

DENVER REVISITED: THE MARKETING OF FELLOWSHIP

by

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to: Professor E. Fredrich

for: Church History 373

Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Library

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Mequon, Wisconsin

It was originally the intent of this writer to discuss the apparent paradox that existed at the 1969 Denver convention of the Lutheran Church -- Missouri Synod; i.e. how could the same convention elect a conservative praesidium, and only a few days later vote to declare altar and pulpit fellowship with The American Lutheran Church. However, after much research it became apparent that this question has no simple answer. Indeed there may be as many answers to this question as there were delegates present in Denver. Answering such a question would produce more speculations than conclusions. Karl Barth, president of the Southern Wisconsin District of the LCMS, probably summed it up best when he told this writer: "Conventions are very irrational creatures." Therefore in this paper we will deal with immediate factors which pushed the fellowship issue 'over the top' at Denver in July of 1969.

The seed which eventually produced Denver's Resolution 3-15 (To Declare Altar and Pulpit Fellowship with The American Lutheran Church) can be found a dozen years prior to Denver.

E. Clifford Nelson records the following event:

It was in 1957 that the first public utterance regarding an alliance between the Missouri Synod and the projected American Lutheran Church was made. President Behnken addressed the English District of the Missouri Synod and expressed the hope that his church body would begin negotiations with the new ALC shortly after its formation in 1960. This was brought to the attention of the principals in The ALC merger negotiations and evidently followed up with some alacrity. On August 24, 1957 (during the LWF Assembly in Minneapolis), President Schoitz (ELC) and

President Henry Schuh (ALC) met with President Behnken and A.H. Grumm in the office of the Minneapolis District of the Missouri Synod. Schioitz described it later as a courtesy call to maintain brotherly feelings and to keep open communications with Missouri. Behnken, however, reported to his synod's doctrinal unity committee that the meeting with Schioitz and Schuh was a conversation "with regard to the possibilities of beginning doctrinal discussions with the groups planning to merge into The American Lutheran Church ..." 1

In 1959 Missouri's San Francisco convention officially approved a proposal for discussions with The ALC. Excluding a temporary one year suspension of talks, nine years of doctrinal discussions followed. The discussions were eventually concluded with the adoption of a "Joint Statement and Declaration." In its 1967 convention, Missouri ratified the document, and The ALC followed suit in its 1968 convention.

During these years the ALC was walking a tightrope between the LCA and the LCMS, not wanting to offend one because of its talks with the other.<sup>2</sup> Therefore it came as no surprise that already in 1964 it was suggested that The ALC discontinue fellowship talks with Missouri and prepare a resolution asking its 1964 Columbus convention simply to declare pulpit and altar fellowship with both the LCA and the LCMS. This proposal, however, was rejected. After more discussions with Missouri (Nov. 22-23, 1964; April 19-20, 1965; Jan. 17-18, 1966), President Schioitz of The ALC recommended a blanket declaration of pulpit and altar fellowship with the LCA, the LCMS, and the Synod of Evangelical Lutheran Churches to be approved at its 1968 Omaha convention. This proposal was adopted without significant debate. The 18 district conventions of The ALC ratified the Omaha convention's action concerning fellowship with the LCMS by an overwhelming 9 to 1 margin.<sup>3</sup> Many of the

above facts, President Schoitz hastened to call to mind for the delegates when he addressed the Denver convention.<sup>4</sup>

The 1967 LCMS New York convention had charged President Oliver Harms to "make arrangements for promoting the widest possible mutual recognition of the doctrinal consensus and its implications for church fellowship among the entire membership of the synod" (Resolution 3-23: Altar and Pulpit Fellowship with The American Lutheran Church).<sup>5</sup> In this connection Harms prepared and presented materials to a meeting of the District Presidents in November of that same year. Shortly thereafter the brochure, "Toward Fellowship" was distributed to the clergy of the LCMS. This was an attempt to help delegates and others understand what would be involved in a declaration of fellowship. It made clear that fellowship with The ALC was not a merger or union.

However some felt that Harms was attempting to influence prospective delegates toward a favorable decision on fellowship. Whether this criticism was justified or not, Harms felt compelled to defend himself in his "President's Report" to the convention:

The President's office will not seek to influence this convention on this matter (fellowship). In fact, the President's office rejects the charge that undue influence has been exerted in support of fellowship in the past two years. ... When charges of unfairness were raised and when distortions were published, it became necessary to put forth special efforts to set and to keep the record straight.<sup>6</sup>

Keep in mind that the LCMS of this time is not a united, single-minded body. Nelson speaks of "right-wing elements" who "continued to organize a vigorous opposition that directed its efforts to the elimination of 'liberalism,' the defeat of the fellowship question, and the restoration of traditional

Missouri theology."<sup>7</sup> On the opposite side of the coin, some of the former Denver delegates who this writer talked with kept referring to the 'libs' who wanted to 'buldoze fellowship through.'<sup>8</sup> Especially in view of more recent developments in Missouri, it can be said that two different camps went to Denver in the summer of 1969.

So the stage was set. The delegates of a sharply divided church body went to the mile high city to vote on fellowship with The ALC. Those who attended that convention still recall the highly charged, almost electrified atmosphere which prevailed. Emotions ran high. The fellowship issue was uppermost in everyone's mind. In the opening convention service, Vice-President Paul W. Streufert alluded to the division on this issue in his sermon:

The moment the dialog on fellowship begins, I'm in trouble. ... I have certain convictions. ... Because I have such convictions, I imagine that I have a halo above my head. I look at my brother who has convictions diametrically opposed to mine and I imagine he is starting to grow horns. The tragic thing is that my brother is also in trouble. With his convictions he imagines he has the halo and I have the horns.<sup>9</sup>

On Saturday morning, July 12, the convention got down to business. One of the first items on the agenda was the "President's Report." Here began the first of the major systematic bombardments, aimed at the delegates, and designed to swing a favorable fellowship vote.<sup>10</sup> President Harms directed the bulk of his report to the fellowship issue. He acknowledged that differences in practice did exist between the two churches. Yet in conclusion he said:

In summary, the recommendation asks this convention to do what the church alone can do and what the church has wisely agreed long ago to do only in convention, that is to declare its readiness to live in altar and pulpit

fellowship with The American Lutheran Church.<sup>11</sup>

Another point of business which is always dealt with early in a synodical convention is the election of synod officials. So also at Denver. At the close of the morning session Dr. W. F. Wolbrecht, the Executive Director of the synod, called attention to "serious breaches in the democratic processes and irregular procedures according to the Constitution and usages of the Synod."<sup>12</sup> Politics had crept into the elections. For weeks before the convention, Herman Otten, and his "Lutheran News" (now "Christian News") had been urging the delegates to vote for J.A.O. Preus, president of the Springfield seminary, who was a known opponent of liberalism. While in Denver, someone had taken out a full page add in the "Denver Post" also advocating Preus as synod president. When the afternoon session opened, Preus received permission to make a statement. The minutes read:

Dr. J.A.O. Preus received permission to address the convention. He disavowed actions taken without his knowledge, stating that the issue was not one of personalities. He declared that he deplored politicking and pleaded that the delegates demonstrate their love toward one another and toward the Lord. He received a standing ovation.<sup>13</sup>

On the second ballot subsequent to the nominating ballot, Preus unseated Harms as president of the LCMS. His election was considered a victory for the conservatives at Denver.

Professor Carl Lawrenz, a WELS observer at Denver, comments:

Voting, also the election of officers in a church body, always involves a division. Yet in a doctrinally united church body it will be a division of judgment as to who by gifts and experience can best carry through a commonly held position and program. In this presidial election the division was on theological positions, though there was a considerable segment of voters who could still be influenced and who repeatedly wavered in their decisions.

In the nomination ballot for the presidency, taken on

the first convention day, the top five candidates, with the exception of the incumbent, Dr. Oliver Harms, were considered to be conservatives. This evidence of conservative strength among the voting delegates continued to show when Dr. J.A.O. Preus, was elected president on the second subsequent ballot.<sup>14</sup>

At the beginning of session 3, Saturday evening, it was announced that Preus was the new president of the synod. Immediately several questions were raised, but the chair ruled them out of order.

We move now to Monday afternoon, July 14. The pro-fellowship artillery continued its barrage. President Harms introduced Dr. Fredrik A. Schoitz, president of The American Lutheran Church and of the Luthean Federation. Schoitz reminded the delegates of the decade of fellowship talks which had preceded Denver. He also assured his listeners that the word 'inerrant' had the same meaning for his church as it did for the LCMS. Toward the end of his speech Schoitz made a statement that may have been a veiled threat. He implied that it was now or never for fellowship:

If you accept our proffered hand, we shall regard it as a gift of God's Holy Spirit. If you do not find it in your hearts to do this, many of our people will ask the question whether God's Spirit may be pointing us to new directions. <sup>15</sup>

Following his speech The ALC president received a standing ovation with sustained applause. Later the chair allowed a question of Dr. Schoitz who agreed to answer it. The delegate asked, "Do you believe that The American Lutheran Church can wait two or four more years for the Missouri Synod decision on fellowship in view of concerns within the Synod?"<sup>16</sup> Schoitz replied that it was a very difficult question, but he repeated his statement that some in The ALC might take a refusal of

fellowship as a directive to "look for new directions."

Tuesday morning, July 15, the fellowship pushers administered a one-two punch. First Dr. Robert Marshall, president of the Lutheran Church in America, addressed the Denver delegates. Marshall's speech centered around Lutheran unity. He frequently referred to "we Lutherans." Although not specifically mentioning the issue, one gets the feeling that here was another fellowship pep talk: "As part of the same clan in the great family of God, we must seek to live so close together that the devil and the world may not come between us."<sup>17</sup>

The convention next heard from Committee 8, Young People's Work. Chairman H. F. Newnaber presented four young people of the Walther League who addressed the convention on the social issues which are the Walther League's main concerns. Again fellowship was a prime concern. Two former Denver delegates recalled one young lady making a particularly impassioned plea. With tears in her eyes, her closing statement was, 'A vote against fellowship is a vote against the youth of your church!'<sup>18</sup>

Later that afternoon the ground work was laid for the fellowship debate. It was resolved to limit speaking from the floor to 3 minutes. Rev. Lloyd Goetz, chairman of the Church Relations Committee, then read Resolution 3-15 -- To Declare Altar and Pulpit Fellowship with The American Lutheran Church. Yet even committee 3 could not be united in bringing this resolution before the convention. After the adoption of Resolution 3-15, permission was granted to read a minority report, labeled 3-15A. Twelve of the forty men of committee



3 had affixed their signatures to this document. In brief this report called attention to The ALC's faulty view of Holy Scripture, its ecumenical principles and its lodge practice. These men then pointed to Missouri's own constitution, and the "Brief Statement" which "made it obligatory that there be full agreement in doctrine and practice before declaring pulpit fellowship..."<sup>19</sup> The report urged continuing doctrinal talks between the two bodies, but postponing the fellowship issue until "a time when there is a greater unanimity of spirit..."<sup>20</sup> For all practical purposes, this report was overshadowed by the pro-fellowship roar.

The convention invited President-elect Preus to address the delegates on the fellowship question, if he wished to do so. The three minute limit would be waived. The next morning Dr. Harms announced that Preus had declined the request.

The story is widely circulated that Tuesday evening, Preus' brother, Robert urged his brother to put his presidency on the line when it came to the fellowship vote.<sup>21</sup> An eye-witness recounted the following story to this writer. Pastor Richard Musser, Pastor Waldo Wearing, and Pastor Robert Preus had met with J.A.O. Preus in the latter's hotel room. The President-elect was talking about the conservative stand he intended to make before the convention on the fellowship issue. His brother mentioned even putting his presidency on the line to show how dead serious he was about this matter. Throughout the course of the conversation, Robert was jotting down notes for his brother's speech the following day. Yet when the opportunity came, J.A.O. Preus was silent.<sup>22</sup> Many of the conservatives who had back Preus, considered this ascent by silence.

Wednesday morning also saw the last major pro-fellowship blast. Dr. Richard Caemmerer presented the third part of his convention essay entitled, "The Edifying Word." As one man said, 'It was as though he forgot about his topic to talk about fellowship.'<sup>23</sup> Indeed that seemed to be the seminary professor's prime concern. He began the final section of the morning's essay with the words: "Having said that, we are prepared to face the problem of unity with Christians of another name."<sup>24</sup> Caemmerer concluded by saying:

The progress toward synodical fellowship, whether you propose to make it official or not, goes on, and you can't afford ever to stop it or to silence it. Least of all do you stop it toward a friend who says, "You folks accept the Augsburg Confession too?" and you say, "Yes, it says, 'For the true unity of the church it is sufficient that with one accord the Gospel is preached and the sacraments rightly administered.'"<sup>25</sup>

Following the essay, discussions regarding Resolution 3-15 were held. At 10:30 the discussion was postponed to a later session.

Session 11, Wednesday evening, saw the fellowship question again come up for discussion. Mr. Kenneth Steege, a student of Concordia College, Bronxville, was given permission to address the convention. Once more came a plea to approve fellowship. During the discussion J.A.O. Preus also addressed the convention. The minutes read:

He (Dr. Preus) voiced a concern particularly for the doctrine of the Word of God, saying that he favored a delay to give an opportunity for further study on this subject. However, he promised to abide by the decision of this convention and to use strenuous efforts to draw all Lutherans into a consensus on fellowship.<sup>26</sup>

After much heated discussion it came time to vote. The voting was done by ballot. The results would be announced on the following morning.

Thursday morning, July 17, Arlen Bruns, chairman of the Committee on Elections announced that of the 961 votes cast, 522 had voted in favor of fellowship, 438 against, and one ballot was blank. The fellowship issue had past by a narrow 84 vote margin. The convention rose and sang the first stanza of "Our God, Our Help in Ages Past." Thus pulpit and altar fellowship between The American Lutheran Church and the Lutheran Church -- Missouri Synod was established.

How did this come about? Three pastors who were present at Denver told this writer something very interesting. It was the opinion of these men that the clergy vote at Denver was predictable. One could go down a roster and with some degree of accuracy predict how a particular pastor would vote on a particular issue.<sup>27</sup> We have already alluded to the polarized division of the synod.

However, the same cannot be said of the LCMS laity. Synod politics directly affected these men to a much lesser degree. Recall Professor Lawrenz's comment: "... there was a considerable segment of voters who could still be influenced and who repeatedly wavered in their decisions."<sup>28</sup> It was a tug of war. Whoever tugged at the laity vote hardest won the issue.

Thus the "extravaganza" which the pro-fellowship liberals staged turned the trick. At one point during the convention Pastor Karl Barth commented to the liberal sitting next to him, 'Cecil B. DeMill couldn't have done better than you people!'<sup>29</sup> Indeed Denver was a well orchestrated show. As a voting layman with the best interest of your church at heart, would you have voted against fellowship if: 1) your synod

president urged its approval; 2) the presidents of two other Lutheran bodies urged it, one hinting that fellowship was now or never; 3) you had heard the emotional plea of the youth of your church also urging approval; 4) a professor from your seminary had declared that to vote against fellowship was to stand in the way of progress; and 5) if you had received no guidance from the president-elect of your synod? It would certainly be doubtful. Whether this systematic bombardment was prearranged we cannot say, but it was nonetheless a fact.

However, J.A.O. Preus offers another view. In a letter to this writer he said:

Having heard Doctor Schoitz assure them that The American Lutheran Church was firmly committed to the inerrancy of Scripture, I believe that the delegates in good faith voted for fellowship largely because of this statement.<sup>30</sup>

Preus refers to this point again when he addressed The American Lutheran Church in convention in October of 1976. Dr. Preus stated:

Particularly, we were impressed with Dr. Schoitz's comments made at the Denver Convention of The Lutheran Church -- Missouri Synod in 1969 relative to the subject of Biblical inerrancy which surely was considered when fellowship was decided.<sup>31</sup>

The final page in the fellowship debate has not yet been written. Of the five men this writer interviewed for this paper (3 pastors and 2 laymen), all five felt that fellowship between Missouri and The ALC will be broken. Karl Barth, now a District President of the LCMS, doubted whether the break would take place at Dallas this summer. He rather referred to some measure which would stop just short of a break -- perhaps a state of confession. However, if the present doctrinal climate in The ALC does not improve, relations will be severed in the future.<sup>32</sup> The final word on LCMS - ALC fellowship has

not yet been spoken.

This paper has not touched on the doctrinal aspects of Missouri's fellowship decision. Nor have we mentioned the side issues of Denver -- the position of women in church work and Missouri's continued membership in LCUSA. That was not our purpose. We have, however, examined the passage of Resolution 3-15. We have considered factors which led to its approval. We of the Wisconsin Synod may be quick to point out the mistake made at Denver. Yet we must not become pharisaical in doing so. We, as The LCMS today appears to be doing, must learn from Denver, lest we too someday fall into the same trap.

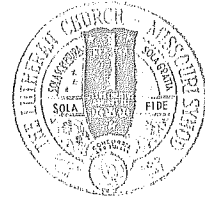
ENDNOTES:

1. Nelson, E. Clifford. Lutheranism In North America 1914 - 1970. (Augsburg Publishing House: Minneapolis. 1972) p. 251.
2. Ibid. p. 252f.
3. Ibid. pp. 253-257.
4. LC-MS Proceedings ... 1969. pp. 73-74.
5. Ibid. p. 50.
6. Ibid. p. 50.
7. Nelson. op. cit. p. 257.
8. Interview with Pastor Richard Musser; Feb. 2, 1977.
9. LC-MS Proceedings ... 1969. p. 56
10. Interview with President Karl Barth; Feb. 25, 1977.
11. LC-MS Proceedings ... 1969. p. 50.
12. Ibid. (minutes) p. 20.
13. Ibid. (minutes) p. 20.
14. Lawrenz, Carl. "The Denver Convention of The LC-MS; July 11-18, 1969" as found in The Northwestern Lutheran. Vol. 56, No. 18. Aug. 31, 1969.
15. LC-MS Proceedings ... 1969. p. 74.
16. Ibid. (minutes) p. 25.
17. Marshall, Robert J. "A Message to Missouri" as found in The Lutheran. Vol. 7, No. 16. August 20, 1969. p. 13.
18. Musser. op. cit.
19. LC-MS Proceedings ... 1969. p. 99.
20. Ibid. p. 99.
21. Barth. op. cit.
22. Musser. op. cit.
23. Interview with Mr. Donald Druckrey; Feb. 22, 1977.
24. LC-MS Proceedings ... 1969. p. 68.
25. Ibid. p. 69.

26. Ibid. p. 32.
27. Barth, Musser, and Bartelt (Feb. 12, 1977) interviews.
28. Lawrenz. op. cit.
29. Barth. op. cit.
30. Letter: President J.A.O. Preus; Feb. 14, 1977.
31. Convention Address: President J.A.O. Preus; delivered Oct. 11, 1976 to The American Lutheran Church.
32. Barth. op. cit.

# THE LUTHERAN CHURCH - MISSOURI SYNOD

500 NORTH BROADWAY · SAINT LOUIS, MISSOURI 63102



OFFICE OF THE  
PRESIDENT

231-6969  
AREA CODE 314

February 14, 1977

Mr. Thomas C. Kutz  
6061A North 37th Street  
Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53209

Dear Mr. Kutz:


This is to acknowledge receipt of your letter dated February 1, 1977 in which you request additional information concerning the decision to declare altar and pulpit fellowship with The American Lutheran Church.

I am sure that the enclosed document, in the address which I presented to The American Lutheran Church last October, will shed some light on the decision of the majority of the delegates to vote for fellowship in 1969. Having heard Doctor Schiotz assure them that The American Lutheran Church was firmly committed to the inerrancy of Scripture, I believe that the delegates in good faith voted for fellowship largely because of this statement.

In any event, please study carefully the enclosed document and I am sure it will be helpful.

Wishing you God's blessings in your studies, I am,

Cordially

  
J. A. O. Preus  
President

JAOP:ek  
Enclosure



Address by Dr. J. A. O. Preus, President  
The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod

to The American Lutheran Church Convention,  
October 11, 1976, Washington, D. C.

Mr. President and members of the convention of The American Lutheran Church: I bring you the greetings from the members of The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod, thanking God always for those who profess faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, who profess adherence to the sacred Scriptures which testify of Him, and share the mutual task of bringing the one and only saving Gospel of Christ to all men. We pray for God's abundant blessings upon your worship, your deliberations, and your fellowship.

Oftentimes, we tend to develop stereotyped views of one another which bear little resemblance to the facts. This is likewise the case with church bodies, even church bodies which are in fellowship with one another. People tend to judge entire church bodies by these public declarations and thereby develop certain opinions which are neither accurate nor representative. I believe that both of our churches suffer from being stereotyped. I certainly hope that you will not judge the Missouri Synod by some of the public statements that are made in various quarters of the Christian church today, and we of Missouri want to avoid making any stereotypes relative to The American Lutheran Church.

It is, however, difficult to avoid making stereotypes when we receive conflicting information. For example, in 1969, fellowship was declared between our two churches after several years of careful study and discussion. I myself was a member of the Missouri Synod Commission and was very happy with the high degree of theological consensus which we reached. Particularly, we were impressed with Dr. Schiotz's comments made at the Denver Convention of The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod in 1969 relative to the subject of Biblical inerrancy which surely was considered when fellowship was decided. Dr. Schiotz spoke on the basis of your Constitution which reads in part:

The American Lutheran Church accepts all the canonical books of the Old and the New Testament as a whole and in all their parts as the divinely inspired, revealed, and inerrant Word of God, and submits to this as the only infallible authority in all matters of faith and life.

I'm sorry to say that Missouri's Constitution is not as concise or as clear a statement on this important subject. In fact, the ALC Constitution is the clearest, most easily understood in American Lutheranism. Missouri entered fellowship, persuaded along with Dr. Schiotz, that the ALC's understanding of inerrancy was exactly that of the LCMS. I, for one, prefer to believe that the position set forth in the ALC Constitution is still a valid statement of your church's stance on Holy Scriptures. I would like to believe that the rank and file in The American Lutheran Church believes with Missouri that God's Book is inerrant. At the same time, I must be frank to tell you that certain statements and positions taken in recent years cause us to wonder whether there are those in the ALC who have departed from the official position of their church.

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It has become the custom among the presidents of the major Lutheran church bodies in this country, when we bring greetings to one another's church bodies, that we speak very openly and forthrightly. You are not gathered here simply to be entertained or to have somebody get up and mouth platitudes.

Today we live in an age when the doctrine of Holy Scripture is under discussion and enveloped in controversy throughout almost every denomination. This is not a matter on which we can cop out, or pass it off as a slippery issue with glib phrases. For almost 200 years the church has been wrestling with the question of the nature of the authority of Holy Scriptures. We Lutherans are the church of Sola Scriptura and I personally believe that we are in an excellent position to render a great contribution to all of Christendom in this area. From its very inception, Sola Scriptura has been vital to Lutheranism, for our confessions of faith are not based on human reason or emotion or papal authority, but on the Word of God alone. The Formula of Concord states:

Holy Scripture remains the only judge, rule, and norm, according to which, as the only touchstone all doctrine should and must be understood and judged as good or evil, right or wrong. (FC. Ep. Pref. 7.).

We, together with the Lutheran confessors, believe that "God's Word cannot err." (Large Catechism). The signers of the Preface of the Book of Concord recognized the sacred Scriptures as "the pure, infallible, and unalterable Word of God."

Nor is this emphasis on the truth and reliability of Holy Scripture merely some fundamentalistic fetish. The only Christ we know is the Christ of the Scriptures; the only Sacraments we observe are the Sacraments as instituted by Christ in the Scriptures. The truest love we can ever show is toward God's Holy Word, which brings us our Lord Jesus Christ, and which makes us ready always to contend for the faith. In this month of the Reformation, can you imagine Luther at Worms confessing the faith as he did, if he believed for one minute that the Bible was a wax nose which each person could twist and interpret in his own way? Can you imagine Luther at Marburg, contesting for the Real Presence of Christ's Body and Blood in the Lord's Supper, suddenly announcing that in order to bring peace to Protestantism, he was willing to say that the doctrine of the Lord's Supper was subject to variant interpretations, and we could never be certain as to what Christ was actually saying to us in these passages? Just as Luther was completely relevant to the questions at his time, so we Lutherans of today with our strong belief in Scriptures as "the only infallible authority in all matters of faith and life" (ALC Constitution) have the certain basis for answering such things as situation ethics, the abortion question, the ordination of women, and all of the moral dilemmas which plague our time.

Above all, in this day and age of the proliferation of so many sects, each proclaiming their own special "good news" we need to be absolutely clear on the fact that the only Gospel we have is that which is revealed to us in God's Holy Word. Paul in Galatians pronounces a curse on those who preach any other Gospel than that which he as the Lord's inspired and chosen apostle has proclaimed to them under the guidance of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 1:9). We can do no less than that proclaim this Gospel--and only this Gospel--today!

It is for such reasons that Missouri has had this great conflict. It is for such reasons that we naturally are very distressed, when, for example, your president in a letter dated April 5, 1976, speaks of the adoption of a doctrinal statement by the Missouri Synod as having "the effect of narrowing the Confessions of the Lutheran Church," and of being "divisive and destructive--tearing down instead of building up fellowship." Such accusations have caused great anguish among us.

These statements of ours were drawn up, just as the statement pending before your convention dealing with the matter of communion practices, in order to help the teaching and worship life of our church, and in order to help us remain faithful to our confessional heritage and faithful in confessing the Gospel before the world. We do not draw up doctrinal statements for their own sake but only as a way of being "Biblical, confessional, and evangelical;" as your president indicated should be the case. The LCMS has not added anything to the historic Lutheran Confessions, nor has it set aside anything from them in adopting a doctrinal statement such as what we call "A Statement of Scriptural and Confessional Principles." While we gladly forgive this allegation, we also categorically reject it.

Our life is an open book. Our documents are matters of public record. We invite anyone, especially those in fellowship with us, to test what we have said and done. We encourage such a probing. We wish to be corrected if corrections are in order. In response to the remarks of your president, our Synod's Commission on Theology and Church Relations in a letter addressed to the ALC has asked for meetings with your fellowship commissioners in order to discuss this and other questions. We are anxious to strengthen the bond of fellowship and to remove misunderstandings and differences. We do not wish to have our fellowship weakened through incorrect and damaging stereotypes and false impressions.

I am sure that you will be pleased to hear that the controversy in the LCMS is in its final stages. There are a few in our church body who are presently seeking to establish a new denomination which will be made up of such congregations of the Missouri Synod as find this venture to their liking. Those departing have called themselves "casualties."

Your president has on occasion expressed himself with respect to these "casualties." At the time these statements were made, many of us in Missouri were surprised and your president was subjected to a certain amount of criticism.

However, insofar as he spoke out of concern for people, we have come to believe that he was demonstrating kindness and churchmanship in offering an invitation to people to join a fully organized and fully established church such as the ALC, rather than to continue in an unhappy relationship or to go through the anguish of creating yet another Lutheran church body. Since many of these individuals, for one reason or another, believe that they can no longer carry out their mission and ministry within the LCMS, and I may continue to say the number will remain very small, would it not be a better thing for them to unite with another church body which has a sound doctrinal position, such as the ALC, and with whom fellowship has already been practiced in the past?

Perhaps, under God, this could well be one of the benefits of our fellowship. Perhaps, too, the ALC can minister more effectively to those whom we have been unable to convince, despite the thousands of hours spent in fruitless meetings. Thus, an invitation by the ALC to Missouri's "casualties" may at this time be a very practical and loving action, something which would be of benefit to all concerned.

We would, of course, caution our brothers and sisters of The American Lutheran Church, that not all of Missouri's dissidents are "casualties." There are some who have been the very cause of our problems. We would hope that the small minority which disagrees with our mutual doctrinal position would not be permitted to drive a wedge between our two church bodies. Another blessing of our fellowship would be Missouri's reception of ALC pastors who for various reasons would be more at home in Missouri. This is not an empty gesture, since we have a very large number of vacant parishes at the present time. The situation differs, but these things happen very regularly. ALC pastors and even congregations who would feel more comfortable with Missouri might well contact our officials.

Finally, nothing could happen that is more agreeable or that is more earnestly and prayerfully to be sought for than that Christians should live together in godly unanimity (Preface to the Book of Concord). As we approach the 400th anniversary of the Book of Concord, the confessional basis of all world Lutheranism, nothing could make us in the Missouri Synod happier than to come together with all Lutherans everywhere in agreement on all the articles of faith revealed in the sacred Scriptures and as confessed in the Lutheran symbols so that Augsburg Confession says, the "Gospel be preached in conformity with a pure understanding of it." It is our firm resolve to work toward this end to the very limit of our resources. We have already discovered areas of mutual interest and endeavor together with you and the LCA in the Lutheran Council in the U. S. A. and we want this cooperation to continue and to expand. Dr. Marshall made reference to this. It is my sincere intention as president of The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod that the Missouri Synod continues to participate in LCUSA in a fruitful and positive way. We are desirous of working together with all Lutherans throughout the world to the extent that agreement in Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions allow.

Therefore, let us refrain from making irresponsible statements about one another. Let us build one another up. Let us emphasize the positive aspects of our faith and our fellowship. Let us make our official positions our living practice and let us bear a strong and united witness to our Lord Jesus Christ, His Holy Word, and our Lutheran faith.

May the Lord bless you, your convention, may He fill you with His Holy Spirit, and may He bless the work which you are doing for Him.

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