

A District Divided

A Brief History of the Effects of the CLC Split on the Dakota-Montana District

[Eastern Pastoral Conference, Fargo, ND, October, 1997]

by: Pastor Bruce Mueller

Acknowledgments

It is easy to stand tall when one is resting on the shoulders of someone else. A great deal of the information for this paper is taken from papers written by Reginald E. Pope and Hans Zietlow. Without their efforts this paper could have never taken its current form.

Special mention and thanks are necessary for Pastor Em. George Enderle. His file of letters, responses, minutes, and papers provided the bulk of the original source material for this paper. Special thanks also go to Prof. Em. Martin Westerhaus. His quick work in scouring the seminary library shelves and synod archive files filled in what otherwise would have been gaping holes.

“Gallia est omnis divisa in partes tres”

Introduction

Much has been written on the “turbulent years”¹ leading up to the break between the Wisconsin Synod and the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, and how this protracted ordeal resulted in the formation of the Church of the Lutheran Confession. The doctrinal issues have been thoroughly dissected and evaluated. The historical events leading up to the splits have been carefully chronicled.

Information is not widely available, however, on the effects of this time of division, especially the effects on the Dakota-Montana District. This paper will attempt to bring together some of this information.

First, a note of clarification: the topic assigned is bit of an anachronism. The Church of the Lutheran Confession did not exist when the “split” that serves as the focus of this paper occurred. The CLC adopted a constitution at Watertown, South Dakota, August 9-12, 1960, and formally organized and elected its first permanent officers in January of 1961 at Sleepy Eye, Minnesota.² Most of the men and congregations severed fellowship ties with the district and the synod before the CLC was founded.

Background

A bit of background information is necessary to understand the events that precipitated the split. In 1955 Wisconsin held its synod convention at Saginaw, Michigan.

One would have to go back as far as 1868 for a synodical convention to equal that of 1955 in significance for the inter-church scene. By convention time our allies, the ELS, had formally declared fellowship ties with Missouri broken Two realities, to a certain extent at war with one another, faced the 1955 Wisconsin convention. The unsatisfactory state of affairs, against which Wisconsin’s 1953 admonition spoke so strongly, had

¹ An excellent conference paper based on first-hand experience and recollections is “The C.L.C. in South Dakota “The Turbulent Years” by Reginald E. Pope, 1987.

² Erwin L. Lueker, ed., *Lutheran Cyclopedia* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1975), “Church of the Lutheran Confession,” p. 178.

deteriorated rather than improved during the biennium. It was hard to advance in admonition without declaring fellowship brokenMany felt that a break would have to be declared, if Wisconsin did not want to make itself guilty of that same sin of unionism that it was protesting against.

On the other hand, there was the calendar and the timetable. No Missouri synod convention had as yet our 1953 admonition on its agenda...The 1953 Missouri convention met before ours did. Missouri would not meet again in convention until 1956. But it was now 1955 and the Wisconsin synodical convention needed to act. What eventuated was the much-debated 1955 resolutions. In a preamble Missouri's unionism was rebuked and identified as the cause for a break in relations. That preamble was adopted unanimously. Then, by a two-to-one vote it was decided to "hold in abeyance," until a Missouri convention had met, the final vote on the proposition. "Whereas the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod has created divisions and offenses by its resolutions, policies, and practices not in accord with Scripture, we in obedience to the command of our Lord in Romans 16:17-18, terminate our fellowship with the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod

When the special Watertown convention assembled [held in 1956 after Missouri's had met], it had before it the report of the Standing Committee on Church Union urging the synod to continue "to hold the judgment of our Saginaw resolutions in abeyance" No one argued that all the problems were solved, But at its earlier 1956 convention the Missouri Synod had declared that the troublesome "Common Confession" would no longer function as a union document Missouri had also gratefully acknowledged our concerns and admonitions. By a five-to-one margin the special convention resolved "to hold in abeyance" This placed the burning interchurch relations issue squarely before the 1957 New Ulm convention.³

Early Tremors

Before we can move on to the 1957 New Ulm convention, however, we need to look at the dissatisfaction with the synod's actions that was rumbling among some pastors of the district.

[The 1955 Saginaw resolution] caused visible dissension [sic], especially from members of the Dakota/Montana District because the resolution itself was interpreted in two different ways. There were pastors in the Dakota/Montana District who looked at this resolution and interpreted that we were now 'marking' the LCMS according to Romans 16:17, but we were failing to follow through with the 'avoiding' Although this was an interpretation of the 1955 resolution which many saw, it was not the interpretation that the Synod intended. According to [*A Report to the Protest Committee*⁴], the resolution did not put the LCMS under judgment of Romans 16:17f. This report explained that even though the preamble says Romans 16:17 could be applied in view of the LCMS's past

³ Edwin C. Fredrich, *The Wisconsin Synod Lutherans* (Milwaukee: Northwestern, 1992) pp. 203-204.

⁴ According to the note at the end of this document drafted by Prof. Carl Lawrenz, "This report was drawn up for the Protest Committee upon the request of the Standing Committee on Matters of Church Union. On June 16, 1958, it was sent to the Protest Committee..."

action, this preamble of judgment would also be held in abeyance until the LCMS could have another opportunity to speak.”⁵

The year 1956 has been described as a year of confusion and indecision in the Dakota/Montana district—perhaps more than in other districts. There were a number of factors behind this. First of all, this district was to a great extent a mission district. The average tenure in an individual congregation was about two years, and a large number of the pastors in the area were young pastors. To top this off, most of the district consisted of rather isolated congregations. Because of this, the President of the district, Pres. [P. G.] Albrecht, was to a large extent the sole contact between many of the men in the district and Milwaukee

Pres. Albrecht was very sincere, but some felt he was too subjective in his opinion on the Synod fellowship matter. He was clearly a proponent of immediate “avoiding” of the Missouri Synod from the very beginning. Undoubtedly, a man with the influence and charisma that Pres. Albrecht had was an influence on the thinking of others.⁶

In spite of Pres. Albrecht’s influence, the Church Union floor committee at the Dakota-Montana District Convention, July 17-19, 1956, presented a resolution “That we concur in the suggestion of our Standing Committee on Matters of Church Union to ‘hold the judgment of our Saginaw resolutions in abeyance’ until our next convention.” They cited Missouri’s setting aside of the 1950 *Common Confession* and their grateful acknowledgment of Wisconsin’s “fraternal expression of concern” as supporting evidence for this position. The report was adopted by a roll call vote with 108 in favor and 19 opposed.⁷

In April of 1957, the Dakota-Montana Pastoral Conference, noting that Synodical Conference meetings seemed only to underscore the fact that there was no progress in the negotiation with Missouri, resolved that “a basic condition for continued negotiations has been removed and that a critical situation confronts our Synod.”⁸

In June of 1957, the Dakota-Montana’s Eastern Conference memorialized the synod: “We earnestly plead that the Synod assembled at New Ulm, Minn., Aug. 7-14, carry out the judgment of the Saginaw resolutions, based on Romans 16:17,18, without delay.”⁹ Ten members of the Western Conference addressed a similar plea to the convention at New Ulm.¹⁰

“A majority of the Dakota/Montana District thought they would be heard at the 1957 Synod Convention, fellowship with the LCMS would be terminated, and the problem would be over.”¹¹ In New Ulm, the synod followed a dramatically different course of action, one that lay open a rift in the Dakota-Montana district.

⁵ Hans Zietlow, “The Winds Behind the High Plain Drifters,” a senior church history paper for Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, 1987, pp. 4-5.

⁶ Zietlow, pp. 8-9.

⁷ *Dakota-Montana District Proceedings 1956*, pp. 35-37.

⁸ *Dakota-Montana District Proceedings 1958*, p. 22.

⁹ *Proceedings 1958*, p. 23.

¹⁰ Zietlow, p. 10.

¹¹ Zietlow, pp. 10-11.

The Split Begins

At the synod convention at New Ulm in 1957, the delegates were nearly equally divided on the question of breaking with Missouri. By a four-to-one margin, Floor Committee No. 2, which had been assigned this issue, brought the recommendation to the convention to break.¹² During the discussion, Prof. J. P. Meyer “delivered *ex temporalis* a brilliant exegesis on Romans 16:17-18”¹³ defining what a “persistent errorist” was. After a long and strenuous debate, the delegates did not follow the lead of the floor committee, rejecting the resolution by a vote of 61-77.¹⁴ Instead it was again resolved and adopted to “continue our vigorously protesting fellowship over against the LCMS”¹⁵ Prof. Lawrenz later summarized the rationale for this move:

The actual discussion of the controversial issues had not yet progressed far enough at the time of the New Ulm convention to permit any conclusive judgment as to whether they would be successful [The] majority of our representatives at the New Ulm Convention were of the conviction that not enough had happened since Watertown to warrant reversing the resolution passed there to hold the Saginaw resolution in abeyance.¹⁶

After a long and difficult day, the convention recessed for the night. The next morning, Dakota-Montana District President Albrecht rose and made the following declaration:

I know the Bible passage, “Thou shalt rise up before the hoary head and honor the face of the old man.” Prof. Meyer knows that I have loved and honored him since that day that I first met him. But I must disagree with him now; for I cannot operate with Scripture as he did last night. To heed his advice would lead straight down the path of unionism.

I agree with him when he says it would be sinful to say, “I am *THROUGH* with the Wisconsin Synod.” I shall never be *through* with the Wisconsin Synod as little as I can ever be *through* with any member of my own family [original emphasis].

BUT I cannot follow the course which the Synod has now chosen; for the Synod was wrong when it rejected the Report of Committee No. 2. This decision I shall oppose with all my might because it is a rejection of a clear Word of God.

Under these circumstances, I will, of course, not be able to serve the Synod on its Union Committee, nor in any other way which should mean support of the Synod’s decision to reject the Report of Committee No. 2, and its (i.e., the committee’s) use of Romans 16:17,18.

While I do not refuse the hand of fellowship to all members of the Synod, I cannot fellowship with those who have advocated the position which the Synod made its own last night. II Thes. 3:6; 11;14,15. (It is selfevident [*sic*] that fellowship with those who now or in the future support and advocate the Synod’s present position is impossible)

¹² Fredrich, p. 205.

¹³ Reginald E. Pope, “The C.L.C. in South Dakota ‘The Turbulent Years,’” a paper for the Eastern Pastor Conference, 1987, p. 6.

¹⁴ Zietlow, p. 11.

¹⁵ *Proceedings 1958*, p. 24.

¹⁶ Carl Lawrenz, “A Report to the Protest Committee,” 1958, p. 6.

I am fully aware of the implications of this statement as far as my District is concerned.¹⁷

“Although this was a startling statement, it did not surprise some members of the Dakota/Montana District. In view of his clear stand against the Synod’s position of continued fellowship with LCMS, Pres. Albrecht almost had to do something along this line to be consistent in his stand on fellowship.”¹⁸

One wonders if Pres. Albrecht was really “fully aware of the implications of this statement” for himself, yet alone the district. Although he still tries to reach out with the hand of fellowship to those in the synod who agree with his own position, by saying he refused to fellowship with those who held the position the synod had adopted and made its own the night before, Pres. Albrecht really declared himself to be out of fellowship with the Wisconsin Synod. “However, the President did not carry out his declaration to its logical end.”¹⁹ He did not, as did Prof. E. Reim at the same convention, resign from his position and leave the synod. Nonetheless, the split had begun. “Above all, at least for our District, the Convention of our Synod of 1957 must be observed as a beginning point for the CLC in our District because it was here that [this] incident occurred that could not help but involve the District in a doctrinal turbulence for years.”²⁰

The Rift Widens

In a letter dated September 17, 1957, the district secretary, D.C. Sellnow, announced the following:

At the request of the Eastern Delegate Conference and with the consent of the other District officers, the President has called a Special Convention of the Dakota-Montana District to be held at Trinity Lutheran Church, 10th Ave. and So. Dakota St., Aberdeen, S.D., on October 22, 1957. The opening devotional service will begin at 10 a.m. The purpose of this convention is to consider the action of the New Ulm Convention in regard to the Union matters. Pastor W. Schumann will present a brief treatise on Romans 16:17-18.

At the convention, Pres. Albrecht continued to voice his opposition to the position taken by the synod in New Ulm. In his eight-page report he retraced the history of the unionism controversy, stating “a careful analysis reveals no essential progress.”²¹ He also downplayed any seeming progress at the recent Synodical Conference meetings. He listed six major protests against the synod’s actions, including the resignation of the seminary president and of six pastors from the synod. “The negative words on any progress with Missouri and then this list of protests seemed to be a build up speech to rally the District to unity, protest, or possibly even some kind of action.”²² “There was also this growing feeling that [Pres. Albrecht] wanted to take the district

¹⁷ Pres. Albrecht’s declaration is quoted here from a copy of his statement that was handed out and, according to handwritten notes on this page, “discussed at length” at the Fall Pastoral Conference, October 9, 1957.

¹⁸ Zietlow, p. 13.

¹⁹ Karl G. Sievert, “Preaching the Gospel on the Dakota-Montana Prairies” or “A History of the Dakota-Montana District of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod,” printed in *Fifty Years of God’s Blessings in the Dakota-Montana District, 1920-1970*, p. 12.

²⁰ Pope, pp. 5-6.

²¹ Pope, p. 8.

²² Zietlow, p. 15

out of the synod, even though this was never stated in so many words. But actions often speak louder than words.”²³

Much of the rest of the special convention stood in stark contrast to Pres. Albrecht’s report. The essay on Romans 16:17,18, assigned by Pres. Albrecht to Pastor W. Schumann, stressed the importance of viewing these verses in the context of the rest of Scripture. No doubt, Pres. Albrecht had expected the study to be further ammunition against the actions of the synod. “Rather than condemn Synod, the essay brought the real issue of the problem into focus. That issue was hermeneutics. The essay was not to try to sway people to one side or the other but to present the Scriptural principles involved.”²⁴

The report of the Church Union floor committee perhaps came as somewhat of a shock to the delegates because of the morning preparation. Some on the committee felt the report could well be the report of only a minority.²⁵ The pastors on committee, W. Schumann, Jr., R. Pope, and W. Ten Broek, had met the evening prior to the convention to draft a report to be considered by the entire committee. Pastor Schumann, the committee chairman, had been informed that there was “no change” in talks with Missouri. Pastors Pope and Ten Broek knew of the most recent report of the Church Union Committee (CUC) that showed signs of good progress. Pastor Schumann called Prof. Lawrenz to hear for himself the current status and recommendations of the CUC to the synod praesidium.²⁶

On the basis of this information, the floor committee presented the following resolution:

“Behold, how good and pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity: It is like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron’s beard; that went down to the skirts of his garments: As the dew of Hermon and as the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion; for there the Lord commanded the blessing, even life for evermore.” Psalm 133. To this end we present our report.

Dear Brethren:

Our Synod in convention, moved by Christian charity (I Cor. 13:4 and 7) and prompted by the hope that future meetings of the Joint Union Committee would help to resolve the controversial issues, decided not to suspend church fellowship with the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod.

WHEREAS, this hope seems to have been substantiated at the recent Chicago meetings where A) a member of the Union Committee of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod indicated that it no longer considers the Common Confession as an actual settlement of the past doctrinal differences between the American Lutheran Church and the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, and where B) the Scriptural presentation of the antiChrist was reaffirmed; and

²³ Herbert A. Birner, “The Saga of a Mission District—Dakota Montana: The First Ninety Years (1880-1970),” printed in *Dakota Montana District 1920-1995: Seventy-Five Years of God’s Blessings*, p. 32.

²⁴ Zietlow, pp. 14-15.

²⁵ Pope, p. 9.

²⁶ Pope, p. 8.

WHEREAS, it would be beneficial to await the forthcoming report of the committee assigned to study the essays on Romans 16:17, I 8 (of Wis. Synod), therefore be it

RESOLVED, that we concur with the action of our Synod that the judgment of the Saginaw resolutions continue to be held in abeyance; but

WHEREAS, the negotiations of the Joint Union Committee have not progressed to all of the unresolved controversial issues which still remain and continue to cause offense; therefore be it further

RESOLVED, that our relationship to the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod be one of vigorously protesting fellowship to be practiced where necessary in the light of II Thess 3:14,15; and be it finally

RESOLVED, that the negotiations of the Joint Union Committee proceed to this end and that without equivocation and evasion they come to grips with all the issues that have arisen between the synods, and that they A) Affirm all matters that are in keeping with the Word of God and the unaltered Lutheran Confessions, and B) With firmness expose and condemn all matters contrary to the Word of God in doctrine and life with the purpose of removing what is not in keeping with the Word of God.

With grateful hearts we acknowledge the blessings upon the labors of the Joint Union Committee and pray the Holy Ghost that He would continue to guide the committee and their synods to true unity in faith, confession, and life.²⁷

After much emotional debate that lasted through the afternoon and on toward midnight, the report was amended several times but passed in substance the same as it had been presented. What was once feared to be the voice of only a minority was now the resolve of the district as a whole.

But it was not a course of action that all accepted. After the resolution was adopted, Pastor H. Birner recounts: President Albrecht then stepped from the chair, and I, the hapless first vice-president found myself in it. He then made a statement in which he resigned as president of the Dakota-Montana District. The motion was made to accept his resignation. It was debated, and believe it or not was rejected. Albrecht was asked to serve out his term according to the dictates of his conscience. After another lengthy discussion President Albrecht said he would consider the request to serve, and he did.²⁸

Twelve others signed letters of protest sent to the district president: Pastors C. Albrecht, M. Eibs, V. E. Greve, C. Hanson, A. P. C. Kell, E. J. Otterstatter, H.E. Rutz, W. Schuetze, C. Spaude, R. F. Zimmermann, as well as Mr. R. Preszler and K. Storm.²⁹ According to First Vice-President Birner,³⁰ these protest letters were the result of a “semi-secret” meeting held

²⁷ The resolution is quoted here in its final, amended form, as recounted by the committee secretary, R. Pope, in “The C.L.C. in South Dakota ‘The Turbulent Years,’” pp. 9-10.

²⁸ Birner, p. 30.

²⁹ *Proceedings 1958*, p. 6.

³⁰ Birner, p. 30.

December 11, 1957, in Aberdeen, attended by fourteen pastors who registered “no” votes at the October Aberdeen meeting.³¹ The letters urged that another meeting of the district be called. The praesidium first sent out notice that the conference be set for January 20, 1958, at Northwestern Lutheran Academy at Mobridge, South Dakota. In a letter dated December 20, 1957, the district secretary wrote,

It is the judgement [sic] of the Praesidium that the situation in our District is such that it is imperative that a Pastoral Conference of the District meet at the earliest possible date in an effort to reach unanimity The Praesidium proposes that the report of the floor committee adopted at Aberdeen be reconsidered. Pastor Pope and Prof. Ten Broek have been asked to present the case for the report; Pastor Rutz and Pastor Hanson the case against it.

The January date, however, fell in the middle the Academy’s semester exam week. A pastoral conference would be a major interruption. So the Academy Board of Control, also showing its support for the district’s position taken in October, informed the praesidium that it could not serve as host for this meeting.³² The January 20th conference was called off, and February 11, 1958, was set as the date for a special pastoral conference to be held at Bowdle, South Dakota.

The conference did little to resolve the difficulties. Instead, the “special meeting at Bowdle only served to polarize the district more. At the same time more and more were growing very suspicious of our president and his actions.”³³ The special meeting reviewed the issues using the format of a debate where two pastors stated the “case” for the district and two others would explain the protest.³⁴ The result was unchanged from the special district convention held in October of the previous year. “Again the president was rebuffed by a majority vote of the pastors.”³⁵ The entire matter was considered again at the regular spring pastoral conference April 21, 1958, at Mobridge, with Prof. C. Lawrenz and synod president O. Naumann in attendance by invitation as representatives of the Church Union Committee with the same outcome.³⁶

Rent Asunder

The district met for its regular biennial meeting June 17-19, 1958, at the Academy in Mobridge. Pres. Albrecht, in his report, made it known that the union issue was still not settled. After noting the twelve formal protests that were filed, he continued:

It is to be regretted that the protests were in no way disposed of and are therefore before us. It is the opinion of the chair that these protests should be given into the hands of the committee which will consider the report of the Church Union Committee as found in the present prospectus. The convention’s reaction to the report of the Church Union Committee will, no doubt, be the District’s answer to the above protests.³⁷

³¹ Zietlow, p. 18.

³² Pope, p. 12.

³³ Birner, p. 30.

³⁴ Pope, p. 12.

³⁵ Birner, p. 32.

³⁶ *Proceedings 1958*, p. 6.

³⁷ *Proceedings 1958*, p. 6.

This time there was little doubt what the district's answer would be. "The lines were clearly drawn and it was a fore drawn [sic] conclusion that there would be a new administration in the district."³⁸ Pastor W. A. Schumann was elected as the new district president, although at first he had requested that his name be removed from nomination.³⁹ The floor committee on Doctrinal Matters, doing its best to avoid a schism, merely noted two different approaches among district members as to the use of Romans 16:17. "Some are convinced on the basis of Romans 16:17 that God demands separation from the Missouri Synod; others, also on the basis of the Word of God, find hope that a break may be averted."⁴⁰ It also recommended that "a committee of six (two pastors and a layman of each conviction) be appointed to formulate the *status controversiae* in the District and then report back to the District with its findings,"⁴¹ first to the fall pastoral conferences and then to a reconvened session of the district convention.

By July 28, 1958, the "Committee of Six" (or the "Committee of Three and Three") had completed the first part of its assignment by preparing and sending out for comment by pastors and delegates a Majority Statement as well as a Minority Statement.

Majority Statement

We hold that in the application of Romans 16:17-18 there is involved the matter of sound Christian judgment as to the time when its admonition "and avoid them" must be applied. Christian love over against an erring brother, a sound understanding of historical developments, and Christian patience in dealing with another church body, with which we have long been affiliated, are factors which must temper such Christian Judgment.

To call a delay of a break with the Missouri Synod an error or a sin involves a judgment regarding those who believe that the promises of such passages as 2 Tim. 3, 16-17; 2 Tim. 2, 24-26; Isaiah 55, 11 still apply at this time.

Our continued efforts to win our brethren of the Missouri Synod is not based solely on the hope that we shall succeed in our efforts, but is based on the knowledge that all our witnessing will not be in vain (though we may not see the immediate fruit) and it is based on the conviction that these efforts are more successful when we deal with the Missouri Synod as our brethren. (K. Sievert & E. Klassus)⁴²

Minority Statement

We hold that any fellowship relationship with the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod at the present time, while the Missouri Synod upholds and defends the errors with which we have charged her, is in violation of the Apostolic injunction in Romans 16:17-18.

³⁸ Birner, p. 30, although Zietlow, p. 20, contends that "Pres. Albrecht fully expected that he would again be elected as President of the District. When he was not re-elected, he was furious and took it as a repudiation of his own position."

³⁹ Zietlow, p. 20.

⁴⁰ *Proceedings 1958*, p. 16.

⁴¹ Pope, p. 16.

⁴² Although not mentioned in the letter, R. Pope (p. 17) identifies the layman for the district position as A. Kluckmann.

We hold that Romans 16:17-18 does not allow continuation of fellowship relationship because of any hope anyone may have of bringing the Missouri Synod back to a sound confessional basis. (P. Albrecht, L. Grams, F. Hanson)

August 25, 1958, the committee met again. In a letter sent to all of the district pastors dated August 27, 1958, they noted that they had received and discussed seven letters commenting on these statements: one appearing to be non-committal, one expressing full agreement and three addressing general agreement with the Minority Statement, one saying “The Majority Statement expresses me quite well,” and one that stated “neither statement represents my position.” A further clarification to the Minority Statement was also added by Pastors P. Albrecht and L. Grams: “We hold that a sound interpretation of Romans 16, 17.18 does not allow a time lapse between ‘mark those’ and ‘avoid them.’” Although the second letter states “The Committee herewith considers its assignment completed,” it met once more November 13, 1958, resulting in this statement: “Some are of the opinion that the situation at the time of the New Ulm Convention (1957) was not such that it warranted the judgment that the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod is a causer of divisions and offenses in the sense of Rom. 16,17. Others are of the opinion that no other judgment was tolerable at that time.”

The convention reconvened January 26-27, 1959, at Mobridge. The floor committee on Union Matters brought this report:

We agree with the floor committee report of the 1957 New Ulm Convention. Due to the failure of the New Ulm Convention to adopt this floor committee report on the basis of the new evidence presented, we find ourselves in a situation where there are two divergent convictions in regard to the application of Romans 16:17. Because of the divergent convictions we also find ourselves disagreeing as to whether the fellowship basis on which the Church Union Committee is functioning is correct. Yet, we do not wish to stifle the negotiations of the Church Union Committee. We recommend, however, that the Synod in its 1959 convention reconsider the fellowship basis under which it has been operating, to the end, that negotiations continue on a scripturally sound basis which recognizes the divine nature of the points of conflict.⁴³

By a vote of 47-31 this resolution prevailed. “Observe that the District, though not separating itself from the Synod, requested the Synod to study the fellowship basis under [which] the CUC conducted its meetings. The District, however, did not reverse its Aberdeen position; and neither did it see 1957 as the one and only year in which we had to terminate fellowship with the LCMS.”⁴⁴ But the district also resolved “That should the impasse continue, the necessary steps be taken by the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod to sever fellowship with The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod.”⁴⁵

⁴³ Pope, p. 17.

⁴⁴ Pope, p. 17.

⁴⁵ Birner, p. 32.

Separation

A number of members of the minority group did not attend the reconvened convention.⁴⁶ Others quickly convened following the convention, drafting the following letter, dated January 29, 1959, which was sent to every pastor in the district:

To the Pastors and Professors of The Dakota-Montana District

Immediately after the close of the convention yesterday a minority group met to consider their future course of action in view of the fact that the District's action was officially interpreted as a rejection of their protests as not based on Scripture.

The group resolved to meet again Feb. 16th. God willing, this meeting will be held at Bowdle.

While no specific invitation is being extended to anyone, the group wishes it to be known that this will be an open meeting in which any member of the District, whether in agreement or disagreement with the group, will be welcome.

In behalf of the group,
Paul Albrecht

February 16, 1959, this group met as planned. Pastor P. G. Albrecht was elected as chairman; Pastor M. W. Lutz was elected secretary. Three essays had been prepared and were presented at the meeting: "Scriptural Fellowship Principles (L. Grams); "The Errors of the Missouri Synod" (M. Eibs); "The Errors of the Wisconsin Synod" (P. Albrecht). Much of the afternoon session

was devoted to a discussion of what definite course should now be followed by those in our midst who have protested the present course of our District and our Synod. Pastor P. G. Albrecht felt constrained to urge that Second Thessalonians 3, 14-15 now be applied, in its proper Scriptural sense, to all who *advocate* the course currently being followed by our District and our Synod. This means that, motivated only by true Christian love for their erring brethren, the protesters should henceforth "have no company with them" but continue to "admonish them as brethren."⁴⁷

That evening the group turned its attention to the following resolutions:

Whereas, our Dakota-Montana District (meeting in Reconvened Convention at Mobridge, S.D., January 26-27, 1959) has officially rejected our protests as not being based on Scripture, and we have, therefore, been compelled to renew these protests; and...

Whereas, thereby the practice of Christian fellowship has been made impossible (II Thess. 3:14-15) with those in our District who reject our protests as not based on Scripture; and...

⁴⁶ Zietlow, p. 23.

⁴⁷ "Minutes of the Special Meeting of the Minority Group in Our District Held at St. John's Lutheran Church, Bowdle, S. Dakota February 16, 1959." p. 2.

Whereas, we feel the need of Christian fellowship; therefore be it

Resolved, that for the time being, arrangements be made to hold a separate spring pastoral conference and also a conference for pastors and laymen; and be it further

Resolved, that a committee be elected to make the necessary arrangements (time, place, agenda) for these conferences; and be it finally

Resolved, that subscription to these resolutions be left open to all members of our Dakota-Montana District.⁴⁸

At the time the meeting minutes were sent out, eight pastors, L. Grams, P. G. Albrecht, H. E. Rutz, M. Eibs, A. Sippert, C. Spaude, Chr. Albrecht, C. Hanson, as well as eleven laymen had subscribed to these resolutions.⁴⁹ Although Pastor A. Sippert would a short time later attempt to explain that this conference (nor the one that would follow) was not held because the group had already terminated fellowship with the district,⁵⁰ the impact of the second “whereas” was just that. It was impossible to hold that the group was only out of fellowship with “those in our District who reject our protest as not based on Scripture,” since by majority vote the district had made this rejection its own.

The members of the minority group did not see matters in quite the same light. In a letter sent to district missions, dated March 16, 1959, mission board chairman H. E. Rutz quotes from a letter he had sent a week earlier to Pres. Schumann explaining his position. He states, “This step of *temporary suspension* of fellowship with *individuals* in the District is still a process of admonition [emphasis mine].” He mentions that “individuals have stated their vote [at the January 1959 convention at Mobridge] did not mean a rejecting of the protests. So I am hoping that this is not yet the final answer to the protests which were renewed.”

About a month later, in a letter postmarked March 20, 1959, St. Luke, Lemmon, South Dakota, gave notice that the congregation, along with its pastor, V. E. Greve, had terminated fellowship with the Wisconsin Synod “UNTIL the Synod of Wisconsin ceases *to be disobedient* to the Word and Command of our Lord in Romans 16:17-18 [emphasis original].” This was the first congregation and pastor to leave the district, but it would not be the last.

The Minority Group met again April 7-8, 1959, at Jamestown, North Dakota. As a result of this meeting, the following letter, dated April 8, 1959, was sent to synod president, O. J. Naumann:

Dear Brethren:

The fact that we have been priveleged [sic] these many years to enjoy the blessings of fellowship with you, a fellowship which was very dear to us because it was based on complete agreement in doctrine and practice, compels us to tell you frankly that we find it impossible to follow you in the course you have chosen, because it involves disobedience

⁴⁸ Minutes, p. 3.

⁴⁹ Minutes, p. 3.

⁵⁰ In a response dated June 26, 1959, to the April 22, 1959, letter sent by the praesidium to the pastors, professors, and congregations of the district, here making reference to p. 3.

to the clear directive in Romans 16, 17-18. The reasons for insisting on suspension of fellowship with The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod are well known and need not be rehearsed here. (Cf. Proceedings 34th Convention; August 7-14, 1957, page 142ff.)

Because we earnestly desire to live and labor in brotherly unity with you, we ask you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to do the following:

1. Acknowledge that you erred and offended when you failed to recognize, i.e. mark, the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod as a causer of divisions and offenses. Isaiah 56, 10; Ezekiel 3, 17-21 and 33, 6-8.
2. Declare suspension of fellowship with the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod on the basis of Romans 16,17 until the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod removes the offenses with which she has been charged. (Cf. Convention Proceedings of 1955, page 84)
3. Make immediate overtures to those brethren, who have withdrawn from the Synod because of the Synod's unscriptural fellowship with the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, inviting them to resume full fellowship relations with us.

Praying for brotherly understanding and true unity in the Synod, we are,

Yours in Christ, (signed)

Chris Albrecht
Clarence Hanson
Paul Albrecht
Albert Sippert
Helmut Rutz
Marvin Eibs
Leland Grams
Martin Lutz
Cyril Spaude

Another letter, also dated April 8, 1959, was sent to the district president:

Dear Mr. President:

We received your communication of April 2, 1959.

It grieves us to not that you have so little understanding of the situation that troubles us, as to operate against us with a constitutional provision which is completely irrelevant. This is not a constitutional matter; it is a doctrinal matter.

Your statement: "The District *merely* means to say that the Romans 16,17 passage does not apply to the present situation" changes nothing, but points up the very issue on which we disagree and again discredits and rejects our position as an unscriptural one.

Be sure that we would have been happy to attend the regular Pastoral Conference if the position taken by you, and those who together with you reject our protests as not based on Scripture, had not made the practice of mutual fellowship impossible, as we had indicated in our resolution of February 16, 1959.

If our protests had been up for additional consideration, we would, of course, have attended. For you [sic] information a copy of the memorial [letter printed above] adopted by our group is enclosed.

Yours Sincerely,

“The Minority Group” (signed)
Leland Grams, Sec.

In response to these letters, copies of which were sent to all pastors, professors, and teachers of the district,⁵¹ the praesidium sent its own letter, dated April 22, 1959, to the membership of the district. The letter notes:

Recently, however, in impatient action with the Church Union Committee’s work and the District’s endorsement of the same, the Minority Group within the District has terminated fellowship. That this separation has taken place is obvious by both action and resolution of the Group. 1. The minority group has met in two separate Conferences and resolved to provide for the third. 2. It has declared that the practice of mutual fellowship has been made impossible. 3. It has stated that it finds it impossible to follow the Synod in the course which it has chosen. This can be interpreted in only one way—a breaking of fellowship with the District and thereby the Synod.

We regret that it is our sad responsibility to acknowledge that this separation exists and must be recognized. For the sake of good order it is apparent that this situation can neither be ignored nor condoned. We would point out that the congregations served by the pastors of the Minority Group are in an ambiguous position: they hold membership in the Synod and yet are served by pastors who have terminated their membership. It will be theirs to determine on the basis of God’s Word whether to adhere to pastor or synod. We urge those pastors and congregations to evaluate their position that our District’s house may finally be put in order. It is, of course, obvious that those pastors who have terminated their membership cannot serve the District or the Synod in any capacity.

The split was now officially recognized. “The letter led some congregations to have the Praesidium explain Synod’s side of the whole controversy. In some cases, the congregations stayed with the Synod. In others, the congregation went along with the pastor, and in yet others, the congregation was torn apart; some going with their pastor and some with the Synod.”⁵²

Pastor R. Pope, a member of the praesidium at the time, makes the following assurances in his paper on this subject:

⁵¹ The April 8, 1959, letter to Pres. Schumann stated such.

⁵² Zietlow, p. 25.

Aside from this letter, each and everyone [sic] who had made it known that he was a part of the “minority” were visited in their studies at their convenience in a spirit of reconciliation. When it was apparent that from some of them there would be no results a personal letter was sent to them explaining their personal situation concerning their membership in the District and the Synod. No [one] was ever “written off.” The praesidium did have to respect a confessional stand when they were given it. A goodly portion of the minority readily returned to the District fellowship and through the years have served the Lord and His Church faithfully.⁵³

Pastor H. Birner echoes a similar sentiment. “A meeting of the new praesidium was called, composed of President Schumann, first vice-president Reginald Pope and this writer. We drew up a list of names of those we felt we could salvage for the synod. We are happy that we did, some of these men rose to rather important positions in the synod.”⁵⁴

Most of the members of the Minority Group did not by resolution vote to “leave” the district or synod; their actions and resolutions did, however, demonstrate that they had already left. The *Book of Reports and Memorials* for the 1959 synod convention reported, “The District Praesidium felt constrained to conclude that the nine pastors had withdrawn from fellowship in the District and thus also in the Synod.”⁵⁵ This prompted a letter of protest, dated June 29, 1959, from Pastors L. Grams, C. Albrecht, A. Sippert, P. Albrecht, and H. E. Rutz. In it they contended that the conclusion of the praesidium was “unwarranted” for the following reasons:

1. We organized no separate conferences but merely met to discuss issues that are troubling us.
2. We never declared fellowship with the District as such impossible but only with those who persistently advocate and uphold the unscriptural position which the Synod has espoused. (The names of the 5 men to whom we had reference will be supplied upon request.)
3. We cannot believe that the drawing up and signing of our Memorial can reasonably be construed as a withdrawal from fellowship

Therefore we respectfully request the withdrawal of this announcement.

The names of fourteen laymen who also asked that the April 22, 1959, letter of the praesidium be retracted were included.

Although many issues still needed to be addressed within congregations directly affected by the split, from the standpoint of the district, the storm of the crisis was over.

When Pres. Schumann had the names of P. Albrecht, C. Albrecht, A. Sippert, and L. Grams listed as suspended in the Oct. 25, 1959, issue of the NWL (p.348), these four men were outraged and immediately got on the telephone. The only response they received was that by their actions they had suspended themselves from the Synod. Their protest against suspension went no farther than the phone call.⁵⁶

⁵³ Pope, p. 21.

⁵⁴ Birner, p. 30.

⁵⁵ Quoted in a letter to the praesidium signed by five members of the group dated June 29, 1959.

⁵⁶ Zietlow, p. 26.

The Results

In his district president's report to the district convention June 21-23, 1960, Pastor W. Schumann noted:

The following have terminated fellowship with the Dakota-Montana District and the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod because of the Synod's continued negotiations with The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod:

St. Luke's of Lemmon, S. Dak., and its pastor, V. Greve
Our Savior's of Jamestown, N. Dak., and its pastor, H. Rutz
Zion of Hidewood Twp., S. Dak., and its pastor, A. Sippert
First Lutheran of Faulkton, S. Dak., and Zion of Ipswich, S. Dak., and their pastor, L. Grams
Pastors M. Eibs, C. Albrecht and P. Albrecht
Pastor C. Hanson tendered his resignation from the ministry to accept a secular position in Minnesota.⁵⁷

The report of the District Home Mission Board also made note of the fact that Faulkton-Ipswich, South Dakota, and Jamestown, North Dakota, left the district's fellowship, since they were both fields whose congregations "had received aid and support through our mission funds for many years."⁵⁸

In the district *Proceedings* for 1962, President W. Schumann reported, "We are sorrowful over the resignations of two of our pastors for reasons of conscience, one to join the Church of the Lutheran Confession, the other to affiliate with The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod." Pastor J. Johannes resigned as pastor of Peace, Isabel, South Dakota, St. Paul's, Timber Lake, South Dakota, and Emmanuel, Trail City, South Dakota, to join the CLC. Pastor R. Schultz resigned as pastor of Immanuel, South Shore, South Dakota, and St Luke's of Germantown Twp., South Dakota to join the LCMS.⁵⁹

A look at the statistical reports from these years gives some indication of the numerical losses to the district. Thirty-nine pastors are listed as serving district congregations in 1956. Because of the split, eight pastors were no longer a part of the district by 1960, with another two losses by 1962. Of the sixty-eight congregations for which reports were filled in 1956, five left the synod. The membership of these congregations in 1956 was as follows:

<i>Congregation</i>	<i>Souls</i>	<i>Communicants</i>
First, Faulkton, SD	105	57
Zion, Hidewood Twp., SD	122	90
Zion, Ipswich, SD	116	47
Our Savior, Jamestown, ND	324	204
St. Luke, Lemmon, SD	220	110

Of course not all of the members of these congregations left the synod; some joined neighboring congregations. For example, the congregation closest to Zion, Hidewood Twp., was

⁵⁷ *Dakota-Montana Proceedings 1960*, p. 12.

⁵⁸ *Proceedings 1960*, p. 14.

⁵⁹ *Dakota-Montana Proceedings 1962*, pp. 9, 11.

Trinity, Clear Lake, South Dakota. In 1956 Trinity reported 270 souls and 208 communicants. In 1960, the numbers had climbed to 326 souls and 235 communicants, with only 5 baptisms and 8 confirmations recorded for that year.

Losses were also experienced in congregations whose pastors terminated fellowship but the congregation did not. The table below compares the membership in these congregations in 1956 to that of 1960:

<i>Congregation</i>	<i>Pastor</i>	<i>Souls</i>		<i>Communicants</i>	
		<i>1956</i>	<i>1960</i>	<i>1956</i>	<i>1960</i>
St John, Bowdle, SD	P. Albrecht	410	185	286	110
Emmanuel, Grover, SD	C. Albrecht	258	132	171	90
St. John, Mazzeppa Twp., SD	M. Eibs	214	173	138	130
St. John, Rauville Twp., SD	M. Eibs	195	166	146	127
St. Peter, Florence, SD	C. Hanson	141	137	84	86

Total baptized membership of the district in 1956 was 11,857, with 7,776 communicants. In 1960 the district reported 11,298 souls and 7,245 communicants. Using the communicant figures for 1958 and 1959 the difference was 8,040 and 7,256 respectively. In his president's report to the 1960 district convention, W. Schumann cites the situation as the cause for "more than 500 communicants [leaving] the District in the past biennium."⁶⁰

Much more difficult to measure is the toll taken on congregations and individuals. Lawsuits over control of church property dragged out in court. Families were split, some following the pastor who left, others remaining with the synod; some family relations are strained because of the ordeal to this day.

But not all of the results of this controversy were negative. Pastor H. Birner writes, "But we pastors did profit by the experience. We had studied carefully the issues and the doctrines that had separated us, as well as the effect they had on the fundamental doctrines of Scripture. Now we could proclaim those doctrines with greater clarity to our people. Indeed, the Lord of the Church reigns, even when we think the church is being torn apart."⁶¹

Conclusion

Like ancient Gaul, the Dakota-Montana District in the mid to late 1950's was divided into three parts. One firmly believed the Wisconsin Synod was correct in its patient dealings with the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. Another was thoroughly entrenched in the conviction that the synod was in error because it did not break with Missouri in 1957 (if not sooner). The third, and perhaps largest group, was not sure who was right, but sought to grow in its understanding through careful study of the issues in the light of God's Word.

Once again church fellowship is in the forefront of church affairs. Church bodies are making newspaper headlines with reports of concordats of joint ministry and purpose. Special emphasis on the issue is being urged in the group studies of synod pastors as well as on a district level. A book and Bible study was not only prepared on the topic, but also sent out free of charge to every congregation of the synod.

Of all the doctrines of Scripture, fellowship may not seem so important to receive such focused attention. But the history of our own district demonstrates that only a thorough study of

⁶⁰ *Proceedings, 1960*, p. 19.

⁶¹ Birner, p. 33.

what Scripture teaches can avail to prevent a replay of the events of the 50's and early 60's, only a firm stand on the truth of God's Word and God's grace can keep our district from once again being *A District Divided*.

Sources

Birner, Herbert A. "The Saga of a Mission District-Dakota Montana: The First Ninety Years (1880-1970)." Printed in *Dakota Montana District 1920-1995: Seventy-Five Years of God's Blessings*.

Dakota-Montana District Proceedings. 1956, 1958, 1960, 1962.

Fredrich, Edwin C. *The Wisconsin Synod Lutherans*. Milwaukee: Northwestern, 1992.

Lawrenz, Carl. "A Report to the Protest Committee." 1958.

Lueker, Erwin L., ed. *Lutheran Cyclopedia*. St. Louis: Concordia, 1975.

Pope, Reginald E. "The C.L.C. in South Dakota 'The Turbulent Years,'" a paper for the Eastern Pastor Conference, Dakota-Montana District. October 26-27, 1987.

Sievert, Karl G. "Preaching the Gospel on the Dakota-Montana Prairies" or "A History of the Dakota-Montana District of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod." Printed in *Fifty Years of God's Blessings in the Dakota-Montana District, 1920-1970*.

WELS Statistical Report. 1956, 1960.

Zietlow, Hans. "The Winds Behind the High Plains Drifters," a senior church history paper for Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. April 13, 1987.

Additional sources include copies of the original letters, responses, minutes, etc., from the files of Pastor George A. Enderle.