

THE CHICAGO (INTERSYNODICAL) THESES

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Church History - A  
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Ever since the days of Luther and the Marburg Colloquy, attempts have constantly been made to effect union between the Lutheran Church and other church bodies. To a great extent these attempts have failed, and justly so. However, in the days since Luther, when theologians who wanted to retain the name "Lutheran" without maintaining the doctrine of Luther abounded, splits also occurred within Lutheranism. From time to time, attempts have also been made to draw <sup>these</sup> various Lutheran bodies together.

At the same time, however, there were other Lutheran bodies who appeared to be separated merely by historical or geographical boundaries, without the wide latitude of theological differences evidenced by so many others. These were the confessional churches who were transplanted to American soil at various points in time and from various countries. In the great "melting pot" of America it was inevitable that these bodies should learn of one another and also attempt to effect organic union. It is Scriptural and quite natural for Christians who believe, teach, confess and practice the same Scripture-based truths, to become united in common purposes and joint endeavors. The tie of Scripture and its doctrines unite them; conscientiousness for the Truth of God's Word holds them together. Such was the case in the formation of the Synodical Conference and its continuation as a confessional body for close to a century.

In the second and third decades of the twentieth century another movement to unite Lutheran church bodies on the basis of God's Word was attempted. The Synodical Conference, on the one hand, consisting of the Missouri, Wisconsin, and Evangelical Lutheran synods, and the synods of Buffalo, Iowa and Ohio, on the other,

met in committee for ten years, not with the purpose of effecting a union, but in order to reach doctrinal unity. If such doctrinal agreement could be reached, then quite naturally, a union or merger of the various synods would be effected.

Although this so-called Intersynodical Movement was the last great attempt at unity (not union!) thus far, surprisingly little has been written concerning it. This is due, no doubt, to the fact that the movement ultimately failed. The many hours and long years of labor could not be brought to fruition. However, due to the fact that subsequent negotiations between Lutheran churches, especially the Missouri Synod with the American Lutheran Church after 1930, were influenced by the actions taken in this Intersynodical Movement, this paper will study the Chicago (Intersynodical) Theses in an attempt to determine why this movement failed and was rejected by the synods of the Synodical Conference. Also treated will be the opinions toward these Theses held by the eminent theologian and Professor of the Wisconsin Synod, Johannes P. Meyer. Other conclusions resultant of this study will also be presented, insofar as they may shed light on other negotiations toward union, past, present or future. It is my hope that in some small way this paper may arouse further interest in this area of history, and a consciousness of the difficulties surrounding the formation of a clear, Scriptural document of doctrine and faith.

### A BRIEF HISTORY

One feels at a loss to decide where to begin in treating the history of the Chicago (Intersynodical) Theses. Certainly, the free conferences of the 1850's would be a possible point of departure. Another point at which to begin would be the five conferences held between 1903 and 1906. However, in trying to limit the scope of this paper, I have decided to begin in the year 1919.

Already by 1919 the Intersynodical Committee was operative, with representatives from the Iowa, Missouri, Ohio, and Wisconsin synods meeting to discuss doctrinal matters. The beginnings of this committee began in the Joint Synod of Ohio in 1912, when that Synod passed a resolution to encourage "intersynodical conferences within smaller circles."<sup>1</sup> Likewise, the 1914 Convention of the Missouri Synod authorized its president to appoint a committee to investigate the desirability of resuming the Intersynodical Conferences. By 1917 many such conferences were being held, especially in the area around St. Paul, Minnesota. One of the results of these small conferences was the following communication to the Missouri Synod Convention:

We pastors of the Minnesota, Iowa, Ohio, and Missouri Synods, assembled for an intersynodical conference at St. Paul, Minn., should like to ... suggest that Synod take any other feasible steps to bring about complete unity of doctrine in the several synods.<sup>2</sup>

At the same time as this Intersynodical Committee was meeting, another set of meetings was taking place. On March 11, 1919 the representatives of the Augustana, Buffalo, Iowa and Ohio synods, the Lutheran Free Church, the Norwegian Church of America, and the United Danish Church drew up the Chicago Theses<sup>3</sup>, which theses,

1. Bunzel, C. "The Missouri Synod And The Chicago (Intersynodical) Theses. Master of Sacred Theology Thesis. St. Louis, Mo. 1964. p.27.

2. IBID. p. 28. Quoted from Lutheran Church-Miss. Synod, Proceedings, 1914

3. IBID. p. 35.

however, must be distinguished from the Chicago (Intersynodical) Theses of a later date. By 1920 all but the Buffalo Synod had accepted the eight theses on: (1) the Work of Christ, (2) the Gospel, (3) Absolution, (4) Holy Baptism, (5) Justification, (6) Faith, (7) Conversion, and (8) Election.<sup>4</sup> Throughout the years 1920 through 1925 moves were made toward closer union by Ohio with the Augustana Synod, by Ohio with the Iowa Synod, and also by Ohio with the Norwegian Lutheran Church. These overtures obviously were rather successful, as one result was the formation of the Minneapolis Theses on November 18, 1925. Almost immediately these theses were distributed to the Districts of the Ohio Synod for adoption. The president of that Synod was also instructed to declare pulpit and altar fellowship with the Norwegian Lutheran Church as soon as the theses were adopted.<sup>5</sup>

By 1926 it appeared that a union was rapidly approaching. The Ohio Synod favored the proposed union with the Iowa Synod, while the Buffalo Synod had already resolved:

That definite steps be taken at our synodical convention in June to effect a merger or union with the Iowa Synod and possibly with Ohio, provided satisfactory arrangements can be made...<sup>6</sup>

It must be kept in mind that the synods of Buffalo, Iowa, and Ohio were engaged in simultaneous discussions with representatives of the Synodical Conference and with representatives of the Norwegian Lutheran Church with a view toward merger. The Norwegians' doctrinal statement of 1912, the Opgjoer, a unionistic document, was being used in these discussions. When in 1923 agreement was reached between the synods of Buffalo, Iowa,

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4. Doctrinal Declarations. Concordia Publishing House. St. Louis, Mo. 1936. p 21-23.

5. Bunzel, C. op. cit. p. 37

6. IBID. p. 36, 37.

Missouri, Ohio, and Wisconsin on the doctrines of conversion and election on the basis of Scripture,<sup>7</sup> questions surely must have been raised as to how Iowa and Ohio would view the two objectionable points of the Opgjoer, namely, its placing the intuitu fidei view on an equal level with the teaching of Article XI of the Formula of Concord, and the failure of that document to completely reject synergism. Obviously, those synods could not accept the Opgjoer as it stood and the theses agreed upon in the Intersynodical Committee. It seems no wonder then that opposition arose within the Missouri Synod to the theses in the years 1923-1926.<sup>8</sup> Nor was the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of the Synodical Conference satisfied with the wording of the theses on election. They wrote on August 25, 1925:

1. Concerning the term "election in a wider" and "a narrower sense" it is our opinion that they should not be used in the manner which they have been employed in the theses, because it gives the impression that there are two doctrines of election in Scripture.
2. The Committee's position as stated concerning the second form does not agree with the sense of the words of the second form as quoted. In the second form as it has actually been used, man is represented as acting, while in the statement of the committee giving the meaning or what is meant by the second form God is represented as acting.
3. The two forms, as they have been used during the controversy, do not teach the same doctrine of election. The first form makes election "the cause of faith," while the second form "presupposes faith and makes it the deciding factor in election." If the last clause means anything at all, it makes man's faith the cause of election. (intuitu fidei -- ablative of cause)<sup>9</sup>

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7. Wisconsin Synod Proceedings, 1923. Committee #21.

8. In a letter to Professor W. Arndt, Professor T. Graebner says: "I think it is pertinent to ask what value we should attach to our Intersynodical Committee work when before it is completed Ohio enters into negotiations, on a separate bases for union with the Scandinavians." Quoted by Bunzel, C. op. cit. p. 34.

9. Bunzel, op. cit. p.31,32.

In the Missouri Synod's Convention of 1926, representatives from the Intersynodical Committee seemed to hit the problem on the head when they said:

5. We believe that the sentences now before Synod cover all doctrinal questions which have been under controversy among the participating synods. Whether the theses are adequate in all points, Synod will have to decide on the basis of the report made by the committee elected to examine the theses.
6. The question now arises whether the adoption of these theses on the part of the participating synods can be followed without more ado by a declaration of unity in doctrine and by fraternal recognition. Such, indeed, ought to be the case. In the present instance, however, we fear that further obstacles must be removed, since, for example, touching the article of church-fellowship a different conception evidently obtains in the synods concerned. At all events a different practise is followed. Still we ought to endeavor, by continued discussion, to attain unity also in those points where differences still exist.
7. We would therefore recommend not to break off negotiations with the representatives of the Iowa, Ohio, and Buffalo synods, but to continue them, . . . 10

In the Wisconsin Synod's Convention the following year, 1927, Professor J. P. Meyer reported that although several meetings had been held during the two years since the last convention, the task was not yet finished.<sup>11</sup> Noting that seven years had passed since the Intersynodical Committee first began to meet, it would seem, at least to this writer, that interest in these theses was beginning to wane. If it is permissible to read between the lines, this would seem to be indicated by the fact that the Intersynodical Committee Report was delegated to Committee # 33, entitled "Miscellaneous." If this were true, the following year, 1928, would mark a renewal in interest at the completion of the Chicago (Intersynodical) Theses.

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10. Missouri Synod, Proceedings, 1926. p 136f. Quoted in Bunzel, C. op. cit. p. 38.

11. Wisconsin Synod, Proceedings, 1927. Committee # 33-A.

The year 1928 was also a convention year for the Ohio Synod. During that convention major resolutions were passed which marked a milestone in the history of the Ohio Synod, and which also are very important for a correct understanding of the subsequent history of the Chicago (Intersynodical) Theses. The announcement was made that all of the districts of the Ohio Synod had by the time of this convention unanimously adopted the Minneapolis Theses. Due to the fact that these theses were being used as a basis for fellowship between the Ohio Synod and the Norwegian Lutheran Church, and also since the Norwegians had already accepted the theses, the Ohio Synod resolved to declare pulpit and altar fellowship between the two bodies.<sup>12</sup> By this move it would seem that Ohio had now approved the Norwegian Opgjoer. Fellowship had been established, notwithstanding the errors on election found in the Opgjoer. Certainly questions must have been raised how the Ohio Synod would be able to accept the Chicago (Intersynodical) Theses which rejects some of the statements of the Opgjoer.

Perhaps it was this tension, as well as other differences, which prompted J. Buenger to write his pamphlet, "Missouri, Iowa, And Ohio The Old And The New Differences". In this informative little booklet Buenger presents the doctrines held by the various synods in the past and attempts to trace their development in a clear manner. He maintained that the difference separating the synods was not merely "a quarrel about triflings, hairsplitting arguments of theologians with little or no practical interest for the Christian lay members."<sup>13</sup>

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12. Bunzel, C. op. cit. p 44.

13. Buenger, J. "Missouri, Iowa, And Ohio. The Old And The New Differences." (1928)? Introduction, p 5.

As it appears to this writer, however, Buenger seems to show little confidence in the proceedings of the Intersynodical Committee in their discussions toward unity. He seems to imply that the representatives of the Iowa and Ohio synods were not trying to achieve doctrinal unity in a straight-forward manner, but were rather trying to cover their doctrinal aberrations by a mask of abiguities. He said:

An error once refuted is by no means silenced, it will return again and again; yet not in its old form in which it was rejected, but in a new garb in which it seems to be harmless and innocent. In this seemingly harmless form it seeks first toleration, then recognition, finally absolute dominion in the Church.... It is the purpose of the following articles to offer all that are interested, ministers as well as teachers and lay members, information about the doctrinal differences between the afore-mentioned groups of synods, so as to enable the reader to form his own judgment. To this end each chapter first presents the crude form of the error in which a false doctrine is easily recognized by any Christian, then, step by step, the more refined and seemingly harmless forms are shown in which the same error tries to hide itself. In this way, by never losing the thread of thought, Christians will be able to perceive even the most subtle and skillful disguise of false doctrine. 14

He then goes on to discuss the differences in the doctrines of (I) Church and Ministry, (II) Open Questions, (III) Millennium and Antichrist, (IV) Sunday, and (V) Conversion and Election, with an addendum on (VI) The Inerrancy of the Scriptures.

While the above quotation in and of itself is correct, yet appearing at the time that it did, it would certainly imply that these differences were still in existence at this time, between the different synods. Thus it appears to be calling for a rejection of the Theses just prior to the conventions at which the synods would have to take a stand on them one way or another. One wonders

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14. Buenger, J. op. cit. p 5,6.

how great an effect this pamphlet had upon the delegates to the various synods' conventions in 1929.

When the Missouri Synod met in convention on June 19-29, 1929, their representatives from the Intersynodical Committee requested that the theses be considered doctrinally, apart from considerations whether they could be used to establish fellowship with the other synods.

The theses are before Synod for adoption or rejection. We consider the question whether the theses can be adopted to be distinct from the question whether we can enter into fraternal relations with the synods with which we have been conferring. The latter is at present excluded by the connections into which, sad to say, these synods have entered and the fraternal relations which they maintain with Lutherans who are not faithful to the confessions. The theses are a matter by themselves, and Synod ought to take action on them. 15

It was the hope of the Committee to salvage something out of the many years of work that had gone into the formation of the Theses. It was evident that due to the coming formation of the American Lutheran Conference, in which Ohio, Iowa, and Buffalo would be in fellowship with the Norwegian Lutheran Church, no fellowship could be declared at this time with the three synods on the basis of these Theses. Either the doctrinal position of the Norwegian Lutheran Church would have to be clarified, or the three synods would have to break fellowship with it before fraternal relations could be established with the members of the Synodical Conference. Obviously, the Opgjoer would have to be rejected in either case. However, the Report of the Examining Committee did not share the same optimism. They could not separate the doctrinal question from the fellowship question.

Therefore they advised their Synod to reject the theses.

After careful examination of the revised theses of August, 1929, your Committee finds itself compelled to advise Synod to reject these theses as a possible basis for union with the synods of Ohio, Iowa, and Buffalo, since all chapters and a number of paragraphs are inadequate. At times they do not touch upon the point of controversy; at times they are so phrased that both parties can find in them their own opinion; at times they incline more to the position of our opponents than to our own. 16

After presenting their criticism of the theses as they then read, they added:

Your Committee considers it a hopeless undertaking to make these theses unobjectionable from the view of pure doctrine. It would be better to discard them as a failure. 17

The convention felt that they could not accept the theses but did not want the negotiations to end immediately with the synods involved. Therefore they took the following action on the Examining Committee's report:

It was emphasized that future discussions be contingent on the following two conditions: --  
a) That the move toward fellowship between the Ohio and Iowa synods, on the one hand, and the Norwegian Lutheran Church, on the other, be first adjusted according to the Word of God;  
b) That future deliberations proceed from the exact point of controversy and take into account the pertinent history. 18

The action to reject the theses was in no way accepted by all the delegates of the Convention. Some who had worked with the theses since their inception, and others who had later worked through them and had found no doctrinal error in them, opposed the Synod's action.

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16. IBID.

17. IBID. p 113.

18. IBID.

W. A. Arndt, a member of Missouri's committee, said that the spirit of the report was heavily criticized at the convention and that, if submitted to a vote, it would have been defeated by a large majority. He regretted his synod's action. 19

The Wisconsin Synod Convention, meeting two months later, on August 14-21, 1929, at Saron Ev. Lutheran Church in Milwaukee, had little to contribute to the history of these theses. That they knew of the Missouri Synod's action can most likely be taken for granted. At this time, however, they seemed to be unready to take definitive action.

Pastor M. Lehninger reported on the work of this (the Intersynodical) committee. He stated that the so-called "Chicago Theses" are the result of ten years of work and the unanimous confession of all participants. The committee recommended that Synod declare its willingness to continue this work with other synods and that all conferences be urged to study and examine the "Chicago Theses" in order that the result of ten years work be made the property of all. 20

On this note the Wisconsin Synod ended its discussion of the Chicago (Intersynodical) Theses. In its subsequent conventions absolutely no mention of the theses is recorded. Obviously, no definitive action was ever taken by this synod. The reasons for this will be treated later in this paper.

The reaction to Missouri's action of 1929 was most bitter. When the Ohio Synod's Adjourned 49th Convention met in 1930, President Hein said in his Presidential Address:

...we wonder whether our efforts to bring about unity proved futile because the Missouri representatives from beginning to end, even after the theses had been unanimously adopted, refused to pray with the representatives of Buffalo, Iowa, and Ohio for divine guidance and unity in the truth. Again we wonder whether what was written by the president of one of the Norwegian Synods in 1908 applies in this case: "As long as work toward union is in the hands

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19. Meuser, Fred. The Formation of the American Lutheran Church. The Wartburg Press. Columbus, Ohio, 1958. p 252, n 103.  
20. Synodal-Bericht (Wisconsin), 1929. p 47.

of professors there is nothing to expect. No union will result. They all work for their own. One wants his doctrinal statements recognized, another wishes to extinguish the zeal for union, still another seeks to devour all. With such motives little can be done for true union." That this is not the attitude of every theological professor we know. We merely wonder whether it applies in this instance. The hostile spirit shown by some of the pastors is another obstacle. 21

As no theological error in the theses was mentioned in the Missouri Synod's resolution, Ohio could only see vague reasons for their rejection. But it was these very vague charges against the theses that angered Hein and the merging synods most. In a letter to O. H. Pannkoke on June 16, 1930 President Hein wrote:

This is something that I shall never forget and as far as I am concerned nothing will be done any more to get closer to Missouri. The spirit of these reports puts an end to that. 22

In the return mail, Hein's views were echoed by Pannkoke in a letter dated July 22, 1930:

It seemed as though finally... understanding had come, and then, with true German tactlessness, the whole thing is brought to naught. I have no more hope in this direction than you have, after this recent foolishness. 23

Officially, however, the Ohio Synod's Convention passed the following resolution:

We deplore the refusal of the Missouri Synod to adopt the Intersynodical Theses which members of their own Seminary faculty at St. Louis had helped to formulate and adopt. We stand ready to re-open negotiations looking toward better mutual understanding. 24

On August 11, 1930, in Toledo, Ohio, the merger between Buffalo, Iowa, and Ohio was ratified and the American Lutheran Church was born. Again they expressed a willingness to re-open

21. Bunzel, op. cit. p 57.

22. Meuser, F. op. cit. p. 253, n 106

23. IBID.

24. Bunzel, C. op. cit. p 57. Quoted from the Minutes of the Adjourned 49th Convention of the Joint Synod of Ohio and Other States, 1930.

negotiations with the Missouri Synod. But before any attempts could be made to that end, in October, 1930, the American Lutheran Conference was formed, with the American Lutheran Church in fellowship. Thus the American Lutheran Church was now in fellowship with the Augustana Lutheran Church, the Lutheran Free Church, the Norwegian Lutheran Church, and the United Evangelical (Danish) Lutheran Church. With such a union effected, steps were made by the synods of Buffalo, Iowa, and Ohio away from the doctrines of the confessions. The Chicago (Intersynodical) Theses were dead, as was the entire Intersynodical Movement.

In conclusion to this Brief History, the following summary is offered of the movement.

The American Lutheran Church is a new body. It consists of an organic union of the former Ohio, Iowa, and Buffalo Synods. An inter-synodical committee (consisting of men from these three bodies and from the Synodical Conference), after years of painstaking labors, had arrived at doctrinal unity by ironing out --on the basis of the Word of God alone--the differences, particularly concerning predestination, election, conversion, point which brought about the sad break in the eighties. The so-called Chicago Theses had all but been adopted by the various participating synods.

But while this matter was under litigation, and we were rejoicing in the early prospect of fellowship with our opponents, the American Lutheran Conference was established. This Conference is a cooperative union with the American Lutheran Church, the Norwegian Lutheran Church, the Norwegian Free Church, the Augustana Synod, and the Danish Lutheran Church. All these bodies, with which the American Lutheran Church has now established fellowship, were more or less guilty of the un-Lutheran deeds of which we just accused the United Lutheran Church. (i.e. fellowship with non-Lutherans, lodgery, sabbatarian, Calvinistic, and Chiliastic tendencies). While the American Lutheran Church was reaching out one hand to establish fellowship with the Synodical Conference through scriptural means, she, with the other hand, embraced in fellowship, by mere official vote,

these other Lutheran bodies, who already were in fellowship with the United Lutheran Church. Thus, if we should have established fellowship with the American Lutheran Church, we should have automatically been in fellowship with practically every other Lutheran body in the United States. The American Lutheran Church would have thus served as a bridge. And that was likely their aim, for while the new organization was pending (the American Lutheran Church), a writer in the journal of one of the constituent synods voiced the opinion that the American Lutheran Church would be the connecting link between the left wing (United Lutheran Church) and the extreme right wing (Synodical Conference) of American Lutheranism.

But for us of the Synodical Conference the fly in the ointment is particularly the Norwegian Lutheran Church... 25

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25. The Northwestern Lutheran, Vol 19, 1932 p 299. Reprint of a Conference paper read before the Crow River Delegate Conference, Buffalo, Minnesota, June 8, 1932. "Why Can We Not Fellowship With The United Lutheran Church And The American Lutheran Church?"

PROFESSOR MEYER'S VIEWS OF THE THESES

Any attempt to enter into the deepest recesses of a man's thinking some fifty years ago, especially when he is no longer with us to define and defend those views, is extremely difficult and dangerous. It is, therefore, with a good deal of fear and trepidation that I now enter into this presentation of Johannes P. Meyer's thoughts concerning the Chicago (Intersynodical) Theses. Realizing that such an attempt is, by its very nature, very subjective, and that it involves a certain amount of "reading between the lines", I hope that this paper will not be guilty of misunderstanding or misrepresenting our sainted Professor.

As a member of the Intersynodical Committee, Professor Meyer was well acquainted with the theses and with the representatives from the other synods. Together they had worked through the difficulties surrounding the formation of the theses. At all times the concern of the Committee was to arrive at a clear presentation of the Scriptural truths. Professor Meyer at this time never thought that the representatives of the Ohio and Iowa synods were trying to pull one over on the members from the Missouri and Wisconsin synods. While there was talk of the ramifications that unity of doctrine might bring, namely merger or union, yet that was not the purpose of these meetings nor was that the immediate goal of the participants.

Whenever during those meetings (of the Intersynodical Committee), either in official conference or in private conversations, the matter of church union was brought up it was in the form of a question: What will be the practical result if and when we come to an understanding concerning the controverted doctrines? And the answer invariably was: Those matters do not concern us, our sole aim must be to establish the Scripture truth in the doctrines before us and to present this truth in clear and unmistakable terms, as we believe it in our hearts and are willing to

confess it before the church. 26

In point of fact, Professor Meyer was quite pleased with the attitude of the various participants involved in these meetings. He held them to be sincere in their beliefs and as eager for true doctrinal unity as he himself was. The formation of the theses was an honorable undertaking and one in which Professor Meyer was pleased to be a part of. In the volume of the Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly (*Theologische Quartalschrift*) in which the Chicago (Intersynodical) Theses were presented in the official German text, Professor Meyer expressed his satisfaction with the efforts of the committee, revealing that he believed unity had been reached among the members of the committee and that unionism had been avoided. His report is printed below in translation, which translation I hope is clear if not fluent.

Concluding Report of the Intersynodical Committee. -- In the present volume we bring to print the Chicago Theses in the text accepted by the Intersynodical Committee on August 2, 1928. -- It was not the task of the Committee to find an expression for presenting the teachings disputed between the synods, which would be acceptable to all, and under which one could retain his hitherto existing meaning unchanged. That would have meant coarse unionism. The sense of the task, to which each member of this Committee of the represented synods heartily agreed, was rather: to once again thoroughly and carefully test the present differences between us in the light of Scripture and the confessions, and then to bring to expression the manifest Truth in Scriptures in a clear, unambiguous, and not to be misunderstood witness. In wholesome horror at all unionism the Committee has constantly endeavored to avoid such an expression which could appear to have perhaps two interpretations, so that the resulting theses would be always understood by all in the same sense, and in their clear wording rests the heart-felt confession of everyone of the Committee members. The blessing of the Lord continued unhindered in the efforts of the Committee. The living Word of our God

demonstrated His uniting power. The Holy Ghost, who gathers the whole Christendom on earth, carried on His work of unity with strength in the Committee members' hearts, so that they found themselves united in the true faith and now lay before the Church a unanimous confession with the accepted theses.

Now the theses go to the individual synods for testing and their opinions. It will be the task of every member of those synods, especially the pastors, to become familiar with the theses according to content and text, and to decide for himself whether they are the expression of his heart-felt belief or not. To this end we bring them to print in this periodical, and our publishing house will prepare a special edition. 27

The optimistic tenor of his words seems to indicate that he favored the adoption of the theses as a correct statement of the truth and as a possible basis for establishing fellowship between the participating synods. However, this does not mean that he was unconcerned about the current trends developing in the Iowa and Ohio synods. The question raised about the doctrine of verbal inspiration, specifically the appearance that Iowa was back-sliding on this doctrine, was a matter of great importance to Professor Meyer. It will be remembered that the proposed Constitution for the Evangelical-Lutheran Synod of America met with difficulties in 1926 because of a change in wording on Article II, Section 1 demanded by the Iowa Synod. The joint committee had drafted this section on Confession of Faith to originally read: "The Synod accepts all the canonical books of the Old and New Testaments as the inspired and inerrant Word of God and the only source, norm and guide of faith and life."<sup>27</sup> The Iowa Synod, however, insisted that it be changed to read: "The Synod accepts all the canonical books...as the inspired Word of God and the only inerrant source, norm and guide of faith and life." The Ohio <sup>Synod</sup> recognized in this

27. Theologische Quartalschrift. Jahrgang 25, #4. Oktober 1928, p 289.  
The Chicago Theses are given on pp 266-288 in the same issue.

28. IBID. p 290.

change, as did Professor Meyer, a possible departure from the truth and therefore refused to ratify the union of the three synods until agreement on this point should have been reached. A true difference on this point would, of course, also effected the Chicago (Intersynodical) Theses.

When agreement was reached on this point in 1928, the same year that the Chicago (Intersynodical) Theses were presented to the synods for action, matters seemed to be much more advantageous for acceptance of the theses. The obstacle to union had been overcome. At this turn of events Professor Meyer expressed his heart-felt joy. "We thank God that the threatening denial of His Word has been averted and that the Iowa Synod was granted courage and strength for an unequivocal confession." <sup>29</sup> The negotiations of Ohio with the Norwegian Lutheran Church, however, still loomed large on the scene and threatened the future of the theses.

In late 1928 the Joint Synod of Ohio and Other States declared altar and pulpit fellowship with the Norwegian Lutheran Church. Serious questions were thus raised concerning the validity and clarity of the Chicago (Intersynodical) Theses. How could Ohio reach out with one hand to the Synodical Conference, while stretching out the other toward the Norwegians? Professor Meyer also questioned the meaning of such a merger.

Does it mean that the Ohio Synod subscribes to the Madison "Opgjoer" with its ambiguous language on election and man's "responsibility" in conversion? Does it mean that the Ohio Synod is willing to share the reproach for the treatment accorded by the Synod of the Norwegian Ev. Luth. Church of America to the "minority", which protested against the unionistic "Opgjoer" for conscience' sake? Does it mean that the Ohio Synod spurns church fellowship with Synodical Conference, which stood by the Norwegian "minority" and in vain administered brotherly admonition to the majority? 30

29. IBID. p 292.

30. IBID. 1929, p 57.

It would seem that almost all hope for union between Ohio and the Synodical Conference had vanished. Only a repudiation of the Norwegians by Ohio, or the rejection of the unionistic Opqjoer by the Norwegians could salvage the movement. To be sure, Professor Meyer was disappointed by the recent events. Yet, he still held that the theses were a correct teaching of the truths of Scripture. Thus he urged, as did Missouri's representatives to their Synod, that the theses be considered on their own merit, apart from the question of fellowship.

In our last issue we submitted to our readers the official German text of the Chacago Theses. These should be prayerfully considered on their own merits by every pastor of our synod and discussed in ministerial conferences, irrespective of what course the establishing of pulpit and altar fellowship by the Ohio Synod with the Norwegian Church may force us to adopt. 31 (Emphasis mine, K.)

With the advent of J. Buenger's pamphlet further questions were raised about the doctrines held by the Buffalo, Iowa and Ohio synods. In a book review, Professor August Pieper commented on his presentation. To this writer, it seems that Professor Pieper's comments express the same sentiments of Professor Meyer at this time.

Buenger's writing is so composed and moderate, so clear and thorough and so masterly in presentation, that we can only wish that every member of our and those synods may studiously study and test them. For they require testing, conscientious and careful testing. We ourselves have had to write again and again on the margin: Do those Synods really teach so today? With the fact that up till now such a public disavowal by that side has been lacking, it will be necessary to hear them about it. 32

Professor Meyer was convinced that the leaders of Ohio no longer held to the erroneous views that Buenger ascribed to them. As a member of the Intersynodical Committee, he knew probably

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31. IBID. p 58.

32. IBID. p 78.

better than many others where Ohio stood on these matters. To doubt their confession and acceptance of the Chicago (Intersynodical) Theses would be to doubt their sincerity, and to judge their hearts. This Meyer was unwilling and unable to do.

Specifically on conversion and election Meyer rejected the charge that Ohio taught the same as before. To him there could be no doubt but that Ohio had brought their doctrine into line with Scripture. In his article announcing the death of Dr. Henry Ernst, Meyer quotes from the "Lutheran Standard" with some chagrin:

When the predestination controversy broke out he (i.e. Ernst) was one of those who protested against the innovations brought into that doctrine. That protest brought him over to the Ohio Synod.... Believing that God has elected, from all eternity, the believers in Christ to salvation, his change of synodical membership and his subsequent type of teaching were the logical corollary of his conviction.<sup>33</sup>

He then added his own remarks on the "Lutheran Standard" articles:

We have no quarrel with the "Standard" for giving a full and accurate account of the important events in the deceased Doctor's life, and his change of synodical affiliation was certainly one of the most important. We deplore, however, that the "Standard" does not avoid giving the impression as though the leaders in the Ohio Synod today approve of the attitude which governed the action of Dr. Ernst in the early eighties, an attitude which is clearly not in accord with the declaration of the Chicago Theses specifically on the phrase: "Cur alii prae aliis?"<sup>34</sup>

Thus it would appear that Meyer believed Ohio's position to have changed, and to have been in complete agreement with the Chicago (Intersynodical) Theses. Entering into the Synod Conventions of 1929 Meyer could still put his stamp of approval on the theses as a sufficient basis for establishing fellowship with the other three synods. Of course, the relationship with the Norwegians would have to be cleared up though.

33. IBID. p. 283.

34. IBID. p. 284.

After "Big Sister" Missouri in their Convention of 1929 rejected the theses, however, many doubts must have plagued the minds of the delegates of the 1929 Convention of the Wisconsin Synod. Missouri, who had been asked to consider the theses on a doctrinal basis rather than on a fellowship basis, still rejected them. Certainly, to many delegates of Wisconsin who did not perhaps know the details of Missouri's report, it would seem that the integrity of the theses had been impugned. Therefore, the best course of action would be the one that was proposed and accepted.

Pastor M. Lehninger reported on the work of this (i.e. the Intersynodical) committee. He stated that that the so-called "Chicago Theses" are the result of ten years of work and the unanimous confession of all participants. The committee recommended that Synod declare its willingness to continue this work with other synods and that all conferences be urged to study and examine the "Chicago Theses" in order that the result of ten years' work be made the property of all.

Synod adopted both recommendations of the committee. 35

In this way, perhaps something might be salvaged from the long years of work by the Intersynodical Committee. And so it remained, never to be officially decided or resolved by the Wisconsin Synod.

In later years, particularly 1936, the views of Professor Meyer changed. This is understandable, since the merger of Iowa, Ohio, and Buffalo into the American Lutheran Church and the union of that body with the American Lutheran Conference practically nullified the statements of the Chicago (Intersynodical) Theses. Professor Meyer came to realize that those theses were rather ambiguous in certain areas and allowed for different interpretations. He still, however, believed them to be Scripturally correct statements as far as they went, and never impugned the sincerity of

the representatives of the synods represented on the Intersynodical Committee. In response to charges by the Rev. Hanssen that the representatives of the Iowa and Ohio synods intentionally worked to omit certain vital points in the doctrines of Election and Conversion, Meyer said:

And to say that "these clever omissions cannot be and are not accidental; but they must be and are intentional; at least as far as the champions of the 'Open Questions' had a hand in their formulation", thus ascribing deliberate insincerity to our opponents, is, according to the observations of the undersigned at the meetings, contrary to fact. For that reason we also deny the statement on p. 95 "that the 'official' colloquents of the Missouri Synod were tricked into giving a declaration" etc. On more than one occasion, when after a thorough discussion a thesis seemed ready for adoption, it happened that one of our opponents raised the warning question if all terms were really understood by all colloquents in the same sense. Far from any attempt to "trick" any one into adopting any ambiguous declaration, our opponents were as much concerned as we of the Synodical Conference to have the differences correctly understood and a real agreement reached in the statement of the truth, impressions to the outside world notwithstanding. 36

Although Professor Meyer denied that any statements of the theses were intentionally ambiguous, yet, he did admit that, looking back at the theses, they were unsatisfactory. This is understandable. Working closely with <sup>the</sup> doctrines involved, and being satisfied that all members of the Committee were agreed on those doctrines, it would be very easy to become blinded by such unity to the possibility that the words could be understood and interpreted otherwise than intended.

The undersigned, as stated before, shares the responsibility for the formulation of the Chicago Theses, and it is not a pleasant thing to admit that they are unsatisfactory, or worse. But on re-reading them after eight years since the last meeting have lapsed, (sic)

I am forced in the interest of the truth to express my agreement with the above verdict of Rev. Hanssen. The subject matter of these theses having been thoroughly discussed in several meetings of the Committee and the Scripture truths having been established in the discussions, the representatives of the Synodical Conference found these very truths expressed in the proposed theses. In the light of the satisfactory oral discussions they seemed to be plain statements of the truth and entirely univocal. To an outsider, who did not take part in the discussions, however, the ambiguities that nevertheless crept into the phraseology are naturally more easy to detect. 37

In conclusion to this section, it would seem that Professor Meyer at first, while he was a member of the Committee and working closely with the other representatives, felt the theses to be a correct and entirely satisfactory expression of the truths of Scripture. This view he defended and would have wished for the acceptance of the theses by Synod. With the passing of time, however, he somewhat altered his views toward the theses. With a more objective look, he could see that some of the statements were open to misunderstanding, or seemed to be concessions to the doctrines of the opponents. Yet, the fact remains that, although ambiguous and unacceptable as a basis for union, the theses do not present a false view of Scripture or any doctrinal error. It will be remembered that neither the Missouri Synod of 1929, nor Professor Meyer could directly attribute false doctrine to the Chicago (Intersynodical) Theses.

OTHER CONCLUSIONS

A. Why Missouri Rejected The Theses.

Quite evidently, Missouri was not willing to declare itself in fellowship with Buffalo, Iowa, and Ohio on the basis of these theses. This was due, no doubt, to the negotiations that those synods were conducting with the Norwegian Lutheran Church. By the 1929 Convention it seemed clear that the three synods would soon be in fellowship with the Norwegians. Missouri could not declare fellowship with any group who was in fellowship with the Norwegians, since they correctly viewed the Opgjoer as a unionistic document.

And yet, the question may well be asked why Missouri rejected the theses as a correct statement of Lutheran doctrine. As will be remembered that was the request made when the theses were presented for action at the Convention. Certainly, the wording of the theses was not typical Missouri phraseology, but that they were full of errors is highly unlikely.

Why then did Missouri reject the theses as doctrinal statements? Quite possibly because of the very thing that Professor August Pieper warned the Wisconsin Synod of, when he said of J. Buenger's criticism of the opponents' doctrine:

We ourselves have had to write again and again on the margin (i.e. of Buenger's booklet): Do those Synods really teach so today? 38

While the members of the Intersynodical Committee had had the opportunity to meet with the representatives of the other synods, and had come to know their doctrinal positions of the present time, i.e. the 1920's, yet the other delegates to the Convention would

not have had such information and may have judged the theses on what was believed a decade before in the opposing synods. They would view the theses from what they knew about the other synods, or from what they believed the other synods believed. Thus, it is possible that the theses were rejected because of a misunderstanding of the current situation. If such were the case, then indeed the story of the Chicago (Intersynodical) Theses ends on a sad note.

B. Why The Wisconsin Synod Took No Action.

Although nothing has been definitely stated for Wisconsin's non-action in this matter, the causes <sup>appear</sup> to be rather self-evident and readily present themselves to this writer. At the time of the 1929 Synod Convention the Wisconsin Synod was enmeshed in a controversy that threatened to tear it apart from the inside, the Protestant Controversy. With problems at home, sorting out the various disciplinary actions that were taken, refuting the errors of the Beitz paper, and trying to establish peace among the brethren, Wisconsin's hands were full. Precious little time remained for discussions on the Chicago (Intersynodical) Theses. The problems at home took precedence. Thus action on the theses was tabled until presumably the next convention, with instructions to carefully study the matter.

When Wisconsin next met in convention, however, in 1931, the merger between Buffalo, Iowa and Ohio, as well as the union between them and the American Lutheran Conference, had already been effected. Fellowship with those synods was entirely out of the question by that year, because of the unionism evidenced by their actions. In short, the Chicago (Intersynodical) Theses were a dead letter. Action on them now would have been senseless and without purpose.

C. Missouri's Change In Attitude After The Chicago Theses.

Looking backward from the viewpoint of one who lives after the turmoil of the break-up of the Synodical Conference, one wonders where Missouri began to change their doctrine of fellowship. It would appear that it was not long after their solid rejection of the Chicago (Intersynodical) Theses.

Whether because of a change in the administration of the Synod, because of the opposition of many at the 1929 Convention (cf. p. 11 above), or because of various other causes, the fact remains that the Missouri Synod's views on fellowship began to change during the early 1930's. In the Cleveland Resolutions committees were appointed with the express purpose and aim of discussing with other Lutheran bodies the possibilities of establishing church union, pulpit and altar fellowship.

Missouri's previous stand had been to first achieve unity of doctrine, and then to discuss church union. In fact, with unity of doctrine, fellowship will take care of itself. Professor Meyer expressed some doubts as to the procedure that Missouri was following.

It may be a debatable question whether it is psychologically possible that conferring committees, with the aim thus definitely stated, can still carry on their doctrinal discussions without bias, with a heart open to the truth alone and with a will to confess the truth unabridged...to stress, even to mention, union as the aim to be achieved cannot but have its detrimental repercussions...The Rev. J.E.Thoen is right when he says on this point: "When committees are chosen to confer with the purpose in view to unite the churches which they represent, they are tempted either to yield to one another in the discussion of doctrinal questions or to use ambiguous and diplomatic expressions or terms for the purpose of leading the opposition to adopt their presentation of the doctrine. The result becomes an agreement which may be understood in two different senses, and the two parties may with some right claim

that they have defended the doctrine of their church and persuaded the opposition to adopt it as right doctrine. The agreement thus becomes a compromise and both parties stand as before without having attained true unity." (Lutheran Sentinel for May 20, 1936, p 164.) 39

These were precisely the same warnings that the other members of the Synodical Conference time after time gave to the Missouri Synod after they began to deal with the Common Confession of the American Lutheran Church. That they went unheeded, history shows plainly enough. In fact, these warnings were nothing else than the same type of statements Missouri made in rejecting the Chicago (Intersynodical) Theses.

It will be noted that the exceptions which the two committees and the 1929 convention of our (i.e. Missouri) synod took to the Chicago Theses (inadequacy of doctrinal presentation, failure to deal with the point of controversy in the light of past history, absence of clinching rejection of errors taught in the past, the fact that while Synod was seeking doctrinal unity with Ohio and Iowa these synods were continuing to negotiate union with a known erroristic body -- in short, pursuing a unionistic course) have been, in essence, major considerations underlying the present representations which the Wisconsin and Norwegian synods have made to Missouri regarding the Common Confession and bases for their rejection of it. 40

History, if nothing else, should serve as a warning to all of us in the Wisconsin Synod as to how quickly the attitude and doctrine of a synod can change. We can change as did Missouri. We are not immune. "A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump," whether slowly or quickly. May God preserve us from such calamity!

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39. Theologische Quartalschrift. Jahrgang 33 #3 Juli, 1936. p 202.

40. The Confessional Lutheran. December, 1955 p 142.

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