

Sounding a Clear Trumpet Call¹

The Role of the *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* In the Break In Fellowship With the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod

By Steven J. Pagels

From its inception in 1904, the *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*² has served as the theological voice of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary and as the WELS theological journal for pastors. Many different writers have contributed to its pages during the last century, but its purpose has remained the same. As the *Quarterly* celebrates its one hundredth anniversary, it continues to stand up for the truth of confessional Lutheranism and to proclaim the truth of the gospel. Fittingly, the motto which has graced the cover in various forms over the years is John 8:31,32: “If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”

The *Quarterly* has always testified to the truth, but its indispensable role can perhaps be seen most clearly in the years which preceded the breakup of the Synodical Conference. What began as seemingly innocent discussions between the American Lutheran Church and the Missouri Synod in the 1930's ended when the Wisconsin Synod suspended fellowship with Missouri in 1961. During that span of roughly twenty-five years, the *Quarterly* found itself in the middle of a battleground of sorts. Wisconsin Synod theologians presented essays which defended the scriptural position on the issues. The News and Comments section reported on the most recent developments and mergers in American Lutheranism. Convention reports and resolutions, as well as doctrinal statements, were reprinted for the benefit of pastors throughout the Synod. In short, the *Quarterly* served as the trumpet which the Wisconsin Synod used to sound a clear call on the basis of Scripture. The purpose of this paper is to examine the role which the *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* played in the conflict between the Missouri and Wisconsin Synods, focusing on the volumes published between the writing of the Common Confession and Wisconsin's final break with Missouri (that is, from 1949-1961).

I. Background

The beginning of the rift in the Synodical Conference can be traced back to 1935, when the American Lutheran Church, a 1930 merger of the Iowa, Ohio, and Buffalo Synods, invited the Missouri Synod to resume negotiations about a possible merger of the two church bodies. The A.L.C. convention of 1938 at Sandusky took a bold step in that direction. From their perspective, the greatest obstacle that stood in the way of union was the *Brief Statement*, a staunchly confessional document produced by the Missouri Synod in 1932. The *Brief Statement* had been enthusiastically accepted by the other three members of the Synodical Conference. In order to circumvent the rigidity of that confession, the A.L.C. came up with its own confessional document. “The *Declaration* demanded that certain points of doctrine be declared as ‘not disruptive of church-fellowship.’ It declared general agreement with the *Brief Statement*, but maintained that the *Brief Statement* needed ‘supplementing’ and a new ‘emphasizing’ of certain parts.”³ In addition, the A.L.C. refused to discontinue its membership in the thoroughly unionistic American Lutheran Conference.

Missouri, however, refused to speak out against these ambiguous and misleading A.L.C. statements. Much to the surprise of her Synodical Conference allies, the St. Louis convention of the Missouri Synod passed

¹ This paper was originally presented as a Senior Church History paper at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, April 1999. Pastor Pagels serves at St. John, Wauwatosa, Wisconsin.

² *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* did not become the official name for the periodical until 1960 (see the “News and Comments,” January, 1960, p.72). Before that year, it was called the *Quartalschrift*. For the sake of consistency, the journal's current name will be used throughout the body of the paper.

³ J. P. Meyer, *The Common Confession and Other Pertinent Documents* (W.E.L.S. pamphlet, 1950) p. 7.

the “1938 Resolutions,” which stated: “The *Brief Statement* of the Missouri Synod together with the *Declaration* of the representatives of the American Lutheran Church and the provisions of this entire report . . . be regarded as the doctrinal basis for *future church-fellowship* . . . “ (from Missouri Proceedings, 1938).⁴ This was a break with the confessional past for the champions of orthodoxy in the Synodical Conference. The 1938 resolutions demonstrated Missouri’s willingness to allow two documents co-exist as the basis for doctrinal unity. They also disturbed the confessional peace within the Synodical Conference.

The Wisconsin Synod entered the fray in 1939. Alarmed by the actions that Missouri had taken the previous year, the Wisconsin Synod appointed a committee to study the matter.

This committee placed before Wisconsin’s 1939 convention its findings that the doctrinal basis established by the Missouri Synod and by the American Lutheran Church . . . is not acceptable. Not two statements should be issued as a basis for agreement; a single joint statement, covering the contested doctrines thetically and antithetically . . . is imperative. . . The sincerity of any theoretical statement must also be evidenced by a clean church practice” (from Wisconsin *Proceedings*, 1939).⁵

This was the first of many official warnings that Wisconsin issued to her Missourian brethren. These warnings went largely unheeded, but in this case an effort was made to find a common ground. It took ten years for the A.L.C. and Missouri to agree upon the kind of joint document which the Wisconsin Synod demanded in 1939.

The A.L.C. and Missouri continued to flirt with the idea of a closer relationship throughout the 1940’s. The *Doctrinal Affirmation*, the first attempt at a joint doctrinal statement, was produced in 1944. It proved to be unacceptable to both church bodies, and was officially rejected by the A.L.C. in 1946. However, this initial defeat was not the end of the story. In 1947, the A.L.C. extended a new invitation to the Doctrinal Unity Committee of the Missouri Synod for renewed negotiations toward the establishing of church fellowship.

They did this in the so-called *Friendly Invitation* in which they at the same time expressed the principle that there was an area of wholesome and allowable latitude of theological opinion on the basis of the teachings of the Word of God, which merely confirmed what the American Lutheran Church had said in convention at Sandusky and which it had never repudiated, namely, that it was neither necessary nor possible to agree in all non-fundamental doctrines. Here we got right back to the teachings of open questions which the Iowa Synod expressed 100 years before and which the Missouri Synod at the time vehemently opposed.⁶

Despite Wisconsin’s repeated warnings, the Missouri Synod accepted the A.L.C.’s “invitation” and the two church bodies renewed their attempts to draw up a document of doctrinal agreement. These meetings bore fruit by the end of the decade.

1950 was a watershed year in the Synodical Conference controversy. In 1950, the Missouri Synod officially adopted the *Common Confession* as a basis for doctrinal agreement with the American Lutheran Church. This document became a major bone of contention between the Missouri Synod on the one hand and Wisconsin and the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (the Norwegian Synod at the time) on the other.

The former viewed the “Common Confession” as an adequate settlement of past doctrinal disagreements. The latter contended that a “common” confession had been achieved only by ignoring real points of controversy and soft-pedaling important doctrinal positions of the Synodical Conference.⁷

Up to this time the Wisconsin Synod had been willing to withhold judgment, but the picture changed dramatically when Missouri adopted the *Common Confession*. Wisconsin had been expressing concerns about questionable church practices in Missouri for years, such as its position on Scouting, “joint-prayer” and military chaplaincy, but Missouri’s acceptance of the *Common Confession* brought the conflict into sharp focus. The controversy caused by the *Common Confession* drove Wisconsin into an in-depth study of the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions. The conflict also forced us to address a number of difficult questions. What impact

⁴ Edward C. Fredrich, “The Great Debate With Missouri,” *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* (Vol. 74, April 1977): p. 158.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 159.

⁶ Waldemar O. Pless, *Historical Background of the Present Issues Between the Missouri and Wisconsin Synods* (A paper read at a special meeting of the Northern Wisconsin District, Reedsville, WI, October 5, 1953) p. 3.

⁷ E.C. Fredrich, *The Wisconsin Synod Lutherans* (Watertown: Northwestern Publishing House, 1992), p. 200.

would Missouri's acceptance of the *Common Confession* have on the Synodical Conference? Had it been written as a replacement for the *Brief Statement* of 1932? Had this new document solved the difficulties between the A.L.C. and Missouri by the application of God's Word, or had it merely avoided them? If the latter was the case, what should be done about it? If the Synodical Conference was to survive, Wisconsin needed to speak up for the truth. More importantly, if confessional Lutheranism was to survive, confessional Lutherans needed to take a stand. The *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* played an important role as the voice of Wisconsin in the decade that followed.

II. Reporting the Facts

Much of the war for the truth of Scripture was waged in the essays that appeared in the *Quarterly*, but these articles were not the only weapons utilized by the Wisconsin Synod. The *Northwestern Lutheran* proved to be a valuable resource for educating the laity about the disputed issues. Dozens of articles were published to inform parishioners about the latest developments in the Synodical Conference controversy. In addition, Wisconsin distributed a number of pamphlets in order to keep its people up-to-date on the issues.

The "News and Comments" section of the *Quarterly* served a similar purpose for the pastors of the Wisconsin Synod. As Lutheran church bodies opened, then broke off, and then resumed negotiations, pastors were able to track these developments as they were reported in the "News and Comments." Whenever Lutheran conventions met and made important decisions, these resolutions were promptly reprinted in the *Quarterly*. Even though they were relegated to the back pages, these news items proved to be helpful for pastors who wanted to keep abreast of the changes on the Lutheran scene. The following is a listing of significant items printed in the "News and Comments" section of the *Quarterly*, 1949-1961. It is not intended to be an exhaustive list. The titles were chosen because they reported on developments in American Lutheranism, especially on the escalating conflict within the Synodical Conference.

1949: Volume 46

January

"The Tide of Union" (60), E. Reim.

April

"Dr. Graebner and the Lutheran Witness" (130), E. Reim.

July

"An Overture and a Reply" (207), E. Reim.

"A Frank Statement" (210), E. Reim.

1950: Volume 47

January

"A Common Confession -- Missouri and A.L.C." (58), E. Reim.

April

"Missouri and the N.L.C." (136), E. Reim.

"We believe and teach" (148), J. P. Meyer

July

"Milwaukee Resolutions on the Common Confession" (239).

October

"A.L.C. Adoption of the Common Confession" (316), E. Reim.

1951: Volume 48

January

"A.L.C. Acceptance of the Common Confession" (59), E. Reim

April

“Another ‘Agreement:’ Communion” (141), E. Reim.

July

“Norwegian Action on ‘Common Confession’” (203), E. Reim.

“Augustana at Galesburg” (205), E. Reim.

October

“The Slovak Resolutions on the Common Confession” (284), E. Reim.

“Wisconsin on the Common Confession” (286), E. Reim.

1952: Volume 49

January

“The Orthodox Lutheran Conference” (59), E. Reim.

“Dr. Sasse on Inspiration and the New Missouri” (59), E. Reim.

“Twenty-five Lutheran Army and Air Force Chaplains” (61), E. Reim.

April

“United Testimony on Faith and Life” (118).

“United Testimony” (134), J. P. Meyer.

“The ‘United Testimony’ on Spiritual Fellowship” (138), E. Reim.

July

“Action on the A.L.C. Merger Plans” (210), E. Reim.

October

“Synodical Conference - A Report” (292), E. Reim.

1953: Volume 50

January

“The National Council of Christian Churches” (59), E. Reim.

“American Lutherans Approve Further Unity Steps” (60), E. Reim

April

“An Understanding and a Misunderstanding” (136), E. Reim.

“The A.L.C. on Inspiration” (141), Norman Madson in the *Lutheran Sentinel*.

July

“Missouri Again Upholds Doctrinal Agreement” (211), E. Reim.

“Missouri and the Lutheran World Federation” (212), E. Reim.

October

“The Wisconsin Reaction to Houston” (277).

“Report and Recommendations of the Floor Committee” (281), E. Reim.

“Lest We Forget” (285), E. Reim.

“Report of the Committee on Doctrinal Unity” (286).

“As Others See Us” (292), from “News Without Comments.”

1954: Volume 51

January

“Ask Favorable Move on Lutheran Merger” (65).

“Lutheran Groups Complete Merger Blueprint” (66), E. Reim.

“Can Two Walk Together Except They Be Agreed” (67), P. Peters.

April

“New Service Book Seen Major Factor In Lutheran Unity” (137), E. Reim.

“Lutheran Students Serve as Scout Camp Chaplains” (138), E. Reim.

July

- “Lest We Forget” (208), E. Reim
- “Report of the Committee on Doctrinal Unity” (208).
- “Evangelical Lutherans Approve Merger Plan” (214).
- “U.E.L.C. Approves Merger Blueprint” (215), E. Reim.

October

- “The Lutheran Scene” (296), E. Reim.
- “‘Free Conference’ of Lutherans Set at Minneapolis , Nov. 11-12” (296).
- “Four-Way Merger Seen Open to Augustana and Others” (297).

1955: Volume 52

January

- “Synodical Conference Report” (62), E. Reim.
- “A.L.C. Approves Fourway Merger” (64), E. Reim.

April

- “The Passing of the American Lutheran Conference” (144), E. Reim.

July

- “Norwegian Action” (213), E. Reim.
- “Lutheran World Federation” (220).

October

- “Committee No. 2 - Floor Committee on Church Union” (287), F. Blume.
- “Resolutions of the Union Committee on Girl Scouts” (291), F. Blume.
- “Dr. Behnken on Scouting” (293), F. Blume.

1956: Volume 53

January

- “Another Merger Invitation” (67), E. Reim.
- “New Lutheran Award Set For Adult Scout Leaders” (70), E. Reim.
- “Dr. Behnken on the New Communion Agreement” (72), P. Peters.

April

Nothing to report.

July

- “Dr. Behnken on Joint Prayer” (216), P. Peters.

October

- “The Wisconsin Reaction” (291), E. Reim.
- “The Norwegian Reaction” (300), E. Reim.

1957: Volume 54

January

- “Synodical Conference Convention” (57), C. Lawrenz.

April

- “The Cause of the Christian Day School” (147), C. Lawrenz.
- “Warning Against ‘Armed Forces’ Religion” (149), C. Lawrenz.

July

Nothing to report.

October

- “Resolutions on the Intersynodical Issues” (290), C. Lawrenz.
- “Two Appraisals of the Third L.W.F. Assembly” (293), P. Peters.

1958: Volume 55

January

- “Merger Movements” (70), P. Peters.
- “A New Doctrinal Agreement” (72), C. Lawrenz.

April

- “Statement on Secret Societies” (143), P. Peters.
- “Total Lutheran Union” (145), P. Peters.

July

- “Membership in the L.W.F.?” (217), P. Peters.

October

Nothing to report.

1959: Volume 56

January

- “Lodge Membership For Ministers” (59), P. Peters.

April

- “N.L.C.’s Invitation Declined” (145), P. Peters.

July

- “Resolutions of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod on Doctrinal Matters” (213), from “News Without Comments.”

October

- “The Union Committee Reports of the E.L.S. and the S.E.L.C. on the Meetings of the Joint Doctrinal Union Committee of the S.C.” (294).

1960: Volume 57

January

- “Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly” (72), P. Peters.

April

Nothing to report.

July

Nothing to report.

October

- “The Thiensville Conclave and Its Commentators” (291), P. Peters.

1961: Volume 58

January

- “Synodical Conference Proceedings” (74), C. Lawrenz.
- “January 1, 1931 -- The American Lutheran Church -- January 1, 1961” (77), P. Peters.

April

- “On Acknowledging Holy Scripture as the Word of God” (143), C. Lawrenz.
- “Intercommunion” (144), C. Lawrenz.
- “Pulpit Fellowship” (145), C. Lawrenz.

July

Nothing to report.

October

- “Resolutions on Intersynodical Matters” (296), W. Pless.

III. Defending the Truth

The “News and Comments” section allowed Wisconsin Synod pastors to read about the changing landscape of American Lutheranism, but that section played only a supporting role in the periodical. The primary purpose of the *Quarterly* was to promote confessional Lutheranism. On its pages, conservative theologians proclaimed and defended the truth of Scripture. They wrote timely articles which spoke definitively about the doctrinal controversies that threatened the Synodical Conference. They presented exegetical essays which demonstrated that Wisconsin based its position upon the inerrant Word of God. They gave opening and closing addresses at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, many of which made applications about Wisconsin’s struggle to remain true to God’s Word at a time when the walls of confessional Lutheranism appeared to be crumbling. All of these things provided pastors with spiritual meat to nourish their souls and strengthen their faith. In the following section, a number of these articles will be examined. Once again, this is not intended to be an exhaustive study. Articles were chosen on the basis of their application to the conflict between Wisconsin and Missouri.

The first essay in the study also happens to be the longest. “Prayer Fellowship” appeared in the July, 1949 through October, 1950 issues of the *Quarterly*. J.P. Meyer originally presented this essay at the 1949 Minnesota Pastors Conference in New Ulm. This was a burning issue at the time because of Missouri’s latest overtures to the A.L.C. When representatives of the two church bodies came together to discuss the possibility of merger, they opened their meetings with prayer. Even though they did not agree on all doctrines, Missouri justified this practice by distinguishing between “prayer fellowship” and “joint prayer.” In his essay, Professor Meyer tested the validity of such a distinction.

The following quotes summarize the content of the article: “Trying to establish the unity while at the same time neglecting the Word, cannot only produce no more than a sham union, in fact, it will cause the rupture to increase.”⁸ Meyer cited the Prussian Union as a historical example of such a hollow union. “Prayer fellowship, or joint prayer, no matter how you like to dilute the term, stands in close relation to the unity of the church, either strengthening that unity as a heart felt expression of it, or undermining it by simulating a unity which does not exist.”⁹ “Who are we to sit in judgment on it (the Word), to sift the true from the false, the important from the unimportant; to declare some its doctrines to be binding, and others to be mere Open Questions, on which it is permitted to agree to disagree.”¹⁰ “It would be dissimulation, hypocrisy, to connive, or to give the appearance of conniving at error by joining the errorist in prayer.”¹¹ Throughout the essay, Meyer strongly defended the “old” Synodical Conference position as the correct application of Scripture to prayer fellowship. Because God’s Word clearly states that prayer is an act of worship, any attempts at union that are not based on complete doctrinal agreement violate the biblical principles of prayer fellowship.

A significant historical essay appeared in the January and April, 1950 issues of the *Quarterly*. Professor M. Lehniger presented “The Development of the Doctrinal Position of the Wisconsin Synod During the Century of Its Existence” to the Centennial Convention of the Wisconsin Synod, which met at St. Lucas, Milwaukee, August 3-9, 1949. Wisconsin owed a debt of gratitude to Missouri for steering it onto a more confessional path during its formative years. One hundred years later, however, it was as if the two Synods had changed roles.

We dare not close without expressing our concern about the growing estrangement between our Synod and our sister synod of Missouri, which is torn by strife in its own midst. Of late, the men in authority in our sister synod are either unable or not willing to cope with certain of their own members who, under the guise of external cooperation, are actually practicing fellowship with men from whom the Synodical Conference has

⁸ J.P. Meyer, “Prayer Fellowship,” *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* Vol. 46 (October 1949): p. 248.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 259.

¹⁰ J.P. Meyer, “Prayer Fellowship,” *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* Vol. 47 (July 1950): p. 202.

¹¹ J.P. Meyer, “Prayer Fellowship,” *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* Vol. 47 (October 1950): p. 298.

been divided on doctrinal grounds for many years. It is not just an isolated occurrence anymore, but an ever growing number of them, which fill us with deep apprehension.¹²

Lehninger's message was clear. Missouri was traveling down a dangerous path. It was the Christian duty of Wisconsin to admonish these erring brothers. Even so, Lehninger showed deep respect and admiration for his brothers in Missouri.

Who are we to disagree with such a large body of men who have held aloft the banner of Lutheran orthodoxy for over a century, a synod, which by its example has strengthened us when we were weak, to which we are sincerely grateful, and for which we have great love in our hearts? We tremble in the consciousness of our unworthiness, our many weaknesses and failings. But for the sake of our own and the salvation of those coming after us we cannot do otherwise than witness the truth against all gainsayers, and be they nearest and dearest to us.¹³

The unity which the two bodies had enjoyed was now in jeopardy. In spite of its weaknesses, and in spite of the consequences, Wisconsin was obligated to admonish its sister synod. Any words of warning, however, needed to be spoken in a spirit of Christian love and humility.

Another essay which celebrated the Wisconsin's centennial anniversary was "The Absolute Authority of the Word of God in Matters of Faith and Life" by Carl Lawrenz. In the introduction, Lawrenz recounted Wisconsin's early struggles to remain faithful to the Word. In controversy after controversy, God preserved the tiny church body from falling into heterodoxy. However, the past was no reason for Wisconsin to let down its guard. A review of this important doctrine was in order because a new threat loomed on the horizon.

It has been our Synod's stand over against the new allurements to unionism which have made an impact upon the Synodical Conference in the very recent decades. As we are now entering the second century of our life and work as a synod we ask God in earnest prayer to grant us grace to continue to bow with unswerving faithfulness to the absolute authority of His Word.¹⁴

As the people of the Wisconsin Synod celebrate more than one hundred fifty years of God's grace, we have much the same reasons to be thankful today. We once again ask God in earnest prayer to preserve the "Sola Scriptura" confession of our church.

1950 was a year of celebration for the Wisconsin Synod, but it was also a time of uneasiness. A July article in the *Quarterly* addressed one specific area of concern. In "The World Council of Churches and Cooperation in Externals," George O. Lillegard condemned the ecumenism which was taking over American Christianity. Sadly, the same unionistic spirit was even creeping into conservative Lutheran church bodies. Missouri's changing position was beginning to blur the distinction between joint church work and mere external cooperation. Conflicting attitudes toward military chaplaincy and membership in the National Lutheran Council strained the relationship between Missouri and Wisconsin. Lillegard's essay flatly condemned all efforts to achieve external unity which were not based on complete doctrinal agreement.

In the face of all proud attempts made today to build a kingdom of God here on earth to solve all "economic and political problems," true Lutherans need to heed the admonition: "Come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord." (II Cor. 6, 17.) There is no greater or more important issue before our church today than this, that we not only keep separate from such organizations as the World Council, but also contend against them and fight them with the sword of the Word without ceasing. And this we must do, even if we

¹² M. Lehninger, "The Development of the Doctrinal Position of the Wisconsin Synod During the Century of Its History," *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* Vol. 47 (April 1950): p. 106.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 107.

¹⁴ Carl Lawrenz, "The Absolute Authority of the Word of God in Matters of Faith and Life," *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* Vol. 48 (January 1951): p. 2.

stand alone or see one after the other of those who formerly took a firm stand against unionism succumbing to its blandishments and compromising with the world.¹⁵

Although Missouri is not singled out in the quote, the last sentence certainly applies to that synod's recent changes in policy. Some may argue that Lillegard overstated his case by calling unionism the most important issue before the church of his day, but history has proven that unionism is like a dangerous poison. Its deadly effects can be seen today in liberal Lutheran church bodies like E.L.C.A.

Professor Meyer wrote a related article, "Inspiration," in the October issue of the same year. The absolute authority of Scripture goes hand in hand with the doctrine of inspiration. Because God's Word is verbally inspired by the Holy Spirit, it is not subject to error. This may seem obvious to us, but some liberal Lutheran theologians were leaving room for the possibility of historical errors in the sacred text. The article was written to counter these "scholarly" attempts to water down the precious doctrine.

If we take up a study of inspiration at this time, the reason is not that the doctrine itself needs a restatement. We are all familiar with it, and not only subscribe to it but confess it with all our heart. Yet a restudy seems desirable because of the many attacks, both open and disguised, that are being made on it in our day in increasing number and with increasing vehemence. There is a danger in these attacks also for us. Not so much that we might weaken in our convictions, but that in meeting the attacks we might lose our sense of proportion, might permit ourselves to be crowded into a false approach to the doctrine.¹⁶

Attacks on the inspiration of Scripture were nothing new, but they had never been so close to home. In 1951, the A.L.C. and Missouri had accepted the *Common Confession* as a joint confessional document. The term, "verbal inspiration," was conspicuously absent from the article on the Means of Grace. This omission played into the hands of liberal theologians who favored the *Schriftganze* approach to inspiration. Under this theory it was claimed that the Bible as a whole was inspired, but it still contained some errors. At first glance, this approach may not appear to significantly change the doctrine, but it is the first step down the slippery slope which ends with a denial of the power and authority of the Word. What the *Common Confession* did say about the doctrine of inspiration was true, but it did not eliminate the possibility for misunderstanding. The Wisconsin Synod ultimately rejected the *Common Confession* because we refused to permit ourselves to be crowded into a false approach to the doctrine.

1953 did not produce any *Quarterly* articles dealing with the widening gap between Wisconsin and Missouri, but the events of that year did mark the beginning of the end of the Synodical Conference. At the 1953 Wisconsin Synod Convention, a recommendation was offered by synod secretary Winfred Schaller to declare fellowship with Missouri ended. This was the first formal call for a break in fellowship, but after discussion it was rejected by the assembly. Instead, the convention approved the floor committee's *in statu confessionis* declaration as an official protest against Missouri. If the battle lines had not been drawn before, they were now. The Wisconsin Synod presented its case on the pages of the *Quarterly*.

"Observations on Ecumenicity" was the first article to appear in the January 1954 *Quarterly*. E. Arnold Sitz was more direct in his criticism of Missouri than any of the previous authors had been. It didn't take long for him to openly accuse Missouri of ecumenical practices.

Within the pale of the Lutheran Church in America the current of the Ecumenical Movement is running strong. It had its beginnings in the mergers of the second decade of this century. It deposited the Opgjoer, the Chicago Theses, the Minneapolis Theses, the Pittsburgh Agreement and other documents on the way. Then for a while it seemed to subside, diked off from the Synodical Conference largely by the Brief Statement of the Missouri Synod. But in recent years it has crevassed this levee, first seeping, then beginning to pour into the Synodical Conference. The chief crevasses through which brackish waters are flowing are

¹⁵ Geo. O. Lillegard, "The World Council of Churches and Co-operation in External," *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* Vol. 47 (July 1950): p. 234.

¹⁶ J.P. Meyer, "Inspiration," *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* Vol. 48 (October 1951): p. 247.

four in number: the English District of the Missouri Synod; the chaplaincy; the high church party; and, sad to say, Concordia Seminary at St. Louis.¹⁷

According to Sitz, the troubles began when the A.L.C. and Missouri began to entertain the idea of merger before they achieved doctrinal unity. The idea of joining forces was not wrong in and of itself, but the shortcuts taken by the two church bodies resulted in disaster. Sitz described the troubled past of the Synodical Conference using a colorful comparison:

Along the banks of the resurgent flood we have seen the pilots of the -- shall we say -- Lutheran ecumenical expedition permit the Brief Statement to be beached alongside of the ALC Declaration. A little further on a side-wheeler called the "Affirmation" lies on the rocks. Still further on the "Common Confession I" has struck a bar, and the "Common Confession II" is laboring with might and main to haul it onto safer waters. Is it not a wasted effort, seeing that "Common Confession I" already has a hole stove in it? But the expedition seemingly neither learns from repeated experience, nor turns back, but continues navigating the turbulent stream. As one man the whole Synodical Conference, but especially the Missouri Synod, seeing it is its very own vessel, should relaunch the Brief Statement, for it remains an admittedly safe and worthy craft.¹⁸

Sitz's solution to the problem of ecumenism was quite simple. Return to the Brief Statement: not because it was the traditional document of the Synodical Conference, not because it stood the test of time, but because it is was an accurate and complete exposition of God's Word.

The anti-dote? Back to the Bible; back to the promises of Christ; back to faith in God; back to the Lutheran Confessions and Luther; back to singing the grand Lutheran chorales; back to a sturdy trust in the word of Christ concerning the Church: The gates of hell shall not prevail against it." In short, be Lutheran!¹⁹

"What Constitutes False Doctrine" by Edmund Reim was the first article in the next issue of the *Quarterly*. It also addressed a thorny problem which had caused a division in the Synodical Conference. Wisconsin had rejected the *Common Confession* of 1950 because it failed to settle past doctrinal differences between Missouri and the churches which had merged to form the A.L.C. in 1930. Missouri considered the *Common Confession* to be an acceptable confession of faith because Wisconsin had not charged it with false doctrine. "The implication is that since the positive statements of the Common Confession have not been challenged, the document must be doctrinally sound."²⁰ To complicate matters, Missouri was in the process of adding a second part to the *Common Confession*, supposedly in order to clear up any that had been left unsettled by the original document.

The purpose of Reim's essay was to examine Missouri's claim about the acceptability of the *Common Confession*. First, Reim established that a comprehensive confession needed to be more than a collection of scripturally sound statements. "The real test for the correctness of our personal teaching is, therefore, not merely whether our individual statements are true or not, but rather how we measure up to the issues that confront us. The purest presentation of Scriptural truths will be vitiated if it used to evade some painful issue."²¹ To support his point, Reim drew a comparison between *Common Confession* and the Lutheran Confessions. About the latter, he wrote:

The individual statements that we find in them are true and Scriptural. But their claim to orthodoxy, their claim upon our loyal acceptance, does not rest upon this alone, nor even primarily on this, but rather on the fact that they constitute a satisfying Scriptural answer to the issues that they were meant to settle.²²

¹⁷ E. Arnold Sitz, "Observations on Ecumenicity," *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* Vol. 51 (January 1954): p. 7.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

²⁰ E. Reim, "What Constitutes False Doctrine?" *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* Vol. 51 (April 1954): p. 82.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 85,86.

²² *Ibid.*, p.86.

In his final analysis, Reim concluded that the *Common Confession* did not qualify as an adequate settlement of past differences. If one accepts his conclusion, then the answer to the question posed by the title of the article becomes readily apparent.

The claim that the Common Confession is Scriptural in its various statements means nothing. It certainly does not prove this document to be an orthodox confession. And to admit its inadequacy even while treating this as though it were but a minor weakness is to ignore the fact that in a confessional statement, in a document meant to be a settlement of old doctrinal controversies, such “inadequacies” constitute a more serious failing. The document must stand or fall by the manner in which it settles or fails to settle the old issues. If it fails, --- as we believe it does --- this means that the Common Confession, in spite of all its correct statements, not merely contains false doctrine. It is false doctrine.²³

Later than year, Carl Lawrenz devoted thirty-four pages of the *Quarterly* to an essay closely related to the articles by Reim and Sitz. It was entitled “The Scriptural Principles Concerning Church Fellowship.” Wisconsin presented a united front in its condemnation of the Ecumenical Movement. The synod as a whole had a clear understanding of the biblical principles of church fellowship. Why, then, was it necessary to review a doctrine which was not a major problem among our churches? Even though Wisconsin was not directly involved in these unholy endeavors, the synod was deeply affected by them nonetheless.

They threaten to disrupt and terminate the precious fellowship which for so many years we have enjoyed with sister synods in the Synodical Conference. As a matter of conscience we have found it necessary to declare inadequate and unacceptable the Common Confession which our sister synod of Missouri and the American Lutheran Church have drawn up and accepted as a full settlement, in the doctrines treated therein, of the doctrinal differences which in the past have been a hindrance to fellowship relations between them. After many years of fraternal discussion and consultation we have also found it necessary to tell our sister synod very clearly that we simply cannot join it in its stand in a number of other related issues. It is this situation which has made Christian fellowship the subject of such intensive study and discussion in our midst.²⁴

Lawrenz divided the study of fellowship into two parts: I - The Invisible Fellowship of Christian Believers, and II - The Outward Expression of Christian Fellowship. A proper understanding of both principles would be essential for Wisconsin in its future dealings with Missouri.

Controversy over the doctrine of election was not a recent phenomenon in American Lutheranism. The Ohio Synod, now a part of the American Lutheran Church, had withdrawn from the Synodical Conference in 1881 because of it. Seventy years later, the doctrine was under attack again. Otto J. Eckert wrote “The Relation of Time to Eternity in God’s Dealing With Man as Concerning the Doctrine of Election” as a review of the doctrine.

When Eckert delivered the essay to the Northern Conference of the Michigan District, the article on election in the *Common Confession* was on everyone’s mind. Whereas the *Brief Statement* of 1932 devoted six detailed paragraphs to election, the *Common Confession* covered the doctrine in all of two sentences. What that brief paragraph said about election was true, but it was not nearly enough. The lack of antithetical statements left the door open for the old *intuitu fidei* position of the Ohio Synod. In words reminiscent of Reim’s article of the previous year, Eckert indirectly condemned the *Common Confession*’s non-committal position.

For the fact that a simple Christian can die in grace ignorant of the doctrine of election does not mean that those whom God has entrusted with the responsibility of being watchmen in Zion may be ignorant of it or unclear on it, since the doctrine of election is the touchstone that proves a man’s theology, either revealing its synergism or its adherence to the SOLA GRATIA... Unsoundness in this doctrine works like a vicious leaven and leads to loose thinking, indifference to other doctrines, lack of doctrinal discipline, lax practice, and

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 87,88.

²⁴ Carl Lawrenz, “The Scriptural Principles Concerning Church Fellowship,” *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* Vol. 51 (October 1954): p. 259,260.

unionism. It is a first step on the road to liberalism; therefore the public doctrine of any church body must sound a clear note both thetically and antithetically in this doctrine and we as pastors must know it well.²⁵

Eckert's article on election was not the only doctrinal essay in the *Quarterly* that year. In the April, 1954 issue, Edmund Reim wrote "A History of the Term 'Objective Justification.'" The *Common Confession* did make use of the term in its article on justification, but it was only a passing reference. The issue, however, was not the use of the phrase in *Common Confession*. It was the legitimacy of the term itself.

Ever since the publication of the *Declaration* of the American Lutheran Church in 1938, and particularly since the appearance of its successor, the *Common Confession*, there has not only been much discussion about the general content of these documents, but particularly also concerning the their presentation of the doctrine of justification...It was claimed that this expression is more or less of an innovation, a mere local use, and without standing in good theological literature. The implication was that differences on such a point of terminology should not be permitted to become a major issue.²⁶

Reim conceded that the scriptural concept could be explained using simpler terminology. This concession demonstrated his concern for the substance of the fundamental doctrine rather than a fanatical insistence on one mode of expressing it. Reim, however, was not willing to put "objective justification" on the shelf for good. To do so could be misinterpreted as an admission of error. Instead, Reim defended both the past and future use of the term in Lutheran theology.

But no apologies need to be offered for the use that has been made of the term. It is certainly not a local idiom, indicating a self-willed, separatistic trend. It is a term that serves well for the uncovering and rejection of the trends of subjectivism, against which our age is by no means immune. Therefore, neither the term nor the fact of an objective justification of all mankind should be permitted to fall into oblivion.²⁷

Many of the *Quarterly* articles written in the 1950's were apologetic in nature. These articles served a good purpose. Those who do not guard what they have will eventually lose it. Apologetics, however, is not all that is needed to proclaim the whole counsel of God. S.C. Ylvisaker's article, "A Truly Biblical Union," demonstrated that point. In a departure from the style of previous articles on church fellowship, Ylvisaker outlined the positive aspects of the doctrine. The true unity of the church, rather than the unionism of other churches was the focus of his essay.

In times of conflict, it is tempting to devote all our time and energies to the problem and thereby, lose sight of the blessings that are ours. Ylvisaker reviewed the God-given blessings of a truly biblical union. "Let those who would unite the Churches consider that the believers themselves are already one in this faith (Eph. 4:3)."²⁸ With or without church mergers, the invisible church is always united by the bond of faith.

In 1955, tensions were mounting within the Synodical Conference. The Evangelical Lutheran Synod had resolved to break fellowship with the Missouri Synod in convention that year. A similar resolution was voted down by the 1955 WELS convention in Saginaw. The primary reason for this delay was a matter of logistics. Because the Missouri Synod met in convention every three years, their representatives had not met since Wisconsin issued its *in statu confessionis* declaration of 1953. In spite of the protest of a vocal minority, the assembly voted to hold in abeyance the resolution to break fellowship until Missouri had a chance to respond in its 1956 synod convention at St. Paul.

In the meantime, the prospects for reconciliation looked bleak at best. In response to Wisconsin's admonitions, Missouri Synod president Dr. J. W. Behnken said: "It is one thing to make charges; it is another to furnish evidence from the Word of God. The latter definitely is lacking (*Lutheran Witness*, Aug. 2, 1955, p.

²⁵ Otto J. Eckert, "The Relation of Time to Eternity in God's Dealing With Man as Concerning the Doctrine of Election," *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* Vol. 52 (January 1955): p. 16.

²⁶ Edmund Reim, "A History of the Term 'Objective Justification,'" *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* Vol. 52 (April 1955): p. 82.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 94.

²⁸ S.C. Ylvisaker, "A Truly Biblical Union," *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* Vol. 52 (April 1955): p. 95.

6).”²⁹ These did not sound like the words of a man or of a synod that was taking these brotherly admonitions to heart. Missouri’s unwillingness to listen may have raised some doubts about the strength of Wisconsin’s position. Therefore, Edmund Reim addressed the issue in the essay, “The Problem of Scriptural Proof.” The article was not a comprehensive study of biblical principles and applications. Its scope was quite narrow. “The intention is rather to discuss the question of Scriptural proof in so far as it has become a problem in the area of our immediate fellowship, the constituent synods of the Synodical Conference.”³⁰

By the time Reim delivered this essay at the Minnesota District Convention of 1956, the Missouri Synod had already met in St. Paul with positive results. Missouri finally resolved to set aside the *Common Confession* as a settlement of past differences with the American Lutheran Church. The assembly also resolved to decline membership in the thoroughly unionistic organization, the Lutheran World Federation. Missouri had gratefully acknowledged Wisconsin’s concerns and admonitions. Things appeared to be moving in the right direction, but a number of divisive issues still threatened the future of the Synodical Conference. Reim’s article warned against declaring a premature victory.

How shall we conduct ourselves under these new and different conditions? Our flesh is quick to suggest the policy of reasonable compromise, or give and take. To take a little here, and give a little there! This seems to be the essence of sound common sense, the sensible solution to all our troubles -- until we remember that these are matters in which the Word of God is involved, the Word which stands as an Absolute, far beyond such pretty policies of “give and take.”³¹

The Word of God does not allow for compromise. If Wisconsin had been faulty in its application of Scripture, it was time to admit its failings. However, if a review of its position revealed that it was firmly rooted in Scripture, then Wisconsin had no choice but to stand firm. Reim held the conviction that Wisconsin’s position was true to the Word of God. Therefore, it was Wisconsin’s duty to defend the truth of Scripture. Reim prayed that God would provide the wisdom and strength to carry out this awesome responsibility.

But the greatest need is that of relentless self-scrutiny, to remove the beam from our own eye, lest our failure in this respect make us unfit for the rescue role that we are attempting, and thus become the decisive cause for the failure of an undertaking that is not only permissible in itself, but the fulfillment of a solemn duty before God. God make us fit and faithful for this task!³²

Another article in the same issue of the *Quarterly* addressed the issue from a different angle. At the special 1956 convention of the Wisconsin Synod at Watertown, the Standing Committee of Matters of Church Union brought several proposals before the assembly. Because Missouri had made some progress in its 1956 convention, the committee proposed that the 1953 Saginaw resolutions continue to be held in abeyance. However, because the two synods were still far apart on issues such as Scouting and military chaplaincy, the Committee recommended the following: “RESOLVED, That our fellowship with The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod be one of vigorously protesting fellowship to be practiced where necessary, in the light of II Thessalonians 3:14 and 15.”³³

Some argued that this was a misapplication of the Thessalonians passage. Professor Meyer was asked to prepare a study of the passage under discussion to clarify things. Several months later, he submitted an exegetical essay entitled, “Second Thessalonians 3:14,15.” Even those who favored the resolution to delay action knew that the matter was far from settled. In his comments on the resolutions made at Watertown, Reim warned: “A ‘state of confession,’ even though pointed up by an occasional practical application of the passage from II Thessalonians, dare not become a *modus vivendi*.”³⁴ In other words, Reim was saying that a protesting

²⁹ Edmund Reim, “The Problem of Scriptural Proof,” *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* Vol. 54 (January 1957): p. 2.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 10.

³³ Edmund Reim, “The Watertown Resolutions,” *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* Vol. 53 (October 1956): p. 298. These resolutions were reprinted in the “News and Comments” section of the *Quarterly*.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 299.

fellowship may not continue on indefinitely. Further steps must be taken either in the direction of reconciliation or separation. If a protest is not followed by decisive action, it becomes nothing more than a hollow warning.

The *Common Confession* was a dead issue within the Synodical Conference by 1958, but many of the questions raised by the document were still alive and well. In his analysis of the document, Professor Meyer wrote the following about Article XII, The Last Things:

Our Lutheran Confessions make, without further qualification, the solemn statement that the Pope is “the very Anti-Christ (Trgl., p. 475, 10). 2 Thessalonians 2 provides the Biblical warrant for accepting this as an article of faith. But the qualified statement of the Common Confession (“still clearly discernible”) leaves room for uncertainty as to the permanence of this conclusion. We therefore hold that at this point the Common Confession does not adequately restate the Lutheran doctrine, nor does it see this matter as an article of faith, but rather as a historical judgment.³⁵

As recently as 1951, the Advisory Committee on Doctrine and Practice of the Missouri Synod gave a report that revealed a change from its previous position on the doctrine of the Antichrist: “Scripture does not teach that the Pope is the Antichrist. It teaches that there will be an Antichrist (prophecy). We identify the Antichrist as the Papacy. This is an historical judgment based on Scripture.”³⁶ In order to appease the A.L.C., Missouri had been willing to give ground on this “non-fundamental” doctrine. As a result, the statement, “*papam esse verum antichristum*,” was sacrificed to the god called unionism.

In a forty-three page essay published in January and April of 1958, W.F. Schink undertook an intensive study of the doctrine. “The Scriptural Doctrine of the Antichrist” was written as an apology of the distinctively Lutheran teaching. Missouri’s willingness to water down the doctrine was a symptom of a more serious problem. The conclusion of Schink’s article demonstrates the inevitable results of compromise.

This article is clearly expressed in the Lutheran Confessions; whoever denies it does not stand in one faith with his fathers; he is not a confessional Lutheran. A Lutheran preacher should know, believe and teach this article or frankly confess that he no longer subscribes to the Confessions of the Lutheran Church.³⁷

In short, if pastors or churches do not hold unswervingly to the doctrine of the Antichrist, they are no longer worthy of the name, “confessional Lutheran.”

Missouri’s actions in 1956 had produced a cautious optimism within the Synodical Conference, but it was becoming increasingly clear in the years that followed that the situation would improve no further. Despite the repeated pleas of Wisconsin, Missouri refused to discontinue its questionable practices. In the October 1959 issue of the Quarterly, George Lillegard wrote an essay entitled, “Modern Ecumenism and Cooperation in Externals.” Although he did not single out Missouri in the introduction, it was obvious that Lillegard was denouncing the synod’s unionistic endeavors.

Others seek to limit their “cooperation in externals” to such matters as do not affect or concern their teachings or the strictly “spiritual side” of the Christian work. This form of cooperation has captured practically all the churches today and threatens also the peace and unity of the Synodical Conference. For in many parts of our country members of the Synodical Conference are cooperating with errorists in various ways, not only defending this on the ground that it is only the “externals” of their church work that are affected, but also expressing the hope that they in this manner can bring about the long-desired unity of churches.³⁸

In the body of the essay, Lillegard challenged many of Missouri’s practices, especially those which were being used as a bridge to unity. His goal, however, was not to prove Missouri wrong. The primary purpose of the article was not to expose the errors of Missouri’s ways because they posed a threat to a Synodical Conference. Admonition was necessary, but it was only a means to an end.

³⁵ J. P. Meyer, *The Common Confession and Other Pertinent Documents* (W.E.L.S. pamphlet, 1950) p. 64.

³⁶ W. F. Schink, “The Scriptural Doctrine of the Antichrist,” *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* Vol. 55 (January 1958): p. 16.

³⁷ W. F. Schink, “The Scriptural Doctrine of the Antichrist,” *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* Vol. 55 (April 1958): p. 103.

³⁸ Geo. O. Lillegard, “Modern Ecumenism and Cooperation in Externals,” *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* Vol. 56 (October 1959): p. 234.

It is not enough for us to *talk* about the evils of these latter days. We must *do* something, even at the cost of being labeled as “separatists,” “isolationists,” “disturbers of the peace in Zion,” and other such opprobrious terms in the unionists’ well-stocked vocabulary of abuse. We must testify openly and publicly against every form of unionism so long as there is opportunity for us to do so with some hope of gaining the erring brother... There is no guarantee that we will not go the way of better men before us into unionism and modernism, unless we seek daily to be faithful to the Word God has given us and by daily repentance and renewal keep the humility and meekness of spirit which alone will enable us to walk the narrow way that leads to life.³⁹

The purpose of Wisconsin’s brotherly admonition was two-fold. First, a failure to act decisively would have been perceived as a tacit approval of Missouri’s errors. Strong words were needed to defend the truth, but the primary motivation behind Lillegard’s call to action was Christian love. The aim was to win back erring brothers. The other reason for action was self-preservation. If churches who possess the truth do not guard it carefully, it will not be long before it is taken from them. If Wisconsin’s warnings could lead Missouri to turn from its ways, both synods would be strengthened in the end.

A number of last-ditch efforts were made to save the Synodical Conference at the end of the decade. “One of these was the so-called ‘Conference of Theologians’ at which representatives of overseas churches in fellowship with the Synodical Convention joined in the discussion. The first meeting was at Oakland in June 1959, the second at Mequon just prior to the 1960 Synodical Conference convention.”⁴⁰ Several essays presented at the Mequon conference by Wisconsin Synod theologians were reprinted in Volume 58 (1961) of the *Quarterly*. Wisconsin Synod President Oscar J. Naumann presented “Church Organization As the Expression of the Foundation of the Church. Seminary professor Paul Peters delivered an essay entitled, “The Historical Development of the Protestant Free Churches From the Reformation to the Present.” Both articles appeared in the January issue.

Irwin Habeck’s article, “Church Discipline,” was printed in the April issue. After a brief isagogical study of Matthew 18, Habeck looked at the various components of church discipline. The article concluded with a discussion of the biblical principles, most notably as they were to be carried out by one church body over against another. This section was of particular importance, given the situation in the Synodical Conference when the essay was presented.

The four synods who at present comprise the Synodical Conference have promised one another in the constitution that they would assist one another in seeking to remove anything that might disturb the unity in their larger fellowship. But even if there are no formal ties, if on the basis of our several confessional positions and not through church-political maneuverings we have come to recognize one another as sister bodies, appreciation for the Spirit-wrought blessing and recognition of the duty which brethren owe one another would lead us to practice doctrinal discipline over against one another.⁴¹

Doctrinal discipline on the synod-to-synod level was more than a constitutional obligation. It was an expression of Christian care and concern, even if the unity of faith was of a more informal nature. On both accounts, Wisconsin was bound to take disciplinary action against Missouri. The final step was taken only a few months later.

The final “Conference of Theologians” essay was published in the October issue of the *Quarterly*. Edgar Hoenecke presented “Extension of the Mission Endeavor” on the last day of the Conference, July 30, 1960. By the time the article appeared in print, the die had already been cast. The 1961 Wisconsin Synod Convention approved a resolution to suspend fellowship with the Missouri Synod. A blessed fellowship of over ninety years had finally come to an end.

³⁹ Geo. O. Lillegard, “Modern Ecumenism and Cooperation in Externals,” *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* Vol. 57 (January 1960): p. 33.

⁴⁰ E.C. Fredrich, *The Wisconsin Synod Lutherans* (Watertown: Northwestern Publishing House, 1992), p. 205.

⁴¹ Irwin Habeck, “Church Discipline,” *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* Vol. 58 (April 1961): p. 99.

The opening address of the 1961-62 school year by Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary President Carl Lawrenz appeared in the same issue of the *Quarterly*. In his sermon, Lawrenz did not avoid the subject which weighed heavily on the hearts of everyone involved. He spoke openly about the events of the previous summer and the ramifications for future pastors.

Also entering into the ministry of our Synod at this time will involve very special vexations and difficulties. In faithfulness to the Lord's Word, our Synod at this time found it necessary to sever a fellowship relation in which it has stood for many decades and in which it has jointly carried out the proclamation of the Gospel. This rupture will create many new problems for young pastors going out into the field at this time. Over against outsiders it will mean bearing the cross of being identified with a church body whose action and position will not be a popular one or one that will generally be appreciated and understood... On the other hand, it is a situation that will make it necessary to be all the more on guard against slipping into methods and procedures that are rigoristic and legalistic, a danger that is always there just when we are much concerned and seek to be conscientious. All this should instill a special note of earnestness into your Seminary training at this time and cause you to desire to gain deep personal convictions from Holy Scripture concerning the positions that you will ultimately be expected to uphold as you go forth into the ministry.⁴²

A cherished relationship had come to an end in 1961, but there was still work to be done. In fact, President Lawrenz saw the break with Missouri as a reason for students at the Seminary to work even harder. A solid theological base would be crucial for the challenges that lay ahead.

IV. Evaluation

Whenever the exercise of church discipline is involved, the warning brother must constantly be on guard so that he does not fall into sin himself. The twin pitfalls he must guard against are at opposite ends of the spectrum. On the one end, he must keep himself from a spirit of laxity. The sinful nature will tempt him to pretend that nothing is wrong. It is much safer to look the other way than to point out sin and risk rejection or even persecution. At the opposite end, brotherly admonition must never descend into legalism. Battles for the truth of Scripture easily deteriorate into personal attacks if the proper focus is not maintained. The goal of brotherly admonition is to win the erring brother, nothing else. These dangers are very real for individual Christians, but they also applied to the conflict between Wisconsin and Missouri. If the articles printed in the *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* are an accurate reflection of Wisconsin's conduct during the Intersynodical Controversy, they give every indication that the synod avoided both extremes.

The Wisconsin Synod, first of all, acted out of necessity. In response to the changes that had taken place in Missouri, it became necessary to sound a clear call on the basis of Scripture. The *Quarterly* played an important role as the theological voice of Wisconsin during those difficult years. Wisconsin did not relish its role as the conscience of Missouri, but the small synod recognized its God-given responsibility to admonish erring brothers. The tone of that warning call was unmistakably clear. Even a brief look at the *Quarterly* reveals the clarity of its contents. No one ever accused the Wisconsin Synod of riding the fence during the conflict. It was never permissible to agree to disagree when matters of doctrine were concerned. The contributors to the *Quarterly* were willing to take their stand on God's Word regardless of the unpopularity of that position.

At the same time, the Wisconsin Synod was also able to avoid the pit of excessive harshness and loveless pride. The Missouri Synod had been largely responsible for Wisconsin's turn to confessionalism during the previous century. For this, Wisconsin owed Missouri a debt of gratitude. Even though that cherished fellowship was being threatened, the writers in the *Quarterly* showed a deep respect for Missouri's confessional past. Missouri's actions called for admonition, but these warnings were spoken in a spirit of Christian humility. Love for the weak was behind the years of patient protests. Love for the straying was behind the articles in the

⁴² Carl Lawrenz, "Opening Address: Follow and Serve the Lord With Wholehearted Devotion," *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* Vol. 58 (October 1961): p. 230.

Quarterly. Christian love was even the motive when Wisconsin officially suspended fellowship with Missouri in 1961.

For the one hundred years of its existence, the *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* has been a tremendous blessing for the Wisconsin Synod. It provided pastors with solid spiritual food during past controversies. The issues may have changed over the years, but the periodical continues to address the challenges that face our synod today. God willing, the *Quarterly* will be used to proclaim the truth of the gospel loudly and clearly for generations to come.

If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples.

Bibliography of Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly Articles

This is a listing of *Quarterly* articles which have been referenced in the body of the paper. During the years covered (1949-1961), much of the literature published in the *Quarterly* had some connection to the Intersynodical controversy. Therefore, this is not intended to be a comprehensive list. The following articles were chosen because they applied specifically to the conflict between Wisconsin and Missouri. They are listed in the order in which they appeared in the paper.

- “Prayer Fellowship” by J.P. Meyer. July, 1949 - October, 1950.
- “The Development of the Doctrinal Position of the Wisconsin Synod During the Century of Its History” by M. Lehninger. April, 1950.
- “The Absolute Authority of the Word of God in Matters of Faith and Life” by Carl Lawrenz. January - April, 1951.
- “The World Council of Churches and ‘Co-operation in Externals’” by Geo. O. Lillegard. July, 1950.
- “Inspiration” by J.P. Meyer. October, 1951.
- “Observations on Ecumenicity” by E. Arnold Sitz. January, 1954.
- “What Constitutes False Doctrine?” by Edmund Reim. April, 1953.
- “The Scriptural Principles Concerning Church Fellowship” by Carl Lawrenz. October, 1954.
- “The Relation of Time to Eternity in God’s Dealing With Man as Concerning the Doctrine of Election” by Otto J. Eckert. January, 1955.
- “A History of the Term ‘Objective Justification’” by Edmund Reim. April, 1955.
- “A Truly Biblical Union” by S.C. Ylvisaker. April, 1955.
- “The Problem of Scriptural Proof” by Edmund Reim. January, 1957.
- “The Watertown Resolutions” by Edmund Reim. (This commentary was printed in the “News and Comments” section. October, 1956.
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