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Green Bay and the Protestant Controversy

GREEN BAY AND THE PROTESTANT CONTROVERSY TODAY

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"Perhaps the time has come for some semblance of bibliographical balance and for printing the other side of the story." With these words Professor Fredrich indicates that the Protestant controversy is in need of re-definition, particularly for today's Wisconsin Synod minister who faces the problem a generation removed. A thorough treatment of the Protestants would perhaps best be given by someone who has lived through the controversy, attended meetings, encountered the principals, read the documents. While this essayist has spent the past months reading, interviewing, and discussing the topic, he feels in no way competent to pass judgment on the matter. The controversy, however, takes on special significance when one's best friend becomes involved.

It is from this impetus, and from a desire to assimilate the the differences which separate brethren, that this paper will deal with Green Bay and the Protestant Controversy Today. The initial section will give a thumbnail sketch of the events surrounding Pastor Christman and the troubles at St. Paul's, Green Bay. Then, as the primary thrust of the paper, this writer will attempt to cite differences in Protestant theology which persist today, both doctrinally and practically, evaluating the Green Bay situation in light of Protestant history. Third, a section analyzing whether or not Robert Christman could be classified as a "Protestant," and finally, a look at possible "solutions" or procedure for the future.

I. BRIEF HISTORY

Pastor Christman first tipped his hand at a meeting with the

Seminary faculty in 1977, ostensibly to determine whether or not Carl Springer, a Protestant and graduate of Northwestern College, would be allowed to enroll in the Seminary. The meeting became a forum for Christman's questions about repentance at the foot of the cross and his own association with the Protestant Conference. Unfortunately, neither his growing conviction and fellowship with the Protestants nor the faculty's advice and instruction were understood reciprocally. Unknown to the faculty, Pastor Christman left the meeting confident that he had made his point and that his fellowship with the Protestants (already four years old) had been tacitly approved. For this reason he claims, in "Some Timely Questions Answered," that the faculty of the Seminary supported his fellowship with the Protestants.² Faculty members deny any knowledge of this support, mentioning that Christman was asked point-blank if he was fellowshiping with the Protestants, and that he denied the charges.³

Consequent history shows a gradual build-up and crystallizing of Christman's mind-set. St. Paul's congregation was affected only subtly by his preaching and teaching, a very persuasive, semantically-beautiful preaching of Protestant repentance. Occasional complaints trickled into President Voss' office,⁴ but the situation remained tranquil. This essayist became aware of the situation at about this time from Michael Hanke, a teacher at St. Paul's and a close confidant of Pastor Christman's. Hanke, at the direction of Christman, began to immerse himself in Faith-Life, subsequently pointing out Synod's "corporate" sins and vilifying catechetical and pedagogical "systems." At about this time I was invited to preach at St. Paul's and chose

II Cor. 5:16-21 as the text: "The Ministry of Reconciliation -- Hear and Proclaim!" It was met with something less than enthusiasm by Pastor Christman.

Christman's adamant opposition to structured evangelism had become well-known to the fellow-pastors of his district. His essay "Why TAS-type Evangelism is Contrary to the Gospel" had provoked heated discussion and a growing awareness that troubles were brewing in Green Bay. He had written two articles opposing TAS and received very little support. President Voss suggested that he take the matter up with the district evangelism committee. Having done this, he still felt "throttled," and composed "An open letter to the WELS Northern Wisconsin District Praesidium (Dec. 5, 1979)." President Voss asked to see the paper before it was published, but Christman disseminated it throughout the district despite his request.⁵ It is interesting that at this point Christman states: "I take exception to no doctrine whatsoever."⁶

Christman had at this point earned the reputation of a man who would not honor convention or abide by Synodical resolution. But his nature and convictions became most apparent when Floyd Brand, a friend and fellow-Protestant sympathizer, was ousted from his East Bloomfield pastorate for refusing to rescind his avowed fellowship with the Protestant Conference (c.f. appended "East Bloomfield Resolution"). It is at this point that Christman no longer suppressed his Protestant empathy, but both publically and privately asserted his fellowship with them.

He immediately penned a vituperative letter to President Voss,

indicting Voss and Synod machinery for the Brand ouster (for personal and ethical reasons the letter is not reproduced here). Voss states that at this point Christman was "no longer dealing with issues but attacking personally."⁷ His letter, as well as Voss' reply, were read by Christman from the pulpit at St. Paul's.

One week later, on November 11, 1980, Christman published and distributed to his congregation the document: "Some Timely Questions Answered," the catalyst for what followed. In it he publically acknowledged his Protestant fellowship, claimed Synodical approval of his actions, objected to the Brand ouster, accused Synod of false doctrine, of being under "divine judgment," of being "given to expediency rather than principle, to convenience rather than conscience, to self-preservation rather than to what is judged to be obedience to God," and of displaying "the spirit of antichrist."⁸

Several "informational" meetings were held with Christman, the District Praesidium (Pastors Carl Voss, Clarence Koepsell, and Larry Ellenberger), and congregational members. Again, as in the '77 meeting with the Seminary faculty, the goals of each side were widely divergent. Christman had lined up a literal "Who's Who in the Protestant Conference" to press the East Bloomfield case. The District Praesidium, on the other hand, hoped to convince Christman to withdraw his charges and set the record straight by disassociating with the Protestants. The Praesidium wrote: "St. John congregation (Bloomfield) has not asked you to make a judgment of its action taken last October, an action which the congregation had neither rescinded nor even questioned since it was taken."⁹ One week later Christman would write:

They steadfastly refused to discuss the issues. Even in the final meeting of February 3 (the District officers, the circuit pastor, and myself, present), they wanted me to suggest some "common ground" that we could discuss and declared the East Bloomfield affair an¹⁰ unfit subject ("everyone has his own way of looking at it").

On the basis of Christman's charges in "Some Timely Questions Answered," because he was totally unwilling to recant these charges (the closest he had come was an addendum to his open letter of January 25: "To avert any misunderstanding, I am not saying that anyone wants to distort the Scriptures, and I am not saying that all the Synod on every occasion distorts the Scriptures."¹¹), and because of his public declaration of fellowship with the Protestant Conference, divisive of our own fellowship, the Northern Wisconsin District Praesidium declared Christman out of fellowship with the Synod and no longer a pastor with membership in District and Synod (for a more complete report of the action taken, please read the appended February 3 documents to Robert Christman and also to St. Paul Ev. Lutheran Church).¹²

Despite a seeming unwillingness to deal with the issue on a congregational level ("at your January 19, 1981 meeting you passed a motion tabling the motion for Pastor Christman's removal until the Synod has acted in the matter"¹³), St. Paul's, upon the action of the District Praesidium, voted to remove Christman as its minister on February 16. The vote was 82-75, further testimony to the popular appeal which Christman enjoyed. Romans 16:17 had become, for Christman, the same "bloody axe"¹⁴ which separated his brother Floyd Brand. His reaction to the February 3 decision was not unusual: "It is He who has seen to it that the truth about the Synod emerged,

that the antics of the District are supported by the whole Synod leadership," and "Worst of all, it is clear that the officials do not know what Christian fellowship is."¹⁵ The entire affair, as far back as 1977, seemed almost orchestrated by Christman in this writer's opinion, a carbon-copy of so many other Protestant desertions.

II. DIFFERENCES IN PROTESTANT THEOLOGY WHICH PERSIST TODAY

It is a bit difficult, perhaps, to define distinct theological aberrations among Protestants, largely due to the fact that confessionalism is a dangerous politic to the Protestant way of thinking. This will be discussed in practice. Doctrinally, however, the most notable break from Synod subscription is the Protestant conception of fellowship. This dates back to the earliest days of the controversy, when early Protestants were disgusted with Wisconsin's hesitance to participate in inter-church discussions. Professor Fredrich comments:

President Brenner and Wisconsin approved of the maxim that urges putting one's own house in order before cleaning up the whole neighborhood. But to say the internal conflict caused a Wisconsin withdrawal in the interchurch relations field is to misread into a situation of simultaneity a cause-effect relationship.

The professed attitude of the Protestants was that this displayed the popery of the Wisconsin Synod. While Missouri gave up its sense of doctrinal discipline, Wisconsin did not, and the Protestants followed Missouri.

The best picture of Protestant fellowship principle is found throughout the pages of the '42 volume of Faith-Life. First, an article by Adolph A. Brux is recorded, condemning the traditional view

of Romans 16:17. An example:

For it is plain from v. 18 that the causers of divisions and offenses referred to in v. 17 are not regarded by Paul as Christians at all, and that the reason given for the admonition to avoid is their directly dishonest and anti-Christian character.¹⁷

Then Faith-Life reproduced the exegesis of Walter Schumann, a more traditionalist view. Finally, Karl Koehler printed his own exegesis, commented on the first two, and applied the passage to the Wisconsin Synod. His documentation is extremely difficult to follow; his purpose is not. Perhaps the following quotation best places Protestant thinking on fellowship in perspective:

As for the A.L.C. and Missouri, both have at odd times made overtures to the Protestants, and since we haven't read either of them out of our fellowship, we watch¹⁸ their development with close concern, and have a call to speak.

The Protestant Conference practices a selective fellowship. Each pastor may "select" any other pastor in any other body whom he feels comfortable with. Pastor Christman's own interpretation of Rom. 16:17 is as fuzzy as the Protestant selective fellowship. In his letter of January 25, he states: "The first passage, Romans 16:17, is properly interpreted, but improperly applied. The shoe fits the officials."¹⁹ On February 10, he says: "As for Romans 16:17, it has become the synod's bloody axe. Usually used to cut off the partially misinformed, it is now being used to eliminate the preachers of the Law (c.f. "repentance" issue to follow).²⁰ On this basis, it becomes easy to ~~and~~ accept a Leigh Jordahl into fellowship, despite his connection with Gettysburg as an American Church History teacher, as long as he "teaches the truth." Robert Christman further crystallized this mind-set in a personal interview with the writer by

saying "if it attracts, it attracts, and we associate."²¹ On this basis he also found it possible to say "Voss(Carl) and I have the same confession."²² That there are two different interpretations is obvious.

The second area of difference, repentance, is not-so-easily grasped. It might seem, at first glance, that there is a deadly serious charge of hardening leveled against Synod. At second glance, it might appear that this is merely a matter of semantics and must be understood in the sense rendered. Upon closer scrutiny, however, Protestant preaching of repentance raises serious doubts about their application of Law and Gospel.

Much is made of the "honesty" of repentance, and that it is elevated to the status of faith and Gospel is indicated in Protestant theology by its link-up with the cross alone. In 1930 Karl Koehler said as much when he declared: "It is not our purpose, however, to prove that Synod is under such judgment (the judgment of hardening). That would be as futile as undertaking to prove the Gospel. Both matters belong to the realm of faith."²³ This is a confusion of Law and Gospel, or to borrow Hans Koch's term for it in 1927, a "Gospel Law."²⁴ G.A. Zeibler comes up short with his definition (1942): "'Contrition' is sorrow for our sin, because by it we grieve our Savior whom we love."²⁵ The quotation might be understood correctly if contrition included the terminus ad quem and Gospel ("our Savior whom we love") was spelled out, but Protestant preaching does not do that. It mixes Law and Gospel, demands repentance as a fruit of faith, and totally negates the stern preaching of the Law, the

Ten Commandments, and the natural law written in man's heart (conscience). The "honesty of repentance" becomes the Protestant slogan for divesting the Gospel of its full comfort. Repentance becomes a Gospel demand, as Beitz said in his famous paper:

True heartfelt repentance is not obtained from the individual commandments as most of us have learned to know them in our Catechism, or Catechetical course. That may bring about a head repentance, a formal confession, but it will not stand the test of God. If you want to see what your sin has done, the heinousness of it, the hell of it, look at Christ on the Cross. Unless your heart is stone it will cry out in anguish: "Lord, be merciful unto me, a sinner. Remember me when thou comest into Thy kingdom." The real edge is put on to the law by seeing ^{the} love, the grace, behind it: The Jehovah -- the Jesus.

Protestant thinking has not changed -- Robert Christman views himself as a preacher of the law. Unfortunately, the Gospel can also become law with improper treatment, as personal phone calls from St. Paul's to President Voss during Christman's service there will attest.²⁷

The final doctrinal difference which this paper will illustrate is the Protestant view of evangelism. Perhaps it is rooted in early Synod actions and Hoenecke's determination to steady the ship; at any rate, the emphasis on missions was simply not there in the early days. This situation seems to have become practice for the Protestant Conference. Christman, in the interview with this essayist, proclaimed himself in total agreement with Protestant principles on evangelism. His singular emphasis is on I Peter 3:15: "...Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have." A few quotes from the appended letter (12/5/79) will suffice:

The question that we must face is whether or not the Lord's witness is called upon to do all this...Jesus' work is a perfect

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manifestation of this fundamental truth. He did not plan and execute strategies, employ field-tested methods, or strive to meet ambitious time tables. He, as He put it, walked in the daylight and did not stumble (John 11:9). Then, what happened, happened... There is a time to speak and a time to be silent. And each time to speak calls for a unique response... But when is an explicit explanation of our faith in place? When someone asks for the reason for the hope that is within us... Is that exquisite moment being here and now jeopardized by your impatient advance? You will never know... Though he (Paul) found himself talking of God, no record is given of him approaching anyone to engage him in a Law-Gospel presentation... The New Testament, by unanimous example and exhortation, calls for us to be ready to answer. That means waiting. And waiting is quite the opposite of not waiting.²⁸

Christman may have framed doctrine for an already-accepted principle in the Protestant Conference. His letter in no way wanders from the line of theory and practice followed by Protestants for 50 years. Just recently, Gerald Hinz inked the same sentiment:

In our singular station as Protestants we are perhaps at an advantage in observing without a program how God works when and where He wills through the testimony of the Gospel. The influence of FAITH-LIFE has extended beyond our telling and determination. In our congregations we have become disabused of the expectation of increasing our membership. People are puzzled that we ignore opportunities to snap up members when they come within reach.²⁹

This writer will avoid the temptation to polemicize the isolationism of the Protestant Conference. The dramatic decline of churches and membership in the Conference should, however, illustrate the differences in approach to evangelism.

There remain yet a number of practical differences which deserve mention. The first, and most burdensome, is semantics. Anyone who has read an issue of Faith-Life is aware of the sharp, threatening, accusatory language which Protestants use. Often it dances on the edge of theological criticism and personal attack, many times it steps right over the line. Phrases like "hardening," "under the

judgment of God," "the spirit of antichrist" are all too familiar.

It is interesting to note that the "bloody axe" which Christman saw leveled on the heads of his fellow Protestants was swung in 1926 by W.F. Beitz, his spiritual forefather:

I hear the cry of your hearts: What shall I do to be saved -- from this judgment? From this wrath to come? From this cold, formal, mechanical, lifeless, apathetic, no-faith life Christianity? We shudder as we hear the awful words: The ~~ax~~ is already laid at the foot of the tree.³⁰

In fairness to the Protestants, it should be mentioned that the charges they make are often intended to include themselves. "The Protestants also believe that divine judgment rests on all Christendom (I Peter 4:17-19), including themselves and the Synod."³¹ This, however, does not answer for the slanderous personal and sweeping general attacks made on others in violation of the eighth commandment.

In the Christman interview, this writer asked how such strong, abusive language could be justified. Christman replied that if a statement is ten percent true, then it is justifiable on the grounds that it has the desired effect of the true believer. Strangely enough, he cited the Old Testament example of Shimei.³² Perhaps there is an analogy here: one person tells a joke, and everyone laughs; someone else tells the same joke, and no one laughs. The situation, the purpose, the speaker and his audience must all be taken into account. Koehler ruled this out in theological controversies:

This must be observed above all...Fairness demands that we seek to understand our opponent not as his words can or even must be understood, but as he wants them to be understood.³³

It is doubtful that Koehler would ever have intended, with these words, to give free license to any statement made at random. Robert

Frost realized the frustration of veiled rhetoric when he wrote:

But so with all, from babes that play
At hide-and-peek to God afar,
So all who hide too well away
Must speak and tell us where they are.³⁴

Yet another practical difference is style. For Protestants,¹ dogmatics, catechetics, hermeneutics, evangelism training are all theological exercises which deaden faith and faith-life. Beitz went so far as to say: "All appeal in all studies must be to the heart not head."³⁵ His argument borders on the ludicrous:

Can you feature Jesus holding forth with treatises on dogmatics? Can you feature Adam and Eve appealing to their sons with the doctrine of the trinity? Can you imagine Paul and Silas advising the jailor at Philippi to buy a set of dogmatics? Can you think of Abraham speaking to his son Isaac of the active and passive obedience of Christ?³⁶

That this practice still persists today in Green Bay is evident from the previously-mentioned outlook of St. Paul's teacher, Michael Hanke. President Voss described the same attitude in Christman's preaching: "You speak from the fulness of the Spirit within you."³⁷ This is a difficult concept to grasp, given the Protestant Conference's¹ insistence that it retains the Wauwatosa Gospel and its historical-grammatical approach. Yet, with this almost-Pentecostalist view of expedient expression and rejection of system, it becomes easier to understand (but not easier to accept) the bold accusations which are made. Here, again, it is interesting to note that Christman expressed surprise that his "Some Timely Questions Answered" met with such close scrutiny when, he says, it was written rather hastily and intended only to provoke discussion.³⁸ Yet he was unwilling to retract even one statement from the document. This is a good indicator

of Protestant style and its ramifications.

Closely related to style is the Protestant personality, which needs little explanation. Protestant ministers seem to reflect the personality of J.P. Koehler (but not the intelligence). The Wauwatosa theology has been defined in various ways. Its most general definition is given by Professor Fredrich: "finding in the Scriptures (in their historic-grammatic sense) that which you believe and preach."³⁹ This writer's definition has been: "that particular theology which is personified by the particular theology of Koehler." The latter definition is appropriate if we are to assume that the Protestant Conference is rightful heir to the Wauwatosa Gospel. Little will be said here of Koehler or his particular personality. Many have written about the Koehler eccentricities and the difficulty of understanding his exceptional work. Yet the same holds true today. Protestants are a very individualistic breed with little concern for structure or organization (see above). President Voss, frustrated with the unapproachable and indiscernible attitude of Christman and the others, labels them "complete mavericks."⁴⁰ As harsh as the term may sound, it's difficult to describe them in another way. Professor Balge of the Seminary mentions the peculiar "mind-set"⁴¹ of the Protestant, a Weltanschauung - of - sorts which, once attained, becomes part-and-parcel of the personality and creates walls to the outsider. Pastor Mark Jeske wrote: "It is easier to align yourself with people than with doctrines."⁴² The strong, intellectual, individualistic bent of each pastor is at least a partial reason for their historical exodus and their present-day federation. Robert Christman is no

exception. This will be discussed in the third section.

Finally, and inextricably linked together with the other practical differences that exist, is the Protestant emphasis on "loftier" theological issues. Again, there is no formal position statement with which one can positively define the issue, but the attitude persists. It is partially united with Protestant antipathy for forms and "machinery"; it is partially united with the corporate Protestant personality and emulation of J.P. Koehler, it is partially an issue of semantics; yet it remains a distinctive Protestant trend. It is also partially united with Protestant emphasis on repentance, evangelism, and Spirit-filled expediency of speech. Beitz said:

We preach year after year and our brothers and sisters in the pews remain babes in Christ for time and eternity. If we would study our Bible for our own personal growth and LIFE BY FAITH we would have a message on Sunday for the people entrusted to us, either from that which WE have found as LIFE for ourselves during the week, or something else⁴³ from the vast fund of a LIFE BY FAITH seeking expression.

It is indeed praiseworthy that the Protestant Conference is not only dedicated to intensive Bible Study and "faith-life," but also that they put into practice the dedication they espouse. Faith-Life is the most prominent example of this. A portion of the PURPOSE statement beginning each issue reads: "to seek with them ever more increasing knowledge of our Lord, that we might win Christ and be found in Him."⁴⁴ An advantage for the Protestant Conference in this regard is the diminutive size of the Conference and the small membership of each congregation. This allows for more thorough equipping of the saints and time for the "higher" theological questions.

It also, unfortunately, allows for theological snobbery and

aloofness. Protestants accuse Synod of only serving milk, and not meat. President Voss commented: "Christman and Brand did not appreciate the emphasis we place on our mission in the world."⁴⁵ The goals of preserving the Word and bringing the Gospel to one's fellow man begin to disappear in the singular quest of attaining "meat." Again, the size of the two bodies is a significant factor, but the practices are distinctly different.

III. ROBERT CHRISTMAN AS A PROTESTANT

This section will be less documented, given its personal topic. The essayist will rely on personal evaluation and personal interview. Robert Christman began his interview by stating categorically that he is NOT a Protestant, (3/7/81, after his removal from office), but that he shares many viewpoints with them and enjoys fellowship with them. This is not unusual, considering his position at the time and his stated antipathy for ANY organization. President Voss, in a lighter mood, asked the writer: "If it quacks like a duck, if it walks like a duck, if it looks like a duck, what is it?"⁴⁶

Perhaps Professor Balge's term, "mind-set," is the closest one comes to any practical definition of Protestant. With that terminology, Christman is the classic Protestant. Three years ago, when I traveled to Green Bay to preach for Pastor Christman, I stopped at his home on Saturday evening to discuss the details of the service. I was ushered into the living room and, with scarcely a "hello," became engrossed in a ninety minute review of an historical book which Christman was currently reading. A bit unusual, perhaps, but an

adequate reflection of the Christman character. Almost totally unconcerned with convention, Robert Christman is a compelling man: intelligent, eloquent, with an attention for detail. His earnest expression undoubtedly accounts for a number of the souls who defected from St. Paul's with him.

But the latter part of our first meeting became a debate on the principles of evangelism. It was here that I first noted his circular logic, his vague applications, and his unwillingness to concede even semantic points. Had I then been familiar with the Protestant Controversy, certain similarities could have been drawn. Subsequent meetings and discussions, particularly with teacher Hanke, have substantiated that observation.

The preceding practical section of Protestant theology places Christman squarely in the Protestant column. The vocabulary, the intensity, the difficult logic of his speech are semantically Protestant. Note also the distinctively hard edge in "Some Timely Questions Answered" and other correspondence. Personally, he is a maverick, privately expressing to me his hatred for Synodical administration and publicly conveying the "Koehler" image. Christman becomes easily frustrated with simplistic ("milk") thinking (as every minister is susceptible to from time to time), and seems to revel in his new position, which allows for deeper study. Stylistically, however, Christman does not seem to be a copy of the Protestant "model." While his sermons and rhetoric pay lip service to the anti-establishment ideal, in practice he is a well-organized man, given to careful planning. This careful

planning, in the writer's opinion, is also partially responsible for the numerical success of his departure from St. Paul's.

Despite this difference in approach, Robert Christman is, practically and particularly doctrinally, a Protestant. The question remains: Why does Christman persist in his statement that he is not a Protestant? In this writer's opinion, he does not consider himself a Protestant, nor does he wish to specifically align himself with any group at this time. This is difficult to determine, however, because of the situation involved. Expediency may be taking place of conviction, and Christman realizes that it is not in the best interest of his membership to declare affiliation with the Protestants at this time. Notice, for example, that in the February 28, 1981 edition of the Green Bay Press-Gazette this statement is made: "His reaction to Brand's ouster was because Brand was forced to renounce his association with the Protestants, after attending only two or possible three meetings."⁴⁷ The statement is not false, but geared to evoke public sympathy. Quite the opposite is true in "Some Timely Questions Answered," addressed to a different situation: "For a year or so he (Brand) had been appreciating the honesty and deep penetration of Protestant Bible study, reading their magazine 'Faith-Life,' and attending their conferences."⁴⁸ Also worthy of consideration is the attendance, at the first "informational" meeting at St. Paul's, of notable Protestant figures. In this writer's opinion, if Christman is not presently a Protestant, his deep-seated convictions, the direction he has taken, and the advent of more settled times with less scrutiny will lead him to declare himself.

IV. SOLUTIONS?

If the controversy in Green Bay is difficult to assess, the Protestant Controversy is even more difficult, and to this point has not even been approached substantially. Years have only added to the confusion, and today's Seminary student is largely unaware of (and in most cases, unconcerned about) Protestant history.

History has not solved the problem. The tragic misunderstandings and flare-ups of the early days serve only as negative examples. In response to the mistakes of the past, the 1962 convention of the Western Wisconsin District approved some very different measures. Since the resolutions have a direct bearing on the Green Bay case, three of the four are listed here:

- B. That pastors, teachers, and laymen be encouraged to study the issues involved and seek to reestablish contact with the Protestants on an individual basis.
- C. That all of us pray for the day when mutual confidence will be restored and we again share in the outward fellowship of faith.
- D. That we urge the Protestants to regard these resolutions as a sincere and earnest effort on the part of this District to heal the breach between us.

It could be said that Pastors Christman and Brand followed resolution B to the letter. Perhaps Christman, at one point, was attempting to comply with this resolution in his early communication with the Protestants. During his interview with this writer, Christman intimated that, were he to find himself at the Seminary with the background of experience he has since then had, he would still seek a call into the Wisconsin Synod. This would lead to the conclusion that not all "pastors, teachers and laymen" should be encouraged to reestablish contact, and that some should definitely be discouraged. Unfortunately,

only those drawn to the Protestant cause seem to be studying the issues and contacting the men involved.

It is clear that Christman and the Protestants have rejected resolution D. Christman charges the Synod with attempting to sweep the problem under the rug by removing the suspensions which the Western District imposed.⁵⁰ It seems improbable that he would fail to see that this was not intended as a declaration of fellowship, but a first step towards more meaningful discussion. Yet he adamantly maintains his point, effectively ruling it out as a possible solution.

Robert Christman was seen in several quarters as the man to heal the breach between Wisconsin and the Protestant Conference. This desired solution has backfired. President Voss would prefer a Synodical statement that the Protestant Conference, based on its history, has declared itself out of fellowship with Wisconsin. In his opinion, this would facilitate a broader understanding of the dangers and prevent another Green Bay.⁵¹ It is this writer's opinion that just such a statement would introduce only an added burden to an already pregnant situation. Wisconsin made that mistake in the early history. The Sixties effort, a grass roots movement, has also failed.

Is there a solution? Perhaps no, but that is for the Lord of the Church to decide. It is our responsibility to continue to preach the Gospel of forgiveness in Christ, and to pray that our fellowship might once again be restored. To responsibly deal with the controversy, however, our church must be well informed and prepared to handle the intricacies of this controversy. To this end, it becomes imperative that the Wisconsin side of the story be published and accessible, not only to point out the inherent dangers involved, but

to lay the groundwork for intelligent communication and reconciliation efforts. Despite the failure of organized attempts, it seems advisable to this essayist to proceed carefully, preparedly, boldly, as a Synod. Green Bay might have been averted if Robert Christman would have had an informed, concerned District helping him. We've worked as a Synod to tear down and as individuals to build up. Perhaps the time has come, as a Synod, to communicate and pray.

ADDENDUM

An additional doctrinal difference not mentioned in the text but worthy of note is the Protestant conception of antichrist. The papacy is only an historical ramification of "the spirit of antichrist" for Protestants. Pastor Christman mentions this only in passing in his "Some Timely Questions Answered" and the issue was not raised in our interview. For this reason it is not a part of the text. References to the "spirit of antichrist" are sprinkled liberally throughout the pages of Faith-Life, and an extensive treatment of the topic is being presented in the '81 volume.

I have chosen to ignore the traditional spelling, "Protes'tant," in the body of this paper, not out of total disrespect, but only in deference to my typist.

President Carl Voss stated in our interview that, had the suspension of Robert Christman been delayed, "complete, utter chaos" would have resulted. It's altogether saddening that the events which transpired in Green Bay ever occurred. As of last Wednesday, April 8, 1981, three teachers; Melvin Koss, Michael Hanke, and Christine Lincoln were suspended. All are expected to accept the calls they have received from St. James, the splinter congregation organized by Christman. A fourth, Janet Maas, has resigned effective at the end of the current school year. It is my prayer that our gracious Lord will bind up and heal, and continue to proclaim His saving Gospel to all the souls in Green Bay..

ENDNOTES

- ¹E.C. Fredrich, "Wisconsin's Interchurch Relations in the First Third of This Century," Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly, (January 1977), p.52.
- ²Robert Christman, "Some Timely Questions Answered," (November 14, 1980), pp. 2-3.
- ³Taken from discussions with several faculty members present at the meeting.
- ⁴Taken from an interview with Pastor Carl Voss, (March 7, 1981).
- ⁵Ibid.
- ⁶Robert Christman, "An Open Letter to the Wels Northern Wisconsin District Presidium," (December 5, 1979), p. 1.
- ⁷Voss Interview, op. cit.
- ⁸Christman, "Some Timely Questions Answered," op. cit.
- ⁹"Letter to St. Paul Ev. Lutheran Church," (February 3, 1981), p. 2.
- ¹⁰Robert Christman, "Notes to the Reader of Current District Documents," (February 10, 1981).
- ¹¹Christman, "Open Letter..." (January 25, 1981).
- ¹²"Letter to Robert W. Christman," (February 3, 1981).
- ¹³"Letter to St. Paul's Ev. Lutheran Church," op. cit.
- ¹⁴Christman, "Notes to the Reader..." op. cit.
- ¹⁵Ibid.
- ¹⁶Fredrich, op. cit., p. 51.
- ¹⁷"The Battle for Romans 16:17," Faith-Life, (January 1942), p. 9.
- ¹⁸Ibid., (May 1942), p. 12.
- ¹⁹Christman, "Open Letter..." op. cit.
- ²⁰Christman, "Notes to the Reader..." op. cit.
- ²¹Taken from an interview with Robert Christman, (March 7, 1981).
- ²²Ibid.

23. Karl Koehler, "Is This Really True? - 'Dass Die Wisconsin Synode Im Gericht Der Verstockung Liege'," Faith-Life, (June 1930), p. 15.
24. Mark Jeske, "A Half Century of Faith-Life," p. 51.
25. G.A. Zeibler, "In Appreciation of Luther's Small Catechism," (September 1942), p. 7.
26. W.F. Beitz, "God's Message to Us in Galatians: The Just Shall Live by Faith," The Wauwatosa Gospel: Which Is It?, p. 11.
27. Voss Interview, op. cit.
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30. Beitz, "God's Message to Us..." op. cit., p. 6.
31. Christman, "Some Timely Questions Answered," op. cit.
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33. J.P. Koehler, The History of the Wisconsin Synod, (1970), xxii.
34. "Revelation," The Poetry of Robert Frost, p. 19.
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42. Jeske, "A Half Century of..." op. cit., p. 80.
43. Beitz, "God's Message to Us..." op. cit., p. 16.
44. Faith-Life.
45. Voss Interview, op. cit.
46. Ibid.
47. Green Bay Press-Gazette, (February 28, 1981), A-5.

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⁴⁸Christman, "Some Timely Questions Answered," op. cit.

⁴⁹"Announcement of Convention Action - Western Wisconsin District,"
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⁵⁰Christman Interview, op. cit.

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December 5, 1979

An open letter to the WELS N. Wisconsin District Presidium
From Robert Christman, pastor of St. Paul's, Green Bay
RE: Our meeting of Monday, November 26, 1979

As I mentioned to you, I want to make my reply in the form of an open letter, available to all the pastors of the District and a few others who have indicated an interest in my essay "Why TAS-type Evangelism is Contrary to the Gospel." The issue, after all, belongs to the whole District. I think this openness is especially important, since you made a point of the fact that some pastors are disturbed by what are regularly referred to as my "charges."

Let me begin, then, by saying again that I do not consider my contentions to be "charges." I am charging no one. What I am saying is, "Brothers, we have something among us that upon close inspection I believe you will find to be detrimental to our cause." It is something that we did not have a chance to carefully review before its introduction into our Synod's life. Moreover, it is something that virtually everyone either feels or has felt less than comfortable with, to one degree or another.

The claim has been made repeatedly that the title of my essay, "Why TAS-type Evangelism is Contrary to the Gospel" is too strong. I want you to know that it was carefully chosen. I am not raising a point of mere personal preference. I am concerned about a method that counteracts our very purpose for employing it.

I realize that such a claim will make some people uncomfortable. This does not please me. But I am not able to agree to the principle that to say that something is "wrong" is somehow unbrotherly and intolerable in our fellowship. Such a self-imposed restriction cannot fail to facilitate our doom in time, for certainly we are not immune to mistakes.

That is why I cannot agree that my contentions amount to waving a red flag in front of the Seminary faculty, who gave TAS its approval, and in the face of all who may have used TAS. I am convinced that we must tell our brothers if something that we have slipped into is not sound, and that such a disclosure will not be a "red flag" in the face of those who realize that we can err and those who are eager to weigh all claims in the balances of God's Word.

I also want to make this point again, publicly, that in speaking of TAS-type evangelism as contrary to the Gospel, I am not accusing our Synod of false doctrine. My essay is addressed to methods, not doctrines. I take exception to no doctrine whatsoever. I am trying my best to show how certain evangelism methods are not in step with the doctrines we all cherish and confess. In this sense my contention is comparable to St. Paul's in Antioch (Galatians 2:14) in which he insisted that Peter "walked not uprightly according to the truth of the Gospel." As Peter and Paul agreed on what the Gospel was (doctrines), so we are all in agreement. That is why I offered to change the title of my essay to "Why TAS-type Evangelizing is not an Upright Walk According to the

And the reason, once again, is the lack of trust in God that TAS-type evangelism is built on. It replaces trust in God with a reliance on the human will. Coercion, in one form or another, is the result; and coercion, hardly an expression of faith, does not win the heart of the unbeliever. This is not to say that the wonderful truths expressed in the quoted passages may not do their salutary work in spite of the hindrance of the method.

We live in the age of the advertisement. Hundreds of times a day we are subjected to communications designed to manipulate us. So accustomed to these mind-bending onslaughts have we become, that we have learned to take them for granted. Whatever inclination we may have had to be manipulative in our own conversation has been strongly confirmed. The result is that our culture, of which we all are a part, is notoriously poor at really communicating. Witness in this regard all the frantic para-psychological attempts to get spouses to communicate, parents and children to communicate, and friends to communicate among themselves. We do a lot of talking, but how little we communicate.

Now TAS-type evangelism is manipulative. It comes straight out of the commercial world, where the object is to apply as much pressure as possible with as much subtlety as possible. Bullying is, of course, counterproductive. One must be manipulated without realizing it.

The type of evangelism represented by TAS poses as pure conversation. Yet, it is carefully designed to give the evangelist the power to turn an everyday conversation into a well-defined religious disclosure. It is designed, further, to enable the evangelist to control the conversation in such a way that a pre-conceived presentation may be made in full. Finally, it is designed to enable the evangelist to press (without getting so tough as to rouse antagonism) for a positive response. All this, in the guise of simple, heart-to-heart conversation.

The question that we must face is whether or not the Lord's witness is called upon to do all this. And if he does, whether this shadow of deceit and this reliance on "field-tested" ploys is a true expression of the sovereign grace of God.

Christ came to bear witness to the truth. The Gospel, by which He Himself dwells in us, makes us simple children in our relationship to God, ourselves, and one another.

Consider our most holy faith. We believe that the whole Gospel is realized by the hand of God, and not by the will of man. This is true for my own salvation and for everyone else's. God's saving will, moreover, is carried out in history. He guides and directs the course of human events to the fulfillment of His gracious good will. Else how would all the elect be saved?

Jesus' work is a perfect manifestation of this fundamental truth. He did not plan and execute strategies, employ field-tested methods, or strive to meet ambitious time tables. He, as He put it, walked in the daylight and did not stumble. (John 11:9). Then, what happened, happened. So did He do the Father's will. When His unbelieving brothers tried to goad Him into going into Judea to make a name for Himself, He told them, "My time is not yet come: but your time is always ready." (John 7:6)

When Jesus' time did come, He entered Jerusalem amid hosannas and palms. So right was the time that, if the people had somehow been silenced "the stones would immediately (have cried) out." (Luke 19:40) How well that He had rejected Satan's idea of jumping off the pinnacle of the Temple to draw attention to His saving person. Satan's time, too, is always ready.

We might also think of Jesus' reaction to the news that certain Greeks wanted to see Him--how directly this applies to evangelism. He answered, "The hour is come, that the Son of man should be glorified." (John 12:23) The Father was showing Him that it was time for Him to receive other sheep not of the Jewish fold. Now was the time for the middle wall of partition to be broken down.

Or consider Jesus' trial's. He came very close to being sent home. What would He have done then? But He was confident. His Father had all things in hand. He need not force any issue. His Father would see to it that His Son would be lifted up and draw all men unto Himself.

This confidence, expressed in patient "waiting on the Lord" and eschewing all take-charge enthusiasm, has always been a hallmark of faith. It is a good portion of that light that shines from every city set on a hill. It reflects the very Gospel. So in the days of Abraham, when his effort to obtain the seed by Hagar failed, Isaac, the miracle child, who came when, where, and how God determined he would come, became his heir. His coming by promise resulted in the blessing of all the families of the earth.

In keeping with the Gospel of God's sovereign grace, Biblical evangelism is a sanctified response to God's revealed will. That will is manifested by the circumstances of history as appraised by those having the mind of Christ and the unction of the Spirit. There is a time to speak and a time to be silent. And each time to speak calls for a unique response. The only constant, when it comes to speaking, is that our words--all of them--be "words of grace seasoned with salt," i.e., reflecting the fact that "God so loved the world" and renouncing the devil and all his works and ways.

But when is an explicit explanation of our faith in place? When someone asks for the reason for the hope that is within us. (2 Peter 15). When you can give answer, then you know what is called for. Otherwise, you can only guess, and

guessing is not a basis for proceeding in faith. Does God perhaps have a key moment planned for the soul you have decided to confront? Is that exquisite moment being here and now jeopardized by your impatient advance? You will never know. All that you will know is that you are the one taking charge, and you are doing it in the dark. No wonder that the other passage that teaches the "how" of evangelism, Colossians 4:6, also urges us to be ready to answer.

When God called Paul and company into Macedonia, He provided Paul with a vision of a man inviting them. Luke says, "Immediately we endeavored to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the Gospel unto them." (Acts 16:10). They knew assuredly, because they had been used to responding to human invitations in the realization that they came from on high, just as calls by congregations are divine calls.

Throughout the "Book of Acts" we find Peter and Paul and the rest waiting for invitations. Paul and Silas were within earshot of the other prisoners while in the Philippian jail; but all those prisoners heard from God's ambassadors, as Luke reports it, were prayers and hymns (Acts 16:25). The apostles were doing it Jesus' way: walking in the light. The jailer was told to believe after he begged them, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" (Acts 16:30)

One of the most complete, perhaps the most complete, description of Paul's daily conduct is found in the account of his voyage from Judea to Rome. Though he found himself talking of God, no record is given of him approaching anyone to engage him in a Law-Gospel presentation. Of course it can be said that an argument from silence is weak at best. But then let someone come up with a better reason for Luke not reporting Paul's "aggressive witnessing" here or anywhere else, better than the fact that, like Jesus, and in harmony with the Gospel, he did not engage in such activity. Would any advocate of the new-style evangelism have missed this opportunity to "promote evangelism," had Luke's pen been in his hand?

One more thing must be squarely faced. A person cannot be both a TAS-type evangelist and a New Testament type evangelist. The New Testament, by unanimous example and exhortation, calls for us to be ready to answer. That means waiting. And waiting is quite the opposite of not waiting.

In this regard, consider this paragraph from the District Evangelism Commission's "A Response to the Essay: Why TAS-type Evangelism is Contrary to the Gospel." You will recognize this as a typical argument, often heard.

Consider a practical example. A Christian is sitting next to an unconverted person on an airplane. If the Christian finds this out

must he wait until the unconverted asks about the Christian's faith? It may be that he will ask. However, if he doesn't, the Christian will seize this opportunity to be a witness for Christ. He will initiate a conversation about the Gospel. Not to do so may indicate a weakness of faith and love. Thanks be to God that there is forgiveness for many such lost opportunities.

It may be that he will ask; but if not, you tell him. Do you see the quandry that this puts you in? How long do you wait? Five minutes? Ten? An hour? Depending upon the length of the flight? What if you wait five minutes, only to have him get up from his seat just seconds before you were going to make your move, to return as the plane is about to land? Will such an experience teach you to seize opportunities without the slightest delay? And if it does, won't you become a pest to be shunned?

A soldier cannot wait to fire on the enemy until the order is given and at the same time fire when he decides the time is right. It is his job to wait, even if he doubts the wisdom of his commanding officer's delay. We cannot wield the sword of the Spirit when God opens doors and when we decide to break the door down. It will be one or the other; and our confidence in God's gracious wisdom tells us which it should be.

Besides the impossibility of both waiting and not waiting, ask yourself how likely the aggressive witness is to be asked the reason for the hope that lies within him. His hope is upstaged by his enthusiasm, making him a threat to anyone with a deep and personal rumbling in his soul.

I would also call attention to the guilt feeling that TAS-type evangelism is destined to arouse in those who are conscientious. "Not to do so (initiate a conversation about the Gospel) may indicate a weakness of faith and love," we are told. We are glad to see the word "may" where we might have read "will." But does this get anyone off the hook? Under what normal conditions will a failure to witness not indicate a lack of faith and love, according to TAS-type reasoning? So the saints who ride city buses every day, who meet people daily in their work, who work beside six or eight heathen, are burdened with guilt that God's Word refuses to impose. They learn to testify anywhere and everywhere, that they can say, "Well, at least I told him of sin and grace." Small comfort to an oppressed conscience!

The other option, I fear, is that a more calloused conscience ignores the implicated guilt for failure and uses his occasional forays into power-evangelism to foster a feeling of self-righteousness.

None of this, as I explained in the meeting, is excuse for the Christian to assume an attitude of selfish irresponsibility. Let him pour over God's Word for his own soul's sake. If it is his delight, and only if it is his delight,

will he be in a position to recommend it to someone else. Moreover, he will grow in readiness. And because he is studying God's word, not to develop a strategy, but to satisfy his own hunger and thirst for righteousness, his answers will always be pure confession.

How beautiful is God's way. How right and good, reflecting, as it does, the incomparable beauty of the Gospel, which is God's own glory. "Be still," says the Psalmist, "and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth." (Ps. 46:10).

Once again, now, I have tried to explain why I cannot confine myself to your "rephrasing" of my "major objections." I list them so that against the backdrop of my express position, you may see why none of you could claim that they adequately represent my convictions.

1. "The TAS presentation of the Law should in a more effective way lead the individual to the terrors of conscience produced by the Law."
2. "The Gospel presentation should then emphasize more pointedly the marvel and wonder of Christ's redeeming grace in all of its beauty and comfort for wretched sinners."
3. "The TAS presentation should not be so structured that it impedes responding to the particular situation of the evangeleee."

Finally let me mention again the way that the Augsburg Confession would handle the differences that are found among us on this issue. After describing their position on God, original sin, repentance, free will, etc. the framers of the Confession conclude (Art. XXI, para.2):

This is about the Sum of our Doctrine, in which, as can be seen, there is nothing that varies from Scripture, or from the Catholic Church, or from the Church of Rome as known from its writers. This being the case, they judge harshly who insist that our teachers be regarded as heretics. There is, however, disagreement on certain Abuses, which have crept into the Church without rightful authority. And even in these, if there were some difference, there should be proper lenity on the part of the bishop to bear with us by reason of the Confession which we have now reviewed....

TAS, I contend, is an abuse that crept in without rightful authority. That authority is, of course the Word. But even the "authority" of the pastoral membership of the Synod was circumvented, as you recall, when the emerging TAS was unavailable except to those who attended the seminars, in which TAS was already in operation.

The abuses about which the fathers think that differences should be allowed because of the sound doctrine of the critics, include the question of both kinds in the Sacrament, the marriage of priests, and the sacrifice of the mass--points which, like the TAS question, are related to a host of passages in Scripture. Still, the early Lutherans call these abuses and not false doctrines.

I call this to your attention in the hope that we can proceed in a thoroughly Lutheran way. Who can insist on a deadline for God to effect full agreement among us on this issue? But with the foundation of Biblical doctrine and an earnest zeal for a fuller and fuller grasp of the Truth, with humble prayers from the back of the Temple and not the front, God will surely bless us in His good time.

SOME TIMELY QUESTIONS ANSWERED

1. Q. Who are the Protes'tants?

A. They are people who have been put out of the Wisconsin Synod. Nevertheless, they believe themselves to be true sons and daughters of Synod. Their full name is "The Protes'tant Conference of the Wisconsin Synod." Since the Synod has disowned them, they seldom use the "of the Wisconsin Synod" part of their name.

2. Q. How did it happen that the Protes'tants were put out of the Synod?

A. Except for the very first Protes'tant, each Protes'tant was put out for two reasons. One, he warned Synod of her corporate sins and called her to repent and mend her proud and self-glorifying ways. Two (in every case but the first), he "fellowshipped" with other Protes'tants. Invariably it was this "fellowshipping" that proved the man's undoing.

3. Q. Is there a Protes'tant that might be known to members of St. Paul's?

A. Yes, Pastor Floyd Brand, who preached for our 1979 Mission Festival. He lately became one. For a year or so CF PRESS GAZETTE he had been appreciating the honesty and deep penetration of Protes'tant Bible study, reading their magazine "Faith-Life," and attending their conferences.

4. Q. How was Pastor Brand put out of the Synod?

A. Briefly, it happened like this. Members of his congregation, known to have opposed former pastors, began to object to Pastor Brand's preaching. His preaching called for real repentance, not finger wagging at others. These grumblers talked to local synod officials and to neighboring pastors and found that Pastor Brand's Achilles' heel was his Protes'tant connection. Being a Protes'tant-like preacher of repentance, he was "fellowshipping" with Protes'tants. When the synod officials told the congregation that, if they did not dismiss their pastor, they as a congregation would be removed from the Synod, the congregation yielded and dismissed him. The officials then stated their agreement with the congregation's appraisal of their pastor, and declared Brand out of the Wisconsin Synod.

5. Q. Are there any other pastors in Synod who share in the Protes'tants' zeal for honest repentance and who practise fellowship with Protes'tants?

5. A. Yes. There is a pastor from Beaver Dam who has been attending Protes'tant conferences of late, and Pastor Christman, who has been attending their conferences for eight years.

6. Q. Has anyone known about this?

A. Yes. The late Synod President Oscar Naumann gave his approval (some-what reluctantly, it would seem), the District President has known of it for years and has not objected, and the Rev. E. Arnold Sitz, retired president of the Arizona-California District and long time member of the Synod's prestigious Doctrinal Commission, has urged Pastor Christman to keep attending Protes'tant conferences.

7. Q. Are there any doctrinal differences between the Synod and the Protes'tants?

A. Both sides normally say no. Yet, both admit that there are some disagreements. For one, the Synod's official claim is that repentance is not found at the foot of the cross, that is, that one is not moved to repent by the sight of Jesus dying for the sins of the world. The Synod also denies that our sins caused Jesus'suffering and death. The Protes'tants insist that repentance is found at the foot of the cross (if not there, then where?), and that it is by no means wrong to say that our sins caused Jesus suffering. The Protes'tants also believe that divine judgment rests on all Christendom (1 Peter 4:17-19), including themselves and the Synod. They do not see this as a denial of God's grace, but as an affirmation of the Law and as good reason to flee to the wounds of Christ, where only we find refuge from God's just wrath, as Scripture and our Lutheran Confessions clearly teach.

8. Q. With regard to these "differences," where does Pastor Christman stand?

A. With the Protes'tants, as do many, if not most, if not all Wisconsin Synod ministers, at least if the issue of the Protes'tants themselves is not brought up.

9. Q. How many know that this is Pastor Christman's position?

A. That, of course, is hard to say. But among those who know is the District President, who has known for years. Also the entire Seminary * faculty, who had a four-hour discussion with Pastor Christman on

10. Q. Has either the District President or the Seminary faculty ever "pressed charges" against Pastor Christman or refused to have fellowship with him because of his Protes'tant outlook?

A. No. Both have accepted Pastor Christman, knowing that he agrees with the Protes'tants and has fellowship with them.

C.F.
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11. Q. Why did the Synod remove Pastor Brand for agreement with the Protestants and fellowshiping with them and not Pastor Christman?

A. That is a good question. It is just one of many "inconsistencies" that show Synod to be given to expediency rather than principle, to convenience rather than conscience, to self-preservation rather than to what is judged to be obedience to God. Another question is, Why is the Seminary faculty not removed from Synod membership for maintaining fellowship with Pastor Christman, who, once again, agrees with the Protes'tants and fellowships with them?

12. Q. What shall we say about an organization that presents itself as the only right people, the only people that a person can pray with, and yet shows itself so unprincipled, so self-serving, and so adverse to any real and pointed preachment of repentance?

A. Such a group displays the spirit of antichrist. It puts itself, its own prosperity, its own holiness, and its own power to bless above the real Christ, and does so in the name of Christ. (Luke 21:8)

13. Q. What should be done about all this?

A. Very simply, we should all stick to what is true and right, honest and God-pleasing. We should refuse to yield to any pressure. We should trust completely in our great God and Savior. Pastor Christman has lodged his objection to the treatment of Pastor Brand with the Synod's Conference of Presidents. This, it would seem, is sufficient for the time being. Under no circumstances should we become headstrong and chart our own proud course. The issue is far too big for us. God alone can direct it, while we betake ourselves to humble faith and fervent prayer.

C.F.
PRES. VOSS'
COMMENTS ON
LETTER RECEIVED

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Resolutions submitted at voters meeting, Oct. 16, 1930

#1. Whereas some members at St. John's (German Ev. Lutheran St. John's Congregation) Lutheran Church, East Bloomfield, are deeply concerned about the further relationship of St. John's with the Wis. Ev. Lutheran Synod and,

Whereas the stand taken by Rev. Brand, either for or against the W.E.L.S., over and against the Protestant Conference (association, group, synod, etc.) and or other conferences, groups, synods, etc. not in fellowship with the W.E.L.S. and the acceptance, or rejection, by the voters of St. John's of that stand will determine the relationship of St. John's to W.E.L.S.

Be it resolved that Rev. Brand state, here and now, whether he will accept, preach, teach and further the doctrinal stand and teachings of the WELS and will abide by the administrative decisions of the synod and further that he will cease and desist from all spiritual and church fellowship and communication with the protestants and or other conferences, synods etc. who do not accept the doctrinal stand and teachings of WELS or are not in fellowship with the WELS, and further be it resolved that he swear his intention, here and now, before God and the voting members of St. John's Lutheran Church.

(secret ballot vote taken as to whether Pastor Brand declare his intent) 37 for declaration, 7 against

Resolution #2

Whereas Rev. Brand has sworn before God that he will not renounce all affiliation, communication, and fellowship with those not in fellowship with WELS and

Whereas some voters still have grave doubts as to his ability to serve God at St. John's

Be it resolved that the voters here assembled withdraw the call that had been extended to Rev. Brand and that as of this time forth he shall neither teach nor preach in St. John's.

(again a secret ballot was taken; results were 26 yes, 15 no, two ballots blank)

(signed) Leon Maierhafer

Sec. St. John's

E. Bloomfield

Many of you who attended last Monday's meeting received a copy of a letter from the District President to our congregation. Of the many things that might be said about last Monday, this must be said. Do not follow the example of the District officials in the way you use the Word of God.

In the third paragraph they cite four passages: Romans 16: 17, I Corinthians 1: 10, Romans 15: 6, and Ephesians 4: 3. They contend that these passages condemn my strong charges as division-causing.

The first passage, Romans 16: 17, is properly interpreted, but improperly applied. The shoe fits the officials. It is very, very dangerous to apply Scripture to others without applying it first to oneself. It makes for hypocrisy. Besides, the interpretation given Romans 16:17 in this letter contradicts the interpretation given it in the officials' November 19 letter to the congregation. One way or the other, not whatever happens to be convenient!

The other three passages speak against petty, selfish, proud, vain-glorious, unspiritual, carnal-minded, division making; against ignoring our great heritage in Christ. They do not forbid us to reprove and rebuke that which opposes the Kingdom of God. They do not contradict such exhortations as those found in Leviticus 19: 17, Matthew 18: 15-17, John 7: 7, Ephesians 5: 11, II Timothy 4: 2, and Titus 1: 13, all of which you do well to look up.

If the three passages cited by the officials were to say what they claim, they would not only condemn me, they would condemn Christ (Matthew 16: 23 and 17: 17) and the Apostles (I Corinthians 15: 34, II Corinthians 10: 4-5, Galatians 2: 11, Philippians 3: 17-19, and Jude). Self-evidently, Scripture does not condemn Christ and the Apostles, and must not be read as though it does.

If we follow their example, and read Scripture with a self-justifying bias, we are lost. God's Word is our only hope. It must govern us, not we it. If we use it for our purpose, God will be unable through it to use us for His purpose. Read honestly, prayerfully, penitently, humbly, courageously. Let it own your mind and heart. Then you will have nothing to fear. (John 17:17)

RWC, 1/25/81

Addendum. To avert any misunderstanding, I am not saying that anyone wants to distort the Scriptures, and I am not saying that all the Synod on every occasion distorts the Scriptures.

"Notes to the Reader of Current District Documents"

by Robert Christman 2/10/81

1. The action taken by the officials (my expulsion) is purportedly in keeping with I Corinthians 1: 10, Romans 15: 6, and Ephesians 4: 3. None of these forbid the reproof of sin. (Cf. bulletin insert of January 25.) as for Romans 16: 17, it has become the synod's bloody axe. Usually used to cut off the partially misinformed, it is now being used to eliminate the preachers of the Law.

2. The officials claim, "We and many others have repeatedly urged Pastor Christman to cease and desist from making condemnatory charges." The condemnatory charges they refer to are in my "Timely Questions" document, distributed to my congregation November 14, 1980. By November 19 the District President had drafted a letter to the congregation, accusing its pastor of "misrepresenting the synod" (which he explained to mean propagating false doctrine). In the letter he claimed that the District officials found that they had to "take issue with what Pastor Christman has written." They urged the congregation to contact them "as soon as possible" regarding "the implications of what Pastor Christman has written." All this without so much as a phone call or a post card to me. I received a copy of the letter; nothing more. After a meeting had been set up in which the District President would have opportunity to accuse me (of precisely what, no one could guess) before my congregation, he did set up a private meeting with me--at the request of my church council. At that meeting he attempted to refute my alleged "false doctrine" regarding repentance. That false doctrine charge was vigorously pressed at the January 12 open meeting. It was unceremoniously dropped a week later at the January 19 meeting. When, after January 19, attempts were made to convince me to drop charges, the point was: You must not say such things. Virtually no attempt was made to refute me.

3. The claim is now made that I did not document or substantiate my charges. This is not so. The mouth of two or three witnesses establishes a point. The East Bloomfield case, the root case in this whole debate, was exposed by Pastor Floyd Brand, Elder Fenfon Ziebarth, and myself. Others also contributed testimony, and much more could have been added. Documents were read and referred to. Noteworthy is the fact that the District Officials never asked for more substantiation or documentation. They steadfastly refused to discuss the issues.* Even in the final meeting of February 3 (the District officers, the circuit pastor, and myself, present), they wanted me to suggest some "common ground" that we could discuss and declared the East Bloomfield affair an unfit subject ("everyone has his own way of looking at it").

4. My ties with the Protes'tant Conference were approved of (albeit with some reluctance) by the late synod president Oscar Naumann, as I testified from the pulpit on October 12, before the East Bloomfield meeting. I told President Naumann that I considered Protes'tant Pastor Paul Hensel to be my brother in the fullest sense of the word as we use it in the church. I asked him what there was about the Protes'tants, if anything, that would prohibit me from declaring myself to Pastor Hensel. He replied that there was nothing wrong with the Protes'tants that he knew of. About three years ago I had a long talk with the

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seminary faculty, in which I clearly took the Protes'tant position and was opposed by them as outlined in brief in my "Timely Questions." Shortly after that meeting I went through the same points with the District President and the Circuit Pastor of that time, challenging them to show me where the Protes'tant positions were in error. My Protes'tant connection has not just recently come to light. It is a club that the officials have had at their side for years.

5. The information that the District Officials were "authorized to report" to the congregation February 3rd, viz., that the full Conference of Presidents agrees with "the steps taken by the District in this issue," is a disclosure for which we must thank God. It is He who has seen to it that the truth about the Synod emerged, that the antics of the District are supported by the whole Synod leadership.

6. The large paragraph on page 2 of the February 3 letter to the congregation largely speaks for itself. Three brief points may be added. (a) It is typical of the Synod to deny categorically all that "seeks to put the Synod in a bad light." We know that only the name of God is to be so defended (Mark 10: 18, "And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? There is none good but one, that is, God.>"). (b) What happened at East Bloomfield is our business. It is for us to weep with them that weep (Rom. 12:15) and to rebuke sharply those who do great harm to the church (Titus 1:13), especially when they act in our name and have committed themselves to turning their attention to us next. (c) The February third claim to the congregation that I lied to them in my report of events at East Bloomfield was never put to me, and even now it includes no specifics.

7. Worst of all, it is clear that the officials do not know what Christian fellowship is.

C.F. FAITH-LIFE '42

Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod

NORTHERN WISCONSIN DISTRICT



THE REV. CARL W. VOSS, President
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THE REV. LARRY G. ELLENBERGER,
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THE REV. DAVID WORGULL, Secretary
4055 Lancer Circle
Manitowoc, WI 54220

January 16, 1981

St. Paul Ev. Lutheran Church
Green Bay, Wisconsin

Dear members of St. Paul Congregation:

Your Church Council has requested a letter stating the issue between Pastor Christman and the Wisconsin Ev. Lutheran Synod. The issue centers on the fellowship of faith we enjoy as Synod members. We regard our blessed fellowship with St. Paul Congregation and some 1,000 other congregations in the Synod, their pastors and teachers, as a precious gift of God. We thank Him for granting us the blessing of confessing in common the precious truths of grace and salvation as He has revealed them to us in His Word. We consider it a singular, noteworthy blessing that He has bonded us together for the work of spreading His Gospel of salvation into all the world, of passing it on to future generations, and of preserving it in its truth and purity in the face of hostile attacks from the devil, the world, and the sin-blinded reasonings of sinful mankind. We are convinced that He has blessed us with the truth in our confession and practice as a Christian church body.

What we believe, teach, and practice on the basis of God's Word has come under attack by Pastor Christman. In his treatise titled, "Some Timely Questions Answered," he has made the charges⁽²⁾ that our Synod denies that our sins caused Jesus' suffering and death⁽²⁾ that our Synod has shown itself adverse to any real and pointed preaching of repentance, that as an organization we present ourselves as the only right people⁽³⁾ that we are unprincipled and self-serving, ⁽³⁾ that we put ourselves, our own prosperity, our own holiness and our own power to bless above the real Christ, and⁽⁴⁾ that we display the spirit of antichrist. We emphatically deny these charges and are convinced that the charges are false.

These charges are divisive of the fellowship God has given us. These charges "cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned" (Romans 16:17). In His Word, God encourages, "Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment" (I Corinthians 1:10); "With one mind and one mouth glorify God" (Romans 15:6); "Keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:3).

January 16, 1981

We would hope and pray that Pastor Christman even now would recant his charges, would disavow words and actions which cause divisions in our Scriptural fellowship of faith, and would once again declare himself in wholehearted agreement with the confession and practice, based on Scripture, subscribed to by the membership of our Wisconsin Ev. Lutheran Synod. May God in His grace so grant!

However, it saddens us to note that since the publication of his treatise, he has not retracted his charges, but has in fact espoused these charges even more vigorously, as evidenced at the meeting held January 12.

Since he is persisting in his erroneous charges, he should be encouraged to separate himself by means of a resignation from our fellowship of faith, as God's Word bids him do with its "avoid them" encouragement found in Romans 16:17. Should he refuse to do so, then he leaves no choice but that the fellowship of faith, that is, St. Paul Congregation and its wider fellowship of faith in the Synod, take the action and declare him no longer in fellowship with us by reason of his divisive charges.

Truly, this is a hard and trying decision, as well as a sad one. However, when the action is taken mindful that God, who has given us our fellowship of faith, wants it preserved and promoted, not fractured and broken by divisive charges, the action can be taken in the knowledge that it agrees with what God Himself wants done, so that we can get on with the work He has given us to do in our congregations and in our synodical fellowship.

With continued prayers for the Lord's grace and favor to rest on you in richest measure, I remain

With you in Him,



Carl W. Voss, President
Northern Wisconsin District, WELS

cc: The Rev. Clarence Koepsell
The Rev. Larry G. Ellenberger
The Rev. Thomas A. Liesener
The Rev. Carl H. Mischke

WISCONSIN EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN SYNOD

Northern Wisconsin District Praesidium

February 3, 1981

St. Paul Ev. Lutheran Church
Green Bay, Wisconsin

Dear members of St. Paul:

At your January 19, 1981 meeting you passed a motion tabling the motion for Pastor Christman's removal until the Synod has acted in the matter. Enclosed is a copy of the notice sent to Pastor Christman in which the undersigned president and two vice-presidents of the Northern Wisconsin District of the Wisconsin Ev. Lutheran Synod have declared him no longer in fellowship with the District and the Synod and consider him no longer a member of the clergy roster of the District and of the Synod. The reasons for the declaration are set forth in the notice.

This action is our testimony that we judge his charges false and a serious threat to the faith of the believers with whom we enjoy fellowship in the Wisconsin Ev. Lutheran Synod.

We kindly ask that you declare yourself in regard to the action we have taken. Do you agree or do you disagree that the action we have taken is in keeping with what God says in I Corinthians 1:10 ("Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment"); also in Romans 15:6 ("With one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ"); also in Ephesians 4:3 ("Endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace"); and also in Romans 16:17 ("Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them")?

We and many others have repeatedly urged Pastor Christman to cease and desist from making his condemnatory charges which he has not documented nor substantiated, but he steadfastly refuses to do so. This evidences that he is not in fellowship with us, that he is causing divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which we have learned, aided and abetted by his acknowledged fellowship with the Protestant Conference, a group that the Synod does not recognize as being within its fellowship. Therefore, since he refuses to separate himself formally from us, we then must separate ourselves from him.

Should you declare your support of the action we have taken, we ask that you adopt a resolution in which you would withdraw the call to Pastor Christman to serve as your pastor. We pledge our service in helping you obtain the services of an interim pastor immediately so that pastoral service in your midst would continue uninterrupted. We also stand ready to aid and assist you in calling another pastor.

Permit us also to state that this disturbing issue was discussed thoroughly and at great length at the January 20-21 meeting of the Synod's Conference of Presidents, chaired by Synod President Carl H. Mischke. We have been authorized to report to you that all eleven presidents and the secretary, who is a professor at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, to a man support and concur with the steps being taken by the District in this issue. They also expressed the hope and prayer that St. Paul

February 3, 1981

Congregation would support and concur with the action being taken and thus reaffirm your fellowship with the Synod.

Please permit also another word concerning the January 12 and January 19 meetings held at your church. Since these were announced as informational meetings only, we determined to abide by their purpose in all that we said. We deplore that there were those who sought to change the meetings into something other than the purpose for which they were called and used bulletin announcements and the meetings themselves for the purpose of making personal attacks and disparaging remarks. Those guilty of this certainly owe you an apology for their ill-advised behavior. We categorically deny any and all remarks made which sought to put the District, the Synod, and their elected officers in a bad light. Furthermore, we appeal to you to permit no discussion of what happened at St. John Congregation, East Bloomfield. St. John Congregation has not asked you to make a judgment of its action taken last October, an action which the congregation has neither rescinded nor even questioned since it was taken. Neither are you in a position to make such a judgment since you neither were in attendance at their meetings nor have you received true and correct information on the matter from Pastor Christman, only biased, distorted opinions, half-truths, and some outright lies. Understandably, Pastor Christman would deny this. But the Lord does not ask you to judge who is right and who is wrong in this matter; neither does St. John Congregation, and neither does the District and the Synod. Therefore, we are confident you will not want to make this an item for your concern. Your only concern should be to act on the divisions and offenses in your midst caused by the charges made by Pastor Christman and by his acknowledged fellowship with the Protes'tant Conference, a group not within the Synod's fellowship.

Should you wish further information, advice, or counsel, please feel free to ask. We stand ready to serve in whatever way we can.

Be assured of our prayers in your behalf, asking that the Lord will restore harmony and unity in your congregation and will preserve the fellowship of faith which we have treasured and enjoyed over many years.

In the Savior's service,

Carl W. Voss, President

Clarence Koepsell, First Vice-President

Larry G. Ellenberger, Second Vice-President

cc: The Rev. Carl H. Mischke
The Rev. Thomas A. Liesener

WISCONSIN EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN SYNOD

Northern Wisconsin District Praesidium

February 3, 1981

The Rev. Robert W. Christman
1020 Chicago Street
Green Bay, Wisconsin 54301

This is to inform you that because

1) you have charged in your treatise, "Some Timely Questions Answered," dated November 14, 1980, that the Wisconsin Ev. Lutheran Synod has shown itself adverse to any real and pointed preaching of repentance, that as an organization we present ourselves as the only right people, that we are unprincipled and self-serving, that we put ourselves, our own prosperity, our own holiness and our own power to bless above the real Christ, and that we display the spirit of antichrist; and because

2) these charges are undocumented, unsubstantiated, and therefore judged unwarranted; and because

3) we reject these charges as untrue; and because

4) you are persisting in these erroneous charges and have shown yourself unwilling to recant these charges and to again declare yourself in wholehearted agreement with the confession of doctrine and practice, based on Scripture, subscribed to by the membership of the Wisconsin Ev. Lutheran Synod; and because

5) your charges are divisive of the fellowship God has given us as a synod of. I Corinthians 1:10; Romans 15:6; Ephesians 4:3; Romans 16:17; and because

6) you have publicly declared yourself in fellowship with the Protes'tant Conference, a religious group that the Synod does not recognize as being within its fellowship;

therefore, we, the undersigned president and two vice-presidents of the Northern Wisconsin District of the Wisconsin Ev. Lutheran Synod, herewith declare you no longer in fellowship with the District and the Synod and consider you no longer a pastor who holds membership in the District and the Synod.

We take this action in the hope and with the prayer that the Lord of the Church will lead you once again to share our confession of doctrine and practice based on the Word of God. May God hasten and speed that day.

Sincerely,

Carl W. Voss, President

Clarence Koepsell, First Vice-President

Larry G. Ellenberger, Second Vice-President

cc: The Rev. Carl H. Mischke
The Rev. Thomas A. Liesener
St. Paul Ev. Lutheran Church

District declares Rev. Christman

Green Bay Press-Gazette Saturday, Feb. 28, 1981

'out of fellowship'

The Rev. Robert Christman, pastor of St. Paul's Evangelical Lutheran Church, Chicago and Clay Streets, Green Bay, since September of 1974, was declared "out of fellowship" by the Northern Wisconsin District of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod early in February.

At a special meeting Feb. 16, the congregation, by a vote of 82-75, removed him from his position as its minister.

The "out of fellowship" letter, sent to Christman and the congregation, was signed by the Rev. Carl Voss, pastor of St. Mark's Lutheran Church, Green Bay, and president of the Northern

Wisconsin District, and two vice presidents.

Voss, who prefers the dismissal to remain an "in house" situation, confirmed the action, but said it came only after many efforts to establish reconciliation.

The Rev. Carl Mischke, WELS president, reported there would be no statement coming from his Milwaukee office. "According to constitutional provision, all matters of doctrine and practice are assigned and are the responsibility of the individual districts." There are 10 districts.

Christman took issue with the Synod after an East Bloomfield, Wis., pastor, the Rev. Floyd Brand, was de-

clared "out of fellowship." Christman adamantly stated his position and wrote a paper entitled "Some Timely Questions Answered," in which he stated "the organization of the synod showed a spirit of anti-Christ and it put itself, its own prosperity, its own holiness and it's own power to bless above the real Christ."

He also answered a question "Are there other pastors in synod who share the Protestant view for honest repentance and practice fellowship with them," by saying he had been attending such conferences for eight years.

Protestants are a group



Rev. Robert Christman

which parted company with the Synod 50 years ago. At the time, the church was moving in the direction of a profound study of Scripture

and critical self analysis, or repentance, said Christman.

Many in the synod were uncomfortable and ousted the Protestants, claims Christman. Voss said there is nothing wrong with individuals making contact with the group, but identifying with its causes was another matter.

Christman claims his association with the Protestants has been known for years and he openly and with permission associated with them in a fraternal way. His reaction to Brand's ouster was because Brand was forced to renounce his association with the Protestants, after attending only

two or possibly three meetings.

Marvin Schneider, president of St. Paul congregation, reported that several meetings were held with Christman and district officials to try to clear up the matter. But no headway was made and neither side would back down. A meeting billed as "informational" didn't settle anything, and after further discussion, a motion from the floor to remove Christman was tabled, waiting further action by the district and synod.

After Christman received his notice from the district, the congregation was also informed that if he were retained, St. Paul would no

longer be welcomed in the synod.

The dismissal letter stated reasons for the action, adding "also you have publicly declared yourself in fellowship with the Protestants, a religious group that the synod does not recognize as being within its fellowship.

"We the undersigned, president and two vice presidents, of the Northern Wisconsin District of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, declare you no longer in fellowship with the district and the synod and consider you no longer a pastor who holds membership in the district and synod."

Christman said that means he can no longer

preach in synod congregations, but is still an ordained Lutheran minister. Some members of the local church did not go along with the decision and have asked him to serve them. A service was held Feb. 22 at the YWCA, with approximately 200 persons attending.

"How many will return as a congregation, only God knows," remarked Christman, who is still in Green Bay, looking for alternate housing for his wife and family.

Christman will continue to hold 10 a.m. Sunday services at the YWCA while he and his supporters plan for the future.