

THE FELLOWSHIP CONTROVERSY BETWEEN THE WELS AND THE CLC-THE WAR IN THE  
DAKOTA-MONTANA DISTRICT.

SENIOR CHURCH HISTORY

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It is with a trembling hand that I begin to write about the controversy that took place in the Dakota-Montana District. What is going to be discussed happened so recently in the history of the WELS that it almost could be a present day news article. As you will see at the end of the paper there is no bibliography. The majority of the content of this paper was gleaned from the following sources:

1) The district reports of the Dakota-Montana District from the years 1956-1960. 2) An interview which I had with Pastor Walter Schuman Jr. of Watertown, Wis. 3) The CLC publications "Concerning Church Fellowship" and "Mark... Avoid...." The origin of the CLC.

It is because of my source of materials for this paper that I say I am writing this with much trembling. I hope that I can give a fair and accurate recounting of the things that Pastor Schuman told me. I hope that after I am finished with this paper Pastor Schuman will come off as a type of hero in the battle of the Dakota-Montana District. Pastor Schuman had some very keen insights into what happened in the Dakota-Montana District, especially when you know what the other side has said and is still saying even today.

I am going to use the question-answer method to explain the controversy between the WELS and CLC in the Dakota-Montana District.

1) WHAT PRECIPITATED THE CLASH IN THE DAKOTA-MONTANA DISTRICT?

Before the CLC even existed there were already problems leading up to a battle within our synod. These battle lines were being drawn over the WELS and its problems with the Missouri Synod. (Mo. Synod) The WELS in the 1956 convention of synod came out with the Saginaw Resolution that encouraged all districts to wait and continue to admonish the Mo. Synod. Some men in our ranks said that Rom. 16:17 did not permit this. These men said that when you mark you must immediately avoid.

Our Church Union Committee (CUC) said that we should take to heart

passages like II Thess. 3:14-15. Our CUC suggested that we go out of our way, out of love, to help lead our erring brethren back to the right track.

"No" said P. Albrecht, the president of the Dakota-Montana District. Albrecht said that Rom. 16:17 was law. When the other passages like II Thess. 3:14-15 were brought up he and his cohorts would not listen to them. This attitude is what was prevalent in most of the men who later left the District for the CLC. These men loved to jump on one passage and beat it to death, forgetting the rest of the Bible. Prof. J.P. Koehler wrote once in the article "Legalistic practices in the church." that it was legalistic to pull out of the Bible one passage which you intend to use as bullets, as shells and forget the rest of the passages.

In 1958, Pastor W. Schuman Jr., 38 years old, was elected president of the Dakota-Montana District. At the Aberdeen convention of the district Schuman had been assigned an exegesis of Rom. 16:17. Albrecht expected something different than he heard, he thought that Schuman would say its time for the Dakota-Montana District to get out of WELS or at least to go into "statu-confessionis" with WELS. After Schuman had finished reading his paper Albrecht knew that he had been had. Albrecht got up on the convention floor and asked whether the district, upholding of the synod's actions at New Ulm in 1957 in which the synod encouraged everyone in WELS to continue waiting and admonishing. Albrecht also asked if what Schuman had said was a rejection of the District's protest to synod? Schuman got up and said that all that Albrecht said was correct. It was at this point that a separation in the district was evident.

The actual separation and leaving of the WELS took a while for the following congregations and pastors: St. Luke's of Lemon South Dakota. Pastor V. Greve. Our Savior's of James town South Dakota Pastor H. Rutz

Zion of Hidewood Twp., South Dakota Pastor A. Sippert, First Lutheran of Faulton and Zion of Ipswich South Dakota plus the following pastors Eibs, C. Albrecht and P. Albrecht. The number of communicants lost was about 500. One Christian Day school was also lost. At first the men said they were in fellowship with WELS. Yet they would not come to conventions, they held their own communion services, they separated themselves from the brethren. They said that they had formed their own conference. Schuman as the District President told them that only the District could form new conferences. Immediately after his message to these men and trying to show them they were out of line, with no response from the men Schuman announced in a 1961 Northwestern Lutheran that these men were no longer in fellowship with the WELS.

The printing in the NWL brought violent reactions. The men listed said that they were still in fellowship with WELS. Albrecht wrote Naumann President Nauman backed up Schuman's action. The complaint from these men went no farther than the letter to Nauman. They didn't even bring their complaint to the floor of the joint synod of WELS.

## 2) HOW DID THE CONTROVERSY AFFECT THE DAKOTA-MONTANA DISTRICT

There were vast repercussions to what happened between these men and the district. The congregations were upset. Throughout the entire controversy the Praesidium of the district walked very carefully. No matter how upset a congregation was the Praesidium did not go in unless they were invited by the congregation. The reason these congregations were so upset was because not all of them agreed that the WELS was out of line in what it did. Especially laymen within congregations did not agree among themselves as to what course of action to take. In order that the laymen might get both sides of the story many of the congregations invited the Praesidium to tell them the WELS side of the story.

It is at the invitation of the Bowdle congregation, at which P. Albrecht was pastor, that the real show down came. The majority of the congregation wrote to Schuman and asked him to come and present the WELS case. After Schuman presented his case for the WELS, the congregation voted and a clear majority said that they wanted to stay in the WELS. This really upset Albrecht, he said that Schuman had violated Albrecht's call. Albrecht said that Schuman had no right in his congregation. Albrecht forgot what he had learned at the Seminary that the congregation is also attached to the synod.

When the majority of the Bowdle congregation decided to stay with the WELS, Albrecht and the minority took the case to court. The trial was held at Ipswich, South Dakota. Albrecht's groups were the ones who asked for a trial. They were also given the right to choose between a judge or a jury trial. Albrecht thought that a judge would be adequate.

When the trial began the WELS was represented by a very good lawyer from Aberdeen. The judge was a very fair man. He said that it was not the court's business to get involved in religious matters. Schuman, P. Albrecht and Ed. Reim were some of the people who testified in the trial at Ipswich.

The crux of the trial came down to one question. When is a pastor's severance with his congregation recognized? Schuman answered the WELS lawyer by saying there are three ways a congregation can terminate a pastor's call. 1) False doctrine. 2) Unfaithfulness in carrying out his duties. 3) Unchristian life.

Albrecht's lawyer then asked the same question about the severance of a pastor. Schuman said that there were 4 ways a pastor's call could be severed. Albrecht's lawyer thought that he had Schuman nailed. The lawyer asked the court reporter to read back the proceedings. Schuman

said wait a minute, you asked me the ways a pastor could leave office, not the way a congregation terminates a pastor's call. The 4th way a pastor's call may be severed is when he decides or declares that he is not in fellowship with the congregation. This literally destroyed Albrecht's lawyer. Being late in the day a recess was called.

That night Albrecht called Edmund Reim in Mankato, Minn and asked him to come to Aberdeen so that he could testify by 10 AM the next morning. As a result of Reim's testimony the conclusion was reached that there were 4 ways a pastor could be terminated from the office he held in the congregation. The judge then voted in favor of the WELS, saying that the majority of the congregation had the right to all prerogatives.

Albrecht was not satisfied. He took this case to the South Dakota Supreme Court. This trial took a couple of months, but in the end the Supreme Court agreed with the judge at Ipswich. By a unanimous decision the Supreme Court ruled in favor of the WELS, upholding the ruling of the Ipswich judge. The wording of the Supreme court of South Dakota was very strong against Albrecht. The Supreme Court said that it is a shame that a few men could lead a minority of people into so many problems.

The repercussions of this trial and all that took place were loud and are still being heard today. Families were spilt. Brothers will not speak to brothers. Some people even put their dogs on other people's sheep. Things really got carried away. "hat was really sad", was that so many of these people had never, ever been told both sides of the story. Many of these people had only heard one side of the story (that of their pastor). The proof that what happened was foolish was proved a couple years later when many of these same people became disenchanted with the CLC. These people then went to the ALC. How concerned about confessionalism could they have been?

## 3)WHAT WERE THE MEN LIKE?

The answer to this question could be as varied as the number of people you ask the question. Pastor Schuman said that these men so strongly believed in what they stood for that they lost their objectivity. It was impossible to talk to these men. You would tell them something and it would go in one ear and out the other. Yet we should never say they weren't sincere, they were conscience bound to take their course of action.

The men involved in the hassle in Dakota were men of a wide range of talents. Some were very talented, others could be backed into a corner easily. Some of the men were legalistic, some were radical. Pastor Schuman said that it was even difficult to eat a meal in peace at conventions because they were always arguing about all that went on.

## 4)HOW LONG DID WE TRY TO WORK WITH THEM?

These problems had been kicked around since early 50's. But in 57-58 they reached their peak. The reason things reached their peak in 57 was because of what happened at the New Ulm convention of WELS. WELS stuck by the Saginaw resolution. It was in 58 that these men in Dakota ceased attacking Mo. Synod for its problems and began attacking WELS for not forgetting MO. Synod. WELS still worked with these CLC men until 61. Yet never did we have to kick them out because they left before it happened.

## 5)HAVE ANY OF THESE MEN RETURNED TO WELS?

No. In fact some have even left the ministry.

## 6)HAVE ANY MORE CONGREGATIONS IN THE DISTRICT LEFT WELS TO GO TO CLC?

No.

## 7)WHO TOOK WHO TO COURT?

In the only court cases the CLC took the WELS to court. The WELS was not that interested in the buildings, they were more interested in the souls of the congregations.

8) WHY DIDN'T CLC MEN LEAVE EARLIER?

They will not answer that question. They know if they do they will then be in the shoes they are trying to get the WELS to wear.

9) DO YOU (PASTOR SCHUMAN) THINK THIS WILL BE STRAIGHTENED OUT?

He doubts it very much. Subjectivity will keep it from happening. No one has forced the CLC out. They took themselves out. A lot of scars remain. The WELS is still waiting for an answer to several questions before discussions can begin. 1) An exegesis of Romans 16:17  
2) The role of admonition in the church.

10) PASTOR SCHUMAN'S REACTIONS

Never did he wonder if the WELS was wrong. He knew that the CLC was wrong. They jumped the gun. They used Rom. 16:17 legalistically. How could 300,000 people of the WELS come to the same decision at the same time? Where was love for fellow Christians?

11) MY OWN REACTIONS

I feel the same about the CLC as Pastor Schuman does. When a person reads their literature you can't help but see a spirit of legalism. It seems that these men were so keyed up to nail both Mo. synod and men in the WELS that they lost all of their objectivity.

The trial at Ipswich was the straw that broke the camel's back as far as the protesters were concerned. If anything is the high point of the controversy the trial is it. The protesters took the WELS to trial and they lost their shirts. These men then had no choice, either they must admit that they were wrong or they had to leave and form their own group.

After reading the CLC literature put out in the early 60's and reading the WELS's CUC literature being put out since the mid-50's a person who is biblically sound can't help but go along with the WELS.

I feel that WELS walked the extra mile both with the Mo. synod and the CLC. The WELS followed all the passages in scripture that encourage love for its erring brethren.

My own personal opinion of Walter Schuman Jr. is that he is a very evangelical, honest, sincere man. At 38 years of age and president of a district he did a tremendous job. In my opinion the Lord used Walter Schuman Jr. to save a district that may have been led out of the WELS. I feel that the WELS and Dakota-Montana district owe Schuman a lot of thanks. Under his leadership he led the district back towards the WELS. In his testimony at Ipswich he shewed us how a scripturally sound man can defend his church even in a court room.

I wish that I had 2-3 months to travel to the different areas that that this battle was fought. I think that the topic of this paper would make an excellent thesis for a man majoring in Church History. This story is so full of different angles and personalities. I hope that in my writing Pastor Schuman and the Praesidium of the Dakota-Montana District of the WELS has come off as the heroes because that is exactly what they are in this controversy.

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