

WELS Relations With  
The Evangelical Lutheran Free Church:  
Fanning The Gift Of God Into Flame

by  
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When Martin Luther said that the gospel is like a passing shower, that it lingers for awhile and then moves on, he did not exclude his beloved Germany. His observation can be seen to hold true throughout history, and yet, by the grace of God, his observation does not always hold true in an absolute way. There lies in the heart of the Reformation land of Saxony a small church body that holds firmly to the unaltered Augsburg Confession and the inerrancy and infallibility of Scripture. With this confession they denounce the popular trend of the historical-critical method of Bible interpretation. The gospel shower remains, although it only hovers over a small, isolated portion of Germany, showering on a body of believers who call themselves the Evangelische Lutherische Freikirche in Sachsen (LFK). This light is shining in the darkness of Communist East Germany; therefore, there are obvious political persecutions that threaten this small light. Far more dangerous, though, are the spiritual pressures. The neighboring church body, the Breslau Synod or Old Lutherans, and the Selbständige Evangelische Lutherische Kirche (SELK), a Lutheran church body in West Germany, would have the Saxon Free Church join them in their liberal theology which ultimately destroys the gospel and robs the Spirit of his opportunities. The WELS now has the opportunity to encourage their brothers in East Germany

to fan their gift of God into flame as they take a stand against the Evil One. This paper will show a brief history of the Saxon Free Church, their doctrinal struggles with the Breslau Synod, and the current struggle with SELK. We will also take note of the WELS' relations and aid to their Saxon brothers.

### Saxon's Happy Beginning

The Evangelical Lutheran Free Church in Saxony, or Saxon Free Church, was founded in 1876 by congregations of Nassau and the kingdom of Saxony. The congregation which formed the church owed much of their conviction to Scripture and the Confessions to Pastor Friedrich Brunn, who had withdrawn from the Union State Church in 1848 and had started his own congregation in Steeden.<sup>1</sup> Brunn was concerned with finding others who were like-minded, and helped the confessional Lutheranerverein in Planitz and Zwickau. He also gained support and example from C.F.W. Walther and the Missouri Synod in the years prior to the establishment of the church body.<sup>2</sup>

From its beginning, the Evangelical Lutheran Free Church in Saxony was in confessional fellowship with the Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America.<sup>3</sup> They never became members of the conference because of the obvious reason they were not in America. There were, however, opportunities for the WELS

to work together with the Saxons. The Poland Mission is the prime example, which began in 1923 when Bethesda Lutheran Church in Milwaukee committed itself to the mission. Pastor Otto Engel was sent in 1925. At that time the mission became an official synodical effort when J.P. Koehler reported enthusiastically about his visit and the convention subsequently raised the mission budget allotment from \$10,000 to \$15,000.<sup>4</sup> Meanwhile, the Saxon Free Church Seminary in Sehlendorf had already been training Poland Lutherans for work in this mission field. From that point, the two churches worked together well as Sehlendorf continued to train WELS men for work in the Poland mission field. To add to the mutual effort, Dr. Peters from the WELS taught at Sehlendorf from 1929 to 1935.<sup>5</sup>

#### War Changes

During the second World War, there was obviously no official contact between the WELS and Saxon Free Church. The young pastors of all the free churches had all been taken from their posts and funneled into the Nazi war effort. The churches simply held on as best they could. Perhaps the most obvious change resulting from the war was the split up in organization of the Saxon Church. When the Allies divided Germany, they gave no consideration to the Free Churches. The

Saxon Free Church was divided and ironically, as we'll see later, the Western Saxons were the worse off for it. From this point on, we'll refer to the East German Saxon Church as the Lutherische Freikirche (LFK). Another change that regarded our own Poland mission was the pastors in diaspora. They fled Poland and sought refuge with their brothers in Germany. Those who found themselves in the West formed their own church body, the Bekenntniskirche. Those in the East were not allowed to start a new church body. Under the Communist rule, only those church bodies that already existed were considered official church bodies. Because of this, the pastors in diaspora joined the LFK and became known as the Diasporabezirk (Diaspora district).

Shortly after the war in Germany in 1947, Dr. Wilhelm Oesch of the Saxon Free Church saw an opportunity to develop a confessional fellowship with the Old Lutherans (Breslau Synod). The Breslau Synod had previously been too compromising in the area of fellowship. Prior to 1947, they practiced selective fellowship with Lutheran territorial churches. They were careful to make sure the individual churches were faithful to the inerrancy of Scripture and the Confessions. But in 1947, Breslau felt compelled to break fellowship when the territorial churches joined in a federation with

the Union state churches and the Reformed churches.

With no apparent obstacle separating the Saxon Free Church and the Breslau Synod, the Einigungssaetze were drawn up and in 1948 officially signed by both church bodies. In 1949, the WELS also declared fellowship with Breslau on the basis of the Einigungssaetze. Unfortunately, previously unheard dissenting voice came from among the Breslau pastors, who, since the Einigungssaetze, had returned from the Russian concentration camps.<sup>6</sup> Dr. Oesch did not stir, for he was convinced that once Breslau was under the Einigungssaetze the liberal element could be disciplined.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, this contention against the Einigungssaetze would continue to plague this unhappy union.

Ministerial training made a 360° turn as a result of the war. The Sehlfendorf Seminary was partially destroyed by the war and was not allowed by the Communists to be rebuilt. The Missouri Synod then saved the day by purchasing a plot of land in the West at Oberursel so that a seminary could be built. This school was a joint effort between the Breslau Synod and Saxon Free Church. Each Church provided two professors. The Saxon Free Church provided professors Wilhelm Oesch and Johannes Kirsten, and Breslau provided professors Laabs and Kiunke. At Oberursel we see no unity in this new fellowship. The WELS was

able to see the problems here through the students that continued to study at the Saxon Free Church Seminary. The WELS students, although they all personally liked Laabs, reported that he would teach according to the Einigungssaetze while at the podium, but when he stepped away from the podium his views would not always be in keeping with the Einigungssaetze. Needless to say, the Oberursel faculty was dangerously divided, and add to that the fact that the Breslau students attended the universities to get a more broad theological perspective before attending the Seminary.<sup>8</sup> With this in mind, one need not wonder how Oberursel could in some cases produce men with less than a sense of urgency toward sound exegetical Bible interpretation.

Before it was too late, the Communists did the LFK a favor by tightening the border, no longer allowing their students to attend Oberursel. They were faced with a need for a seminary. Dr. Ernst Lerle was then informally asked to start a new seminary. Dr. Lerle gladly responded by setting up a school in Leipzig, complete with his own rules and no board of directors. Dr. Lerle did a remarkable job with the students who also attended the universities for their theological training. Despite the early doctrinal setbacks, Dr. Lerle was able to delouse the students.<sup>9</sup> Unlike Oberursel, a doctrinally strong seminary rose up among the ashes of post-war East Germany.

The Struggle Continues

The two Lutheran free churches sought fellowship with others who could agree with the Einigungssaetze. In 1949, apparent agreement was found with the Selbstaendige Evangelische Lutherische Kirche (SELK). One would have hoped that they would have demanded unconditional agreement that the document expressed the only way in which Scripture could be interpreted. Unfortunately, they were satisfied with a confession that the Einigungssaetze were not contrary to Scripture.<sup>10</sup> The SELK ministerial candidates rarely made use of Oberursel. They instead were satisfied with the universities' theological training. Without the possibility of sound doctrinal study, how could they expect the SELK ministers to be a positive addition to their fellowship? The feeling in the Saxon Free Church seemed to be that once they are under the Einigungssaetze, they would have to conform or be disciplined; however, the other two church bodies would not share their view.

At the time of this fellowship establishment, the WELS was urged by the Oberursel faculty to seek fellowship with the SELK. At that time the WELS was hesitant because the Hermannsburg-Hamburg diocese of the SELK was carrying on a joint mission effort with the territorial church of Hannover. Breslau stated that their fellowship was based on a status confessionis on that very issue. They were giving the SELK diocese time to make



the necessary break. Nevertheless, the WELS remained cautious because of the fact that time was being given.<sup>11</sup> Here, then, the WELS gave testimony to God-pleasing fellowship principles.

During the next decade, the WELS had little contact with the German Free Churches because she was forced to put all her energies into discussions to preserve fellowship with the Missouri Synod. In addition, she had to educate her people as to the doctrinal fallacies that had smuggled their way into the Missouri Synod. In 1964, WELS representatives visited the free churches of Saxony and Breslau in order to review what happened to the Synodical Conference and to determine who remained in confessional agreement. In their meetings, the WELS representatives learned that the three free churches, Breslau, Saxony, and SELK, were planning a merger. Since WELS was not in fellowship with SELK, they sought more information, and would return in 1968.

Meanwhile, the Seminary at Leipzig had undergone more change. It seems that the Breslau Synod was unhappy with the uncompromising confessionalism in grammatical-historical interpretation of Scripture that was coming from the Seminary. They pushed for a school that would require their students to receive all of their training at Leipzig, to which the present President, Dr. Lerle, was opposed. Recall, however, how

Dr. Lerle was staunch in his confessionalism and apt in reforming young minds to proper Scriptural interpretation. Breslau also backed Dr. Gottfried Wachler who favored the plan to have students receive all their studies at the Seminary, and who, incidentally, at that time favored the fellowship ties with Breslau. If Breslau was aiming for a man who was more open-minded in Scriptural interpretation, they completely missed the target. Dr. Wachler is equal to Lerle in his stand on inerrancy and proper Scriptural interpretation. He favored the ties with Breslau for the same reasons Dr. Oesch favored them. He desired to work with Breslau after getting them under the Einigungssaetze.<sup>12</sup> Praise God for his grace and mercy in continuing to provide the Saxon Free Church with a confessional Seminary!

In 1965, the three free churches formally discussed the merger. Fortunately, conservative voices were heard which strongly suggested that the differences in doctrine and practice which had become quite evident be worked out before any merger be considered. It was also noted that the Einigungssaetze, which were supposed to be the basis for their fellowship, were being ignored since they no longer agreed on the binding nature of the Einigungssaetze.<sup>13</sup>

It became evident that the new merger would have to take place on the basis of a different document.

So the praesidia of the free churches formed a committee to see to this matter. The committee came through with a compromising and doctrinally limp document called the Basisformel. The Basisformel left itself and Scripture wide open for interpretation when it substituted "untrueglichen" for "irrtumlos." As a matter of course, the Saxon Free Church pastoral conference would not accept the Basisformel, and the other churches, although they approved of the document, agreed that it should not be used in negotiations for a merger. Instead, they returned to the Einigungssatze and began discussions concerning its binding nature.<sup>14</sup>

Breslau's resolution of 1966 stated clearly their understanding of the Einigungssatze, as well as their stand on Scriptural interpretation. In Dr. G. Rost's clarification of the 1966 resolution, he states:

Certainly, the understanding set forth in the Einigungssatze has at all times had a place in our Church and has always been considered as a legitimate possibility in interpreting Scripture and the Confessions. Hence, there is also no retreat back beyond the resolutions of 1947. On the other hand there is not only the possibility, but the necessity of growing beyond the measure of comprehension to which we have been led. Accordingly the resolutions of 1947 and the Einigungssatze are not like the notorious historical baggage, which one could or should cast off as soon as possible. Rather, as Prof. Dr. Guenther carried this out before the Regional Synod West, they are to be compared to the ring of a tree, which has inseparably grown into the life of our Church but about which also further year rings will and must be formed organically.<sup>15</sup>

So then, the Einigungssaetze was not binding in regard to biblical interpretation; however, it was highly regarded as a document that settled a difference of the past. Needless to say, this resolution was unacceptable, and WELS fellowship relations with Breslau were badly strained since we had declared fellowship with them in 1949 with the understanding that the Einigungssaetze was binding. When the WELS representatives met in Oberursel in June of 1968, they had the opportunity to pursue their concerns with representatives of the Breslau Synod. They were happy to be informed of the Gemeinsame Erklaerung which was drawn up between Breslau and Saxony since 1966. This document was acceptable since it upheld the Einigungssaetze as a document to be followed at the present time. The document did concede that there were new problems not addressed in the Einigungssaetze that needed to remain open for discussion. The Gemeinsame Erklaerung was accepted by all, and officially adopted by the 1968 convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Free Church.<sup>16</sup>

While the WELS appreciated the doctrinal struggles that the free churches were having, they were also earnestly desiring a settlement on the triangular fellowship that existed between WELS, the free churches, and the LC-MS. With that in mind, the Commission on Doctrinal Matters of the WELS formulated "A Message of

Concern to the German Free Churches." In this writing the valid reasons for terminating fellowship with the LC-MS were stated, such as becoming a charter member of the LCUSA, even though they were not united in doctrine and practice, and also the declaring of fellowship with the ALC in their 1969 convention. Along with this information concerning the LC-MS, the Commission informed the free churches of the doctrinal differences that remained between the WELS and SELK, asking the free churches to consider their merger in the light of these discussions. The Commission's final concern regarded Oberursel calling a man from the territorial Lutheran churches, and the allowance of certain territorial church members at the Lord's Supper.<sup>17</sup> The fellowship relations and consequently doctrinal stands had become a tangled mess.

#### Bleckmar to Mequon

Discussions between WELS and SELK were a logical place to begin in order to untangle these relationships and begin to understand each other. In fact, discussions to recognize unity and declare fellowship had already begun in Bleckmar in 1969. Unfortunately, the representatives of SELK showed reservations in one absolute application of the doctrine of inerrancy, and raised objections to the WELS This We Believe Article II,

"Creation, Man, and Sin." Their main disagreement was on the literal interpretation of the six creation days. Further discussions were necessary as they could come to no absolute agreement.<sup>18</sup>

In June of 1972, discussions resumed with the WELS, Bekenntniskirche, and what was then the new SELK. The Evangelical Lutheran Free Church and the Breslau Synod voted overwhelmingly in October 1971 in Wittingen to merge with the five diocese of the old SELK. This merger, however, included only the West organizations of the two free churches. The WELS representatives were disheartened that their merger went ahead before the WELS had formally declared fellowship with the old SELK.<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless, the Commission on Doctrinal Matters was open for discussion, and in December of 1971 issued a Memorandum for Additional Doctrinal Discussions which set up the discussions of June, 1972. At these discussions nearly all the documents brought for discussion met with full agreement; however, not all points were resolved. Those involved with the discussions remained optimistic, since these 1972 talks served to pinpoint the problem areas. Among the promising developments were the withdrawal of the original confessional statement of the SELK, the Votum, and a restructuring of the statement that met full approval. This new statement was to be a guide for discussion and discipline, if necessary. The WELS

representatives were also assured of a position of protest against the LC-MS. The problem areas, which included specific fellowship principles, and the six days of creation interpretation, gave occasion for the Mequon meeting of July 1973.<sup>20</sup>

In the Mequon meeting the Commission on Inter-Church Relations (CICR), formerly the Commission on Doctrinal Matters, and the SELK Kirchenleitung's representatives agreed to center on these three points: (1) Doctrine of Scripture and inerrancy especially as applied in the creation account; (2) Church fellowship; and (3) Doctrine of the ministry with respect to ordination.<sup>21</sup> The results of the Mequon discussions were most encouraging. Unconditional agreement was established on all these points. With regard to Missouri, the representatives informed the CICR that the new SELK had adopted the former Evangelical Lutheran Free Churches' protesting stand and were awaiting the results of the LC-MS convention at New Orleans. Fellowship was informally declared and formally practiced in a joint worship in the Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary chapel.<sup>22</sup>

The joy that these men experienced in fellowship would prove to be short-lived. In subsequent correspondences, acceptance of the Mequon resolutions would show that there was not total agreement between the church bodies. Questionable wording showed itself in

the SELK Administrative council and council of Superintendents' adoption of the resolution. President Naumann accordingly sought clarification on two points of the adoption here stated:

- (1) Therewith they proceed from the presupposition that the determination of the duration of the six days is of a philological exegetical nature.
- (2) In keeping with the WELS Commission, they (i.e. the SELK Kirchenleitung and Council of Superintendents) declare furthermore, that the SELK rejects a historical-critical method of Scripture research according to which every intervention of God is impossible.<sup>23</sup>

The CICR was duly apprehensive at this wording, for it is at best ambiguous and at worst contradictory of the resolutions of the Mequon discussions. Their apprehension proved to be well founded, based on SELK's reply through Dr. Gerhard Rost. Regarding the first request for clarification, Dr. Rost replied, "This sentence is to guard against the misunderstanding that the Independent Evangelical Lutheran Church agrees to a dogmatization of the duration of the six days." In answer to the second request the Kirchenleitung through Dr. Rost offered this second formulation on their views of the historical-critical method of Scripture interpretation: "The Independent Evangelical Lutheran Free Church rejects a historical-critical method which calls the authority of Scripture into question."<sup>24</sup> During the next two years there were a couple correspondence exchanges



in which the CICR expressed the impossibility of recommending a declaration of fellowship with the SELK, since they were not upholding the doctrines with which the Mequon discussions had arrived at for doctrinal fellowship. The SELK Kirchenleitung, on the other hand, expressed disappointment in the CICR's refusal to acknowledge the union that had been established at the Mequon meetings.

By 1976 it was clear that there could be no doctrinal fellowship with SELK in the near future. Furthermore, the WELS suffered the loss of their brothers in the Bekenntniskirche. They had declared fellowship with the SELK in their convention of May, 1974, even though Bishop Rost answered negatively to the question, "Should the teaching of "days" in creation, being interpreted as extended periods of time, be subject to church discipline?"<sup>25</sup> The visions of doctrinal clarity and sound biblical testimony in Germany had begun to fall apart, becoming more and more unlikely, at least in West Germany, the so called "free world."

#### All is not Lost

On January 21, 1977, the CICR received a most encouraging report from the Swedish brothers who had visited the Lutheran Free Church of Saxony in the East. There remained brothers in East Germany who were struggling

gling to uphold sound confessional Lutheranism, but were being hampered by "collaboration and fellowship with congregations and pastors of the old Breslau Synod. . . coupled with fellowship with the SELK of West Germany."<sup>26</sup> Specifically, the developments that hampered their confessional stand was a resolution of the 1976 joint convention of the Breslau and the LFK. The resolution was to make plans for an organic merger of the two bodies with SELK. It was thought by some of the confessionally minded pastors that such a merger would provide an opportunity to come to grips with the issues of biblical inerrancy and church fellowship. Other confessionally minded men feared the results of such a merger. The CICR recognized the struggle to maintain a confessional position by the Diaspora district of the Evangelical Lutheran Free Church. On this basis, financial support to the Diaspora district would continue and President Naumann would continue to send letters of encouragement and support.

A fellowship problem still existed within the Evangelical Lutheran Free Church. President August Lampert acknowledged the necessity to eliminate the triangular fellowship that existed between the WELS, the Evangelical Lutheran Free Church, and the Independent Evangelical Lutheran Church of West Germany. Nevertheless, he did not want to separate from one

or the other, but rather to reconcile the differences between the WELS and the SELK. He sought therefore, to set-up a discussion on interpretation of the Scriptures and the historical-critical method of hermeneutics. This subject matter was proposed because, as he saw it, the previous WELS/SELK discussions in Mequon revealed disagreement on Scriptural fellowship not hermeneutic. He, therefore, proposed the meeting for March, 1978.

On the part of the CICR, the meeting seemed like an acceptable way to help settle the triangular fellowship problem. The CICR stood ready to accept the invitation. Dr. Gerhard Rost of the SELK, however, proposed a deferral of the meeting because they would be unable to prepare.

By the next spring the CICR received a letter from Dr. Rost in which he expressed disapproval of the agenda for the proposed Leipzig meeting. He felt that the discussions should be limited to SELK/WELS matters only and not to East German/SELK matters. SELK looked upon the CICR resolutions of 1977 regarding the settling of doctrinal differences before any merger to be an intrusion into the internal affairs of the SELK and the East German free churches.<sup>27</sup>

In view of Dr. Rost's letter, the CICR no longer felt the Leipzig discussions would be profitable. In their communication to the East German churches, they expressed their appreciation for LFK decision to defer

the merger pending resolution of the doctrinal controversy between themselves and Breslau. (This decision will be taken up shortly.) The CICR did not see the purpose in attending the Leipzig meetings despite this promising sign from the LFK. Their reason stated that they feared their participation would be looked upon as unwarranted intrusion into East German affairs since the SELK had ruled out East German involvement in the discussions, considering them to be silent observers.<sup>28</sup>

#### The Shining Testimonies

President Wilde, in a letter dated December 5, 1979, recognized that triangular fellowship ultimately becomes an offense and contrary to Scripture. He understood why the CICR had come to the decision that they could no longer justify a triangular fellowship with SELK, LC-MS, and the German free churches; nevertheless, he urged the CICR to exercise patience for two reasons. First of all, they felt that the LC-MS was coming back to a strong doctrinal position. Secondly, the pastoral conference of the LFK had voiced their concerns to Bishop Rost regarding his presidential address and apparent use of the historical-critical Bible interpretation. This they were presently working to resolve. He also urged WELS representation in the upcoming discussions.

The CICR would hold to the principles stated in

regard to the Leipzig discussions when invited to this international doctrinal discussion. They were involved in resolving triangular fellowship not only with the East Germans at this time, but also with the France-Belgium church and the South African church. They then would do nothing that might becloud their testimony.<sup>29</sup>

By April of 1983 Gotthilf Doehler of the LFK Theological Commission expressed agreement with the CICR regarding SELK restrictions of fellowship to "pulpit-altar" or other formal relations between congregations and church bodies. He also requested further clarification of the WELS stand on church fellowship. Although communications had difficulty getting through the mail, by April of 1984 the Saxon Theological Commission gave full support and agreement to the WELS stand on fellowship.<sup>30</sup>

Attestimony to the LFK stand on fellowship shines in their dealings with the Breslau Synod. On May 25-27, 1984,<sup>at</sup> the Hartenstein Convention the LFK suspended fellowship with the Breslau Synod. The doctrinal problem that led to this suspension began in the fall of 1976 when the two church bodies met at a joint convention. At this convention, some of the Breslau pastors expressed errors in connection with the inerrancy of Scripture. In view of these erroneous statements President Lampert of the LFK asked Pastor Gottfried Rost of the Breslau Synod to present a paper on the topic of inerrancy at

the next joint pastoral conference. In February of 1977, Pastor Rost presented "De Sola Scriptura Sacra" in which he held to the position of historical biblical criticism. The governing council of the Breslau Synod did not consider this paper to be contrary to Pastor Rost's ordination vows, and did not discipline him for his heretical views on Scripture. In April of 1978, the pastors of the LFK issued an official protest against the Breslau governing council's lack of action.

Through the discussions that followed over the next six years an impasse had been reached. The governing council of the Breslau Synod refused to acknowledge the historical-critical method of interpretation as false teaching, but even after the break in 1984 they held to the stand that what is keeping the two church bodies apart is a difference of opinion.<sup>31</sup>

The decision of the LFK to break from the Breslau Synod was not without dissenting voice, however. The pastors of the Diaspora district, although they agreed with the need to break, did not think the break to be a timely one.<sup>32</sup> The pastors of the Diaspora district found themselves in a more difficult position in regard to breaking with Breslau than did the rest of the LFK. Geographically they are closer to the Breslau congregations than the rest of the LFK, and were ministering to Breslau people at the time of the break. Because of these interrelations, ties have yet to be

broken with Breslau in the Diaspora district. The difficulty that the Diaspora district is having in separating themselves from the Breslau people has become a matter of concern for the rest of the LFK as well as the CICR. Some have looked upon the Diaspora's reluctance to make an abrupt break with the Breslau people in their presence as an indication that they do not agree with the Hartenstein resolution.<sup>33</sup> However, representatives from the CICR in a meeting which will be brought out in more detail later, spoke with the pastors of the Diaspora. They were assured by this meeting that The Diaspora pastors fully agreed with and supported the Hartenstein resolution, but required more time to complete the break.<sup>34</sup>

In regard to the WELS feelings toward the decision of the LFK to break with Breslau, their response could not have been more positive. Professor Schuetze, on behalf of the CICR, sent a correspondence to the LFK shortly after receiving the details of the break. In his correspondence he heartily agreed with the LFK and encouraged them to continue their stand. As far as the CICR was concerned the LFK break with Breslau had ended the WELS efforts to retain fellowship with Breslau. The WELS convention of 1985 passed a resolution supporting the LFK Hartenstein resolution to break with the Breslau Synod. Before breaking with Breslau themselves, the CICR thought it expedient to explain to Breslau their support of the Hartenstein

resolution and in this way give clear testimony to the truth of God's Word.<sup>35</sup>

On April 8 & 9, 1986, the CICR had a meeting in Leipzig with all the pastors of the LFK except one. To a man there was full agreement on the inerrancy of Scripture and fellowship. The Free pastors also revealed a genuine concern for the elimination of triangular fellowship. At that time, the CICR also met separately with the Diaspora pastors. The Diaspora pastors made it clear that they would be unable to continue their work without the WELS subsidy. Since the Diaspora district was receiving no support from SELK and since the WELS was still in fellowship with the Diaspora district, it was decided that there was no reason to recommend a discontinuation of the subsidy. The CICR also wanted to meet with the Breslau officials. The Breslau officials refused to meet with the CICR unless they retracted their resolution of 1985 which supported the LFK suspension of fellowship. It will be the recommendation of the CICR to the 1987 convention that fellowship with Breslau be officially suspended.<sup>36</sup>

Meanwhile, the CICR was becoming impatient with the LFK. It had been ten years since the CICR decided they could not recommend fellowship with the SELK for essentially the same reasons that the LFK/terminated fellowship with Breslau. The CICR had difficulty understanding why the LFK was so long in terminating fellowship with SELK. Humanly speaking, the CICR could



understand the LFK desire to secure the position of the Diaspora district and possibly win over some of the West Saxon congregations presently in the SELK, before suspending fellowship; however, Scripturally speaking the time had come to separate from the persistent errorists.<sup>37</sup>

In a meeting with SELK and Breslau, Wilde and Wachler came to the same conclusion. They were not hopeful in effecting a change in the pluralism in those church bodies, but they were concerned about time to educate their people.<sup>38</sup> Consequently, an agreement was reached at a meeting between WELS and LFK representatives. They decided to allow two years before the LFK body would vote at the next synod convention of the LFK regarding termination of fellowship with SELK. When this decision was brought to the attention of the next LFK pastoral conference, it was voted down. They considered it unbrotherly not to allow the SELK one last chance to come around to the truth, stating that two years would not allow a cumbersome church body<sup>time</sup> to make such a complete turn around. While they were in favor of breaking with SELK, they did not think it advisable to set a stringent time table.<sup>39</sup>

The CIOR at the WELS convention of 1987 plans to recommend a termination of fellowship with the South Africans for failure to take action toward termination of fellowship with the SELK. For this reason they had felt obligated to take the same stand with the LFK.

In keeping with a church body concerned with holding firmly to teaching and holding to all which the Lord Jesus has commanded us, the LFK in January of 1987 assured the CICR of steps being taken toward the termination of fellowship with the SELK.<sup>40</sup> It is well for us at this time to consider word for word the CICR official stand as of January 1987 in regard to the LFK:

As indicated in the LFK correspondence, the Selk officials had not responded to date to the June 1986 convention request of the Evangelical Lutheran Free Church of East Germany for doctrinal discussions with respect to the doctrines of Holy Scriptures and church fellowship. Lacking such response from SELK officials, the Free Church pastors have now directed an inquiry to SELK officials requesting answers to some specific questions on the issue at hand. MOTION asking the Chair (Prof. A. Schuetze) to direct a communication to President Wilde to the following effect: (1) that our commission is glad to learn of the steps being taken by the Evangelical Lutheran Free Church of East Germany over against the confessional position presently being maintained by SELK of West Germany; (2) that in view of the course being followed by the Free Church of East Germany our commission does not plan to recommend that our 1987 synod convention consider the termination of fellowship with the Evangelical Lutheran Free Church of East Germany; (3) that our commission stands ready to help the Free Church in its present struggle, if there is any additional help which we can provide; and (4) that we shall keep the Free Church informed with respect to the formation or establishment of a new synodical conference.<sup>41</sup>

The future of confessional Lutheranism in East Germany is bright, for the Evangelical Lutheran Free Church is holding the Lamp of Scripture in the fear of God. May it continue to be a Light to their path.

The WELS may consider themselves blessed to have the opportunity to give and receive encouragement in connection with their East German brothers. The future lies in the hands of the Almighty. Will the Diaspora district finally be able to loosen their ties with Breslau without losing too much of their contingency? Will their ties with Breslau eventually lead to a separation from the LFK? If so, will the LFK be too severely crippled by the loss of almost one third of their membership? Will a new synodical conference be formed? If so, will the Communist government of East Germany continue to allow support from the West? These, of course, are idle speculations which need not concern us. Our only concern is to continue to give testimony to the truth and continue to fan the gift of God into flame. May God's will be done.

#### ENDNOTES

1. Carl Lawrenz, "WELS Efforts at Confessional Fellowship with the German Lutheran Free Churches", Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly, vol. 78(Jan.1978), p.7.
2. Gottfried Herman, Lutherische Freikirche in Sachsen(Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1985), pp.61-63.
3. Lawrenz, p. 7.
4. E.C. Fredrich, WELS History, Part II (Unpublished as of April 1987; available on reserve shelf of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Library).
5. Carl Lawrenz, Interview with myself and Pastor Waldemar Loescher(October, 1986).
6. Lawrenz, interview.
7. Lawrenz, interview.
8. Lawrenz, interview.
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10. Lawrenz, interview.
11. Lawrenz, interview.
12. Lawrenz, interview.
13. Lawrenz, p.9.
14. Lawrenz, pp.9-10.
15. Lawrenz, p.11-12.
16. Lawrenz, p.16.
17. Lawrenz, pp.17-21.
18. Lawrenz, p.16.
19. Lawrenz, interview.
20. Lawrenz, p.33.
21. Lawrenz, p.36.
22. Lawrenz, interview.

ENDNOTES continued

23. Lawrenz, pp. 42-43.
24. Carl Lawrenz, "WELS Efforts at Confessional Fellowship with the German Lutheran Free Churches (conclusion)", Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly, vol. 75 (spring, 1978), pp. 131-132.
25. CICR meeting minutes of July 17, 1974.
26. CICR minutes, January 21, 1977.
27. CICR minutes, April 1978.
28. CICR minutes, June 10, 1978.
29. CICR minutes, January 19, 1980.
30. CICR minutes minutes, April 6, 1984.
31. Gottfried Hermann, "Der Hartensteiner Beschluss," p.1.
32. Armin Schuetze, interview, April 29, 1987.
33. Carl Lawrenz, interview, April 25, 1987.
34. Schuetze, interview.
35. Schuetze, interview.
36. CICR minutes, April 1986.
37. Lawrenz, interview.
38. CICR minutes, September 28, 1986.
39. Gottfried Wachler, correspondence to Pastor Waldemar Loescher, October 25, 1986.
40. CICR minutes, January 1987.
41. CICR minutes, January 1987.

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