

HISTORY AND THE INDIVIDUAL

*The Effects and Involvement of  
Professor Armin Schuetze in the  
WELS Termination of Fellowship with the LCMS*

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## INTRODUCTION

When we study major historical events, whether they are events involving nations or states or cities or religious bodies, we invariably study the main characters involved in the event. We also study the effects this event had on a nation or a state or a city or a religious body. Yet, in all historical events, especially events of great magnitude, there are countless individuals who play lesser, supporting roles. While many individuals may not play as important a role, their contributions to the historical event are, nevertheless, interesting and worthy of study. In addition, major historical events not only affect large groups, but each individual is also affected in many ways.

For the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS), the major historical event of the twentieth century would have to be its severing of fellowship ties with the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod (LCMS) in 1961. Since the WELS is a rather small church body, a high percentage of its members and pastors were involved and affected by this event. Professor Edward Fredrich, in his history book, The Wisconsin Synod Lutherans, writes this opening paragraph to the chapter entitled "Break with Missouri."

For those who were Wisconsin Synod members in the middle years of the twentieth century and lived through the long struggle to maintain the Synodical Conference on its historical confessional foundations, the loss of the battles and of the war will always remain the most significant and traumatic episode in their own personal version of their church body's history. The struggle was long, stretching over a quarter century. The losses in cherished fellowships were large, touching personally most pastors, teachers, and lay families of the synod. The results could have been tragic in the extreme, as dire prophecies of the time from without and within loudly and repeatedly proclaimed. That they

were not was because the Lord of the church once again did all things well.<sup>1</sup>

One such pastor who lived through the struggle with the LCMS and was involved in a supporting role is Pastor-Professor Armin Schuetze. He did not have a leading role in the controversy, yet he was involved in several of the key events, contributed some writings and was well-acquainted with the men who were primary characters. In addition, he was greatly affected by this event in both ministerial and family relationships. This paper intends to look at the controversies with the LCMS in terms of Armin Schuetze. It will speak to his involvement in the matter and the effects he endured because of the break. Unless otherwise cited, information comes from an interview with Professor Armin Schuetze.

#### EARLY PHASES OF THE CONTROVERSY

The dates of the controversy with Missouri, 1938-1963, almost perfectly coincide with Pastor Schuetze's first quarter century in the ministry. The problems began when the Missouri Synod started to make overtures to the newly formed American Lutheran Church (ALC), an amalgamated body consisting of the Ohio, Iowa and Buffalo Synods. Historically, these synods and the synods of the Synodical Conference had never come to full doctrinal agreement. Now, seemingly all of a sudden, the LCMS and the old ALC were professing that they might be in doctrinal agreement on the basis of two documents: *The Brief Statement* of the LCMS and the *Declaration* of the ALC. The two documents were not in total agreement. *The Brief Statement* was a very sound

document wholeheartedly endorsed by the WELS. On the other hand, "the terms of the *Declaration* were considered as not stating the truth clearly, nor excluding error, in the controverted doctrines."<sup>2</sup> The WELS responded promptly at its 1939 convention in Watertown, WI. A committee which had been established to study the matter reported back to the convention that the ALC statement was not acceptable. In addition, "not two statements should be issued as a basis for agreement; a single joint statement covering the contested doctrines thetically and antithetically and accepted by both parties to the controversy, is imperative."<sup>3</sup> This was the first of many statements of warning to be issued over the next 22 years, culminating in the final warning of termination.

These early developments occurred while Pastor Schuetze was Seminararian Schuetze. While he may have only been a Middler and Senior at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary during the early phase of the controversy, he was still informed of the proceedings. Professors related to the students what was happening, since the faculty was a part of the committee which studied the matter.

Seminararian Schuetze became Tutor Schuetze in 1940. Upon graduation, he was assigned to Michigan Lutheran Seminary for a year. In 1941, he was called to a group of congregations in South Dakota: Timber lake, Isabel, Trail City, and Athboy. It is interesting to note that in three of these places churches from the ALC joined with WELS congregations. In September, 1941, Pastor Schuetze married Esther Waidelich at Luther Memorial

Chapel, a Missouri church in Shorewood, Wisconsin. The Waidelich family had a Missouri Synod background.

#### A WELL-INFORMED PARISH PASTOR

In the Fall of 1943, Pastor Schuetze accepted a Call and moved his family (two daughters, Virginia and Beth, were born in South Dakota) to Thiensville, Wisconsin, where he served as pastor of Calvary Lutheran Church until January, 1948. Since Calvary was only a few blocks from the Seminary, it is only natural that several Seminary professors were members at Calvary. Pastor Schuetze had as his members Professors Reim, Lawrenz, and Schaller. He developed good relationships with all of them. Professor Lawrenz would eventually be his colleague on the Seminary faculty for twenty-five years. He cultivated an especially close relationship with Professor Reim. Professor Reim took young Pastor Schuetze under his wing and served as sort of a mentor.

During those years at Calvary, the controversies with the LCMS continued to heat up. First, World War 2 was raging and the issue of military chaplaincy moved to the foreground. The LCMS totally bought into the government's chaplaincy program which encouraged chaplains to serve all Protestants. Wisconsin rejected this as unionistic and a denial of the divine Call. Secondly, the matter of Scouts became a hot topic. "At its Saginaw convention in 1944 the Missouri Synod abandoned its long-standing position on the Boy Scouts. Its individual congregations could now decide for themselves whether or not to

have troops in their midst."<sup>4</sup> Because the WELS took such a firm stand against Scouting due to Scouting's work-righteous ethics, the "anti-Scout" label was firmly pinned on the WELS. Also at this 1944 convention, the LCMS began attempts to justify its <sup>unscriptural</sup> dubious practice of joint prayer at meetings with church bodies with whom it was not yet in fellowship. This issue of prayer fellowship proved to be the decisive doctrine on the basis of which the WELS finally terminated fellowship ties with Missouri in 1961.

As the tensions rose in the Synodical Conference, Pastor Schuetze received a great deal of firsthand information about the issues from Professor Reim. To study and debate the controversial issues, the WELS had formed the Standing Committee on Matters of Church Union which consisted of the Conference of Presidents and the Seminary faculty. The president of the synod, President Brenner at this time, served as the chairman and Professor Reim was appointed secretary. As secretary, Professor Reim was in direct correspondence with LCMS representatives and was also involved in face-to-face meetings. The Synodical Conference also appointed the Committee on Intersynodical Relations to deal with the divisions. Professor Reim was also a member of that committee. It would be safe to say that in the intersynodical debate, Pastor Schuetze was one of the better informed parish pastors in the WELS because of his close friendship with Professor Reim.

#### A WELL-INFORMED PROFESSOR

In January, 1948, Pastor Schuetze became Professor Schuetze. He again packed up his family (Barbara, my mother, and Fred were born while in Thiensville) and moved back to South Dakota, this time to Mobridge where he was installed as instructor at Northwestern Lutheran Academy (NLA). During the seven-plus years he spent at NLA, Professor Schuetze honed the teaching skills which would serve him well during his long tenure at the Seminary. Because of the small faculty, he taught a wide variety of courses, including Religion, German, History, English, and even Typing.

Even though Professor Schuetze was no longer in the Milwaukee area, he still was kept abreast of developments in the Synodical Conference. The district president of the Dakota-Montana District was Pastor Paul Albrecht, an uncle of Professor Schuetze. Because of their proximity to one another, Professor Schuetze enjoyed a close relationship with his uncle. Besides the occasional correspondence with Professor Reim, he also received firsthand reports from Pastor Albrecht who was also a member of the Church Union Committee.

During his years at the Academy, the tensions continued to soar in the Synodical Conference. The problems were portrayed vividly at the Synodical Conference conventions of the early 1950's. Committee reports and delegate voting were divided along synod lines. Christian brotherly love was not always evident, especially by the Missouri delegates over against the warnings and objections of the WELS representatives.

Professor Schuetze, together with his good friend Pastor George Boldt, attended the 1952 Synodical Conference convention in the Twin Cities. This convention marked the lowest point as far as civil relations were concerned. Once again, the objections of the WELS delegates were rejected outright by the LCMS delegates. The main focus was on the "Common Confession" which had been issued by LCMS and ALC representatives as a basis for union. The WELS and ELS "contended that a 'common' confession had been achieved only by ignoring real points of controversy and soft-pedaling important doctrinal positions of the Synodical Conference."<sup>5</sup> As a result of the actions of this convention, the WELS declared itself to be *in statu confessionis* (in a state of confession). This vigorous protest would continue until the break came in 1961.

As a result of this protest, the various districts of the WELS were asked to hold special conventions to study the "Common Confession." Members of the Seminary faculty were sent out to the districts to lead the discussions of the controversial articles. Professor Reim was sent to the special session of the Dakota-Montana District convention held in Mobridge. He asked Professor Schuetze to present the discussion on election.

#### INVOLVEMENT IN THE "PAMPHLET WAR"

During the early 1950's, besides the developments at the various conventions, a "pamphlet war" ensued between the Missouri and Wisconsin Synods. Professor Reim led the charge with his series of Northwestern Lutheran articles entitled "Where Do We



stand?" "Continuing in His Word", a series of eleven tracts, was also published dealing with the "Common Confession" and other pertinent issues. Professor Schuetze wrote Tract Number 4, "Not By My Own Reason Or Strength." The doctrine of conversion was brought up because it stemmed from the election controversy in the Synodical Conference in the 1880's. The "Common Confession" claimed to solve the difference when, in reality, it had not.

If this "Common Confession" is to be a settlement of past differences, it must take this past history into consideration; it must face the fact that the Ohio, Iowa, and Buffalo Synods, the present American Lutheran Church, have not officially disavowed this distinction in the kind of resistance a man offers over against the Gospel. In the final analysis, retaining this distinction makes a man's conduct play the decisive part in his conversion. This is a denial of the central doctrine of Holy Scriptures, the doctrine of salvation by grace alone.<sup>6</sup>

Professor Schuetze aptly pointed out that "false teaching cannot be isolated in one doctrine; it sets up a chain reaction."<sup>7</sup> This point can be equally applied to the WELS position against Missouri in the fellowship issue. One may start out by praying with heterodox church bodies, but it soon leads to worshipping together and the next thing you know, either doctrine is being watered down so there seemingly are no differences, or the teaching of false doctrine is tolerated. A study of LCMS history of the 1960's and early 1970's bear this out clearly. The teaching of false doctrine was being tolerated in the seminaries. Doctrine was being watered down to make it more palatable to other Lutheran church bodies.

The presentation on election and the writing of the pamphlet on conversion demonstrate that Professor Schuetze, during his

years at Mobridge, began to take a more active role in the intersynodical situation. His most active role while at Mobridge was at the 1955 synod convention in Saginaw.

THE 1955 CONVENTION: ON FLOOR COMMITTEE #2

During the 1950's and early 1960's, many people from around the country would come as visitors to the synod conventions. They were anxious to hear the discussions about the intersynodical problems and see what the conventions would decide. The most important floor committee at these conventions was Floor Committee #2, Report of the Church Union Committee. This was the floor committee that directly dealt with the doctrinal problems and its report was what everyone was waiting to hear.

Professor Fredrich writes about this 1955 convention, "One would have to go back as far as 1868 for a synodical convention to equal that of 1955 in significance for the inter-church scene."<sup>8</sup> Not only was Professor Schuetze chosen as a delegate to the 1955 convention, but he was also appointed to Floor Committee #2. The enormity and seriousness of the task presented before Floor Committee #2 is expressed in the prayer with which it opened its report.

Precious Savior, Lord of the Church, grant us Thy Holy Spirit, the Spirit of knowledge and wisdom and peace. Keep our hearts firmly fixed on Thy Holy Word, that it may be a living fire in our hearts. Fill us with zeal so that our doctrine and practice will ever glorify Thee, the only true God and head of the Church. Amen.<sup>9</sup>

The primary task of Floor Committee #2 was to study the Preliminary and Supplementary Reports of the Standing Committee

on Matters of Church Union. The Supplementary Report was added because several important doctrinal committees were meeting shortly before the convention. The Floor Committee spent the entire convention in committee. Its members did not attend any part of the convention proceedings, except those which pertained to their committee. Besides preparing their report, the committee prepared a historical chronology of the entire situation so that all the members of the committee and synod would be well-informed.<sup>10</sup> Professor Schuetze, because of his special interest during the course of the controversy, took the lead in preparing these notes.

From the two reports of the Standing Committee, it quickly becomes apparent that a break was imminent and necessary if Wisconsin was not to be guilty of the same unionism<sup>of</sup> which it was accusing Missouri. The Preliminary Report in particular is very pointed. After summarizing the current situation, the Report states:

F. We have, however, arrived at the firm conviction that, because of the divisions and offenses that have been caused, and which have until now not been removed, further postponement of a decision would be a violation of the apostolic injunction of Romans 16:17...

On the basis of these considerations we recommend the following resolution, which we herewith submit for study by our brethren and for subsequent consideration and action by the synodical convention.

RESOLVED: That with deepest sorrow, taking notice of the fact that the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod is causing divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which we have learned, we, in obedience to God's injunction to avoid such, declare the fellowship which we have had with said synod to be terminated.<sup>11</sup>

The Supplementary Report merely adds a summary of the various Synodical Conference committees appointed to discuss the

problems. The only positive to come out of these committees was that "a resolution, indeed, was adopted pertaining to antithetical statements."<sup>12</sup> Despite this "step, at least, in the right direction, or as someone else called it, a ray of hope"<sup>13</sup>, the situation looked even worse. Not only were the errors persistently adhered to and defended, Missouri officials were accusing the WELS of making false accusations.

We deplore the fact that our testimony has not been heeded by the Mo. Synod. On the contrary, we find that our testimony is being openly repudiated by Mo. Synod representatives, and we are now publicly being accused of misapplying Scriptures and of bringing false charges against the Mo. Synod. We also deplore the vehement tone and the assertion of Dr. John W. Behnken, President of the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod, in his last two articles in the Lutheran Witness (July 19 and August 2) that there is no basis for any of the charges of the Wisconsin Synod: "We do not admit the charges. On the contrary, we emphatically deny them." Thus any gains that may have been achieved by the committees mentioned above have practically been nullified by this complete and unconditional denial.<sup>14</sup>

The Supplementary Report echoed the Preliminary Report by stating that "our Synod, bound by the Word of God, should now declare itself on the matter."<sup>15</sup>

It was up to Floor Committee #2 to do the declaring. It should be noted that not everyone on the committee had the same opinions on the intersynodical debates going into the convention. For example Pastor Paul Nolting, now a leading pastor in the Confessional Lutheran Church (CLC), came to the committee opposed to doing anything. Through study and discussions within the committee, he came to see that a break was needed. Professor Schuetze had already come to the conclusion that a break was needed and that the break should occur without delay. He had

more information, however, than most committee members because of his relationships with Professor Reim and Pastor Albrecht. Not everyone had the same information and experiences. Some people might have had neighboring LCMS churches that were just as doctrinally sound as any WELS church. Some might have been ignorant as to the seriousness of the charges which Wisconsin was bringing against Missouri. Nevertheless, all the members of the committee came to the conclusion that a break was needed. The only disagreement was when the break should occur.

The committee was determined to make a strong statement. This is evident in the Preamble of its report. The Preamble basically summarized the report of the Standing Committee and concurred with its recommendation. One section bears quoting to give the flavor of the Preamble.

A church body which creates divisions and offenses by its official resolutions, policies, and practices not in accord with Scripture also becomes subject to the indictment of Romans 16:17-18. The Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod has by its official resolution, policies, and practices created divisions and offenses both in her own body and in the entire Synodical Conference. Such divisions and offenses are of long standing.<sup>16</sup>

This Preamble was unanimously accepted by the convention, demonstrating that delegates had now come to the realization that a break was going to have to occur.

There were certain circumstances, however, which raised some doubts as to whether the break should occur immediately. The resolution itself points out these circumstances.

We recommend this course of action for the following reasons:

1. This resolution has far-reaching spiritual consequences.
2. This continues to heed the Scriptural exhortation to patience and forbearance in love by giving the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod opportunity to express itself in its 1956 convention.<sup>17</sup>

The course of action was that the resolution to terminate fellowship be acted upon "in a recessed session in 1956."<sup>18</sup> the biggest problem was that of timing. The Missouri Synod had not been in convention since 1953, before the 1953 Wisconsin convention. Many felt that the LCMS should be given an opportunity to speak in convention to the WELS 1953 resolution regarding its vigorous protest. Therefore, the decision to delay was made by a vote of 94 to 47.

There was much debate and some dissension on the decision to delay, even within the committee. Professor Schuetze was one of those who believed that a delay would not accomplish anything because Missouri was too far down the path of unionism. That is why he was among the seven men on the committee who registered a dissenting vote with the following explanation. "We, the undersigned members of the Floor Committee, although we are in full agreement with the Preamble and the resolution to terminate fellowship, are of the conviction that the reasons stated for delay do not warrant postponement of action upon the resolution."<sup>19</sup> Again, it must be stated that Professor Schuetze had information and experiences which other delegates and members of the committee did not have. In addition, in objecting, these men were saying that they were ready to break. They were not saying that the Synod was sinning by not applying Romans 16:17 at that point. The CLC contends otherwise. Some fifty delegates

also formally protested the postponement. While Professor Schuetze was not among those delegates, Professor Reim, Pastor Paul Albrecht, and Pastor Christian Albrecht, another uncle of Professor Schuetze, did protest.<sup>20</sup> In fact, Professor Reim tendered his resignation from the Standing Committee and as president of the Seminary because he felt that the convention was repudiating his authority. His resignation was not accepted by a unanimous vote of the convention.<sup>21</sup>

As can be seen by the various dissensions and protests, there was considerable tension even among the members of the WELS. Although Professor Schuetze himself was ready to vote for the termination of fellowship with the LCMS at this time, he was afraid that a close vote either way would result in a split of the Wisconsin Synod. A partial split did occur with the formation of the CLC in 1960. Yet, as Professor Schuetze said, "The Lord guided things in such a way that everything worked out for the best."<sup>22</sup>

One other resolution of Floor Committee #2 should be mentioned. The committee also resolved that "a Confession of Faith be drawn up by a sub-committee appointed by the Conference of Presidents and working under the direction of our Standing Committee in Matters of Church Union."<sup>23</sup> This "Confession of Faith" was not drawn up until the early 1960's. By then Professor Schuetze was at the Seminary. He, together with a layman and a Christian day school teacher, was appointed to the sub-committee which drafted "This We Believe" and served as its primary writer.

### THE SUMMER OF 1956

The summer of 1956 was a very busy one for Professor Schuetze. First, he again became Pastor Schuetze by accepting a Call to start a church on the southwest side of Milwaukee. Once again he moved his family (by now the remainder of the children had been born: Kris, Kathy, and John). Unlike most mission endeavors today, this one started by building a church near 76th and Oklahoma. Pastor Schuetze was called to find members to put in the church. As a testimony to the power of the Gospel, Divine Peace Lutheran Church had over one hundred confirmed members by the time Pastor Schuetze left in the summer of 1958.

The summer of 1956 was also busy because of the recessed convention which met in Watertown, August 21-23. After all the debate and discussion and excitement of the 1955 convention, the recessed convention was rather anticlimactic. The primary reason for this was that the LCMS made some very positive resolutions at its 1956 convention. In three areas, the LCMS seemed to change its position for the better. It resolved to "respectfully decline the invitation to become a member of the Lutheran World Federation."<sup>24</sup> It stated that "hereafter the 'Common Confession'... be not regarded or employed as a functioning basic document toward the establishment of altar and pulpit fellowships with other church bodies."<sup>25</sup> The most hopeful sign was "the frankness with which it is acknowledged that strained relations exist between our Synods because there are very obvious differences of interpretation and practice, but even more by the



conciliatory tone which pervades the entire report."<sup>26</sup> The LCMS also called for joint doctrinal committees of the Synodical Conference to be set up to prepare joint doctrinal statements demonstrating union. The convention also urged an international conclave of theologians to begin meeting in order to discuss the controversial doctrines in further effort to bring about agreement.

Because of these apparent steps forward, the Standing Committee recommended that "we hold the judgment of our Saginaw resolutions in abeyance."<sup>27</sup> The Standing Committee did not do this, however, without expressing concern that Missouri's position on Scouting, military chaplaincy, and prayer fellowship had not changed. Floor Committee #2, of which Pastor Schuetze was again a member, basically adopted the recommendation of the Standing Committee. "RESOLVED, That we concur in the suggestion of our Standing Committee on Church Union to 'hold the judgment of our Saginaw resolution in abeyance' until our next convention."<sup>28</sup> The Floor Committee did, however, in light of the concerns raised by the Standing Committee, also present this resolution. "RESOLVED, That our fellowship with The Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod be one of vigorously protesting fellowship to be practiced, where necessary, in light of II Thessalonians 3:14 and 15."<sup>29</sup> Pastor Schuetze unhesitatingly supported these resolutions. The convention also adopted these resolutions by an overwhelming vote of 108 to 19. Professor Reim did issue a warning that "a 'state of confession,' even though

pointed up by an occasional practical application of the passage from II Thessalonians, dare not become a *modus vivendi*."<sup>30</sup>

In view of the LCMS resolutions of 1956, there seemed to be a light at the end of the tunnel in the intersynodical debate. During the next year, the light was quickly extinguished by official Missouri practices which were in contradiction to its resolutions. On the one hand, the meetings of the Joint Union Committees of the Synodical Conference were progressing quite nicely. On the other hand, the answers given by the Missouri Praesidium to direct questions from the Standing Committee were unclear and did not seem to acknowledge that there were divisive issues. The Standing Committee did not present a recommendation to Floor Committee #2 at the 1957 convention, but it did present the facts and the facts did not look promising for unity. In addition, there were numerous memorials presented, including one signed by Pastor Paul Albrecht and Pastor Waldemar Schuetze, Pastor Armin Schuetze's brother.

"MOTIVATION": ESSAYIST AT THE 1957 SYNOD CONVENTION

Pastor Schuetze attended the 1957 synod convention in New Ulm as an essayist. He presented the essay "Motivation."<sup>31</sup> It was a timely essay in that it dealt with "the importance of proper motivation in our lives as Christians, likewise also in our work as a Church, as a Synod."<sup>32</sup> The first part talked about what alone motivates a Christian's behavior, namely, "the great love God has shown to him, which results in love to God, including love for His Word."<sup>33</sup> He then turned to application on

a personal, congregational, and synodical level. On all three levels, he brought out points that ought to be heeded in the 1990's. Pertaining to the fellowship issue, he wrote: "In our relations with churches the one question that love to our Savior will lead us to ask is this: What does the Lord say? And when we recognize that a given word of our God applies to a certain situation, then our course of action is clear, we must obey."<sup>34</sup> Not "fear of consequences," not because following fellowship principles is unpopular in the world, but only love for God and his Word is to be the motivating force in our relations with other church bodies. He concluded his paper by discussing how proper motivation can be attained. Again, these words are worthwhile reading today. Only the means of grace can produce proper motivation. "Yes, we must encourage without ceasing, regular, frequent, consecrated use of the means of grace. Thus and thus alone will we attain proper Christian motivation."<sup>35</sup>

#### FRIENDSHIPS AFFECTED

Pastor Schuetze was not a voting delegate at this convention, nor was he on any floor committee. The resulting vote on the fellowship issue should be mentioned because it had a profound effect on Pastor Schuetze's relationships with certain individuals. Floor Committee #2 presented the resolution to terminate fellowship. The resolution was voted down 61 to 77. Instead, a resolution was adopted "that we continue our vigorously protesting fellowship over against The Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod."<sup>36</sup> The majority of the convention felt that

the Joint Union Committees should be given a longer time to work. In addition, the conclave of theologians had not yet had the opportunity to meet.

In the Proceedings, four men are listed as making statements concerning their personal fellowship stances with the Wisconsin Synod: Pastor M. J. Witt, District President of the Pacific Northwest District; Pastor Winfred Schaller, former WELS Secretary; Pastor Paul Albrecht; Professor Edmund Reim.

Pastor Albrecht's statement was a little confusing. "While I do not refuse the hand of fellowship to all members of Synod, I cannot fellowship with those who have advocated the position which the synod made its own last night."<sup>37</sup> This confusion is evident in the conflicts that ensued in the Dakota-Montana district and Pastor Albrecht's church in Bowdle, South Dakota, for the next four years. Matters became so ugly and bitter that Pastor Albrecht even took the church to court.<sup>38</sup> Pastor Albrecht eventually founded an opposition church in Bowdle. When the CLC was formed in 1960, at Watertown, South Dakota, Pastor Paul Albrecht was elected its first president. Because of the tense nature of the conflict, Pastor Schuetze never enjoyed the same relationship with his uncle.

Professor Reim was much clearer in his statement. "I have tried to make this protest clear and strong to this convention. Since it has been disregarded nevertheless, I find myself compelled to discontinue my fellowship with the Synod."<sup>39</sup> The difficulty in Professor Reim's case was his position as president of the Seminary. A special meeting of the Seminary Board of

Control was called and they declared a vacancy. The departure of Professor Reim from the Seminary made headline news in the Milwaukee papers. After his dismissal, Professor Reim paid a visit to Pastor Schuetze. Despite this visit, their relationship was never quite the same. There was limited correspondence, but the close contact had been lost. Something should be stated about Professor Reim's attitude in the whole situation. He left the WELS as a matter of his own conscience. He never made it a matter of conscience for anyone else, something which many of the men who left to form the CLC were doing. And he never intimated to Pastor Schuetze that he should leave the WELS.

#### THE SEMINARY PROFESSOR

Pastor Schuetze, as the essayist, had an important role at the 1957 convention. The results of the convention had a profound effect on his life and ministry. In the spring of 1958, the Seminary Board of Control called Pastor Schuetze to fill the vacancy left by Professor Reim (Professor Lawrenz was called to become president of the Seminary). Despite some initial misgivings about replacing his long-time friend, Pastor Schuetze again became Professor Schuetze and moved his family into the familiar house on top of the hill at the Seminary campus, where he would live for the next 33 years.

While Professor Schuetze may have lost one close friend in Professor Reim, he gained another in Professor Lawrenz. Professor Lawrenz took over Professor Reim's position as the chief spokesman in the debate. His friendship with Professor

Lawrenz, coupled with the fact that he was, for the time being, a member of the Standing Committee enabled him to be kept well-informed and involved.

During the ensuing years, 1957-1959, matters progressed. The Joint Union Committees met several times and drew up an excellent statement on Scripture. Yet, when discussion turned to church fellowship,

Missouri Synod representatives were not ready to acknowledge the Scriptural correctness of the basic point of our Wisconsin Synod presentation. The basic point is this that all joint expressions and demonstrations of a common Christian faith -- call them Church Fellowship or by any other name -- are essentially one, that they involve a unit concept, and that they are therefore all governed by one set of principles.<sup>40</sup>

The 1959 LCMS convention also sent mixed signals. On the one hand, they were eager to establish doctrinal unity and even to exercise doctrinal discipline in their midst. On the other hand, the convention passed resolutions confusing matters in the Scouting issue. In addition, Missouri officials were again giving tentative and vague answers to pointed questions. To put it simply, inconsistency reigned in Missouri.

#### THE 1959 CONVENTION: THE ABSENT PROFESSOR

Since there appeared to be little progress in the debate, numerous protests and memorials were filed for the 1959 WELS convention. Once again, Pastor Waldemar Schuetze, together with his associate, Pastor Gerhard Pieper, and a portion of their church council at St. Peter's in Fond du Lac, signed a memorial requesting termination of fellowship. The stage appeared to be

set for a continuation of the problems which occurred at the end of the 1957 convention. The Standing Committee's report, which Professor Schuetze put together since he was secretary, again presented the fact of the situation but made no recommendation. Professor Schuetze was unable to attend the convention himself because he came down with an infection which put him in the hospital for four weeks.

Floor Committee #2 did not present a resolution to terminate fellowship. Instead, they issued a series of resolutions urging the Joint Union Committees to hasten their discussions, asking the LCMS to practice doctrinal discipline if needed, and recommending that the Conference of Theologians continue meeting (one meeting had taken place shortly before the convention).<sup>41</sup> The resolutions were adopted by the convention. The delegates, for the most part, decided that the Joint Union Committees and the Conference of Theologians should be given more time to work.

#### INVOLVEMENT INCREASES

During this period, it was also decided to reorganize the Standing Committee since it was getting too large. A smaller Commission on Doctrinal Matters was formed and the entire Conference of Presidents and Seminary faculty, together with a few others, formed the Advisory Committee on Doctrinal Matters. Professor Schuetze was on the Advisory Committee, while his friend Professor Lawrenz chaired the Commission on Doctrinal Matters. Professor Schuetze's position on the Seminary faculty

and his gift for writing meant that he would continue to be involved in the ongoing controversy.

For starters, in 1958, Professor Schuetze was asked to write a regular column for the Northwestern Lutheran, "A Lantern to Our Footsteps: God's Reply to Our Questions." In this column, he often dealt with practical problems that arose as a result of the ongoing controversy. He was even more instrumental in clarifying doctrine and practice after the break occurred. A series of his articles concerning the practical aspects of church fellowship was published in 1962, entitled "Timely Topics."

In addition to his Northwestern Lutheran work, Professor Schuetze also attended the Conference of Theologians, held at the Seminary, July 20-30, 1960. He did not play an active role, but was merely an observer. At this conference, the overseas delegates made a concerted effort to save the Synodical Conference. They attempted to play the part of a mediator, even issuing a document on fellowship. Unfortunately, the document did not agree with the WELS position on prayer fellowship. It only called for fellowship in the means of grace.

Professor Schuetze also attended the Synodical Conference Convention of 1960 in Milwaukee. He even attended the recessed convention in May, 1961, also in Milwaukee. The problem in both conventions stemmed from the Joint Union Committees. The committees met three times after the 1959 WELS convention, but by the third one, in May, 1960, the WELS delegates declared an impasse in the area of church fellowship. The fellowship issue was discussed at great length (as it had been at the Conference



of Theologians), but the resolutions made it apparent that the LCMS had not departed from its false teaching and practice pertaining to the doctrine of fellowship.<sup>42</sup>

#### "FELLOWSHIP THEN AND NOW"

During all of this, the Advisory Committee kept busy. At its meeting in January, 1961, the committee "resolved to submit for publication in our Northwestern Lutheran in successive installments a document entitled "Fellowship Then and Now", which had been prepared by a subcommittee of professors Gerald Hoenecke, Joh. P. Meyer, and Armin W. Schuetze."<sup>43</sup> Professor Schuetze did much of the writing, although the research and planning was the work of the entire committee.

"Fellowship Then and Now" was written to show that the WELS was holding to the historic Synodical Conference position.

We are concerning ourselves with the principles of fellowship that have been followed in the Synodical Conference and its constituent synods throughout the years. Such a study, we believe, will show that the position of our Synod and of our Commission on Doctrinal Matters is simply a reaffirmation of this position.<sup>44</sup>

The pamphlet basically traced the history of the doctrine and practice of church fellowship in the Synodical Conference. It showed clearly and unmistakably, even using examples from Walther's life, that the WELS was holding to the historic Scriptural position.

In this presentation, by letting the fathers themselves speak, we have shown what the traditional position of the Synodical Conference in the matter of church fellowship was. We have seen how our fathers applied these principles also particularly in the area of joint

prayer, which is one of the vexing problems disturbing the Synodical Conference today. We believe that we must uphold the principles our fathers confessed and applied. We believe this, not simply because it is a position that has come down to us through the years and is sanctified in a manner by tradition. We want no tradition just for the sake of tradition. But we are convinced that these principles are those taught in the Scriptures. We want to cling to the clear Scripture truth to which our Synod was led out of an early unionistic beginning especially through the spiritual leadership of Dr. Adolph Hoenecke, for many years professor and director of our Seminary, a man who more than any other gave definition to our doctrinal position.

The importance of this document is seen by the fact that it was mentioned in the "Whereas" portion of the resolution which was eventually passed suspending fellowship with the LCMS.<sup>45</sup> This document was a representation of the official WELS position in the doctrine of church fellowship. Since it was originally published in the Northwestern Lutheran, it also served to educate the people of the WELS as to the historical correctness of the WELS position.

#### BROTHER WALDEMAR GOES CLC

While the meetings and convention continued leading up to the 1961 WELS convention, another sad local incident occurred which effected Professor Schuetze. Mention has already been made of his brother, Pastor Waldemar Schuetze, formerly a pastor in South Dakota, but at this time the assistant pastor at St. Peter's in Fond du Lac. Both Pastor Gerhard Pieper and Pastor W. Schuetze were of the opinion that the WELS was erring by continuing its relations with the LCMS.

Pastor Schuetze was actually more vocal in expressing his beliefs, but Pastor Pieper held the same

sentiments. Eventually they found themselves committed to a position from which they could not turn back and had no other choice than to ask St. Peter Lutheran Church to terminate fellowship relations with the Wisconsin Synod.<sup>46</sup>

in early February, 1960, the pastors called a voter's meeting to decide whether to stay in the WELS. The congregation voted to remain in the WELS by a slim margin. An article appeared in the Milwaukee Sentinel and the local Fond du Lac newspaper covering the story. Again things got a little ugly. The pastors still claimed to be the divinely called pastors, while the church council had already made arrangements for a vacancy pastor. While the matter never had to be brought to court (the pastors were much more cooperative in vacating the parsonages), Pastors Schuetze and Pieper and a small portion of the congregation formed a new church which eventually joined the CLC. Pastor Schuetze's step-son, Pastor Daniel Fleischer, is the current CLC president.

Once again, the fellowship debate cost Professor Armin Schuetze a close relationship, this time with his brother. Things were never the same after this incident. They still talked, especially at family gatherings, but there was always a certain uneasiness. They were never able to discuss theological topics.

#### THE 1961 CONVENTION: THE BREAK FINALLY HAPPENS

The 1961 WELS convention brought about the final decision to break with Missouri. Professor Schuetze attended the convention at Wisconsin Lutheran High School as an advisory delegate because

of his position on the Advisory Committee on Doctrinal Matters. As such, he really did not have an active role in the decision-making process at the 1961 convention. Yet, the convention is worth looking at simply because its decision affected every pastor, professor and member of the WELS.

The Commission on Doctrinal Matters presented a lengthy report detailing the meetings of the Joint Doctrinal Committees, the Theologians' Conference, the Synodical Conference Conventions, and several other pertinent documents.<sup>47</sup> Included in the report was mention of "Fellowship Then and Now." The report basically reviewed what had taken place from the time the impasse had been declared (May, 1960) through the Recessed Convention of the Synodical Conference (May, 1961). The report shows clearly what caused the impasse and the great lengths to which the Commission on Doctrinal Matters went in an effort to discuss what caused the impasse. It also demonstrated emphatically that the WELS had never departed from the historical Scriptural stand of the Synodical Conference. That is why "Fellowship Then and Now" was mentioned. The report made it very clear that joint prayer with groups with which one is not in fellowship is unscriptural. The report cited numerous examples where groups within the Missouri Synod were practicing just such joint prayer. The report especially took note of the fact that official LCMS statements supported such practices.

Once again, it was up to Committee #2 to deal with the matters discussed in the report. Almost unanimously the committee resolved to terminate fellowship.

*Resolved*, a) That we now suspend fellowship with The Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod on the basis of Romans 16:17-18 with the hope and prayer to God that The Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod will see in this resolution an evangelical summons to "come to herself" (Luke 15:17) and to return to the side of the sister from whom she has estranged herself...<sup>48</sup>

The resolution was adopted by a sizable majority of 124 to 49.<sup>49</sup>  
The break was finally a reality.

There was actually a profound feeling of relief that the break had finally occurred. It was especially comforting to see that the resolution passed by such a large majority. It was evident that most WELS members now saw the need for suspension of fellowship. The passing of the resolution also served to bring a certain amount of peace and harmony back into the synod. Up until the 1961 convention, there was considerable distrust in the WELS. Individuals were always wondering where others stood on the fellowship issue. The break with Missouri showed where the WELS as a whole stood. Those who remained in the WELS demonstrated that they were behind the resolution. The few that ended up in Missouri showed where their sympathies laid.

Throughout the controversy, the timing of the eventual termination of fellowship was certainly in the Lord's hands. If the break had occurred in 1955, the WELS might have split down the middle. If fruitless discussions had been allowed to continue, the WELS might have ended up with the same sort of situation that occurred in the LCMS in the early 1970's with the "Seminex" walkout at St. Louis. The WELS was already being infiltrated by the historical-critical method of interpretation. Professors Gehrke and Jungkuntz of Northwestern College were

beginning to question the verbal inspiration of Scripture. The big problem was that they were very popular and influential professors. The effects of their teaching was beginning to be felt at the Seminary in the early 1960's. Following the break, they both left the WELS and eventually taught at various LCMS institutions. The break with Missouri prevented any further proponents of a false view of Scripture from finding a home in the WELS.

#### POST-BREAK INVOLVEMENT

The years following the break were difficult for the average WELS member. Many families were split. Professor Schuetze's was one of them. Mrs. Schuetze's family was LCMS, which undoubtedly caused some uncomfortable moments at family gatherings. Several congregations were split. Pastor Waldemar Schuetze's congregation and Pastor Paul Albrecht's congregation are examples. Many of the lay people needed practical advice. Professor Schuetze provided examples of application to the fellowship principles in his Northwestern Lutheran articles entitled "Timely Topics." In addition, as was mentioned earlier, he was on the committee which drafted "This We Believe," providing WELS members a concise confession articulating their stand in all doctrines.

Discussions on a more informal basis between the synods continued after the break occurred. Beginning in 1964, a series of six free conferences was held. The free conferences originated in the Advisory Committee. Professor Schuetze was the

chairman of the Planning Committee for these free conferences and so was in charge of drawing up the agendas. People from the WELS, CLC, ELS, ALC and LCMS all attended these conferences. As chairman of the Planning Committee, Professor Schuetze was responsible for mailing out the agendas and notices concerning the various conferences. He had a ready made assembly line of children for the task. The conferences proved to underscore the fact that the WELS and the LCMS were still not in doctrinal agreement.

All of these activities served Professor Schuetze in good stead during the many years that he spent on the Commission on Inter-Church Relations. It is rather ironic that in his last year on the Commission, discussions would resume with the CLC. Unfortunately, the discussions resolved nothing. Because of his position on the Commission and his knowledge of German, Professor Schuetze was also instrumental in the meetings which resulted in the formation of the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference.

#### CONCLUSION

Major historical events inevitably affect individuals in a variety of ways. Some may be involved, to a greater or lesser degree, in the event. Others may endure changes in relationships as a result of the event. Professor Schuetze fits both of these categories in the major historical event which was the WELS termination of fellowship with the LCMS. This event may not warrant mention in many religious history books, but it deserves

to receive considerable attention in any history of the Wisconsin Synod. So many individuals were affected in so many ways by this one particular event. Professor Schuetze is an excellent example of just such an individual. A study of such a major event and how it affected one individual serves to illustrate the fact that the God is certainly the Lord of the Church. He uses the events of history for the good of his Church.



ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Edward Fredrich, The Wisconsin Synod Lutherans (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1992), p. 198.

<sup>2</sup>Proceedings of the Twenty-fifth Synodical Convention of the Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States, 1939, p. 60.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 59.

<sup>4</sup>Fredrich, p. 200

<sup>5</sup>Fredrich, p.200.

<sup>6</sup>"Not By My Own Reason Or Strength" (Conference of Presidents, The Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States), p. 4.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, P. 2.

<sup>8</sup>Fredrich, p. 203.

<sup>9</sup>Proceedings of the Thirty-third Convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States, 1955, p. 84.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 82-84.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 79.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 80.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 80.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 81-82.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 82.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 85.

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 86.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 86.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 87.

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 87.

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 88.

<sup>22</sup>"Interview with Profeseor Armin Schuetze", 4-8-95.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 86.

<sup>24</sup>Proceedings of the Thirty-third Convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States - Recessed Session (as reported in Proceedings of the Twentieth Biennial Convention of the Northern Wisconsin District, 1956), p. 53.

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 54.

<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 56.

<sup>27</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 57.

<sup>28</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 60.

<sup>29</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 61.

<sup>30</sup>Edmund Reim, "News and Comments," Quartalschrift, October, 1956, p. 299.

<sup>31</sup>Proceedings of the Thirty-fourth Convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States, 1957, p. 118-130.

<sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 118.

<sup>33</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 121.

<sup>34</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 127.

<sup>35</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 130.

<sup>36</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 144.

<sup>37</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 145.

<sup>38</sup>For the complete story, see Glen Hieb's "Early Beginnings of the Church of the Lutheran Confession in the Dakota-Montana District", 1980, in the Church History files at the Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary library.

<sup>39</sup>Op.cit., p. 145.

<sup>40</sup>Proceedings of the Thirty-fifth Convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States, 1959, p. 165.

<sup>41</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 194-197.

<sup>42</sup>Proceedings of the Thirty-sixth Convention of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, 1961, p. 185.

<sup>43</sup>"Fellowship Then and Now" (WELS Commission on Doctrinal Matters, 1961), p. 4.

<sup>44</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>45</sup>Proceedings of the Thirty-sixth Convention of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, 1961, p. 196.

<sup>46</sup>Bill Heiges, "The CLC & Its Effect in Fond du Lac" (Church History Paper, 1980), p. 3.

<sup>47</sup>Proceedings of the Thirty-sixth Convention of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, 1961, p. 168-195.

<sup>48</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 198.

<sup>49</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 199.

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