expressly prohibits prayer fellowship with erring Christians whom we must still regard as members of the universal Christian Church"<sup>1</sup> must not be overlooked and passed off without so much as a second thought.

While we readily admit that there is no Bible passage which says 'Thou shalt not pray together with erring Christians,' the warnings and exhortations of the inspired writers do apply also in this situation. For though they do not in so many words say 'do not pray together with erring Christians' the general principles which they set forth make it perfectly clear that joint prayer with Christians who are persistent in their errors are

forbidden.

But not only did the apostles sound stern warnings against such a practice, but also conducted themselves accordingly. They clearly showed that it is always the will of God for His believers to display in worship and in prayer the fellowship of faith that unites them until and unless confession of the truth and rejection of error require them to separate. "If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed; for he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds" ( 2 Jn 10-11).

These are not legalistic rules which the apostles set down but evangelical principles. They are to be applied in the spirit of our Savior, who would not break a bruised reed, nor quench a smoking flax.

## II. The Principles are Practiced

These principles which the inspired writers recorded for the use of God's children were followed by the early Christian Church even after the last of the apostles had been called to eternal glory. Those who showed themselves to be contrary to the Gospel were excluded from the congregation and fellowship was not practiced with them.

Werner Elert, a conservative German theologian, carried on exhaustive research regarding church fellowship as practiced by Christians of the first centuries. Concerning the schism which developed between Bishop Meletius of Lycopolis and Peter of Alexandria, he relates that Epiphanius

says that the controversy came to a head in this that " the one party and the other prayed separately, and likewise each performed the other holy ministrations for himself."<sup>2</sup> In other words, they suspended prayer and sacrament fellowship.

Elert states in his book that no grounds or basis for varying degrees and distinctions in church fellowship can be found in the practice of the early Christian Church. "If in modern inter-confessional relations distinctions and degrees of church fellowship are made ... this can in no wise be traced to the customs of the Early Church."<sup>3</sup> Clearly the early Christians abided by the scriptural principles in the matter of church fellowship.

During the Reformation there were many meetings and colloquies held among the various reformers who were not necessarily all in perfect agreement in doctrine. Nevertheless, joint worship services were held in which the participants joined in prayer with one another. Perhaps the classic example is the Marburg Colloquy at which Luther and Zwingli met in an attempt to reach agreement in the doctrine of the Lord's Supper. Services were conducted at which Luther changed off with Zwingli and Bucer. But there was no joint celebration of the Sacrament. Now when we view this we have to remember that at that time there was no 'Lutheran' or 'Reformed Church' in the later sense of these designations. Confessional lines were not yet conclusively drawn in 1529.

The results of the Colloquy were somewhat encouraging with the Zwinglians subscribing to the first fourteen of the Marburg Articles. However, they still clung to their errors in the matter

of the Lord's Supper. At the end of the Colloquy they were told that unless they came to the biblical teaching of the Lord's Supper they could not be regarded by the 'Lutherans' as brethren and members in Christ. Christian fellowship could not be practiced with those who did not accept all the teachings of the Bible. From this incident and numerous others it is evident that the principles which guided Luther were those which Scripture clearly sets forth.

Despite what some say, these same scriptural principles were followed in the formative years of the Missouri Synod and the Synodical Conference. During the years 1856-1859, a number of Free Conferences were called by Dr. Walther. At these conferences the sessions were opened with joint prayer even though the participants came from Synods which were not in fellowship. But in order to properly understand this, several factors have to be taken into consideration.

At that time in history a large number of Lutheran Synods were united in the General Synod, formed in 1820. The confessional stand of this Synod was atrocious. In its constitution the Lutheran Confessions were not so much as even mentioned. But there was also an ever increasingly large number of men in the General Synod who defended the Confessions, who wanted to stand on the Unaltered Augsburg Confession.

In 1865, Dr. Walther in "Lehre und Wehre," the theological magazine of the Missouri Synod, proposed a series of Free Conferences. To be invited were those men who subscribed to the Unaltered Augsburg Confession.



When Dr. Walther received encouragement for this undertaking, he proceeded to publish the following invitation: "The undersigned of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the United States, with the conviction that the unity and the well-being of our Lutheran Zion will be greatly advanced through the free expression of opinions regarding the various interests of our Church in this land by brethren who are united in faith, hereby with extend an invitation to all members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the United States who hold the Unaltered Augsburg Confession to be a true presentation of the teachings of the Word of God to meet with them ... in a free and brotherly conference concerning the status and needs of the Church in America."

Note well, the invitation was based on a wholehearted acceptance of the Unaltered Augsburg Confession; the invitation was issued to individuals, not church bodies. Thus the fellowship expressed at these Free Conferences was not with the unionistic General Synod, but with whoever stepped forward with a positive confession for the truth and against the laxness of the General Synod. Therefore "since the Free Conferences consisted of men who confessed unreserved acceptance of the Unaltered Augsburg Confession, there was present a fundamental unity. Whatever errors one or the other may have held, was a matter of weakness and not of persistence. To refuse joint prayer under such circumstances would have been a violation of the brotherhood."<sup>5</sup>

Missouri's Colloquies with the Buffalo Synod and Iowa Synod are two more cases in point. After Grabau revealed his true colors and left the Buffalo Synod, Missouri in 1866, invited

the Buffalo Synod for a colloquy. The purpose of the colloquy is described in the "Lutheraner" in this way: "with the gracious help of God to arrive at unity of doctrine and peace and Christian reconciliation" (Lutheraner, 1866, p. 28). Under such circumstances they could hardly be considered as such who were set and hardened in error. They were men whose doctrinal position was somewhat uncertain, but who were looking for the truth and willing to bow to the Word of God.

When in 1866-1867 the General Council was formed as a refuge for Lutherans who held to the Unaltered Augsburg Confession, but failed to take a clear and decisive stand on the so-called Four Points (lodgery, pulpit fellowship, altar fellowship, and chiliasm), the Iowa Synod among others refused to join. In so doing they showed a strict sense of confessionalism. Thus when Iowa and Missouri met for a colloquy, the question was not, can unity be attained? Quite the opposite, can unity, threatened by error, be preserved? Since basic unity of confession was present between Iowa and Missouri, opening the Colloquy with joint prayer was in place. By no stretch of the imagination can this be construed as joint prayer with representatives of bodies who were persistently adhering to error.

When in 1872 the Synodical Conference was formed, it spoke very clearly regarding the scriptural principles involved in fellowship. After Romans 16:17 and Titus 3:10 were quoted, and in a footnote six additional passages adduced, the following statement was made: "In these and similar passages of Holy Scripture God expressly and earnestly commands us not to remain in church-

brotherly fellowship with false teachers and heretical people, much less to seek their fellowship or to enter in upon fraternal associations. On the contrary, we are earnestly and as a matter of principle to flee from and avoid them."<sup>6</sup>

During the Election Controversy the Synodical Conference not only stood firm in its scriptural teachings on election, but also in the matter of fellowshiping with those who were not in agreement on this doctrine.

"Also we say openly and honestly to everyone who teaches differently from us, even though he appeals to the Confession of the Lutheran Church: We do not belong together and so must go our own separate ways. By that we do not say that our opponents are heretics, nor do we condemn them.... But this is what we say: We can no longer walk together. We also cannot pray with one another any longer. For you will pray for our and we for your conversion. But such joint praying is an abomination in the sight of God."<sup>7</sup>

The early 1900's saw the Missouri Synod holding free conferences with the Ohio and Iowa Synods. But since Ohio was adamant in its position regarding election (Ohio left the Synodical Conference in the Election Controversy) and Iowa held to its unscriptural position regarding open questions, the members of the Synodical Conference objected to joint prayer at these meetings.

In the 1920's attempts were once again made by the Synodical Conference and the Ohio, Iowa, and Buffalo Synods to arrive at agreement again. In these meetings there was no joint prayer, that is, until the last meetings, at which the participants thought they had reached agreement. This was quite proper.

For many years the theologians spoke and write boldly in defense of the scriptural principles involved in prayer fellowship.

In 1895, District President Wegener read a lengthy exposition on twelve theses about prayer to the Southern District of the Missouri Synod. He wrote: "People who join in prayer must be of one mind, one faith, one hope, for joint prayer is an expression of a common faith. For that reason Christians cannot pray together with the heterodox."<sup>8</sup>

When the synods of the Synodical Conference were criticized for not practicing joint prayer at the free conferences in the early 1900's referred to previously, Dr. Bente in "Lehre und Wehre" defended this practice. He wrote:

"The prerequisite for prayer fellowship and church fellowship is unity of faith. God has expressly forbidden us to practice church fellowship with such with whom we are not united in the truth."<sup>9</sup>

In a lengthy article in 1905, he wrote:

"If anything is clearly taught in the Scriptures, not only indirectly, but directly, then it is just this that with such who cannot be regarded as weak in understanding, but must be considered persistent errorists we are not permitted to practice church and brother fellowship."<sup>10</sup>

Quoting Romans 16:17 he stated:

"The Apostle speaks here of people in the Roman congregation who came up with a doctrine that differed from the doctrine they had heard from the Apostles, who clung to that doctrine, and sought to gain adherents for it .... And what is the command of the Apostle to all Christians in regard to such false teachers? Is it perhaps: Practice pulpit fellowship, church fellowship, altar fellowship with them, or at least conduct liturgical prayer services with them? On the contrary, he says: 'Avoid them.'<sup>11</sup>

Regarding II John 11, 12 he commented:

"Clearly John here speaks of church fellowship and brotherly intercourse ( and so also of prayer fellowship and fellowship in worship) with errorists .... He judges that Christians who engage in such church and brother fellowship with false teachers become partakers of their sins. Also this passage requires and justifies the conduct of the Synodical Conference at Detroit. Through a joint fraternal prayer service the

Synodical Conference would have defiled itself with the errors of its opponents. It would have confessed itself to their errors. At least, it would thereby have declared to its opponents that their errors are not dangerous, are insignificant, a matter of indifference, and not especially obstructive of the Christian truth."<sup>12</sup>

In 1919, Pastor W. Schoenfeld wrote a pamphlet which was issued by the Missouri Synod Committee on the American Legion. In this pamphlet, entitled "Promiscuous Prayer, Unamerican-Unbiblical," we read:

"Let the Christian also ponder deeply the admonition of St. Paul in Rom. 16:17: 'I beseech you, brethren, mark those who cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned, and avoid them.' If, as the Apostle here admonishes, Christ's disciples must avoid schismatics, who by false teaching have disrupted Christ's Church, how can they join them in prayer."<sup>13</sup>

In an essay on Unionism, Dr. F. Pieper said to the Oregon and Washington District:

"The Holy Scriptures very emphatically and in manifold ways teach that all fellowship with false doctrine is forbidden by God and is harmful to the Church." On II John 10,11 he said: "God here forbids Unionism, religious fellowship with those who are known to be false teachers. To pray with them, or to partake of the Lord's Supper with them, would mean to consent to, and to become 'partakers of their evil works.'"<sup>14</sup>

In 1937 Dr. William Arndt wrote an essay on "Christian Prayer."

In it he states:

"We are not going too far when we say that adherence to false doctrine is a barrier to prayer fellowship is evident from the insistence with which Jesus has commanded that we remain faithful to everything that He has taught." That refusal of joint prayer with errorists is not a loveless act, but motivated by a deep concern for their spiritual welfare, Dr. Arndt showed in the following words: "In humility, with fear and trembling, we must do our duty and point to what is wrong, rebuking and reproving with all patience."<sup>15</sup>

But soon the time would come when the principles would be questioned.

### III. The Principles are Challenged

The first challenge came from Dr. Adolph A. Brux, a Missouri Synod missionary in India. A graduate of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis in 1917, he began his ministry as a faculty member at the synodical preparatory high school and junior college in Milwaukee. During the summer of 1918, he studied Semitic languages and literature at the University of Chicago. In 1919 he pursued a doctoral program in Arabic studies and received his degree in 1923. Ever since the summer course of 1918, he considered entering the foreign mission work of the church being especially interested in working among the Muslims. His studies made him eminantly qualified for this work, and in 1923, he was commissioned for service in India.

On January 1, 1924, Dr. Brux and his wife arrived in Bombay together with two other missionaries and their wives and three single women sent out by the Missouri Synod. Due to the high hotel rates and limited financial resources, these missionaries registered at a Protestant missionary hospice which was established in order to accomodate incoming and outgoing Protestant missionaries in the port city.

It was customary for all guests to be invited to Scripture reading and evening prayer following supper. Though his two missionary colleagues found it convenient to take an after dinner stroll, Brux and his wife, together with two of the other women, found it more fitting to accept the invitation of the host and be present for the evening devotion.

By participating in the evening prayers led by a Protestant

Christian that evening, Brux was raising the entire issue of inter-Christian relations. He took part on the basis of his understanding of what the synodical version of Luther's Small Catechism stated under the subject of prayer fellowship, namely that "all believers in Christ the children of one Father and should, therefore, pray for and with each other."<sup>16</sup> From the writings of various theologians in the Missouri Synod it is obvious that they interpreted this statement to mean prayer fellowship with the saints in the invisible church and with visible Christians who were affiliated with the Missouri Synod.

Brux, however, could find no biblical warrant for such an interpretation. So not only did he participate in this service lead by a Protestant of another denomination, but defended his actions among his new missionary colleagues as they traveled via rail to their new stations.

Shortly after the arrival of the Bruces in Vaniyambadi, North Arcot District, Madras Presidency, the incident was discussed at the meeting of the Missouri Synod missionaries of the Northern (Ambur) District Conference held in Vaniyambadi, January 24-30, 1924. It soon became apparent that there were differing opinions on the subject. Therefore Brux was invited to present a conference paper on the subject of Christian prayer fellowship and unionism at the spring conference in Krishnagiri.

Though time was short and he was extremely busy settling in a new land and in new work, yet Brux devoted himself to a thorough study of the matter and the Bible passages involved. His conclusions were very bold and controversial, for he declared that "there was no sound biblical warrant for the current official

practice of the Missouri Synod, which forbade praying with Christians who were not in organizational fellowship with the Synod."<sup>17</sup>

As could well be expected, his essay aroused a torrent of conflicting opinion among his colleagues. Since the matter could not be settled, the conference requested Missinnary Blaess to write an essay on the same topic, which would then together with Brux's paper, be read and discussed at the next conference.

This was then done at the next conference, held July 24-Aug. 1, 1924. Blaess's essay was read as well as portions of Brux's and then the matter opened for discussion. Once again no agreement could be reached and it was decided to discuss the matter further at the next conference in October. In the meantime all members of the conference were asked to read and study both papers and submit their opinions to the conference secretary who in turn was to inform Brux of the same.

When the conference met again in October Blaess withdrew his paper though he was retained as moderator of the discussion. Still a third time the subject was not resolved but carried over to the next meeting, February, 1925. At this meeting the discussion was concluded with the resolve that Dr. Brux submit a final copy of his essay to the Board of Foreign Missions.

Since the paper was to be submitted with the opinions by his fellow missionaries, Brux again circulated his paper asking for the missionaries to reply. Only two complied. Due to further complications the paper was not submitted to the Board until Brux was home on furlough in 1931.

Then ensued a fantastic number of meetings with various



officials within the Missouri Synod.

Rev. Boerger, a member of the Board, first discussed the subject with Brux. The outcome of this meeting was that Boerger agreed with Brux on his interpretation of the Scripture passages involved.

In a meeting with the St. Louis Board, when no progress could be made on the subject in question, it was resolved that Prof. Sommer and Rev. Boerger constitute a committee to discuss the matter with Brux. Meetings held by these men resulted in no progress.

Brux's paper was then referred to the faculty of Concordia Seminary for an opinion. The faculty however, declined to give an opinion, stating "that the discussion would be too lengthy and that the Mission Board can settle this question itself."<sup>18</sup> I might say at this point, that this was an unfortunante move on the part of the faculty. A sound refutation should have been given by all these men and the matter could have been resolved in a God-pleasing manner. Already one can see how poorly the matter was being handled. Nevertheless, the meetings and negotiations went on.

In February, 1932, Professors Fuerbringer and Graebner, under whom Brux had studied at the Seminary, met with him. But once again the results were entirely negative.

Finally on May 16, 1932, the St. Louis Board passed the following resolution:

"Whereas, Missionary A. A. Brux no longer holds and confesses with us that Christians having the pure Word of God should not have prayer fellowship with sectarian Christians, but on the contrary holds and declares that the prayer fellowship is

required of them not only in private, but also in public, e. g. in prayer meetings; Therefore, be it herewith resolved with sincere regrets that we cannot return him as a missionary to India."<sup>19</sup>

This resolution was then passed on to the Plenary Board of Foreign Missions for approval at its meeting on June 14, 1932. However, because various members of the Board had not studied Brux's paper, a vote on the resolution was postponed.

It should be noted that in the periods between various meetings, Dr. Brux was not idle. He wrote letter after letter to the various Boards with which he was dealing defending his position as the scriptural and God-pleasing one.

On October 11, 1932, the Plenary Board of Foreign Missions met again with Dr. Brux present to discuss Brux's paper on prayer fellowship. At this meeting the argument centered on the exegesis of Romans 16:17-18. The Board defended the proper interpretation of the passage over against Brux's interpretation, namely, that this passage applies only to "antichrists, determined to undermine and subvert Paul's doctrine of justification by faith,"<sup>20</sup> and the doctrine which Paul refers to must be "limited to the fundamental doctrines of Christianity, and cannot be extended to include all non-fundamental points of Christian doctrine as well."<sup>21</sup>

As a result of that meeting the following resolution was passed by the Board:

"Since Dr. Brux in his paper on "Prayer Fellowship" has departed from the accepted scriptural position of our Synod with respect to prayer with heterodox Christians, as he himself acknowledges, and since our long continued efforts to convince him of the error of his position have been unavailing, RESOLVED that we cannot return him to the field in India if he does not recede from his position within the time stated in his remarks as given in the minutes above. RESOLVED furthermore that we await the definite answer of Dr. Brux referred to in the foregoing, and that if he

continues to hold his present position, his connection with our Board terminate Oct. 31, 1932, and that his salary cease Nov. 30, 1932."22

However, no conclusive action followed and the Board passed the question onto a Fiduciary Committee. This committee was composed of the following prominent Missouri theologians: H. Daib, Theo. Laetsch, and W. H. T. Dau. It met for three days in Chicago in 1933, but could not reach a unanimous conclusion. The committee did, however, suggest that a fraternal discussion of the points in controversy be continued. The committee recommended appointing two persons to meet with Dr. Brux for this purpose, one to be a member of the Mission Board, the other a man who would be agreeable to Dr. Brux. The Board did not accept the recommendation of the Fiduciary Committee but adopted a resolution which said in effect that it considered such meetings unpromising. A positive move on the part of the Board.

Brux met with President Pfoth and urged him to intervene and rectify the injustices done to him. (If the presentation which Brux makes in his "Appeal" is factual, and there is no reason to doubt that it is, I would have to agree that the way Brux's case was handled was unfortunate in certain respects.) Nevertheless, Dr. Pfoth properly refused to intervene. And so Dr. Brux resolved to take his case to the Synod in Convention in 1935.

In 1934, Brux issued his "Appeal" in which he gave a detailed history of the case and also defended his position. Also in 1934, Dr. Brux reworked and reissued his controversial paper "Christian Prayer Fellowship and Unionism." The following six points summarize his paper.

1. That the Bible passages of group I (Mt 7,15; Rm16,17; II Cor 6,14; 11:13-15; Gal 1,6-9; Phil 3,2; II Thes 3,6-15; I Tim 6,3-5; II Tim 2,16-18; Titus 1,10-16; Titus 3,10; II Peter 2,1ff; II John 10-11) refer to such persons as may not be regarded as Christians, or, as in the case of II Thes 3, 6-15, clearly enjoin that Christian religious fellowship should be maintained.
2. That the Bible passages of group II ( Mt 5, 23-24; 10,32-33 (Luke 12, 8-9); Mt 18,15-17; 18,19; Luke 9,26 (Mark 8,38); Jn 8, 31-32; Acts 2,42; Gal 5,9; Eph 4, 1-6; I Thes 5, 22; Amos 3,3) do not prove that prayer fellowship with Christians differing from us in doctrines which do not overthrow the foundation inherently involves a violation of confessional conscience and therefore unionism ( compromise of truth).
3. That there is, therefore, not one Bible passage to uphold Synod's negative position, and that the claim that the Scriptures forbid prayer fellowship with Christians of other denominations thus falls to the ground.
4. That, on the contrary, the Scriptures ( Eph 2, 18; 3,12) base prayer and prayer fellowship on fundamental faith in Christ as Redeemer, not on agreement in every particular of doctrine, and thereby make prayer fellowship an act of universal Christian fellowship and a normal expression of the existing brotherhood of all Christians in the universal church.
5. That prayer fellowship with Christians of other denominations becomes impossible only when circumstances carry into the act such implications as will necessarily involve a violation of the confessional position and conscience and thereby give offense.
6. That Synod's negative position breaks down in practice, because it is felt by many to violate the facts and truths of the universal church, and that it should, therefore, be changed to conform to what the Scriptures teach with respect to the church, to prayer, and to prayer fellowship."<sup>23</sup>

And so the stage was set for the 1935 Convention at Cleveland.

A committee was appointed to meet with Dr. Brux at the convention and the following report was unanimously approved by said committee.

"Your Committee, appointed to study the appeal of Dr. Brux, who served as Missionary to the Mohammedans in India during the years 1923-1932, has had a number of meetings with Dr. Brux and also with several other brethren who kindly offered their services to clear up this case of longstanding, one of the great issues involved being that of prayer fellowship. We are happy to report that agreement has been reached on the following statement with respect to prayer fellowship, which we consider satisfactory:

1. So far as direct Scripture teaching on prayer fellowship is concerned, there is no passage, so far as we know, that expressly prohibits prayer fellowship with erring Christians whom we must still regard as members of the universal Christian church.

2. There are, however, passages which prohibit compromise of the truth, indifference to doctrine, unionism, and giving of offense.

3. Hence every kind of prayer fellowship which involves one of these objectionable features must be avoided. Dr. Brux states that this has always been his doctrinal position.

Your Committee also discussed with Dr. Brux that section of his essay treating of the clarity of Scriptures. As to this, Dr. Brux declared that he in no manner questions the clarity of Scriptures and is in full agreement with our church's doctrinal position. Furthermore, he states that if there is any passage in his essay which anyone is inclined to interpret as being unscriptural, he is willing to reconstruct such a statement or to withdraw it entirely.

As for the essay in question, Dr. Brux states that he had never considered the treatise as final, but rather as a contribution for the discussion of the issue.

Therefore we hold that Brother Brux is eligible for the ministry.

Since Dr. Brux has spent so many years in very special preparation for the work as minister to the Mohammedans, and since he has proven himself especially qualified to bring the gospel to Mohammedan peoples, we recommend to Synod to instruct the Board of Foreign Missions to reinstate him in his chosen work."<sup>24</sup>

But when this report was read to Dr. Pfothenauer, he immediately recognized that it was easily open to misunderstanding and could be misused to propound unscriptural teachings. Therefore he asked that it be reworded. Points one, two, and three were rewritten as follows:

"Scripture very plainly prohibits compromise of the truth, indifference to doctrine, unionism, and giving of offense and therefore forbids every kind of prayer fellowship which involves one of these objectionable features. - There are in the domain of casuistry cases where the question whether unionistic prayer fellowship is involved cannot be answered in advance."<sup>25</sup>

Also the paragraph regarding the clarity of Scripture was reworded to read:

"As to the clarity of Scripture, Dr. Brux declares that he in

no manner doubts the clarity of Scripture and is in full agreement with our Church's doctrinal position. Furthermore, he states that, if there is any passage in his essay which anyone is inclined to interpret as being unscriptural, he is willing to reconstruct such a statement or withdraw it entirely."<sup>26</sup>

Finally the following paragraph was added to the resolution:

"We furthermore recommend that the pastoral conferences throughout Synod earnestly and diligently study the Scripture passages pertinent to the question of prayer fellowship."<sup>27</sup>

This report was then adopted by the convention. And so the Brux issue was to have been closed.

But such was not the case. Brux continued to hold to his interpretation in the matter of prayer fellowship and in so doing caused the Missouri Synod a great deal of grief.

The resolution of 1935 stating that Brux should be returned to the work in India was never carried out. When an admission of guilt was demanded of Brux before he could be issued a new call to India, he refused to accede to this demand and the old animosities were unleashed anew. Brux wrote numerous letters defending himself and his unscriptural position and charged various officials of the Synod with erring in dismissing him as a missionary.

In 1938 Brux issued his "Reappeal to Synod" in which he detailed the most recent injustices accorded him by Synod. Again he defended his understanding of the scriptural principles of prayer fellowship and criticized the position Missouri held. Brux said:

"On the basis of the doctrinal statement in the Report and its evident and necessary implications the position of the Synod may therefore be stated thus: Prayer fellowship with erring Christians whom we must still regard as fellow-members of the universal Christian church is as such not prohibited

in the Scriptures, but is, on the contrary, taken for granted and encouraged as the normal and proper exercise of Christian fellowship, as the Catechism also states it to be in the words: 'Because all believers are in Christ the children of one Father, and should, therefore, pray for and with each other.' However, since the Scriptures forbid compromise of the truth, indifference to doctrine, unionism, and giving of offense, any act of prayer fellowship involving one of these objectionable features is on that ground prohibited; and since the possibility of the involvement of such an objectionable feature may always be present, cases of prayer fellowship with erring Christians whom we must still regard as fellow-members of the universal Christian church are cases of casuistry. The decision as to whether in a given case, prayer fellowship is permissible or not permissible is by the Scriptures left to the consciences of the individual Christians and hence is left there by Synod also. Synod therefore makes no attempt, nor will it tolerate any attempt to legislate with regard to the frequency or infrequency of the involvement of the objectionable features referred to."<sup>28</sup>

This of course would be in keeping with his interpretation.

But Brux continues

"Yet Dr. Brand, the Board of Foreign Missions, and Dr. Pfothenauer insist on taking a view of this statement that involves its complete overthrow and would substitute for it an unscriptural and legalistic position, namely that prayer fellowship with Christians not affiliated with the Synodical Conference is presumptively prohibited. In their opinion, difference in doctrine - non-fundamental, of course, . . . and membership in a body not affiliated with the Synodical Conference constitute a positive bar to prayer fellowship on the assumption that prayer fellowship with such in itself involves a compromise of the truth, indifference to doctrine, unionism, and giving of offense."<sup>29</sup>

It is good to see that though there was dissention and pressure within the Missouri Synod to surrender the scriptural principles of prayer fellowship, under the able leadership of Dr. Pfothenauer she withstood these attacks of satan.

At the Synodical Convention in 1938, Brux reappealed his case.

"Since the Board of Foreign Missions and its General Secretary have failed to carry out both the resolution adopted by Synod at Cleveland in 1935 with respect to my case and promises made by the Board's representatives in committee and have thereby violated the settlement achieved by Synod, I respectfully reappeal my case to Synod."<sup>30</sup>

Synod upheld the agreement of 1935 but the Board of Foreign Missions made no move to return Brux to India. The exhausting clash finally ended in 1940 when Brux left the Synod to devote himself to private scholarly research.

Though officially the Missouri Synod had by God's grace withstood this attack of satan, the seeds of dissention had been sown. The lack of quick, firm action against the teachings propounded by Brux would take its toll soon enough. For Brux had gained many adherents to his interpretation of the principles of prayer fellowship. However, for the time being they remained silent.

But already during the Brux issue another potentially dangerous situation confronted the Missouri Synod, a trick of satan which ultimately lead to the downfall of the Missouri Synod.

During the Cleveland Convention of 1935 at which the unscriptural principles of Dr. Adolph Brux were being debated, the Missouri Synod received a communication from the American Lutheran Church seeking to establish pulpit and altar fellowship with them. To this Missouri responded with the following resolution:

"WHEREAS, our Synod has always recognized the duty and desirability of 'the conservation and promotion of the unity of the true faith (Eph 4:3-6; I Cor 1:10)' and a united defense against schism and sectarianism; and

WHEREAS, God-pleasing, scriptural external union and cooperation is based upon internal unity, oneness in faith, confession, doctrine, and practice; therefore be it

RESOLVED, 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.

RESOLVED, That a standing committee of five, to be known as the Committee on Lutheran Church Union, be appointed by the Chair to conduct these conferences . . . ."31

The Committee on Lutheran Church Union consisted of Drs. Wm. Arndt, Theo. Engelder, C. F. Brommer, and Pastors K. Kretzmann and F. H. Brunn.



At the 1938 Convention of the Missouri Synod in St. Louis the committee reported that it had held six meetings with the representatives of the A. L. C. Their discussions were based on the doctrinal position of the Missouri Synod as presented in the "Brief Statement".

A few comments regarding the "Brief Statement" are in order. The so-called "Brief Statement" was accepted in 1932 as a definition of the Missouri Synod on the questions that had been under discussion with the very synods which now constitute the American Lutheran Church. It was the work of Dr. Franz Pieper and Dr. Theo. Engelder, two outstanding theologians of that day in the Missouri Synod. Because of its soundness and clarity this new confession met with instant acceptance by the other synods of the Synodical Conference.

But at the 1938 convention the committee had to announce that the A. L. C. did not unqualifiedly accept the "Brief Statement". It is no wonder since this fine document set forth the scriptural teachings in several matters <sup>with</sup> which the synods constituting the A. L. C. disagreed.

Therefore the A.L.C. summarized their own convictions in a lengthy "Declaration." This "Declaration" was then presented to the Missouri Synod.

The reviewing committee, known as Committee 16, reported to the Synod that it found "first of all an agreement in the doctrinal statements concerning teachings disputed in the past or still in debate in some sections of the Lutheran Church in America, notably in the doctrine of inspiration, predestination and conversion, Sunday, and the office of the public administration

of the means of grace."<sup>32</sup> The committee furthermore reported that "in some non-fundamental points concerning the doctrine of the last things the Declaration of the American Lutheran Church representatives asks tolerance for certain teachings and interpretations which have been rejected in our circles."<sup>33</sup> The committee also referred to the fact that the Declaration spoke of "a visible side of the Church."<sup>34</sup>

Then instead of rejecting this "Declaration" of the A. L. C. and showing an uncompromising attitude toward the clear doctrines of the Scriptures, the committee made the following recommendations among others which then in turn were adopted by Synod.

"That Synod declare that the Brief Statement of the Missouri Synod together with the Declaration of the representatives of the American Lutheran Church . . . be regarded as the doctrinal basis for future fellowship between the Missouri Synod and American Lutheran Church. That in regard to the points of nonfundamental doctrines mentioned in the Declaration of the American Lutheran Church representatives (Antichrist, the conversion of the Jews, the physical resurrection of the martyrs, the fulfillment of the thousand years), we endeavor to establish full agreement and that our Committee on Lutheran Union be instructed to devise ways and means of reaching this end. That in regard to the propriety of speaking of the 'visible side of the Church' we ask our Committee on Lutheran Union to work to this end that uniform and Scripturally acceptable terminology and teaching be attained. That since for true unity we need not only this doctrinal agreement, but also agreement in practice, we state with our synodical fathers that according to the Scriptures and the Lutheran confessional writings, Christian practice must harmonize with Christian doctrine and that, where there is a divergence from Biblical, confessional practice, strenuous efforts must be made to correct such deviation. We refer particularly to the attitude toward the antichristian lodge, anti--Scriptural pulpit and altar fellowship, and all other forms of unionism."<sup>35</sup>

In the meantime it was urged by the Missouri Synod that "the pastors of both church bodies are encouraged to meet in smaller circles wherever and as often as possible in order to

discuss both the doctrinal basis for union and the question of church practice."<sup>36</sup> The advisability of this suggestion is questionable to say the least. For it would surely raise the issue of prayer fellowship which at this point was completely out of place between the two synods.

The hopes of reaching agreement on the disputed points quickly were lost as the A.L.C. Sandusky convention in October, 1938, adopted the following points:

1. That it is neither possible nor necessary to agree in all non-fundamental doctrines.
2. That the American Lutheran Church will not give up its membership in the American Lutheran Conference.
3. The phrase 'in the light of,' occurring in the sentence: 'We believe that the Brief Statement viewed in the light of our Declaration is not in contradiction to the Minneapolis Theses.'"<sup>37</sup>

Thus the A.L.C. began to show her true colors insofar as they were in no way inclined to submit to the clear teachings of God's Word. Negotiations should have been broken off here but they were not and Missouri continued on a down hill slide.

More and more things happened which made it obvious that the doctrinal differences between Missouri and the A.L.C. were much greater than originally thought. With reference to the "Brief Statement" the A. L. C. showed its real attitude when its commissioners stated that "their assertion of agreement with the Brief Statement did not imply endorsement in every case of the exegetical or other lines of argumentation and the feeling of obligation to use the same phraseology."<sup>38</sup> It soon became obvious that in the area of prayer fellowship it was more than a simple matter of phraseology.

While Missouri's sister synods (Wis. Synod and the Norwegian

Synod) urged her to break off negotiations, no such action was taken.

On the contrary, in her 1941 convention, the Missouri Synod resolved;

"That we express our willingness to continue our efforts toward bringing about true unity in the Lutheran Church in this country both in doctrine and practice, but that we are determined to do so only on the basis of the Word of God and the Lutheran Confessions.... Also: That we continue our negotiations with the American Lutheran Church in an effort to establish doctrinal unity."<sup>39</sup>

On a more positive note the Missouri Synod affirmed that there could be no distinguishing between fundamental and non-fundamental doctrines when working toward fellowship and that while negotiations were going on in an attempt to unite the Missouri Synod and A.L.C. "it be understood that no pulpit-, altar-, or prayer-fellowship has been established between us and the American Lutheran Church; and until such fellowship has been officially declared by the synods concerned, no action is to be taken by any of our pastors or congregations which ignores the fact that we are not yet united."<sup>40</sup>

This last point brought the question of prayer fellowship and joint prayer out into the open again and the principles are questioned again.

#### IV. The Principles are Subjected to Further Questioning.

By itself the resolution regarding pulpit, altar, and prayer fellowship sounds fine. From all outward appearances it upholds the scriptural principles of fellowship. But when the meaning behind said resolution is revealed, compromise to the A. L. C. and more importantly, compromise of God's Word is evident. As is stated in Memorial 615 in the 1944 Proceedings of the Missouri

Synod, this resolution is interpreted as not applying to the offering of a prayer when intersynodical conferences would meet.

(This practice had been going on for some time in the meetings held between the Missouri Synod and the A.L.C.)

In its action on this memorial and Memorial 614 which also called for a clarification and stamp of approval for such action the Missouri Synod adopted the following report:

"We reaffirm the position taken at the Ft. Wayne Convention, page 303, paragraph 11, 'that in the meantime it be understood that no pulpit, altar, or prayer fellowship has been established between us and the American Lutheran Church; and until such fellowship has been officially declared by the synods concerned, no action is to be taken by any of our pastors or congregations which ignores the fact that we are not yet united.'

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 Ft. 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."<sup>41</sup>

Already at this time Missouri intimated that there is a difference between prayer fellowship and praying together, referred to as 'joint prayer.' Here it is suggested that a different principle may govern. For while prayer fellowship, together with pulpit and altar fellowship, is said not to be permitted because "we are not yet united," in the case of joint prayer it is permissible at conferences involving members of synods which are not united completely in doctrine. The other condition is that this prayer asks God for His guidance and blessing upon the deliberations and discussions of His Word.

The background for these resolutions as reported by official representatives of the Missouri Synod is this. "The committee

which had been meeting with a committee of the A.L.C., had found itself so fully in doctrinal agreement with the A.L.C. commissioners that they felt constrained to pray with them, and now wanted synodical sanction for their course of action."<sup>42</sup> This is a rather sad commentary on the state of affairs which existed already at this time within the Missouri Synod.

The next great blow to the scriptural teachings on prayer fellowship came in 1945 in the "Statement of the 44." This too shows what direction Missouri was leaning. This document breathed the new spirit toward which Missouri leaned. This is quite evident in the following quotations from the "Statement."

FIVE

"We affirm our conviction that sound exegetical procedure is the basis for sound Lutheran theology.

-We therefore deplore the fact that Romans 16:17-18 has been applied to all Christians who differ from us in certain points of doctrine. It is our conviction, based on sound exegetical and hermeneutical principles, that this text does not apply to the present situation in the Lutheran Church of America.

-We furthermore deplore the misuse of I Thes. 5:22 in the translation "avoid every appearance of evil." This text should be used only in its true meaning, "avoid evil in every form."

EIGHT

We affirm our conviction that any two or more Christians may pray together to the Triune God in the name of Jesus Christ if the purpose for which they meet and pray is right according to the Word of God. This obviously includes meetings of groups called for the purpose of discussing doctrinal differences.

-We therefore deplore the tendency to decide the question of prayer fellowship on any other basis beyond the clear words of Scripture.

NINE

We believe that the term "unionism" should be applied only to acts in which a clear and unmistakable denial of scriptural truth or approval of error is involved.

-We therefore deplore the tendency to apply this non-biblical term to any and every contact between Christians of different denominations.

ELEVEN

We affirm our conviction that in keeping with the historic

Lutheran tradition and in harmony with the Synodical resolution adopted in 1938 regarding Church fellowship, such fellowship is possible without complete agreement in details of doctrine and practice which have never been considered divisive in the Lutheran Church."<sup>43</sup>

Among those who signed the "Statement" were Drs. Wm Arndt and Theo. Graebner, both of whom formerly had unflinchingly taught and defended the scriptural teachings in the matter of fellowship.

When the document was published and sent to every pastor in the Missouri Synod it met with varying responses. Those whose position it represented could not praise it highly enough. Others who still held to what God's Word clearly teaches were saddened and upset by it.

The official action that the Missouri Synod took concerning the "Statement of the 44" in its 1947 convention is disgustingly shameful. Instead of soundly condemning it, it was more or less swept under the rug. In response to a Memorial which was submitted by those men who met with the signers of the "Statement" which called for a repudiation of the "Statement," the Synod passed this resolution:

"WHEREAS, "A Statement" as such no longer is a basis for discussion according to the "Agreement" reported by the President; and  
WHEREAS, The issues raised by "A Statement" and by memorials referring to "A Statement" are being submitted for study to pastors and congregations on the basis of materials supplied by direction of the President; and  
WHEREAS, The subject matter is such as to call for time and patience, so that all pastors and laymen may have an opportunity to study the same in a quiet, earnest, and prayerful manner (a course which the Church should always follow); and  
WHEREAS, It is imperative that we continue on the foundation of God's Word, and God's Word alone; therefore be it  
RESOLVED, That the President continue to submit to pastors and congregations material for the scriptural study of the question at issue."<sup>44</sup>

In reality, the propositions it set forth were not dealt with at

all. This was a big mistake on the Synod's part. Such action only paved the way to further error.

Despite the 1944 resolutions regarding joint prayer which would certainly seem to be in opposition to the "Brief Statement" and in response to questions raised by the "Statement of the 44," the Synod at its 1947 convention reaffirmed its loyalty to the Holy Scriptures, the Lutheran Confessions, and the "Brief Statement."

The joint prayer issue was by no means settled at the 1944 convention and it was a topic of lively debate as well at the 1947 Convention in Chicago.

The fact that there was dissent and division as well as concern for retaining the pure truths of God's Word is reflected by one memorial in particular submitted to the Convention for action. The memorial spoke unflinchingly against the new teachings regarding fellowship which were being propounded in the Synod.

6."Concerning Romans 16:17-18. We believe, confess, and teach that Rm 16:17-18, according to the clear statement of the inspired writer, must be applied to every persistent aberration from the truth of Holy Writ in any degree, shape, or form, and that it is therefore applicable not only to non-Christians and non-Lutherans, but also to such as may bear the Lutheran name, but continue to cling to any kind of false teaching. We believe that the word 'doctrine' in this text includes the entire body of doctrine as taught by the inspired prophets and apostles and that the verb 'avoid' demands a form of separation tantamount to a rejection of error and a refusal to be identified with persistent errorists by prayer, altar, and pulpit fellowship.

We therefore reject and condemn the teaching that 'this text does not apply to the present situation in the Lutheran Church of America.' We likewise reject and condemn the restriction of this passage to troublemakers in the Church or in the individual congregation. We furthermore reject the notion that a 'different approach' or a 'different exegesis' of this passage will eliminate its clear teaching as a proof text against even the most subtle forms of unionism, and that two opposing kinds of exegesis are here permissible, since 'every exegesis of a Scripture passage producing a false doctrine, or explaining away, or nullifying a scriptural



doctrine is potentially divisive of church fellowship.'

8. On Prayer Fellowship. We believe, confess, and teach that confession is a necessary concomitant of prayer and that therefore common, or joint, public prayer in groups that are not doctrinally united and may even have resorted to public recriminations, is contrary to clear scriptural prohibitions.

We therefore reject and condemn the teaching that 'any two or more Christians may pray together in the name of Jesus Christ if the purpose for which they meet and pray is right according to the Word of God' (?), since the statement, as it reads, would permit public joint prayers with heterodox Christians. We likewise reject and condemn the assertion 'that confession of faith to others and acknowledgement of their agreement with us is never an essential and inherent part, an unavoidable concomitant of prayer,' since this sweeping statement militates against both the precept and the example of Holy Writ."<sup>45</sup>

The action the Convention took on this memorial was very much in keeping with its recent past performances on these matters. Instead of affirming the statements made in this memorial (quoted above) as correct and scriptural, the Convention simply said that points six and eight of Memorial 607 are covered by the resolutions on prayer fellowship (which permitted joint prayer at intersynodical conferences) and selective fellowship (fortunately selective fellowship was soundly condemned by the Missouri Synod though favored by the A.L.C.).

Another memorial which resolved

"That Synod declare that the phrase 'provided that such prayer does not imply denial of truth and support of error' be interpreted to mean that those with whom we thus publicly pray are in statu confessionis, i.e., have repudiated all false doctrine and have declared their perfect agreement with us in all doctrines of Holy Scripture, their determination to defend such agreement over against the church body to which they belong, and their readiness eventually to sever their connection with such body if their testimony is rejected."<sup>46</sup>

and a memorial which stated

"We deplore the fact that Romans 16:17-18 has sometimes been wrongly applied to our contacts with erring Christians. This passage nevertheless contains a principle which excludes

complicity with all and every kind of error.

None of the passages usually quoted against opening meetings with joint prayer, for instance, with the representatives of the American Lutheran Church, forbid all such prayers. These passages should not be applied in the same way to erring Christians as we apply them to reprobates, anti-Christian errorists, enemies of Christ.

Joint prayer is a confession of agreement on the doctrine of Christ's atonement, but is not necessarily a confession of agreement on all details of doctrine."<sup>47</sup>

were answered simply by reaffirming the 1944 resolutions on prayer fellowship.

A positive note which came out of this Convention in 1947 was Missouri's rejection of selective fellowship between Lutheran congregations who found themselves in agreement.

Now to go back in history for a moment, at the 1941 Convention it was determined that one document should be composed as a foundation for fellowship between the A.L.C. and Missouri Synod. In 1950 that document finally appeared under the title of the "Common Confession."

When subjected to careful [REDACTED] scrutinization the new Confession would have to be characterized as sadly wanting. It simply did not maintain the high level of the "Brief Statement." This feeling was characteristic of the feelings held by many pastors in the Missouri Synod and that this was true is evident by the many memorials submitted to Synod requesting that the "Common Confession" not be accepted. One memorial, number 603, is worth quoting since it points out the objectionable features of the "Common Confession's" article on Church Fellowship.

"The "Common Confession" reads: 'We dare not condone error or have altar or pulpit fellowship and unscriptural cooperation with erring individuals, church bodies, or church groups that refuse to be corrected by God's Word.'

Note, first of all, that the "Common Confession" does not

include prayer fellowship in the forbidden church fellowship. This is in conformity with Paragraph 8 of "A Statement" of which the chairman of our committee on Doctrinal Unity is a signer. 'We affirm our conviction that any two or more Christians may pray together to the Triune God in the name of Jesus Christ if the purpose for which they meet and pray is right according to the Word of God.'

Note, in the second place, that 'altar and pulpit fellowship' are not to be practiced only with such erring individuals, church bodies, or church groups 'that refuse to be corrected.' Which errorist does not say that he sincerely believes that he is teaching according to God's Word? And which errorist is so base as to declare that he is not willing to be corrected?

Scripture, on the other hand, commands us to mark and avoid those who persist in causing divisions and offenses contrary to Apostolic doctrine, Rm 16:17. Our "Brief Statement" therefore confesses: '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, Rm 16:17.'

The "Common Confession" does not confess the scriptural doctrine of church fellowship."<sup>48</sup>

Nevertheless the "Common Confession" was accepted by the Synod at the 1950 Convention. The following is a part of that resolution: "...WHEREAS, We find in this document nothing that contradicts the Scriptures, ... therefore be it RESOLVED, That we accept the "Common Confession" as a statement of these doctrines in harmony with Scriptures . . . ."<sup>49</sup>

Also it is interesting to note that yet in 1950 there were numerous memorials calling for a repudiation of the "Statement of the 44" and disciplinary action against such as held to the teachings presented in the "Statement." However, unfortunately President Behnken failed to take decisive action against the men who did hold to and teach these doctrines, a factor which contributed directly to Missouri's departure from the clear teachings of God's Word.

Despite the fact that the Missouri Synod adopted the "Common Confession," despite the fact it had declared its position on

joint prayer already in 1944, many of its pastors and congregations pleaded with Synod, via memorials sent to the Synod for consideration at its convention, to reconsider its position and reaffirm the once solid scriptural stance she once held.

The 1950 Convention was no exception. Memorials 641, 642, and 643 called for Synod to declare in convention "that there is NO scriptural basis for a distinction between 'prayer fellowship' and 'joint prayer.'"<sup>50</sup> Nevertheless the Synod refused to do so but instead set the issue aside by resolving "that this question be held in abeyance until the treatise on 'Prayer Fellowship' has been published."<sup>51</sup>

The 1953 Convention contributed no help toward holding the scriptural position in the matter of prayer fellowship. It simply passed the following resolution condoning joint prayer.

"WHEREAS, Such prayer at intersynodical meetings does not pretend that doctrinal unity exists where it does not exist, nor intimate that doctrinal differences are unimportant, but rather implores God, from whom true unity in the spirit must come, for His blessings, in order that unity may be achieved in those things where it is lacking; be it therefore RESOLVED, that Synod declare that it does not consider Joint Prayer at intersynodical meetings unionistic and sinful, 'provided such prayer does not imply denial of truth or support of error' (1947 Proceedings)."<sup>52</sup>

The 1956 Convention was no better than the 1953 Convention had been. Instead of taking the bull by the horns and dealing with the matter in a God-pleasing manner in accordance with the scriptural principles, the matter was assigned to the faculties of the theological seminaries for study, with the request that they submit a report far enough in advance of the 1959 Convention so that it could be scrutinized and studied.

Missouri was now engaged in a life and death struggle for the

truth and things didn't look good for the truth. All signs indicated that Missouri had departed from the truth and was doing the best she could to defend her new position. What followed in the next few years made this even more obvious.

#### V. The Principles are Cast Aside

The new study on fellowship was not ready yet in 1959, and so the members of Synod were forced to wait until the 1962 Convention. There at the Cleveland Convention "The Theology of Fellowship" (printed in 1962 Reports and Memorials, LC-MS) was presented. In its first draft the document consisted of two parts, the first part consisting of a study of the passages involved in the biblical doctrine of fellowship, and the second part, an application of the principles set forth by these passages and the matter of separation.

However, the 1962 Convention was not entirely happy with part two of the document stating that it was open to misunderstanding and criticism and therefore asked that it be restudied and rewritten. A new Commission was established, the Commission on Theology and Church Relations, and it was then the responsibility of this commission to replace or redraft "The Theology of Fellowship." All memorials requesting rejection and repudiation of this document were also referred to this new commission.

It is interesting to note that in the 1962 resolution to replace or redraft "The Theology of Fellowship" the claim is made that almost since its inception Missouri had practiced joint prayer in meetings with other synods (cf. part #2 of this paper). However, the resolution and its formulators failed to recognize

the conditions under which this was done in Missouri's early history.

In 1965, the new version of "The Theology of Fellowship" was presented to the Convention in Detroit. The new version consisted of three parts. The first part was the same as the original. Part two was entitled: "The Concept and Practice of Church Fellowship as Disclosed by Church History." In this part the authors endeavored to show that joint prayer had always been a part of the Christian Church. Part three, the redrafted part two of the original document, was entitled: "Specific Questions Regarding the Practice of Fellowship."

The Convention took positive action on the new version resolving that "'The Theology of Fellowship' be received for study and guidance . . . and be recommended to the Synod for adoption at the next Convention...."53

In 1967, "The Theology of Fellowship" regarded by the Missouri Synod as "a sound presentation of the basis, biblical, theological, historical, and practical principles of Christian fellowship."54 was adopted.

This then was the final step in Missouri's turn from her original, scriptural teaching regarding prayer fellowship. For the teachings set forth in "The Theology of Fellowship" can hardly be called scriptural.

A brief look at some statements contained in this document will suffice to show this.

"Our Synod should understand that, in the case of doctrinal discussions carried on with a view to achieving doctrinal unity, Christians not only may but should joint in fervent prayer that God would guide and bless the discussions,

trusting in Christ's promise Mt 18:19: "Again, I say unto you, that if two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of My Father which is in heaven."

The opening prayer on such an occasion should be suited to the specific situation. If all parties meet in an atmosphere of mutual confidence there will be no problem. In a tense or an uncertain situation it may be suggested that the conference use the great hymns and liturgical prayers of the church..."55

While a great deal more evidence could be adduced which would also show the true character of this document, such as the questionable interpretation of various Bible passages warning against unionism (interpretations which are so very much reminiscent of the interpretation Dr. Brux placed on these passages in the '30s), the paragraphs quoted above show what the end result of the controversy which raged within Missouri for more than thirty years was, namely, a departure from the clear teachings of Scripture.

Unfortunately, the move toward liberalism within the Missouri Synod did not end here. Soon joint prayers at civic occasions became commonplace. Today even the inspiration and authenticity of the Scriptures themselves are being questioned.

It is only natural that when one views so dramatic a change as occurred within the Missouri Synod, he ask himself - why, what was the cause? It's very difficult to point to any one thing as the cause. But the one thing that strikes me the most was the way the entire matter was handled. Whenever sharp condemnation and discipline against such false teachings as were being propounded within the Missouri Synod was called for, it was lacking! Things were simply swept under the rug, or ignored in hopes they would go away. Instead they only continued to collect and band

together and pick up momentum until it was too late. The history of the turn about presented in this paper clearly shows this was the case.

In 1961, the Wisconsin Synod found it necessary, after years of patient admonition, to sever fellowship bonds with the Missouri Synod. Shortly thereafter, the Synodical Conference was disbanded. All were unfortunate events to be sure.

May this unfortunate incident in the history of our former sister synod serve as a warning to us that we ever hold fast the precious, pure teachings of God's Word.



Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Adolph A. Brux, Reappeal to Synod, 1938, p.10.
- <sup>2</sup> Werner Ehlert, Abendmahl und Kirchengemeinschaft in der Alten Kirche, p. 138 (as quoted in Fellowship Then and Now, p.30).
- <sup>3</sup> Ibid., p.30
- <sup>4</sup> Lehre und Wehre, 1856, p.186.
- <sup>5</sup> G. Hoenecke, Joh. P. Meyer, A. W. Schuetze, Fellowship Then and Now, p. 9.
- <sup>6</sup> Ibid., p.12.
- <sup>7</sup> Missouri Synod Proceedings, 1881, p.30.
- <sup>8</sup> Fellowship Then and Now, p. 18.
- <sup>9</sup> Ibid., p.18.
- <sup>10</sup> Ibid., p.18.
- <sup>11</sup> Ibid., p.18.
- <sup>12</sup> Ibid., p.19.
- <sup>13</sup> Ibid., p.19.
- <sup>14</sup> Ibid., p.20.
- <sup>15</sup> Ibid., p.20.
- <sup>16</sup> F. Dean Lueking, Mission in the Making (St. Louis: Concordia, 1964), p.272.
- <sup>17</sup> Lueking, Ibid., p.272.
- <sup>18</sup> Adolph A. Brux, Appeal to Synod, 1934, p.8.
- <sup>19</sup> Brux, Ibid., p.8.
- <sup>20</sup> Adolph A. Brux, Christian Prayer Fellowship and Unionism, 1935, p.20.
- <sup>21</sup> Brux, Ibid., p.20.
- <sup>22</sup> Brux, Op. Cit., p.13.
- <sup>23</sup> Brux, Op. Cit., pp.100-101.
- <sup>24</sup> Brux, Op. Cit., p.3.

- 25 Proceedings of the Thirty-Sixth Regular Convention of the Ev. Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States, 1935, p.293.
- 26 Ibid., p.293.
- 27 Ibid., p.293.
- 28 Brux, Op. Cit., pp.34-35.
- 29 Brux, Op. Cit., pp.35-36.
- 30 Proceedings of the Thiry-Seventh Regular Convention of the Ev. Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States, 1938, p.317.
- 31 Proceedings (1938), Op. Cit., p.221.
- 32 Walter A. Baepler, A Century of Grace (St. Louis: Concordia, 1947), p.321.
- 33 Baepler, Ibid., p.321.
- 34 Baepler, Ibid., p.321.
- 35 Baepler, Ibid., p.321-322.
- 36 Baepler, Ibid., p. 323.
- 37 Baepler, Ibid., p.323.
- 38 Baepler, Ibid., p.324
- 39 Baepler, Ibid., pp.326-327.
- 40 Proceedings of the Thirty-Eighth Regular Convention of the Ev. Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States, 1941, p.303.
- 41 Proceedings of the Thirty-Ninth Regular Convention of the Ev. Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and other States, 1944, pp. 251-252.
- 42 Irwin J. Habeck, "Entrenched in Unionistic Practices - How the Leaven Worked in the Matter of Prayer," The Northwestern Lutheran, Vol. 49 (March 25, 1962), p.89.
- 43 "A Statement," Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly, Vol. XLIII (Nov., 1970), pp. 151-152.
- 44 Proceedings of the Fortieth Regular Convention of the Ev. Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States, 1947, p.523.
- 45 Ibid., pp. 514-515.
- 46 Ibid., p. 516.

- 47 Ibid., pp. 516-517.
- 48 Proceedings of the Forty-First Regular Convention of the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod, 1950, pp. 577-578.
- 49 Ibid., p. 585.
- 50 Ibid., p. 646.
- 51 Ibid., p. 659.
- 52 Proceedings of the Forty-Second Regular Convention of the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod, 1953, p. 552.
- 53 Proceedings of the Forty-Sixth Regular Convention of the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod, 1965, p. 98.
- 54 Proceedings of the Forty-Seventh Regular Convention of the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod, 1967, p. 91.
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