

"I Have Made You A Watchman:"

How the *Northwestern Lutheran*
Prepared the Wisconsin Synod
For the Break in Fellowship with
The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod

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The Wisconsin Synod's break in fellowship with the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod in 1961 was one of the most traumatic events, maybe the most traumatic event, in the synod's entire history.

This long drawn-out effort to maintain a precious fellowship is a major chapter in the story of Wisconsin's interchurch relations. Future developments may well show us that this episode is the most significant and important occurrence in all of our church body's history.¹

Even though the signs of trouble had been in the air for many years, even though the 1961 synodical convention "called for an orderly termination of joint projects" and "expressed a willingness to discuss the issues 'under proper conditions' "², yet the decision of that convention to suspend fellowship with Missouri hit the Wisconsin Synod and its members hard.

Yet just as a doctor prepares the patient before performing major surgery, so the Wisconsin Synod prepared its people for what amounted to a major amputation. This preparation came through education. On the local level the parish pastor worked with the individual congregations; on the synodical level the *Northwestern Lutheran* played an important role in educating readers about church fellowship issues, unionism, and the situation with the Missouri Synod. This paper will examine the means and methods used in the *Northwestern Lutheran* to educate

¹E.C. Fredrich, "The Great Debate With Missouri," *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, LXXIV (April 1977), p 157.

²E.C. Fredrich, *The Wisconsin Synod Lutherans* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1992), p 207.

members of the Wisconsin Synod on fellowship and union issues and, as events turned out, to prepare them for the break in fellowship with Missouri and the eventual dissolution of the Synodical Conference.

In preparing this paper I examined coverage of fellowship and issues related to the Missouri Synod situation in the *Northwestern Lutheran* from 1938, when the convention of the Missouri Synod formally resolved to begin working toward fellowship with the American Lutheran Church (ALC), until 1963, the year the Wisconsin Synod formally withdrew from the Synodical Conference. During these years the *Northwestern Lutheran* printed many articles and editorials pertinent to this examination. Because of the wealth of material, I will not attempt to summarize everything printed, but instead I will give an overview of what the *Northwestern Lutheran* did to educate the Wisconsin Synod.

The *Northwestern Lutheran* covered fellowship and union issues in two basic ways. The first we might call "positive" or "abstract". This category covers the many articles and editorials which discussed fellowship and the church in a general, purely educational way. The goal of these was to teach the truths of Scripture and to instill a love for those truths, as a form of vaccination against false teachings. In this way the *Northwestern Lutheran* mirrored our catechetical training, where the students spend most or all of their time learning the positive truths of Scripture and relatively little time looking

at negative false teachings. The "negative" function of *Northwestern Lutheran's* teaching of fellowship issues wasn't necessarily limited to coverage of false teachings, though it certainly included those. Rather, in this category we would include the many "practical" articles, which discussed specific teachings, ideas and actions which applied the teachings of Scripture and which either upheld them or fell short of faithfulness to Scriptural principles.

First Stage: Before the "Common Confession" (1938-1949)

In the early years, the *Northwestern Lutheran* did not devote much coverage to discussions between the Missouri Synod and the ALC. It is not easy to develop a clear picture of the exact progression of historical events by examining the *Northwestern Lutheran* alone. This is not to say that the issues were never covered. However, both Wisconsin and Missouri Synod editors agreed to "refrain from discussing controversial issues in those publications which are designed for our lay members"³ Instead, lay members received much of their information and education on the specific issues through their congregational leadership, who were kept up to date through the *Quartalschrift*.⁴ The *Northwestern Lutheran* followed that policy until 1947, which was considered a year of "momentous decisions, in which the eyes of Lutherans everywhere, liberal as well as conservative and

³E. Reim, "A Time to Keep Silence, and a Time to Speak," *Northwestern Lutheran* (April 13, 1947), p 115.

⁴Ibid.

confessional, will be fixed on our sister synod, eagerly seeking to determine what its future stand will be."⁵

By 1938 a strong spirit of unionism was in the air. The pervading theme of this push toward union was not a desire for doctrinal unity, but rather unity in spite of doctrinal differences. "Unionists deem it sufficient to agree in fundamentals. In non-fundamentals they are willing to agree to disagree...The Lutheran Church must testify against error, and not adopt the principle that one doctrine is as good as another."⁶

Wisconsin Synod members could not be assumed to be automatically immune to such a spirit of doctrinal indifference, or, at best, of making doctrinal unity secondary. Nor could they be assumed to know automatically just where they and their synod stood in relation to such union movements. Thus the *Northwestern Lutheran* printed doctrinal information on unionism and fellowship in general, and also specific information on union movements active at the time.

To combat false ideas about union, the *Northwestern Lutheran* presented truths. For example, Irwin Habeck wrote in his article "The Church's Strength"⁷ that God pleasing church union grows out of agreement in doctrine and practice, then "there will

⁵Ibid.

⁶Theo Hoyer, "Union Movements in the Church," *Northwestern Lutheran* (September 11, 1938), p 296.

⁷*Northwestern Lutheran* (May 19, 1940), p 149.

follow, first mutual encouragement, then the removal of external causes which might lead them to friction, and finally a recognition of the existing unity of spirit by the formulation of an outward union of some kind. It was thus that our Synodical Conference grew together."⁸

E. Reim, then a pastor in Neenah, Wisconsin, wrote "Union, Unity, Unionism",⁹ which was printed in 1939 and reprinted in 1947 when the Missouri situation began to heat up. Since "Lutherans of the Synodical Conference have been confronted with the necessity of informing themselves on the merits or demerits of a definite proposal for union, the one submitted by the American Lutheran Church to the Missouri Synod,"¹⁰ Reim briefly examined the three terms "union," "unity," and "unionism" and the Scriptural principles behind them. Reim presented "union" as an initially neutral term. Union can be either good or bad, depending on the elements taking part in the union or merger. Unity, true inward unity, is a positive thing, while unionism, desire for union without inward doctrinal unity, "is far from being a complimentary term...[which] seems to carry with it the suggestion of improper motives, aims, and methods."¹¹

W.J. Schaefer in his article "UNION" confessed that he was not in favor of unionism and then told why, answering the claim

⁸Ibid.

⁹*Northwestern Lutheran* (July 16, 1939), p 226.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Ibid.

that outward divisions are detrimental to the church and its message as a whole. Not outward union, but inward unity is important:

If these bodies at all times and under all circumstances are mindful of the brotherly ties that unite them in "the same mind and in the same judgment" and are scrupulously considerate of one another, then the very outward separation will only tend to emphasize the inner union, and after all, this is the important factor in the sight of God.¹²

Indeed, Schaefer made it clear in "Blind Leaders of the Blind"¹³ that divisions in visible Christianity come from not teaching the Word purely. Rather, those who leave the Word's pure teachings are the ones who cause divisions, yet they are the ones who want to create by force a unified man-made church. Nor did Schaefer leave any doubts about where unionistic tendencies lead: eventually they bring about total unionism.¹⁴ Avoiding unionistic tendencies is not cause for shame and does not cause divisions, as some unionists contend. Rather, it is simple obedience to God's Word:

To the superficial unregenerate observer it may seem that by declining to merge all churches or even to unite in union services regardless of doctrine we are causing divisions, but God turns the thing around. In the last chapter of Romans the Apostle writes. "I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences *contrary to the doctrine* which ye have learned, and avoid them." Does Paul say, "Mark them which cause divisions by refusing to join in church

¹²W.J.S[chaefer], "UNION," *Northwestern Lutheran* (May 21, 1939), p 168.

¹³*Northwestern Lutheran* (May 18, 1941), p 147.

¹⁴W.J. S[chaefer], "The Road of the Unionists--Whither Does It Lead?" *Northwestern Lutheran* (Dec 15, 1940), p 387.

unions because of disagreement in doctrine and do not follow their intolerant, narrow-minded example"? No, he says that those who go *contrary to the doctrine* are causing the divisions. The shoe is on the other foot. Those who are loudest in accusing others of being troublemakers are often the real troublemakers themselves.¹⁵

Writers in the *Northwestern Lutheran* recognized the need to deal with specifically Lutheran union efforts, which would have a stronger pull on Wisconsin Synod Lutherans than efforts among other denominational traditions. Professor A. Zich covered the big Lutheran mergers of recent years: the 1917 Norwegian merger, the United Lutheran Church in 1918, and the 1930 American Lutheran Church merger.¹⁶ He then mentioned the situation with the ALC and Missouri and reported that "here the union, if it comes to pass, is to be achieved upon the safe grounds of strict agreement in doctrine."¹⁷

At this time the *Northwestern Lutheran* often mentioned the United Lutheran Church, especially in connection with its struggle over the doctrine of inspiration.

As mentioned earlier, during these early years the *Northwestern Lutheran* commented often on union efforts between other Lutheran bodies, but was much more restrained when dealing with the Missouri Synod. In 1938, when the Missouri Synod and the ULC began discussions "to consider doctrinal questions," Zich

¹⁵I.P. Frey, "Who is the Troublemaker?" *Northwestern Lutheran* (September 24, 1939), p 310.

¹⁶[A.] Z[ich], "Lutheran Union Movements," *Northwestern Lutheran* (October 23, 1938), p 339.

¹⁷Ibid.

began his comments with a disclaimer: "Merely as a news item taken from the News Bulletin and without any comment we publish the following."¹⁸ Any comments or evaluations were very restrained. In 1939 the *Northwestern Lutheran* reprinted a *Lutheran Sentinel* report on the Missouri Synod discussions and "doctrinal basis for future church fellowship with the American Lutheran Church," and included the Norwegian Synod's comment on the matter: "In our judgment this agreement leaves much to be desired as a doctrinal basis for fellowship between synods that have been in serious and mutually acknowledged disagreement for decades."¹⁹ Since the original appearance of the *Lutheran Sentinel* article the ALC had met at Sandusky and issued resolutions which would have made future negotiations seem impossible. No further comment would be made until the Missouri Synod had held its convention and had time to react to Sandusky. Zich then added, "As this report speaks for itself, we have nothing to add in the way of comment, but we venture to hope that it will be well considered by our readers, to whom this report should be of great interest."²⁰

Because of the Missouri Synod's longtime membership in the Synodical Conference, reports on such matters would indeed be interesting to Wisconsin Synod readers. Because of fellowship

¹⁸[A.] Z[ich], "Comments," *Northwestern Lutheran* (June 5, 1938), p 182.

¹⁹[A.] Z[ich], "Comments: The Inter-synodical Committee," *Northwestern Lutheran* (January 15, 1939), p 21.

²⁰Ibid.

arrangements within the Synodical Conference, any action Missouri took would affect the other members. Yet at this stage, after the ALC's Sandusky convention, it may not have seemed very likely that doctrinal agreement would be found between Missouri and the ALC.

ALC-ULCA agreements on Scripture in the well-known "Pittsburgh Agreement" had so clouded the issue that continuing negotiations between the ALC and any Synodical Conference members would involve a denial of the truth and would cause confusion and disturbance and should be suspended until the air could be cleared.²¹

In the report on the 1939 synodical convention, Pastor Edgar Hoenecke talked in detail about "*Union Endeavors*."²² He reported that in response to the Missouri Synod's request for opinion on their 1938 convention actions, the Wisconsin Synod in convention adopted a communication addressed to Missouri. The first two preliminary points gave the historical data. The third gave the principles which should govern such a resolution as Missouri adopted. The fourth applied those principles to the present case and asked Missouri to recognize and make known the implications of the Sandusky Resolutions and the Pittsburgh Agreement. Although the *Northwestern Lutheran* may have refrained from making many comments and judgments about the Missouri-ALC situation, it certainly did not refrain from reporting the facts of the matter. Wisconsin's close ties with Missouri required such thorough information.

²¹Edward C. Fredrich, "The Great Debate With Missouri," p 159.

²²Edgar Hoenecke, "The Spirit of the Convention.," *Northwestern Lutheran* (August 27, 1939), p 285.

More thorough information appeared in the report on the Synodical Conference convention of 1940, in the report of the Committee on Church Union:

The Committee on Church Union, which was appointed to give all the members of the Synodical Conference an insight into the proceedings of the Union Committees of the Missouri Synod and the American Lutheran Church submitted a printed report which was distributed to all the delegates. This report brought forth a long and lively discussion, but the admonition to speak the truth in love was heeded. It was pointed out that the following still stood in the way of a union between the Missouri Synod and the American Lutheran Church: The American Lutheran Church still belongs to the American Lutheran Conference, the Missouri Synod to the Synodical Conference; various statements in the Sandusky Resolutions; the approach of the ALC to the ULC; matters of practice, as for instance lodges and unionism.²³

This was the last thorough information to appear for several years, until the appearance in 1944 of the Missouri Synod and ALC's attempt a joint document, the "Doctrinal Affirmation." With the start of America's involvement in World War II the *Northwestern Lutheran* devoted much less space to union matters than it had in previous years. One notable exception was Professor M. Lehninger's article on "Lutheran Union Movement Today."²⁴ In his article Lehninger devoted three full pages to a detailed account of union efforts in the ULC, the ALC and the Missouri Synod, all the way up to the Synodical Conference resolutions of 1940. Lehninger's article was by far the clearest and most thorough summary of union efforts to appear in the

²³P. Schumm "Report of the Synodical Conference Convention," *Northwestern Lutheran* (September 22, 1940), p 295.

²⁴*Northwestern Lutheran* (March 9, 1941), p 68.

Northwestern Lutheran up to this point. This set a pattern for later articles on the subject, a pattern necessary for a periodical: first would come a summary of past events involved in a particular issue, then would come the issue itself. Given the complicated nature of the issues in later years, this frequent review of historical background was a definite advantage for understanding the development of later controversies.

By 1943 the editors of the *Northwestern Lutheran* began to deal with various effects of the war on ecumenism. World War II brought a rise in unionistic spirit. Once again the *Northwestern Lutheran* provided some basic education on matters of unionism. A unionistic spirit does not call for union based on doctrinal agreement, but rather calls for union based on human compromise. This can only lead to a watering down of the gospel.²⁵ However, the principles of the Bible aren't man's to play with or change or ignore. "There is, then, but one principle on which all religions can unite and that is the *faithful adherence to every word of the Bible*."²⁶ Divisions show that people ignore this principle. As soon as everyone follows it, union will be achieved.²⁷ Particularly timely was Pastor Raymond Huth's article on "Isolationism,"²⁸ which pointed out that even though

²⁵W.J. S[chaefer], "A Case in Point." *Northwestern Lutheran* (January 24, 1943), p 20.

²⁶"JWS", presumably W.J. S[chaefer]. "Be Not Deceived," *Northwestern Lutheran* (January 24, 1943), p 19.

²⁷Ibid, p 20.

²⁸*Northwestern Lutheran* (April 18, 1943), p 121.

a church which holds to the Bible alone and doesn't compromise may be accused of isolationism. in actuality it is simply holding to its sacred duty to search the Word and seek God first. During 1943 J.P. Meyer ran a series on "The Communion of the Saints," which concluded with a statement that church strength is not to be sought in outward things, i.e. large numbers or superficial agreements. The points found in these teaching articles were echoed often in the following years, particularly in editorials by I.P. Frey and W.J. Schaefer.

The *Northwestern Lutheran* was not always up to date in reporting new developments in the Missouri-ALC situation. Such was the case with the "Doctrinal Affirmation" of 1944. I found no mention of it until the report of the 1945 Wisconsin Synod convention.²⁹ The section titled "Church Union" reported on the Missouri-ALC discussions. "The question is, whether true unity in doctrine and practice exists between the Synodical Conference and the American Lutheran Church, for a union without this unity is impossible."³⁰ The synod's standing committee to watch church union matters wasn't satisfied that the "Doctrinal Affirmation" prepared by the committees of the Missouri Synod and the ALC adequately safeguarded the truth of God's Word. The standing committee was ready to report misgivings to Missouri. The problem became more difficult because of number of incidents

²⁹"The Convention Proceedings," *Northwestern Lutheran* (September 2, 1945), p 181.

³⁰Ibid, p 184.

anticipating that union. Official protest had been filed. The report on this convention devoted almost a full page to a summary of J.P. Meyer's doctrinal essay on unionism; the *Northwestern Lutheran* was not only interested in reporting the mere facts, but also wanted to provide theological education to the lay reader.

Some of the other problems developing in Missouri also received little coverage in their early years. The issue of chaplaincy was not mentioned during the war, and Scouting only received one short article in 1945, along with brief mention in Meyer's doctrinal essay as an example of a modern back door for unionism. Missouri's problematic effort to distinguish between joint prayer and prayer fellowship also received no mention until 1947. We need not criticize the *Northwestern Lutheran* too harshly for these omissions; in its evangelical attitude it doubtlessly wanted to avoid reporting false information and making hasty judgments on controversial issues, as its editors had agreed with the editors of Missouri's *Lutheran Witness*. The *Northwestern Lutheran's* editors and writers surely knew what was going on in the Missouri Synod, but kept their reporting sparse until 1947. About the only specific mention of Missouri-ALC issues until 1947 appeared in connection with conventions of the Wisconsin Synod or the Synodical Conference. In the report on the 1946 convention of the Synodical Conference,³¹ the *Northwestern Lutheran* summed up the hopes it had always held for

³¹"Milwaukee Host to the Synodical Conference," *Northwestern Lutheran* (September 15, 1946), p 296.

the eventual outcome of the intersynodical problems:

We note with gratification the desire of the Committee on Doctrinal Unity of the Missouri Synod to work in close cooperation with the constituent synods of the Synodical Conference, as evidenced by the submission of this report [on changes made to the "Doctrinal Affirmation" to remove objectionable parts]. . . We urge the Committee on Doctrinal Unity of the Missouri Synod to continue in its efforts at preserving the truth of the Gospel and the true unity which alone can make for sound Lutheran fellowship.³²

Throughout the intersynodical problems the editors and writers of the *Northwestern Lutheran* expressed the hope that the doctrinal disagreements could be cleared up and that normal fellowship through unity in doctrine could be restored. As we know very well today, this desire was not fulfilled.

"The Debate On Union"

The year 1947 saw a change in the *Northwestern Lutheran's* policy of avoiding coverage of controversial issues involving the Missouri Synod. With E. Reim's editorial "A Time to Keep Silence, and a Time to Speak,"³³ the floodgates were opened and the magazine began to give thorough coverage of the issues and problems with the Missouri Synod. The same issue reprinted Reim's 1939 article "Union, Unity, Unionism" as a preface to a series of articles under the general heading "The Debate On Union." Reim in his editorial stated that the former policy of keeping silence was no longer appropriate. Instead,

Now we believe that there has come "a time to speak".
No, not for the purpose disrupting now the fellowship

³²Ibid, p 297.

³³*Northwestern Lutheran* (April 13, 1947), p 115.

about which we were so concerned before. This fellowship we shall try to preserve, now as ever, earnestly "endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." If we deem it necessary to discontinue our previous policy of silence, it is not because we now have a different end in view and have therefore changed our objectives. It is rather because the situation is no longer the same. Time is passing. Issues must eventually be decided. Indications are that this year of 1947 will be one of momentous decisions, in which the eyes of Lutherans everywhere, liberal as well as conservative and confessional, will be fixed on our sister synod, eagerly seeking to determine what its future stand will be.³⁴

Reim's first article under the heading "The Debate On Union," entitled "How Did We Get Into It?"³⁵ dealt with the concern that Wisconsin might not have any business commenting on Missouri's affairs. Reim pointed out that in 1938 the Missouri Synod referred its "St. Louis Agreement" to its sister synods for approval, and had done the same with following documents such as the "Doctrinal Affirmation." Thus, when the Wisconsin Synod did comment on them, finding them unacceptable as a basis for fellowship, and later defended its stand, it was only "in serious compliance with a solemn obligation which we have assumed toward each other in the fellowship of our Synodical Conference."³⁶

In his next two articles in the series, both titled "Where Do We Stand?"³⁷ Reim dealt with Missouri and ALC's "Doctrinal Affirmation." The "Doctrinal Affirmation" was not an adequate

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵*Northwestern Lutheran* (April 27, 1947), p 136.

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷*Northwestern Lutheran* (May 11, 1947) p 150, and (May 25, 1947), p 165.

basis for fellowship because it was not in agreement with Missouri's "Brief Statement." Indeed, the ALC itself had rejected the "Doctrinal Affirmation" in its 1946 convention. Reim found the main problem in the ALC's indifferent attitude toward doctrine. This attitude came out clearly in the ALC's "Friendly Invitation," which stated "that it is neither necessary nor possible to agree in all non-fundamental doctrines."³⁸ The ALC didn't see any fundamental differences which would forbid pulpit and altar fellowship with Missouri; any differences, it felt, were in "areas where there exist an allowable and wholesome latitude of theological opinion on the basis of the teachings of the Word of God."³⁹ Reim recognized this attitude: "This is the principle which the old Iowa Synod advocated so strongly before it became part of the American Lutheran Church."⁴⁰ The "Doctrinal Affirmation" was unacceptable because it did not constitute an acceptance of the "Brief Statement," because it did not adequately settle the old controversies within the ALC but instead left room for them to persist, and because it was willing to allow doctrinal disagreement within the context of fellowship. The ALC accepted and even desired this theological latitude. However, it was not acceptable within the Synodical Conference because it was forbidden by Scripture itself.

³⁸ Ibid. p 151.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

Reim next asked, "What Are The Prospects?"⁴¹ He saw two possibilities: either Missouri would accept the ALC's liberal position, or else it would return to its old position. Worse than either would be a compromise, for that would leave the liberal trend unchecked while draining the strength from the conservative side. Missouri would have to decide what course to take at its convention in July, 1947. The decision would be an important one for the Wisconsin Synod also. "The clearness of our own confessional stand is at stake. We dare not permit it to be compromised."⁴² Reim then urged readers to go back and restudy what he had already presented, to learn and assure themselves of the correctness of Wisconsin's position. Two articles followed which dealt with the issue of "Scouting in the Lutheran Church" (June 22 and July 6, 1947). The July 20 installment dealt with "The Intersynodical Movement,"⁴³ specifically with "cooperation in externals." The August 3 article answered the question, "Doctrinal Differences in The Synodical Conference?"⁴⁴ Here Reim dealt with still more of the issues causing problems within the Synodical Conference: prayer fellowship, the doctrine of church and ministry, and chaplaincy, and seemed to find not differences in doctrine, but rather differences in application (as in church and ministry) and in

⁴¹*Northwestern Lutheran* (June 8, 1947), p 182.

⁴²*Ibid.*

⁴³*Northwestern Lutheran* (July 20, 1947), p 233.

⁴⁴*Northwestern Lutheran* (August 3, 1947), p 245.

judgment (as in chaplaincy) between the synods.

Reim's last articles in the series "The Debate On Union" dealt with the synodical conventions of 1947. In "The Chicago Convention"⁴⁵ Reim discussed the Missouri Synod's convention, which he had attended. Since this particular convention was Missouri's "Centennial Convention," the delegates showed "an outstanding degree of loyalty and a determination to stand together and to keep disturbing differences in the background as far as possible."⁴⁶ This prevailing mood made it difficult to deal effectively with the major issues. For example, although the synod at this convention declared that it was not ready to enter into fellowship with the ALC, and resolved that its 1938 resolutions would not be a basis for fellowship, it did not actually face the underlying issue: theological latitude. Although the convention postponed action on the question of membership in the National Lutheran Council, yet it "expressed its official willingness 'to cooperate in matters agreeing with Synod's principles'."⁴⁷ It dealt in similar manner with prayer fellowship and Scouting.

Reim in his last article, "The Watertown Convention"⁴⁸ reported on the Wisconsin Synod's convention, but because of the importance of Missouri's convention he mainly reported on their

⁴⁵*Northwestern Lutheran* (August 31, 1947), p 285.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*

⁴⁷*Ibid.*

⁴⁸*Northwestern Lutheran* (September 14, 1947), p 295.

decisions. In this article he exhibited a cautious attitude toward developments at Missouri's convention. He closed the article with the notice that more information would come as the need arose.

Meanwhile, the *Northwestern Lutheran* informed readers about a new development: the Lutheran Men of America in Wisconsin. The L.M.A.W. was a unionistic group formed of laymen from different Lutheran bodies. In his article, "What is Wrong with the 'Lutheran Men of America in Wisconsin'?" G.W. Fischer identified the group as being unscriptural, unlutheran and uncharitable.⁴⁹ The *Northwestern Lutheran* fought an ongoing battle with L.M.A.W. and its paper, the *Milwaukee Lutheran*, which took exception to Fischer's remarks. The editors of *Northwestern Lutheran* defended Fischer's stand, and later reported outright unionism in the organization which involved Missouri Synod laymen and pastors.

The *Northwestern Lutheran* between Reim's articles in 1947 and the "Common Confession" of late 1949 provided more education on issues related to the intersynodical problems. In 1947 it ran a series of articles about Scouting and its disagreement with Scripture. In 1947 J.P. Meyer published the article "Prayer Fellowship,"⁵⁰ which discussed prayer and the fact that Christians who are united in doctrine pray together. Organizations which have non-sectarian prayers are to be avoided

⁴⁹G.W. Fischer, "What is Wrong with the 'Lutheran Men of America in Wisconsin?'" *Northwestern Lutheran* (October 12, 1947), p 325.

⁵⁰*Northwestern Lutheran* (October 26, 1947), p 346.

because true prayer is only through Christ. In 1948 readers learned about "Joint Prayer at Public Meetings."⁵¹ Both of these articles upheld prayer fellowship only between Christians who are united in doctrine.

For those who worried about being viewed as intolerant because of such principles, Dr. Henry Koch wrote "The Spirit of Intolerance."⁵² Koch contended that the church cannot be tolerant of false doctrine and unchristian practices. We can be tolerant with weak brothers "for a time, so that they may see the error of their way and mend it."⁵³ We must be intolerant of all false doctrine and laxity in church discipline.

Only by a strict adherence to Scriptures can the true Church hold her own. There is but one Truth. Let us always be found siding with it and never warring or plotting against it. It was Luther, who liberated the Church from the yoke of intolerance. Let us cling to true Christian freedom and ever and anew proclaim the Truth that makes us free."⁵⁴

The editors had nothing good to say about unionism. In the column "Siftings" they reported on unionism reduced to absurdity: for an interfaith rally including Jews, Protestants and Catholics a rabbi thought it would be impressive to include an "interracial" choir (i.e. Gospel choir). Although the rally itself was a glaring case of doctrinal compromise, it backfired

⁵¹Dr. Henry Koch, "Joint Prayer at Public Meetings,"
Northwestern Lutheran (May 23, 1948), p 165.

⁵²*Northwestern Lutheran* (November 9, 1947), p 362.

⁵³Ibid.

⁵⁴Ibid, p 363.

for that rabbi: the choir sang "Were you there when they crucified my Lord?" "Here then is a case of unionists themselves undoing Unionism."⁵⁵

"Where Do We Stand?"

In 1949, before the advent of the "Common Confession," E. Reim published another series of articles under the heading "Where Do We Stand?" These articles covered some of the same territory as the series "The Debate On Union," but from a somewhat different perspective. "The Debate On Union" presented a historical perspective on the Missouri situation as it developed from 1938 on. "Where Do We Stand" presented the Missouri situation within the social framework of unionism. Although the series mentions Missouri's negotiations with the ALC, those union efforts weren't the primary issue in early 1949. Rather, the primary problem with Missouri was unionism in both subtle and blatant forms.

In the first article, "The Point of the Question,"⁵⁶ Reim introduced his new series and presented its purpose: to keep Wisconsin Synod readers up to date with the latest intersynodical developments, and also to examine Wisconsin's own stand. Reim wanted to examine the answer to the question, "Where do we stand?" to make certain that Wisconsin stood firmly on Scripture in its principles.

⁵⁵"Siftings," *Northwestern Lutheran* (March 28, 1948), p 102.

⁵⁶*Northwestern Lutheran* (January 30, 1949), p 37.

The second article, "II: We Face A Trend,"⁵⁷ pointed out that incidents of unionism were not isolated, but were part of a general trend within the church. Reim observed that "the facts speak for themselves. Lutherans of the Synodical Conference have been working together with other Lutherans to a degree which has never been the case before."⁵⁸ The newly-formed World Council of Churches was a demonstration of unionism on a larger scale, a unionism which extended into the secular world of business and politics too. Reim contended that understanding this trend "is an indispensable first step toward a true understanding of our problem."⁵⁹

With this background, Reim wrote his third article, "We Judge The Trend."⁶⁰ Reim answered the question, "Is it proper for a Christian to judge?" The Christian has the duty "of soberly and carefully weighing all things that bear upon his personal faith or upon the work and welfare of the Church. That is the meaning of the Biblical injunction to 'prove all things, hold fast to that which is good'."⁶¹ However, in doing that weighing we must watch out for false motives on our own part. This was a common caution in articles dealing with fellowship. As Christians it is natural to desire unity and to grieve when

⁵⁷*Northwestern Lutheran* (February 13, 1949), p 56.

⁵⁸*Ibid.*

⁵⁹*Ibid.*, p 57.

⁶⁰*Northwestern Lutheran* (February 27, 1949), p 70.

⁶¹*Ibid.*

unity is ruptured. However, in any work toward unity it is necessary to keep in mind Romans 16:17. "It is according to this and similar passages that we must judge the trend of which we are speaking. Doctrinal unity must ever be recognized as the basic requirement."⁶² When that requirement is recognized, it is easier to judge the value of union movements. Union efforts aimed at union without doctrinal unity first, condemn themselves. "We Judge The Trend" concludes that "in the main this trend is unsound, misleading, dangerous."⁶³

"We Resist The Trend"⁶⁴ describes some of the history and means by which the Wisconsin Synod had resisted the prevailing trend toward unionism, particularly between Missouri and the ALC. In 1939 the Watertown convention had refused to sanction the St. Louis Agreement of 1938. The Synodical Conference was used as a tool to resist and to debate the underlying issues. Wisconsin Synod periodicals--the *Northwestern Lutheran*, the *Gemeindeblatt*, and of course the *Quartalschrift*--educated and warned members against union movements. Even many Missouri Synod pastors had resisted Missouri's union efforts. The results? Reim found it difficult to say. However, what was certain was that the Wisconsin Synod would continue to resist the trend toward union without unity.

Reim's next three articles, "V. We Have A Problem:

⁶²Ibid.

⁶³Ibid.

⁶⁴*Northwestern Lutheran* (March 13, 1949), p 87.

Scouting,"⁶⁵ "We Have Another Problem: L.M.A."⁶⁶ and "VII. Still More Problems: Co-operation"⁶⁷ dealt with specific doctrinal problems in the Missouri Synod. Reim found the Scouting program lacking because of its element of false religion, an element which would compromise the Christian's confession of Christ as the only source of salvation. Reim found the L.M.A. improper because of its blatant unionism in worship, a feature which itself passed judgment on the movement when viewed in light of Romans 16:17. The third article dealt with cases of supposed "cooperation in externals," which actually ended up being "joint work of a spiritual nature,"⁶⁸ and thus unionism.

Reim closed this series of articles with "VIII. A Strong Position."⁶⁹ After examining the issues of unionism with the Missouri Synod, Reim concluded that the Wisconsin Synod could be certain of its strong position because that position was based on Scripture, not on any human ideas. That Word of God not only provides a source of strength, but also a means for winning those who disagree. We can be certain of that position because of Jesus' words, words which had been often used in the *Northwestern Lutheran* when dealing with the proper basis for fellowship: "If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed, and ye

⁶⁵ *Northwestern Lutheran* (March 27, 1949), p 106.

⁶⁶ *Northwestern Lutheran* (April 10, 1949), p 119.

⁶⁷ *Northwestern Lutheran* (April 24, 1949), p 133.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ *Northwestern Lutheran* (May 8, 1949), p 154.

shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."

This detailed examination of *Northwestern Lutheran's* coverage of fellowship issues from 1938-1950 in a way provides a foretaste of its coverage from 1950-1961. The appearance of the "Common Confession" and following events understandably brought a dramatic increase in the amount of space given to such matters, but the content of what was printed in the later years of the intersynodical conflict repeated much of what had already been said.

Second Stage: The "Common Confession" (1950-1955)

In late 1949 the "Common Confession" was released. This was to be the single document which would provide a doctrinal basis for further work toward Missouri-ALC fellowship. First notice of this document in the *Northwestern Lutheran* came in early 1950. The "Common Confession" signaled a new stage in Missouri-ALC relations: it signaled a desire to move forward with fellowship discussions. This was quite serious from the Wisconsin Synod's perspective, because agreement on the "Common Confession" might have been just one step away from full fellowship between a Synodical Conference body and one which had been demonstrably more liberal. Reim stated in 1950 that "this Lutheran merger may well be just around the corner."⁷⁰ The seriousness of this move prompted a flood of new information and articles in the *Northwestern Lutheran*. Some of these examined and evaluated the

⁷⁰E. Reim, "This 'Common Confession Of Faith'--I," *Northwestern Lutheran* (February 26, 1950), p 74.

"Common Confession" itself. Others kept readers up-to-date on developments in the intersynodical situation more than had been done previously. The *Northwestern Lutheran* clearly wanted its readers to be as informed as possible, which was a necessity considering the close relations between Wisconsin and Missouri up to this time. Wisconsin Synod readers needed to know as much as possible about their synod's position and the reason for that position, so that they could, with good conscience, hold that position themselves.

"As We See It"

That desire to keep readers informed was the reason for E. Reim's article "As Others See Us: Separation or Separatism?"⁷¹ An unofficial Missouri Synod paper, the *American Lutheran*, had expressed "grave concern over the 'growing spirit of separatism'"⁷² which it had claimed to have observed in the Wisconsin Synod. The editorial which made that claim had been reprinted in the ALC's *Lutheran Standard* and the L.M.A.'s *Milwaukee Lutheran*, and thus Wisconsin Synod lay members could end up hearing that accusation made by others. Because of this situation, Reim decided it was fitting to reply to the charge. Reim called "separatism" (causing division where Scripture doesn't call for it) just as much a sin as "unionism" (establishing union while lacking the Biblical requirements for it). Yet he distinguished between "separatism"--a sin--and "separation"--a Biblical mandate

⁷¹*Northwestern Lutheran* (February 12, 1950), p 57.

⁷²Ibid.

to avoid fellowship with those who differ in doctrine. The Wisconsin Synod was not being separatistic, but was practicing and would continue to practice separation wherever the situation called for it. He concluded, "we remind our critic that not every separation is separatism. And finally we remind him that misrepresentation may also become a sin."⁷³

In "Separation or Separatism?" Reim set the tone for a new series of articles under the heading "As We See It." For the next five years (February 1950-July 1955) this series was the *Northwestern Lutheran's* primary means of keeping readers informed on the intersynodical situation. Reim wrote over 50 articles in this series. A majority of the articles present purely historical information about the intersynodical situation, giving updates on developments at synodical conventions and providing information on other developments. With the situation continuing as long as it did, such notices were necessary to keep readers up to date. Other articles, mainly at the beginning of the series, presented doctrinal information intended to inform readers of the theological problems involved with the Missouri Synod and the "Common Confession." Many of the articles gave a little bit of both, giving the doctrinal and theological causes or implications of various developments in the controversy as they happened. Reim was extremely thorough in presenting his information and in keeping the reader informed. At least part of the time he wrote as secretary of the Standing Committee in Matters of Church

⁷³Ibid, p 58.

Union. Thus he was in a prime position to inform the Wisconsin Synod on what was taking place in the intersynodical conflict.

Examining the "Common Confession"

Some of Reim's first articles in "As We See It" dealt with the "Common Confession." Reim realized and stated from the outset that "It is self-evident that a question of such importance needs to be studied carefully from every side--without haste, without prejudice, in a calm and sober attempt to judge the issue according to its merits, on the basis of the Word of God, and with an earnest prayer for His help and guidance."⁷⁴ When he wrote his February 27 article, "This 'Common Confession Of Faith'--I," Reim had not yet received an official copy of the "Common Confession," so he could not deal with the content at first. However, he could and did deal with "the preliminaries, the externals and the background of the document."⁷⁵ He pointed out that the "Common Confession" was a single document designed to be a basis for fellowship between Missouri and the ALC. However, the new document would have to be examined to see if it would be a worthy successor to Missouri's "Brief Statement" of 1932. "Anything less will be a surrender--unless it can be shown that the old position [of the "Brief Statement"] was wrong."⁷⁶

Reim also pointed out that previous attempts to produce a

⁷⁴E. Reim, "This 'Common Confession Of Faith'--I," *Northwestern Lutheran*, (February 26, 1950), p 74.

⁷⁵Ibid.

⁷⁶Ibid.

single document--namely the "Doctrinal Affirmation"--had failed. Obviously differences in doctrine still remained which had foiled those attempts. Reim asked, "Has the new document solved these difficulties by the application of God's Word, or has it merely avoided them?"⁷⁷ Closely related was the question of whether the new statement would "breathe the ALC spirit"--i.e. allow room for theological latitude, the old Iowa Synod's "open questions." The questions Reim raised would have to be a vital part of evaluation of the "Common Confession."

After Reim had received copies of the "Common Confession" he asked and answered these questions in "This 'Common Confession Of Faith' " parts II and III. He dealt with the last question first: "Has the issue been faced that is raised by the oft expressed view of the ALC, namely that full doctrinal agreement is not necessary for church fellowship?"⁷⁸ He found that although the "Common Confession" opened with the assurance that "it is the duty of the Church to be faithful to its Lord and His Word in all its testimony,"⁷⁹ a promising beginning, yet "in fairness one must grant that when the ALC speaks of its principle of 'wholesome latitude' [in theology], it is of course honestly convinced that thereby it is being 'faithful to its Lord and His

⁷⁷Ibid, p 75.

⁷⁸E. Reim, "This 'Common Confession Of Faith'--II," *Northwestern Lutheran* (March 12, 1950), p 87.

⁷⁹Ibid.

Word."⁸⁰

To answer the other questions, whether or not the "Common Confession" upheld the high standards of the "Brief Statement" and whether or not it had solved existing doctrinal differences, Reim briefly examined some of the chief articles of the "Common Confession": Election, Inspiration, Justification, Conversion, and Eschatology. In each of these he found problems and concluded that the "high level of the Brief Statement has not been maintained."⁸¹

In his third article on the "Common Confession,"⁸² Reim asked the question, "Are we too critical?" The matter between Missouri and the ALC certainly was cause for concern in the Wisconsin Synod. But was Wisconsin expecting too much of the "Common Confession"? Reim pointed to two editorials, one printed in the ULCA's *The Lutheran* and the other in the ALC's *Lutheran Standard*, which pointed out false ideas on Scripture held within those church bodies, ideas which the "Common Confession" could not proscribe. "Have we been asking too much of this document? We think not. . . It is a situation which can not safely be ignored."⁸³

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid, p 88.

⁸² E. Reim, "This 'Common Confession Of Faith'--III," *Northwestern Lutheran* (March 26, 1950), p 104.

⁸³ Ibid, p 105.

"An Investigation Of The Common Confession."

Reim dealt with the "Common Confession" again in a few of his other columns, but no in-depth discussions of the statement appeared until after the Wisconsin Synod convention of 1951. During the convention a series of six essays was read with the general theme, "An Investigation Of The Common Confession." Summaries of these essays appeared in six successive issues of *Northwestern Lutheran* from September 23 to December 2, 1951. The issues investigated were: the Word, Justification, Conversion, Election, Church and Ministry, and the Last Things. The summaries themselves are masterful examples of clarity. They explained clearly to readers exactly what was objectionable about the "Common Confession". In each case the "Common Confession's" statement on a doctrine, while initially sounding acceptable, actually proved to leave room for the exact same false understanding found in the ALC's predecessors. Each summary article emphasized the need for a doctrinal statement to contain antitheses to exclude any possible misunderstanding of any doctrine, whether intentional or not.

In "An Investigation Of The Common Confession's Statement On The Word,"⁸⁴ Professor John Hoenecke found that the "Common Confession" allowed room for the ALC's rejection of the doctrine of verbal inspiration and for the old Iowa Synod error on the function of the Law. These failings made the statement "entirely

⁸⁴*Northwestern Lutheran* (September 23, 1951), p 297.

inadequate. It is in reality no confession at all."⁸⁵

The "Common Confession's" statement on Justification showed similar weakness. In his article, "An Investigation Of The Common Confession's Statement On Justification,"⁸⁶ Pastor E. Wendland first presented the historic Lutheran and Synodical Conference position, then reviewed the Ohio Synod's rejection of objective justification. When examining the "Common Confession's" statement on this doctrine, Wendland found room for the Ohio Synod error.

Pastor T. Adascheck, in "An Investigation Of The Common Confession's Statement On Conversion,"⁸⁷ contrasted the Biblical and Lutheran position with the Ohio and Iowa Synod error of synergism. Again, although the "Common Confession's" statement was Scripturally correct, "The inadequacy of the article consists, not in what it says, but in what it omits."⁸⁸ The "Common Confession" statement left room for synergism in conversion.

In the fourth article, "An Investigation Of The Common Confession's Statement On Election,"⁸⁹ Professor Armin Schuetze presented a summary of the election controversy and found that the "Common Confession" did not settle the issues at all. He

⁸⁵Ibid, p 298.

⁸⁶*Northwestern Lutheran* (October 7, 1951), p 311.

⁸⁷*Northwestern Lutheran* (October 21, 1951), p 333.

⁸⁸Ibid.

⁸⁹*Northwestern Lutheran* (November 4, 1951). p 341.

concluded that "This article must be considered as a compromising confession and whatever compromises the truth of Scripture must be considered false and rejected."⁹⁰

The final two articles came to the same conclusions as the first four. In "An Investigation Of The Common Confession's Statement On The Church And The Ministry,"⁹¹ Professor E. Kowalke found false ideas on the nature of the Church which contradicted Scripture and which opened the door for unionism. He also found the common misinterpretation of Jesus' prayer in John 17, "that all of them may be one." The "Common Confession" understood these words to refer to outward union, a misunderstanding held by all who desire union without doctrinal unity. Finally, the "Common Confession" left room for the Iowa Synod teaching on the ministry which held "a touch of popery."⁹² Again the "Common Confession" turned out to be unacceptable.

Finally, in "An Investigation Of The Common Confession's Statement On The Last Things,"⁹³ Pastor O. Siegler presented the Lutheran identification of the papacy as the Antichrist and rejection of millennialism. When he examined the "Common Confession," he found room for the old Iowa Synod teaching of millennialism and doubt on the identity of the Antichrist, teachings which were still found at Wartburg Seminary at the

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ *Northwestern Lutheran* (November 18, 1951), p 361.

⁹² Ibid, p 361.

⁹³ *Northwestern Lutheran* (December 2, 1951), p 378.

time.

These articles unanimously found the "Common Confession" to be unacceptable as a statement for doctrinal unity. The "Common Confession" statements were almost always shorter than those in the "Brief Statement," leading to suspicion that they weren't as comprehensive. When examining the various statements, that suspicion was found to be true--due to double-talk and lack of antitheses, the "Common Confession" left room for the old errors of the ALC. The "Common Confession" thus could be accepted by the Missouri Synod for what it said and by the ALC for what it didn't say. In printing these articles the *Northwestern Lutheran* gave its readers an education in Scriptural doctrine and a clear analysis of the problems with the "Common Confession's" teaching on a few key doctrines.

Reim wrote a few other articles on the "Common Confession" and its inadequacies, ultimately finding the "Common Confession" to be unionistic because it allowed doctrinal disagreement under the guise of doctrinal unity.⁹⁴ It could be read and understood in more than one way. When looking at some of Missouri's recent statements on Antichrist, he even found a hint of a shift away from the historic Lutheran position toward the doubt of the ALC. He found hints that the "Common Confession" was beginning "to influence the speaking and thinking of its defenders" and even had to ask if one of those defenders was "beginning to alter the

⁹⁴E. Reim, "The Unionism of the CC: Justification," *Northwestern Lutheran* (May 15, 1955), p 150.

Brief Statement."⁹⁵ Reim's statements left little doubt about the problems with the "Common Confession."

In Statu Confessionis

When the 1952 Synodical Conference convention was not able to make any progress toward resolving the intersynodical problems, the Wisconsin delegation declared itself--and the synod--to be *in statu confessionis*. Reim reported on this immediately and explained just what it meant: that it was no longer possible for relations between Wisconsin and Missouri to remain exactly the same as they always had, yet Wisconsin was not yet ready to break fellowship with Missouri. It was "necessary that no one be left in doubt"⁹⁶ that the relationship had been changed. However, the new situation could not be allowed to "serve as an excuse for adapting oneself to an unpleasant situation and learning to live with it, so to speak. We must recognize what deception would be involved against ourselves and others if we were anything but completely sincere in our protest."⁹⁷ Two months later the *Northwestern Lutheran* published another article, "A State of Confession: A Study of Its Implications on the basis of II Thess. 3:14-15," by Professor Frederic E. Blume.⁹⁸ Blume reviewed the Wisconsin delegation's

⁹⁵E. Reim, "The Unionism of the CC: Antichrist," *Northwestern Lutheran* (June 12, 1955), p 184.

⁹⁶E. Reim, "A State Of Confession," *Northwestern Lutheran* (September 7, 1952), p 282.

⁹⁷Ibid.

⁹⁸*Northwestern Lutheran* (November 2, 1952), p 345.

action and its implications, and presented the Scriptural basis for that action in an examination of II Thessalonians 3:14-15. He wrote that the Wisconsin Synod had taken the position of admonishing an erring brother, that it had been forced into that position "NOT because they find themselves in disagreement with anything that Missouri has taught in the past, but *because in their estimation at least the spokesmen for Missouri...have taken a position which deviates from the historic position of the Missouri Synod.*"⁹⁹ As this new "state of confession" developed, the *Northwestern Lutheran* showed a desire to help its readers understand the Wisconsin Synod's new state of protest.

The *Northwestern Lutheran* wanted readers to understand thoroughly not only the issues directly related to the Missouri situation, but also more widely related issues. Reim wrote several articles on the Synodical Conference and its purpose, helping the reader to understand just what role this body was playing in trying to settle the controversy. In the "As We See It" series, Reim also wrote articles about Scouting, chaplaincy, and outside criticism of Wisconsin's position.

The *Northwestern Lutheran* worked hard to encourage its readers to learn about the intersynodical controversy. When Northwestern Publishing House produced a series of tracts, "The Differences Between The Wisconsin Synod And The Missouri Synod," the *Northwestern Lutheran* encouraged readers to use them. "The tracts will not be light reading... They will require serious

⁹⁹Ibid., p 346.

study by pastors and congregation members together. . . The pamphlets are to serve an educational purpose in our congregations, and ought to be in demand by our people."¹⁰⁰

However, the *Northwestern Lutheran* also wanted readers to have a good foundational understanding of the background issues of the doctrines of church and fellowship. Thus it encouraged readers to use the tracts to assure themselves "not only of the Scripturally correct position of the Wisconsin Synod, but also [to] be well informed as to what is at stake in this sad controversy."¹⁰¹

For this more general educational purpose of understanding the principles of church fellowship, the *Northwestern Lutheran* also published such articles as E. Schaller's "A Brief Catechism on Unionism,"¹⁰² and P.E. Kretzmann's "When Separation Becomes A God-given Duty,"¹⁰³ which pointed out the important distinction between valid and invalid separation--separation and separatism, as E. Reim put it. Kretzmann reaffirmed the point that schism or separation without just cause is an abomination before God--for reason of subjective ideas or false teachings. However, separation from those who are teaching or practicing falsely is necessary.

¹⁰⁰"Siftings," *Northwestern Lutheran* (February 7, 1954), p 34.

¹⁰¹W.J. S[chaefer], "The Differences," *Northwestern Lutheran* (May 2, 1954), p 132.

¹⁰²*Northwestern Lutheran* (May 7, 1950). p 155.

¹⁰³*Northwestern Lutheran* (July 2, 1950), p 212.

The *Northwestern Lutheran* even pointed out and judged unionistic thought from the President of the United States. In early 1951 President Truman had told church press members that denominations should forget doctrinal differences and work together for peace. According to Truman, all people are headed for the same place, after all. The editor asked the obvious question: Who gave him authority to speak on religion? Obviously he didn't know what he was talking about.¹⁰⁴

Since examination of the "Common Confession" had made it clear that the election controversy was not quite dead, the *Northwestern Lutheran* presented some historical background on that issue in J.P. Meyer's two-part examination of "The Doctrine of God's Election In American Lutheran Controversy."¹⁰⁵ To give readers background on the entire doctrine of the church, the magazine also printed Meyer's 16-part Series on "The Church As Jesus Spoke Of It" from 1953-1954.

As efforts were made through the Synodical Conference to resolve the conflict between the synods, the *Northwestern Lutheran* made appropriate reports, usually reporting the simple facts without comment. Reim. of course. in "As We See It" reported the facts and put them into historical perspective, keeping readers' eyes open to the theological and practical problems underlying current events. These efforts kept Wisconsin Synod readers informed and in touch with the issues as the 1955

¹⁰⁴"Siftings," *Northwestern Lutheran* (April 22, 1951), p 114.

¹⁰⁵*Northwestern Lutheran* (November 16 and November 30, 1952).

convention approached.

The Approach of the 1955 Convention

The 1955 Wisconsin Synod convention is regarded as a turning point in interchurch relations. Fredrich states, "One would have to go back as far as 1868 for a synodical convention to equal that of 1955 in significance for the interchurch relations field."¹⁰⁶ The situation with Missouri had not improved but had deteriorated, and the situation was rapidly becoming intolerable. By this time, continuing to remain in a protesting fellowship while admonishing the Missouri Synod could possibly involve Wisconsin itself in unionism by maintaining fellowship which was no longer based on doctrinal unity. "All this added up to the conviction that something drastic would have to be done in 1955."¹⁰⁷

Ironically, relatively few articles related to the intersynodical problems appeared in the *Northwestern Lutheran* during this pivotal year. Part of the reason for this was the end of Reim's series "As We See It," just before the synodical convention. His efforts before the convention dealt mainly with keeping readers up-to-date with current intersynodical developments, especially in regard to Scouting and the chaplaincy issue. The Missouri Synod's recent provision for its chaplains "in emergency situations" to serve the Lord's Supper to Lutherans

¹⁰⁶E.C. Fredrich, "The Great Debate With Missouri," *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* LXXIV (April 1977), p 167.

¹⁰⁷Ibid.

of any body had provided a great deal of material for *Northwestern Lutheran* writers and was proving to be a major bone of contention between Missouri and Wisconsin. Reim's reporting continued until the July 10, 1955 installment of "As We See It," entitled "The Norwegian Action,"¹⁰⁸ a report on the Norwegian Synod's suspension of fellowship with the Missouri Synod. Reim's closing words echoed the feelings of many by the time of the 1955 convention: "The Norwegians are a small group, but they have met a major test magnificently. They have measured up! God grant that we do as well when the time for our decision comes!"¹⁰⁹

I.P. Frey in an August 7, 1955 editorial titled "Ichabod"¹¹⁰ pointed out the need for caution in making that decision, the need to make that decision based on love for the gospel and for the truth, on living faith. The Biblical name Ichabod means "the glory is departed" That name could be applied to many church bodies, who are proud of large membership and are impressive in outward things, but who don't have the gospel anymore. The Wisconsin Synod holds fast to true doctrine, but also needs living faith. "Orthodoxy with no living faith is like a nut which is all shell and has no kernel. Ichabod, the glory has departed; let us pray God that He may never have reason to apply that name to us."¹¹¹

¹⁰⁸*Northwestern Lutheran* (July 10, 1955), p 215.

¹⁰⁹*Ibid*, p 216.

¹¹⁰*Northwestern Lutheran* (August 7, 1955), p 244.

¹¹¹*Ibid*.

Final Stage: Efforts Toward Restoration (1955-1961)

The Thirty-Third Convention of the Wisconsin Synod was held in Saginaw, Michigan August 10-17, 1955. It was the convention which did Fredrich's "something drastic"--almost. The *Northwestern Lutheran* reported that the convention passed the resolution:

That whereas the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod has created divisions and offenses by its official resolutions, policies and practices not in accord with Scripture, we, in obedience to the command of our Lord in Romans 16:17-17, terminate our fellowship with the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod.¹¹²

However, that resolution was not to go into effect immediately, but would be presented for final action to a recessed session the next year. The *Northwestern Lutheran* gave the reasons:

1. This resolution has far reaching spiritual consequences.
2. This continues to heed the Scriptural exhortations to patience and forbearance in love by giving the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod opportunity to express itself in its 1956 convention.¹¹³

The *Northwestern Lutheran* report on the convention emphasized the fact that Missouri would have its chance to react to the resolution before it was put into effect. It explained the application of Romans 16:17-18 to the current situation and pointed out that the Wisconsin Synod would "terminate fellowship with the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod if there is no concrete

¹¹²"The Thirty-Third Synod Convention," *Northwestern Lutheran* (September 4, 1955), p 277.

¹¹³Ibid.

evidence of a substantial change in the situation."¹¹⁴ The *Northwestern Lutheran* report emphasized the great amount of study and work put into this matter. It reported on the dissenters, who felt the action should have been put into effect immediately. The report ended with the conclusion that "What is needed, above all else, is the earnest prayer that the Lord may in His mercy rebuild the crumbling walls of the Synodical Conference Zion and lead His own to do His will."¹¹⁵

Overall the *Northwestern Lutheran* presented a clear, balanced report of the action taken by the 1955 synod convention. It fairly reported on the dissenters, but explained the reasons for the delay in putting the resolution into effect, just in case any readers might wonder. In the November 13, 1955 issue, the *Northwestern Lutheran* printed the full report of the Floor Committee On Church Union,¹¹⁶ so readers could see it for themselves. During this time of critical decisions with enormous implications the *Northwestern Lutheran* did a commendable job of providing its readers with detailed and thorough coverage of the main issues leading up to the convention's action and the consequences of that convention--the resolution to break fellowship.

¹¹⁴Ibid.

¹¹⁵Ibid, p 278.

¹¹⁶"Committee No. 2 -- Floor Committee On Church Union," *Northwestern Lutheran* (November 13, 1955), p 360.

"The Voice Of The C.U.C."

Not all agreed with the Wisconsin Synod's decision to delay final action on its 1955 resolution, however. The *Northwestern Lutheran* reported that fact when it spoke of the dissenters. One of those dissenters was E. Reim. Because of his stand, he "felt that he could no longer serve as the spokesman for the Standing Committee in Matters of Church Union."¹¹⁷ This essentially meant the end of the long-running informative series "As We See It." However, Reim agreed "to write when asked to do so by a different editor."¹¹⁸ Thus, even after the 1955 convention a few articles did appear under the heading "As We See It." However, the *Northwestern Lutheran's* educational articles on church union proceeded along a different path. The members of the Standing Committee "felt that the readers of the *Northwestern Lutheran* would want the Committee to keep them informed about the matters which lie heavily upon the hearts of all of us in the differences which are tearing the Synodical Conference apart."¹¹⁹ Thus, under the heading "The Voice Of The C.U.C.," the Standing Committee in Matters of Church Union would "try to bring articles which we hope will answer questions which You may be asking. We do pray that the Lord may use what we bring to show you His will and to make you cheerful in obeying it for your

¹¹⁷Irwin Habeck, Editor's Note to "The Voice Of The C.U.C.," *Northwestern Lutheran* (November 27, 1955), p 374.

¹¹⁸Ibid.

¹¹⁹Ibid.

Savior's sake."¹²⁰

This push to educate readers on church union matters became particularly noticeable in the *Northwestern Lutheran* between the 1955 and 1956 conventions. From late 1955 through 1956 more articles appeared dealing with the intersynodical issues than in any other similar amount of time. The largest single source of these articles was the series "The Voice Of The C.U.C."--eighteen articles between November 27, 1955 and July 22, 1956. "The Voice Of The C.U.C." was written by a number of different men, including Habeck, Carl Lawrenz, J.P. Meyer, and F.E. Blume. Even Reim wrote an installment (April 15, 1956). The content of the articles varied from doctrinal essays (e.g. "Does Romans 16:18 Limit the Application of the 'Avoid' of verse 17?" by F.E. Blume¹²¹) to information on Missouri's doctrines (e.g. Carl Lawrenz's "The Missouri Synod's Position on Scouting"¹²²) to practical essays aimed at encouraging lay members (e.g. Irwin Habeck's "A Preacher's Quarrel?"¹²³).

"The Voice Of The C.U.C." wanted to prepare the readers of the *Northwestern Lutheran* as much as possible for the action of the 1956 convention, and it did so by presenting a wide variety of information related to the issue at hand. The series made clear to the reader that the differences and problems were in

¹²⁰Ibid.

¹²¹*Northwestern Lutheran* (November 27, 1955), p 374.

¹²²*Northwestern Lutheran* (March 18, 1956), p 88.

¹²³*Northwestern Lutheran* (March 4, 1956), p 72.

fact real and serious, serious enough to break doctrinal unity and thus church fellowship. By examining the problems with the new Missouri Synod positions on Scouting, prayer fellowship, chaplaincy and other issues, "The Voice Of The C.U.C." showed its readers exactly why such serious action was necessary. The series was not always negative, either. "On the Credit Side of the Ledger,"¹²⁴ by Karl F. Krauss, reported some positive developments in the Missouri Synod, and although the articles clearly showed the seriousness of the intersynodical conflict and its potential consequence--a break in fellowship--yet many of them still expressed hope for a settlement and correction of the problems and a renewal of the long-standing fellowship with the Missouri Synod.

Other articles outside the series also worked to educate *Northwestern Lutheran* readers. Carl Lawrenz in his series "Studies in God's Word" occasionally dealt with church issues (e.g. "The Christian Church, The Glorious Work of God's Spirit"¹²⁵ and "The Marvelous Growth Of Christ's Kingdom"¹²⁶) and prayer (e.g. "Lord, Teach Us To Pray"¹²⁷). In one issue two editorials, "Remember Our Lutheran Heritage" by Norman Madson, and "Our Kind of Church" by G. Sydow¹²⁸, worked to build

¹²⁴*Northwestern Lutheran* (May 13, 1956), p 152.

¹²⁵*Northwestern Lutheran* (May 13, 1956), p 148.

¹²⁶*Northwestern Lutheran* (June 10, 1956), p 180.

¹²⁷*Northwestern Lutheran* (April 29, 1956), p 132.

¹²⁸*Northwestern Lutheran* (May 27, 1956), p 163.

appreciation for conservative Lutheran church and its heritage of pure doctrine. H.A. Koch in the August 5, 1956 issue dealt with "The Antichristian Religion of the Freemasons and other Lodges."¹²⁹ In a later issue Koch dealt with Scouting under a similar title. E. Schaller in his series "From A Wider Field" dealt with union and fellowship issues often during these years. Some articles dealt with fellowship in a more practical way. Wm. H. Wiedenmeyer in "That You Might Know"¹³⁰ covered "what is fitting and proper in a funeral service". Wiedenmeyer spoke of proper music, and then moved to the fact that solo singing is a form of preaching, so only those united with us in doctrine, faith and practice should do this. The same holds true with organists. Both of these come under the category of unionism, which God wants us to avoid (Romans 16:17).

The *Northwestern Lutheran* presented so much information on union and fellowship issues between the 1955 and 1956 conventions that the faithful reader certainly would have been thoroughly informed and prepared if the 1956 convention decided to uphold the termination of fellowship resolved in 1955. Yet "The Voice Of The C.U.C." in its last installment before that convention reported some hopeful signs within the Missouri Synod, signs which seemed to express "an earnest desire of reestablishing the

¹²⁹*Northwestern Lutheran* (August 5, 1956), p 246.

¹³⁰*Northwestern Lutheran* (April 29, 1956), p 138.

former unity of spirit."¹³¹ Thus the Standing Committee recommended that the convention hold the 1955 resolution in abeyance. Meanwhile, on an inside column right next to this report ran an article titled "Why Avoid Them?"¹³², an explanation of Romans 16:17-18 and its bearing on the current situation. Both these articles expressed prayerful hope that the intersynodical situation could be resolved and that the Synodical Conference could be restored to its former status. President Naumann clearly expressed the seriousness of the coming convention and his desire for such restoration of harmony within the Synodical Conference in his article "Finally, Brethren, Pray For Us!"¹³³ based on II Thessalonians 3:1.

The 1956 Recessed Convention

The recessed convention voted by a wide margin to accept the recommendation of the Standing Committee in Matters of Church Union, and the Saginaw resolution of 1955 was held in abeyance. The *Northwestern Lutheran* devoted several pages to a report on that convention¹³⁴. The conclusion was that

¹³¹"Report of the Standing Committee on Matters of Church Union to the Nine Districts of the Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States," *Northwestern Lutheran* (July 22, 1956), p 231.

¹³²Otto J. Eckert, "Why Avoid Them?" *Northwestern Lutheran* (July 22, 1956), p 232.

¹³³*Northwestern Lutheran* (August 19, 1956), p 264.

¹³⁴E.C. Fredrich, "Fellowship To Continue: Report Of Recessed Convention," *Northwestern Lutheran* (September 16, 1956), p 294.

Not all of our hopes and not all of our fears were realized at Watertown. Problems and difficulties remain with us. But so does our cherished, though strained, fellowship with The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. And so does our God. . . He it is, not we or others, who has averted a termination of fellowship. He has given us more than we ourselves could have gained or have deserved. Ebenezer. His joy is our strength in the year and years ahead.¹³⁵

After the 1956 convention, the amount of space devoted to union and fellowship issues dropped off dramatically for two years. No major series devoted to such issues appeared until 1961. It was a time of waiting, watching to see what the Missouri Synod would do. Smaller articles and editorials continued to provide information on the foundational issues in the controversy, such as Scouting and chaplaincy, but much attention turned away from the intersynodical problems and focused on unionism outside the Synodical Conference, such as the World Council of Churches and other such unionistic organizations.

However, the controversy was far from over. The 1957 convention of the Wisconsin Synod saw much debate over the matter of termination of fellowship. Even though many felt that immediate action needed to be taken, after long debate the convention rejected a resolution to break fellowship and "urged a continuation of efforts to restore full unity."¹³⁶ Those efforts would involve discussions on two levels: "joint union

¹³⁵Ibid, p 295.

¹³⁶E.C. Fredrich, "The Great Debate With Missouri," *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* LXXIV (April 1977), p 170.

committees of the Synodical Conference and the conclave of theologians that would bring the overseas brethren into the picture."¹³⁷ These discussions were aimed at producing a doctrinal statement which would serve the Synodical Conference as a whole. As these meetings were held, the *Northwestern Lutheran* reported on them without comment. Several reports appeared under the heading, "The Voice Of The C.U.C." By 1959 the joint committees had made some progress. They had produced a statement on Scripture which the Wisconsin Synod in convention adopted unanimously, as did the other synods of the Synodical Conference. Fredrich comments that "It was fitting that the Synodical Conference's swan song should be a testimony to its historic position on the Holy Scriptures."¹³⁸ "The Voice Of The C.U.C." printed that statement in the *Northwestern Lutheran*¹³⁹, along with the doctrinal statement on the Antichrist¹⁴⁰ which had been drawn up and which the Wisconsin Synod also adopted in its 1959 convention, but which the Missouri Synod did not.

While the *Northwestern Lutheran* was able to report some hopeful developments in the intersynodical situation, other developments were not so positive. The long duration of the

¹³⁷Ibid.

¹³⁸Ibid, p 171.

¹³⁹"Statement On Scripture Adopted by the Joint Committee of the Synodical Conference," *Northwestern Lutheran* (February 15, 1959), p 59.

¹⁴⁰"The Antichrist," *Northwestern Lutheran* (January 4, 1959), p 8.

controversy had led some to conclude that the Wisconsin Synod was sinning in not breaking fellowship with Missouri. Irwin Habeck in his article, "Disobedient to God's Word?"¹⁴¹ dealt with that notion by looking at the recent history of intersynodical relations on the basis of Romans 16:17-18. The Missouri Synod had not indicated that its course was unchangeable and so hope remained that the problems could be solved. However, Habeck concluded that if the last-ditch efforts being made by the joint committees were to fail, i.e. if the differences could not be reconciled, then the Wisconsin Synod would have no choice but to apply Romans 16:17-18 to the Missouri Synod and "avoid them."

Impasse

The issue which ultimately destroyed hope for reconciliation was the doctrine of church fellowship. Missouri's long-standing distinction between prayer fellowship and joint prayer had always been a divisive issue. In 1960 it finally divided Wisconsin and Missouri. The Commission on Doctrinal Matters (formerly the C.U.C.) reported in the June 19, 1960 issue of *Northwestern Lutheran*¹⁴² that the Missouri Synod could not and would not accept the Wisconsin Synod view of the unit principle of fellowship. Instead, the Missouri Synod upheld its distinction between prayer fellowship and joint prayer and defended its unionistic activities, including its attempts at establishing

¹⁴¹*Northwestern Lutheran* (April 27, 1958), p 135.

¹⁴²Irwin Habeck, "The Commission On Doctrinal Matters Reports," *Northwestern Lutheran* (June 19, 1960), p 197.

relations with the National Lutheran Council and the National Council of Churches. The Wisconsin Synod's Commission on Doctrinal Matters would report this impasse to the Synodical Conference convention of 1960 and to the Wisconsin Synod convention of 1961. The handwriting was on the wall.

As the intersynodical conflict heated up for the last time, coverage of union issues in the *Northwestern Lutheran* heated up too. During 1960 many editorials and articles dealt with unionism. Some discussed the newly constituted ALC and the newly formed LCA. It is interesting to note that at its constituting convention the ALC predicted another big Lutheran merger coming before too much time passed. In reality it took 28 years.

Many of the articles in the *Northwestern Lutheran* during 1960 continued to educate laymen on issues involved in the conflict. The usual subjects of Scouting, lodges, and funeral fellowship received treatment, along with new issues such as the Billy Graham Crusades. To keep laymen informed that the seemingly picky issues at hand were indeed important, C. Toppe wrote a short editorial entitled "Distinctions With a Difference":

Laymen at our conventions frequently become impatient when pastors debate about the words and phrases in confessions and doctrinal statements. To the laity such arguments may appear to be mere quibbling about words. The clergy seem to be making distinctions without a difference.

But it is more likely that they are seriously concerned about safeguarding truth against error. They know that error can readily pass as truth. We need theologians who can distinguish the vital difference between truth and truth-simulating error, even if they must leave no

word unturned in doing so.¹⁴³

Preparation for the 1961 Convention

As the Wisconsin Synod's 1961 convention approached, the Commission on Doctrinal Matters published a series of articles about the impasse on the doctrine of fellowship. The series would show first of all the two opposing views of church fellowship involved in the impasse, and then would show that the Wisconsin Synod position was nothing other than the doctrine of Scripture itself. This series of six articles was prepared by Gerald Hoenecke, J.P. Meyer and Armin Schuetze. After presenting the two differing views on fellowship, the authors looked at the history of the two synods and of the Synodical Conference to see which view had been historically practiced. The authors found the Wisconsin position of unit fellowship to be the historic position of the Synodical Conference, and then presented five areas where the Missouri Synod had departed from that position: the distinction between prayer fellowship and joint prayer: joint conferences of seminary students, faculty, editors and others; cooperation in mission activity; application of Romans 16:17; and prayers at civic occasions.¹⁴⁴ In the last installment the authors looked at fellowship practices before the founding of the Synodical Conference, and concluded from all their observations that all forms of unionism must be avoided. The authors clearly

¹⁴³*Northwestern Lutheran* (September 11, 1960), p 291.

¹⁴⁴"Fellowship Then and Now," *Northwestern Lutheran* (April 9, 1961), p 117.

presented historical and doctrinal background on the fellowship controversy which showed that the Wisconsin Synod position was not only the Synodical Conference's position, but historically that of the Church as a whole.

The 1961 convention would be a time of crucial decisions. The course Wisconsin would have to follow seemed unavoidable: suspension of fellowship with the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. However, the *Northwestern Lutheran* had prepared Wisconsin Synod members for this necessary action. The magazine kept reminding readers that no matter how much was at stake in the way of joint work and benefits, social relationships or any other earthly thing, the overriding principle the Wisconsin Synod would have to follow above everything was faithfulness to God and his Word. On the eve of the convention C. Toppe urged that "As a crucial convention approaches, our prayers must be that, above all, our position will be found to be God's position, and, if it has been found to be such, that we act solely in keeping with that position."¹⁴⁵

Suspension of Fellowship (1961)

The September 10, 1961 issue of the *Northwestern Lutheran* reported that the synod convention had taken the difficult, yet necessary step of suspending fellowship with the Missouri Synod. Two of the three editorials in that issue dealt with the convention's action, but not in an introductory way. The editors

¹⁴⁵C. Toppe, "To Prove What Is Right," *Northwestern Lutheran* (July 30, 1961), p 243.

assumed that the news of the suspension would have reached the reader long before the *Northwestern Lutheran* did. C. Toppe's editorial, "Progressive 'Traditionalists',"¹⁴⁶ strengthened the conviction that the convention's action was a correct one by pointing out that even though the great majority of Americans would see that action as "hopelessly reactionary," yet the synod convention actually had been very forward-minded in its actions concerning worker training, evangelism and many other issues. The Wisconsin Synod was not "hopelessly reactionary," but was instead reacting to God's Word by taking actions in accordance with it. I.P. Frey's editorial, "A Mere Formal Church Membership,"¹⁴⁷ took advantage of the heightened awareness of church-related issues to repeat the fact that church membership is more than mere orthodoxy or church attendance, but rather is a matter of having a living faith. This reminder was a good encouragement to readers to examine their own spiritual lives and to think about the reason for their membership in the Lutheran church.

The report on the synodical convention also appeared in the September 10, 1961 issue. The section on "Union Matters"¹⁴⁸ presented a detailed account of the process by which the convention arrived at its decision to suspend fellowship with the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. It also reported a resolution to

¹⁴⁶*Northwestern Lutheran* (September 10, 1961), p 291.

¹⁴⁷*Northwestern Lutheran* (September 10, 1961), p 291.

¹⁴⁸*Northwestern Lutheran* (September 10, 1961), p 295.

reconsider the Watertown resolutions and Fort Atkinson suspensions which had led to the Protestant controversy. On such an important issue and weighty action, the *Northwestern Lutheran* wanted its readers to be as informed as possible, especially because the synod's action at the convention would affect a great many of those readers. The report gave the text of the resolutions and brief comment on them, devoting three pages to the matter. As the Wisconsin Synod carried out the action for which it had prepared so long, the *Northwestern Lutheran* brought that action to the lay members of the synod.

Aftermath (1961-1963)

Even though the Wisconsin Synod had been preparing, directly or indirectly, for over 25 years for the suspension of fellowship with Missouri, the actual fulfillment of that suspension was still a hard blow. Before the convention of 1961 the *Northwestern Lutheran* informed its readers about all the issues which were part of the intersynodical conflict. After the break in fellowship, the *Northwestern Lutheran* still worked to help its readers understand just why the action had been necessary, and also worked to inform readers of the implications for their daily lives.

In the troubled times after the convention, the *Northwestern Lutheran* provided encouragement for its readers, who may have been shocked by the blow. C. Toppe in his editorial, "Minding Our Business,"¹⁴⁹ pointed readers away from the fact that "For

¹⁴⁹*Northwestern Lutheran* (October 8, 1961), p 323.

many it will not be easy to live in the new situation," because of all the changes which would have to take place in intersynodical relations as well as everyday Christian living. Toppe pointed them instead toward the fact that as a Christian church the Wisconsin Synod still had work to do, the work of proclaiming the gospel to the world. He pointed readers to Paul's words in I Thessalonians 4:11 and urged them to keep their eyes focused on God's work. "We are to tend to our knitting, to get the work of the kingdom done. That's good advice at any time."¹⁵⁰

Toppe also reminded *Northwestern Lutheran* readers a year after the 1961 convention that "You Can't Go Home Again."¹⁵¹ Because of all the intersynodical troubles, "there may come a desire to escape the unrest and disturbance caused by this break in relations between synods once long in fellowship. We may wish to return to the past when the two synods believed and confessed as one."¹⁵² Many Wisconsin Synod members had been raised in Missouri Synod churches, and may have been thinking about returning to the Missouri Synod. Toppe reviewed many notable and commendable traits which the Missouri Synod had held in the past, but then reminded his readers that "A new spirit reigns in that synod today. . . The synod of the past is no more. To that synod

¹⁵⁰Ibid.

¹⁵¹*Northwestern Lutheran* (August 12, 1962), p 243.

¹⁵²Ibid.

you can't go home again."¹⁵³ I.P. Frey in "Negative Theology"¹⁵⁴ reminded readers that the Wisconsin Synod had not shown "a spirit of negativism" in its dealings with Missouri, but rather Wisconsin simply had been carrying out its God-given duty to expose and condemn false teachings. "Sometimes it is necessary to tear down the structure of error to build the edifice of divine Truth."¹⁵⁵

The *Northwestern Lutheran* also devoted space to more practical matters pertaining to the fellowship situation. Most notably Armin Schuetze's long-running series, "A Lantern to Our Footsteps: God's Reply to Our Questions," turned after the 1961 convention to answering reader questions about issues related to the fellowship suspension. The articles covered a wide range of questions related to the fellowship issue. Some of these were: "May We Pray At Table With People Not of the Wisconsin Synod?"¹⁵⁶, "Is the Synod Resolution Binding On All Congregations?"¹⁵⁷, "Is the 'Avoid Them' of Romans 16:17 the same As Excommunication?"¹⁵⁸, and "Is the Interpretation of Luther's Catechism the Same In the Different Lutheran Church

¹⁵³Ibid.

¹⁵⁴*Northwestern Lutheran* (September 23, 1962), p 291.

¹⁵⁵Ibid.

¹⁵⁶*Northwestern Lutheran* (October 22, 1961), p 342.

¹⁵⁷*Northwestern Lutheran* (November 19, 1961), p 375.

¹⁵⁸*Northwestern Lutheran* (December 3, 1961), p 391.

Bodies?"¹⁵⁹ In this series, Schuetze provided a useful and necessary service to Wisconsin Synod members by answering their specific concerns.

Finally, the *Northwestern Lutheran* ran other series of articles dealing with church and fellowship, in an effort to keep Wisconsin Synod members informed on those issues during times when many questions, concerns and doubts arose. Carl Lawrenz published a series of eight articles from December 3, 1961 through March 25, 1962, covering "Entrenched Unionistic Practices" in the Missouri Synod. In his articles Lawrenz showed how developments in the Missouri Synod both before and after the suspension of fellowship had shown the wisdom of that action. The situation was not improving as time went on.

Covering more general fellowship and union issues were "Some Reflections on the Ecumenical Movement," by Gerald Hoenecke, which ran in the April 1962 issues of *Northwestern Lutheran*, and "A New Cooperative Association of Lutheran Churches in America?" a three-part series by O. Siegler, which ran from May 6 through June 3, 1962.

Wisconsin Synod's closing act in the scope of this paper was its withdrawal from the Synodical Conference in 1963. In the report of the synodical convention of 1963, in the section on "Doctrinal Matters,"¹⁶⁰ Marcus Nitz talked about the activities of the Commission on Doctrinal Matters in keeping contact and

¹⁵⁹*Northwestern Lutheran* (February 24, 1963), p 357.

¹⁶⁰*Northwestern Lutheran* (September 22, 1963), p 293.

reporting developments in other Lutheran bodies, and then reported the synod's decision to withdraw from the Synodical Conference in "solemn protest against the departure of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod from the historic doctrinal position of the Lutheran Synodical Conference."¹⁶¹ The report closed with mention of efforts to reunite with the Church of the Lutheran Confession and the Protestant conference.

Evaluation

Now that we have seen what the *Northwestern Lutheran* did to prepare the Wisconsin Synod for the suspension of fellowship with Missouri, the natural question to ask next is how well did it do this job? Evaluation of the *Northwestern Lutheran's* coverage need not include such incidentals as writing style or quality-- since the vast majority of articles was written by theologically trained professionals, writing quality and clarity were almost always quite high. Evaluation of such incidental matters would not teach us much. Rather, evaluating the *Northwestern Lutheran's* coverage in terms of content and technique can teach us much about theological education and about dealing with controversy today.

When surveying the vast amount of information printed in the *Northwestern Lutheran* during the intersynodical controversy, some general trends and characteristics become evident in the reporting. This evaluation will identify some of those trends and characteristics and then draw some general lessons from them.

¹⁶¹Ibid.

first dealing with more general characteristics of the *Northwestern Lutheran's* reporting, and then evaluating more specific techniques used in reporting and educating during the intersynodical conflict.

During the early years of the controversy, when perhaps it didn't seem so likely that the Missouri Synod would actually come to agreement on doctrinal unity with the ALC, the information presented in the *Northwestern Lutheran* was not as thorough or complete as it was later, specifically after 1947. E. Reim informed readers in 1947 that that scantness of information was intentional, due to an agreement between Missouri and Wisconsin Synod editors. During these early years, pastors and congregational leaders were obviously more important as a source of information and education for lay members. That fact didn't necessarily change after 1947, but the *Northwestern Lutheran* did expand its coverage immensely after that year. Where in the early years the lay members had to get most of their information from secondary sources--pastors--some of whom might not have been as close to the situation or as well informed as others, the *Northwestern Lutheran's* expanded coverage after 1947 standardized the information provided to lay members--all readers had access to information of the same completeness and quality. Most likely this standardization of information went a long way toward preserving synodical unity. A laity which is informed on doctrinal problems is far less likely to permit similar problems in its own midst. A laity which is uniformly educated about the

problems which its church body faces will have a common ground on which to stand together.

In the earlier years the *Northwestern Lutheran* was not always very up-to-date in reporting new developments in the Missouri-ALC situation. This may possibly have been due to channels of communication at the time. Today, however, with all our modern means of communication, we need to be as up-to-date as possible in reporting new developments in the religious world, especially when they hold direct bearing on our own church body. We need to respond to problems and conflicts as quickly as possible, even if that response only means simple acknowledgement with the promise of more detailed treatment to follow. *Rumor volat*, especially with today's communications systems. On the Internet, for example, just within the last month I've sent electronic documents around the world within minutes and held a real-time chat with a Lutheran in Finland. Information travels more quickly than ever, and the same is true of rumors, problems, and controversies. Today we need to make use of rapid communications and keep our laity informed as quickly as possible.

Those who wrote the *Northwestern Lutheran* articles and editorials used some effective techniques to show readers the real issues in the controversy. One technique often used was review of the historical development of the controversy and its various parts, to give a background and a clearer understanding of where an issue stood, where it came from, and how it could

best be resolved. For example, by showing some of the historic errors of the Iowa and Ohio Synods, those who investigated the "Common Confession" could more easily show the reader how the "Common Confession" was inadequate in excluding those exact errors from present-day Lutheranism.

Another effective technique often used during these years was the article series. Since space in a magazine is so limited, a series of articles could more adequately present the large amounts of information needed for a proper understanding of the intersynodical situation. A series of articles also gave opportunity to look at an issue from different angles and repeat important facts. *Repetitio mater memoriae.*

The writers themselves showed a consistent evangelical attitude which helped readers see that their articles were honest attempts to solve problems, rather than diatribes against enemies. The *Northwestern Lutheran* writers consistently used Scripture to show the principles involved and how to apply those principles. They always held up God's Word not only as the highest source of authority, but also consistently held up doctrinal unity as the key requirement for any kind of union or fellowship. The *Northwestern Lutheran* articles kept applying Scripture to the issues at hand, and kept explaining the meaning of passages which were central to understanding the principles of church fellowship, especially Romans 16:17-18 and Jesus' prayer in John 17. Such a strong emphasis on Scripture made clear to the readers that the authors were not attempting to present a

human viewpoint, but instead were presenting God's will.

Those who wrote the *Northwestern Lutheran* articles during these years showed a willingness to express frank and honest evaluations. When they saw problems, they weren't afraid to say so, to describe and explain those problems in no uncertain terms. Yet they also were always willing to "put the best construction on everything." They were usually willing to give the Missouri Synod the benefit of the doubt, and they always expressed hope that the Missouri Synod would come back to its old doctrinal position, the position of the Synodical Conference.

The *Northwestern Lutheran* and its writers set a good example and a high standard in informing and preparing the Wisconsin Synod for the eventual break with the Missouri Synod. The *Northwestern Lutheran* faithfully carried out its task as watchman, warning Wisconsin Synod Lutherans against doctrinal error and unionism, and keeping them up to date on the battle which was being fought. The *Northwestern Lutheran* and its writers always pointed readers back to Scripture and showed them the importance of remaining faithful to God in all situations. Whenever we defend the truths of God's Word, we will want to remember that example and follow it ourselves.

List of Articles and Series 1938-1962

N.B. This list gives only major articles and series of articles pertaining directly to the intersynodical situation, though it also includes some other articles pertaining to fellowship. This list is far from exhaustive. Many other articles and editorials dealt with fellowship in general and the intersynodical situation specifically, but the articles listed here are by far a majority of the most important. The lists of series themselves are as complete as possible, but I may have missed an installment or two.

"Grow In Knowledge: Union, Unity, Unionism"--Pastor E. Reim
July 16, 1939; reprinted April 13, 1947 as part of "The Debate On Union"

"Lutheran Union Movement Today"--Professor M. Lehninger
March 9, 1941

"The Debate On Union"--Prof. E. Reim
April 13, 1947: "Union, Unity, Unionism"
April 27, 1947: "How Did We Get Into It?"
May 11, 1947: "Where Do We Stand?"
May 25, 1947: "Where Do We Stand?"
June 8, 1947: "What Are The Prospects?"
June 22, 1947: "Scouting in the Lutheran Church"
July 6, 1947: "Scouting in the Lutheran Church"
July 20, 1947: "The Intersynodical Movement"
August 3, 1947: "Doctrinal Differences in The Synodical Conference?"
August 31, 1947: "The Chicago Convention"
September 14, 1947: "The Watertown Convention"

"Where Do We Stand?"--Prof. E. Reim
January 30, 1949: "The Point of the Question"
February 13, 1949: "II: We Face A Trend"
February 27, 1949: "III: We Judge The Trend"
March 13, 1949: "IV: We Resist The Trend"
March 27, 1949: "V. We Have A Problem: Scouting"
April 10, 1949: "We Have Another Problem: L.M.A."
April 24, 1949: "VII. Still More Problems: Co-operation"
May 8, 1949: "VIII. A Strong Position"

"As Others See Us: Separation or Separatism?"--Prof. E. Reim
February 12, 1950

"As We See It"--Prof. E. Reim
February 26, 1950: "This 'Common Confession Of Faith'--I"
March 12, 1950: "This 'Common Confession Of Faith'--II"
March 26, 1950: "This 'Common Confession Of Faith'--III"
April 9, 1950: "A Letter To Missouri"
April 23, 1950: "We Count The Cost"

May 7, 1950: "Adequate?"
 June 4, 1950: " 'Spoken...That Ye Should Not Be Offended' "
 June 18, 1950: "The Gist Of The Letter"
 July 2, 1950: "A Voice From The Past"
 July 16, 1950: "A Report On Milwaukee"
 July 30, 1950: "The Role Of The Synodical Conference"
 September 10, 1950: "The Role Of The Synodical Conference--
 II"
 November 5, 1950: "Our Fort Wayne Statement"
 April 8, 1951: "Once More: The Common Confession"
 April 22, 1951: "Synodical Conference: What Does It Stand
 For?"
 May 6, 1951: "Looking To The Foundation"
 May 20, 1951: "The Church Of The Lord"
 June 3, 1951: "The Problem Of Church Fellowship"
 January 27, 1952: "A Lutheran Mother Speaks"
 June 29, 1952: "The Common Confession. A Year Ago--And Now"
 July 13, 1952: "The Practical Problems"
 July 27, 1952: "We Go To St. Paul"
 September 7, 1952: "A State Of Confession"
 December 14, 1952: "Who Has Changed?"
 July 12, 1953: "The Houston Convention"
 July 26, 1953: "Houston: Number Nineteen"
 September 6, 1953: "The Question Before The House"
 September 30, 1953: "Why So Serious?"
 October 4, 1953: "A Little Strength"
 November 1, 1953: "Special Convention Of The Joint Synod Of
 Wisconsin, Held in Milwaukee October 8-9"
 November 15, 1953: "This Fraternal Word"
 January 10, 1954: "A Grain Of Truth"
 January 24, 1954: "A Bit Of History"
 February 21, 1954: "Something To Read"
 April 4, 1954: "That They All May Be One"
 April 18, 1954: "Lest, When I Have Preached To Others..."
 June 27, 1954: "A Matter Of Terminology"
 July 11, 1954: "A Matter Of Method"
 July 25, 1954: "The News: How To Read It"
 September 5, 1954: "Why?"
 September 19, 1954: "Why Not?"
 December 12, 1954: "The Chicago Convention"
 February 20, 1955: "Is This The Way?"
 March 6, 1955: "A Report--Scouting"
 March 20, 1955: "Another Report--Chaplaincy"
 April 3, 1955: "The Fact Remains..."
 April 17, 1955: "Two Necessary Questions"
 May 15, 1955: "The Unionism of the CC: Justification"
 June 12, 1955: "The Unionism of the CC: Antichrist"
 June 26, 1955: "A Serviceman Speaks"
 July 10, 1955: "The Norwegian Action"

"An Investigation Of The Common Confession's Statement On..."
 September 23, 1951: "The Word"--Prof. John Hoenecke

October 7, 1951: "Justification"--Pastor E. Wendland
October 21, 1951: "Conversion"--Pastor T. Adascheck
November 4, 1951: "Election"--Prof. Armin Schuetze
November 18, 1951: "The Church And The Ministry"--Prof. E.
Kowalke
December 2, 1951: "The Last Things"--Pastor O. Siegler

"A State of Confession: A Study of Its Implications on the basis
of II Thess. 3:14-15"--Professor Frederic E. Blume November 2,
1952

"The Doctrine of God's Election In American Lutheran
Controversy"--J.P. Meyer November 16 and November 30, 1952

Report of Synodical Convention:

August 27, 1939
September 5, 1943
September 2, 1945
August 28, 1949
September 9, 1951
September 6, 1953
September 4, 1955: August 10-17, 1955
September 16, 1956: Report of Recessed Convention
September 1, 1957:
September 13, 1959:
September 10, 1961

Report of the Synodical Conference Convention:

September 11, 1938
September 22, 1940
September 3, 1944
December 13, 1954: November 16-19, 1954
January 6, 1957: December 4-6, 1956
August 31, 1958: August 5-8, 1958
August 28, 1960:
June 18, 1961--Report of Recessed Convention
December 16, 1962: November 13-15, 1962

Report of Wisconsin-Missouri Presidents' Conference

February 7, 1954: January 12-15, 1954
June 13, 1954: May 11-14, 1954

Report Of The Meeting Of The Joint Union Committees Of The
Synodical Conference

March 17, 1957: January 23-24, 1957
[The following reports appeared under the heading "The
Voice Of The C.U.C.]
December 8, 1957: October 7-9, 1957
March 2, 1958: January 14-16, 1958
June 22, 1958: May 6-8, 1958
December 21, 1958: October 1958
March 1, 1959: January 19-21, 1959

Committee Reports:

November 13, 1955: Committee No. 2--Floor Committee On Church Union

"The Voice Of The C.U.C. (The Standing Committee in Matters of Church Union"

- November 27, 1955: "Does Romans 16:18 Limit the Application of the 'Avoid' of verse 17?"--F.E. Blume
December 11, 1955: "Participation in Synodical Conference Committees on Doctrine Suspended--I"--Joh. P. Meyer
December 25, 1955: "Participation in Synodical Conference Committees on Doctrine Suspended--II"--Joh. P. Meyer
January 8, 1956: "1956--A Year Of Decision"--Oscar J. Naumann
January 22, 1956: "A New Communion Agreement"--P. Peters
February 5, 1956: "One Another"--H.C. Nitz
February 19, 1956: "Joint Prayer and Church Fellowship"--Im. P. Frey
March 4, 1956: "A Preacher's Quarrel?"--Irwin J. Habeck
March 18, 1956: "The Missouri Synod's Position on Scouting"--Carl Lawrenz
April 1, 1956: "The Seriousness of Inadequacy"--Irwin J. Habeck
April 15, 1956: "Cooperation in Externals"--E. Reim
April 29, 1956: "In Defense of the Common Confession"--E. Arnold Sitz
May 13, 1956: "On the Credit Side of the Ledger"--Karl F. Krauss
May 27, 1956: "The Military Chaplaincy"--Gerhard L. Press
June 10, 1956: "Referendum?"--Oscar J. Naumann
June 24, 1956: "Were We Wrong?"--Irwin J. Habeck
July 8, 1956: "Church Fellowship"--G. Hoenecke
July 22, 1956: "Report of the Standing Committee on Matters of Church Union to the Nine Districts of the Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States"--Oscar J. Naumann
January 4, 1959: "The Antichrist"
February 15, 1959: "Statement On Scripture Adopted by the Joint Committee of the Synodical Conference"

"Why Avoid Them?"--Otto J. Eckert July 22, 1956

"Finally, Brethren, Pray For Us!"--Oscar J. Naumann August 19, 1956

"The Intersynodical Situation"--Irwin J. Habeck July 21, 1957

"Disobedient to God's Word?"--Irwin J. Habeck April 27, 1958

"The Convention and Intersynodical Relations"--Irwin J. Habeck July 19, 1959

"The Commission on Doctrinal Matters Reports"--Irwin J. Habeck

February 28, 1960
June 19, 1960

"Fellowship Then And Now"--Carl Lawrenz

February 12, 1961
February 26, 1961
March 12, 1961
March 26, 1961
April 9, 1961
April 23, 1961

"A Lantern to Our Footsteps: God's Reply to Our Questions"--Armin Schuetze (After the break in fellowship, answered reader questions on the matter)

October 22, 1961: "May We Pray At Table With People Not of the Wisconsin Synod?"

November 5, 1961: "What Is Meant by 'Serve Their Own Belly' in Romans 16:18?"

November 19, 1961: "Is the Synod Resolution Binding On All Congregations?"

December 3, 1961: "Is the 'Avoid Them' of Romans 16:17 the same As Excommunication?"

February 24, 1963: "Is the Interpretation of Luther's Catechism the Same In the Different Lutheran Church Bodies?"

"Entrenched Unionistic Practices"--Carl Lawrenz

December 3, 1961
December 31, 1961
January 14, 1962
January 28, 1962
February 11, 1962
February 25, 1962
March 11, 1962
March 25, 1962

"Some Reflections on the Ecumenical Movement"--Gerald Hoenecke

April 8, 1962
April 22, 1962

"A New Cooperative Association of Lutheran Churches in America?"

--O. Siegler
May 6, 1962
May 20, 1962
June 3, 1962

"The Lutheran World Federation"--Donald Bitter.

June 30, 1963: "I. How It Began"
July 14, 1963: "II. How It Operates"
July 28, 1963: "III. Why we Object"

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