

■ A Closer Look for Those who are Concerned



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(Updated and edited by Rev. Daniel Fleischer, 1995)

[As indicated above, the original preparation of this historical information was done by Rev. Arvid Gullerud, who at the time was pastor of Bethel Lutheran Church in Spring, Texas. It has been updated and edited by Rev. Daniel Fleischer, pastor of Grace Lutheran Church in Fridley, Minnesota. Both pastors are members of the Church of the Lutheran Confession. The Word of God is clear concerning the errors of unionism. Therefore, for instruction and strength we go to the Word. However, it is helpful for us to consider the history, so that we might be reminded of the insidiousness of compromise. "Let him that thinks he stands, take heed lest he fall." (1 Corinthians 10:12)]

We believe that there is much to be learned from the history of Christianity - the failures as well as the triumphs. One glaring failure has been indifference to Scriptural doctrine,

which leads to religious unionism. Unionism is the practice of church-fellowship with the adherents of false doctrine. Union between churches where there is not complete agreement in doctrine is forbidden by God. (Romans 16:17, 2 John 9,10) Unionism involves the constant danger of losing the Word of God entirely. (2 Timothy 2:17-21) [Cf. BRIEF STATEMENT of the Missouri Synod, 1932]

Our Lord and Savior has taught us to pray in the 1st Petition: "*Hallowed be Thy name.*" How is this done? Luther's explanation explains: "*When the Word of God is taught in its truth and purity and we as the children of God lead a holy life according to it.*" Only when God's name is hallowed can we with a good conscience and with His blessing pray, "*Thy kingdom come.*" Yes, all of God's doctrines are important. Paul writes to the young minister, Timothy: "*TAKE HEED to yourself and TO THE DOCTRINE. Continue in them, for in doing this you will both save yourself and those who hear you.*" (1 Timothy 4:16) Again: "*If any man loves Me, he will keep my Words.*" (John 14:23) ". . .charge some that they teach *NO OTHER DOCTRINE.*" (1 Timothy 1:3) The smallest error is to be rejected, for even the smallest error dilutes what God wants us to teach. "*A little leaven leavens the whole lump.*" (Galatians 5:9)

NOT A RECENT DEVELOPMENT: THE LEAVEN AT WORK ALREADY IN 1938

Many a concerned Lutheran had become deeply disturbed by the events and official resolutions that had been passed in the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. The breakdown in doctrinal discipline was not an abrupt one. It had been developing steadily. In 1872 the Synodical Conference was organized. It was made up of the LUTHERAN CHURCH-MISSOURI SYNOD (LC-MS, 1847), the WISCONSIN SYNOD (1850), [Now the WISCONSIN EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN SYNOD - WELS], SLOVAK SYNOD (1902), and the NORWEGIAN SYNOD (1860-1917), [Now the EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN SYNOD - ELS]. These synods worshiped and worked together in unity of doctrine and practice. Controversial issues were quickly settled on the basis of Scripture, in a brotherly manner. Truly this federation was a creation of the Holy Ghost, Who joined hearts, souls and minds together in the same judgment. (1 Corinthians 1:10) In all things the authority was the Word of God.

In 1938 a change became noticeable. In that year the LC-MS declared that the "BRIEF STATEMENT" of the Missouri Synod together with the 'DECLARATION' of the American Lutheran Church (ALC) and the provisions of this entire report of (the) Committee now being read and with synod's actions thereupon be regarded as the doctrinal basis for future fellowship between the Missouri Synod and the American Lutheran church." That same year, the American Lutheran Church also resolved that, "We declare the 'BRIEF STATEMENT' of the Missouri Synod, together with the 'DECLARATION' of our Commission, a sufficient

basis for fellowship between the Missouri Synod and the ALC...(and) that we are firmly convinced that it is neither necessary nor possible to agree in all non-fundamental doctrines."

In 1969 the LC-MS declared fellowship with the ALC. Concerned Lutherans stood in awe and amazement that the LC-MS, a once staunch confessional church, had so quickly degenerated to one that had to be recognized as heterodox. It stood condemned by its own "BRIEF STATEMENT." (The LC-MS officially severed the fellowship arrangement with the ALC in 1981.)

CHICAGO THESES – 1919

For a number of years prior to 1929, efforts had been made to bring about a union of the many synods of the Lutheran Church. An inter-synodical committee had been chosen from the Synods of Iowa, Ohio, Buffalo, Missouri, and Wisconsin. The sole object was to establish "fully (sic) agreement upon the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confession." This committee drew up a document which became known as the "CHICAGO THESES." This document was laid before the several synods for action.

BRIEF STATEMENT OF THE LUTHERAN CHURCH-MISSOURI SYNOD - 1932

The Missouri Synod took action in 1929. It's examining committee reported: "Your committee finds itself compelled to advise synod to reject the theses as a possible basis for union with the Synods of Ohio, Iowa, and Buffalo, since all chapters and a number of paragraphs are

inadequate. At times they do not touch upon the points of controversy; at times they incline more to the position of the opponents than to our own. . . Your committee considers it a hopeless undertaking to make these theses unobjectionable from the view of pure doctrine." The same committee also recommended: "It now seems to your committee a matter of wisdom to desist from inter-synodical conferences. . ."

Thereupon the Missouri Synod rejected the "CHICAGO THESES." It elected a committee to formulate a document beginning with the points at issue in order to simply and clearly present the doctrines of the Scriptures. Thus the "BRIEF STATEMENT" came into being. At its 1932 convention the LC-MS adopted it. From then on the "BRIEF STATEMENT" was to serve as the doctrinal basis in all future efforts to bring about an honest and Scriptural agreement with the ALC, or all others who wanted union on the basis of Truth alone.

"DECLARATION" OF ALC – 1938

The ALC did not accept the "BRIEF STATEMENT." Its committee found it necessary to "supplement" the doctrinal presentation in order to "emphasize" the points which seemed essential to them. The ALC added its own "DECLARATION."

Although the LC-MS did not at this time enter into fellowship with the ALC, it nevertheless declared its own "BRIEF STATEMENT" together with the

"DECLARATION" of the ALC an acceptable doctrinal basis for future fellowship. It submitted this conclusion to the other synods of the Synodical Conference for approval.

THE LEAVEN GROWS

The Norwegian Synod, (now known as the Evangelical Lutheran Synod-ELS), and the WELS protested publicly against the "DECLARATION." To yoke it with the "BRIEF STATEMENT" was too much like the forbidden plowing "with an ox and an ass together." (Deuteronomy 22:10) Conservatives in the LC-MS likewise protested. In the meantime, the ALC made it very clear that it was going to join hands with other liberal Lutherans just as it pleased, while at the same time enticing the LC-MS under the liberal tent. In 1939, the "PITTSBURGH AGREEMENT" linked the ALC with the modernistic United Lutheran Church (ULC).

THE LEAVEN CONTINUES TO GROW

In 1944 a new union document came forth known as the "DOCTRINAL AFFIRMATION." This document was again a compromise agreement. Its purpose was to adjust the differences between the "BRIEF STATEMENT" and the "DECLARATION." It met with opposition from the two sister synods and from many conservatives of the LC-MS.

The liberal trend of the LC-MS leadership became manifest also in other matters at the 1944 convention. LC-MS adopted a definition of "prayer-fellowship" contrary to all its earlier pronouncements. This opened the door for a wide

range of unionistic practices. The 1944 convention also adopted a resolution with regard to the work-righteous Boy Scout movement. It was a resolution contrary to its earlier stand. It adopted this resolution in the face of opposition from the Wisconsin Synod and the ELS who pointed out the naturalistic and unionistic practices in the scouting movement. It split with the two sister synods also over the matter of the military service chaplaincies, although the LC-MS had Scripturally and traditionally opposed them as undue mixing of church and state. (See Pieper's dogmatics, Vol. II, page 416)

THE "LEFT-WING" OF MISSOURI SPEAKS OUT PUBLICLY

In 1945, the liberal "left-wing" element of the LC-MS felt itself strong enough to publish a manifesto called the "CHICAGO STATEMENT." It was signed by 44 leading pastors and professors. The statement openly rejected the old LC-MS stand on church unity and related matters. Although there was wide opposition to the false doctrines expressed in the statement, nothing effective was done to discipline the errorists. In fact, many of the "signees" - there were eventually several hundred pastors and professors who subscribed to the statement - were rewarded with more influential offices in the church than they had held before. Thus, instead of driving out error, the errorist and his error was given honor.

THE "COMMON CONFSSION"

In 1950, the "COMMON CONFSSION" was formulated as another attempt to join the LC-MS and the ALC. In 1951 it was submitted to the other synods of the Synodical

Conference. The Wisconsin Synod and the ELS again objected that past differences were not in fact settled. Instead of repudiating the "COMMON CONFSSION," the LC-MS in 1953 reaffirmed its stand and proposed part II which was supposed to answer the objections. In August, and again in October of 1953, the Wisconsin Synod reviewed the developments of the last 15 years. Since pleas and admonitions so far had gone unheeded, and since objections to the "COMMON CONFSSION" and to LC-MS unionistic practices had been ignored, the Wisconsin Synod found it necessary to declare the existence of the "present break in relations that was now threatening the existence of the Synodical Conference and the continuance of our affiliation with the sister synod."

COOPERATION IN EXTERNALS

Even though fellowship had not yet been officially established between the LC-MS and the ALC, cooperative spiritual work with the ALC was condoned during these years under the name of "Cooperation in Externals." This cooperation went on with the ALC, with the World Federation and with the National Lutheran Council. The leaven had begun to affect the whole body. God's Word stands forever true: "*A LITTLE LEAVEN LEAVENS THE WHOLE LUMP.*" (Galatians 5:9)

THE LEAVEN GROWS IN THE WISCONSIN SYNOD AND THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN SYNOD

In 1953, the WELS in convention in Watertown, and Milwaukee spelled out the issue that had been under debate

between the LC-MS and the WELS. The issue was religious unionism. Unionism is the sin of worshipping together and doing spiritual (church) work with those whom there is not agreement in doctrine and practice, with such as are guilty of preaching or teaching, as well as tolerating, false doctrine. The WELS declared that the LC-MS had broken the link that once bound the two synods together, by departing from the scriptural position it once had held. ". . . We declare that the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod by its persistent adherence to its unionistic practices, has brought about the present break in relations. . . ." (1953 Proceedings of the WELS, p. 14)

Although the words of the resolution indicate that the convention had "*marked*" in the sense of Romans 16:17, the convention applied Galatians 6:1, 2 and Romans 15:5, 6 to the situation. These passages, especially the Galatians passages, speak of the proper attitude and action of a Christian over against a "*weak brother*" who has been "*overtaken in a fault.*"

In 1955, the ELS "suspended relations with the Missouri Synod" but did not terminate its fellowship. It continued membership and financial support in joint efforts with the LC-MS. Many protested this half-step measure. Others again said that the ELS should wait until the WELS had acted. It seemed as though God's Word did not decide the matter! When to terminate fellowship with an erring church body now became the point of controversy within the ELS and the WELS.

The 1955 Saginaw convention of the WELS, heard the president clearly report: " We have reached the conviction that through these differences, divisions and offenses have been caused contrary to the doctrine which we have learned. And when that is the case, the Lord our God has a definite command for us: 'Avoid them!' For those of us who have been closest to these problems it appears quite definite that we must obey the Lord's Word in Romans 16: 17." (Proceedings, page 13)

But then the president of the WELS introduced a phase that was destined to dominate the thinking, much talking, and lack of action of the next half dozen years - "ray of hope." That elusive, phantom "ray of hope" dulled the thinking and paralyzed the will of the synod. The arguments at the conventions of 1956, '57, '59, and '61 went like this: The Missouri Synod is an heterodox church-body, but even though one personally avoids the Missouri Synod for conscience sake, do we not still have an unpaid debt of love to those whose fellowship we cherished for so many years? (Proceedings 1955, page 14) The factor of **human judgment** came into the picture - that it was a matter of **human judgment** when to terminate fellowship with a church-body that had been declared heterodox. This suggested that God's Word left one in a dilemma, and that Scripture had nothing to say about such a situation or, at least, was unclear.

In order to justify its failure to "avoid them" as Romans 16:17,18 clearly and simply states, and even though the WELS had "*marked them,*" (the LC-MS) as a church-body teaching "*contrary to the doctrine which we have learned,*" passages were introduced describing the proper dealing with a sinning brother. (Matthew 18:15-17; 1 Corinthians 5:1-6) These passages were placed in juxtaposition to the problem posed by false teachers. Accordingly, the WELS argued that the LC-MS was to be avoided only after it was determined that "admonition is of no further avail." The determination for terminating fellowship was therefore made on the basis of **human judgment** [the course of admonition] rather than on the established fact that the LC-MS was guilty of false teaching and practice, a fact already recognized and declared by the WELS.

By thus applying the procedure which is prescribed for dealing with a brother whose sin is weakness, the WELS not only violated the directives of Romans 16:17, but defended a teaching and practice which defeats the purpose of that passage, namely, that causers of divisions and offenses are to be avoided, "*lest by good words and fair speeches they deceive the hearts of the simple.*" (Romans 16:18)

Thus, contrary to all the elements of this basic passage, an unscriptural position was crystallized in the presentation "Church Fellowship" and by the synod's (i.e. WELS) acceptance of this document. Moreover, the error had

become evident in the synod's dealing with the LC-MS in the years 1955-61, as well as previous years. Here the WELS was faced, not simply with weak brethren, but with errorists who taught contrary to the Word of God, persisted in their error over a period of years, made propaganda for it and thus caused divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which "*you have learned.*" A synod must deal with another synod as a body, not with individuals of that synod. A church is judged by its public doctrine. (Cf. "BRIEF STATEMENT," para. 28) The WELS knew this and passed judgment on Missouri's public doctrine as early as 1953. Yet it continued with what, for want of a better expression, we have come to call "the weak brother approach." (Taken from the 1968 proceedings of the 8th convention of the Church of the Lutheran Confession.)

CHURCH OF THE LUTHERAN CONFESSION

In 1959 a number of pastors, professors and laymen confronted the WELS convention with a "Call for Decision." They called for the synod to meet the issue head-on and to follow Romans 16:17,18 without injecting **human reason** into it. This "Call for Decision" was answered on page 194 of the 1959 proceedings. The answer stated that the WELS felt that admonition was still of avail.

The false principle of church fellowship of the WELS had also infiltrated the ELS and began to be used by it as a justification for not terminating fellowship. Although the

two synods eventually terminated fellowship with the LC-MS, nevertheless, these historical developments plus official proceedings and statements promoted a false principle. It is a false principle that they have not been willing to reject clearly and unequivocally. It is the very same false principle that the LC-MS entertained when false teachers reared their heads in its fellowship in the forties. History repeats itself, and we have no assurance that false teachers will not again arise in the church militant. So then we are confronted with a choice. We can follow the false principle and go on and on with false teachers on the basis of misapplied Scripture passages, or we can do what God's Word teaches us to do for our own protection and for the preservation of His truth! The choice is not difficult, if we desire to remain true to the Word of God.

Since the WELS and the ELS and the LC-MS no longer followed their own historic position established upon Romans 16:17,18; pastors, teachers, and professors as well as lay people withdrew from their respective synods. They did so in a final attempt to make their testimony heard. But they did so especially in order that they might be obedient to God's Word. *The Gospel and the confidence of salvation was at stake. Every departure from God's Truth undermines the Gospel and the confidence of salvation!* Many of those who left their respective synods did so at the cost of their ministry, their churches, their schools. They re-grouped to begin again in the struggle that has always faced the remnant that is faithful to the Truth. They desired to hold to all that the synods of the Synodical

Conference had here-to-for taught and practiced in accord with Scripture.

This remnant formed the **CHURCH OF THE LUTHERAN CONFESSION (CLC)**. In its official church paper, "THE LUTHERAN SPOKESMAN" this name was explained: "We call ourselves CHURCH because we are gathered together in Christ's name. We call ourselves LUTHERAN because we are continuing as children of the Reformation. We take seriously our heritage: Scripture alone, Faith alone, Grace alone. We say CONFESSION because our faith must be a living faith, unashamed of its God. We want to confess its Author and Preserver before friend and foe, that His name be hallowed in the hearts and lives of all."

The "LUTHERAN WITNESS" (Official organ of the LC-MS) in years gone by had on its masthead the following quotation from the "BOOK OF CONCORD": "It is, in truth, no easy matter to be separate from so many people and to teach a different doctrine, BUT THERE IS GOD'S COMMAND, instructing everyone to beware of joining hands with those who teach error." We are in the CLC only because we have taken that admonition to heart, and because we wish to be obedient to the Word of God, so that we by God's grace may be preserved from the unionistic spirit that has now infected the synods of the formal Synodical Conference. The existence of the CLC is a continuing admonition to those with whom we were once united in the Synodical Conference. Only as we remain

faithful to the Word of God, also in the exercise of fellowship, can we effectively bring the Truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ to a world of lost and condemned sinners. Only if we remain true to the Word of God will we be fit instruments through which the Spirit of God, working through the Gospel, will build Christ's Church. Only then can we be suited to bring the Word to others so that they might know the Truth that makes men free. (John 8:31,32)

LORD, KEEP US STEADFAST IN THY WORD!

THE RELATION OF REASON TO FAITH

One of the most dangerous opponents of the Word of God is **human reason**. Our mind and reason is indeed a grand endowment with which the Creator has equipped us. But because of sin, reason was corrupted and now is proud and conceited, unwilling to bow before the authority of the Scriptures. *"The carnal mind [that is, the natural mind] is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the Law of God, neither indeed can be."*(Romans 8:7) On the one hand, we could not learn and understand what God says in the Scriptures if we had no reason. On the other hand, we are in constant danger of rejecting God's teaching because our natural reason arrogates to itself the authority of deciding what is right and what is wrong in the revelation of God. Natural reason wishes to cancel every doctrine it cannot

grasp, or with which it disagrees. That we have so many church-bodies, or denominations, is chiefly due to the unwillingness of **human reason** to be captive to the Word of God. Scripture clearly teaches us that we must not be influenced by the negative, criticizing, unfavorable judgments of our reason. Rather, we are in all simplicity to cling to the Scriptures. (John 8:31,32; 20:29; 2 Corinthians 5:7; Luke 11:28) From these passages of Scripture it is clear that the Word of God must be the higher authority. Reason is to humble itself before the Word of God. Reason is to be an INSTRUMENT, but NOT THE MASTER, when we are studying the Word of God (e.g. the doctrine of the Trinity, the virgin birth, etc.). So also when Scripture tells us that when we have "*marked*" or ascertained that an individual or a church-body is a causer of "*division and offenses contrary to the doctrine which we have learned,*" we are to "*avoid them.*" Reason and emotion must then be taken captive to the Word of God. They are blessed who, with the Psalmist, confess before God, "*THY WORD is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.*" (Psalm 119:105)
