

# The Strength of Christian Unity

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I am well aware that the above topic reveals no startling degree of originality. Unity has been discussed before, at quite some length and by abler men. The need appears in every walk of life. It is the last word with which an athletic coach sends his boys into a game, the slogan with which an industrial leader seeks to put his staff on their toes, the insistent demand of politicians as they gird themselves for the battle of votes, etc. Its dress is varied only slightly when men speak of harmony, co-operation, teamwork, solidarity, of a common front. Under one or another of these terms it has been warmly commended even in our synodical circles. To take up this well-worn subject once more may therefore seem a sure way to invite that greatest calamity which can befall a speaker, to have his listeners settle back in their seats and say with a sigh, "We've heard that before."

Yet there is need of running the risk. In these days when the fate of nations is hanging in the balance, the tragic results of disunity are most convincingly demonstrated. Our own national need for internal harmony is so apparent in this hour that it need only be mentioned in passing. These things should serve to remind us that the same, of course, is true of our synod. Where our resources and strength are so severely limited, where the task is so great and the cause so all-important, we dare not let lack of unity sap our strength. Yet the record speaks against us, not necessarily of violent clashes and open breaks, although we have had them also, but of that peculiar Wisconsin-Synod characteristic of standing on our freedom and rights whenever there is some common task to be done, that inability to submerge our rugged individualism or yield a personal opinion. When, as so often happens, we fall short in some task which no one has assigned to us but we ourselves, when with great enthusiasm we set out boldly on some major undertaking and then our performance fails to match our purpose, isn't that an indication of an underlying lack of unity? This fact alone should justify a restudy of our topic.

In addition to this, however, we have the union movement of our days, where strong, conflicting tides are surging in every direction, where we shall be tossed about like ships on the sea, where any influence we otherwise may have will be dissipated into thin air *unless we have the strength of internal unity*. It should, of course, go without saying that this may not be mere unity on any convenient platform but must be on the basis of the truth of God's Word. For a pattern of this unity I am taking a page from Philippians, encouraged particularly by two circumstances. The first is noted by Farrar in his general remarks on the letter. He says: "The Philippian Church was eminently free from errors of doctrine and irregularities of practice. No schism seems to have divided it; no heresies had crept into its faith; no false teachers had perverted its allegiance. One fault, and one alone, seems to have needed correction, and this was of so personal and limited character that, instead of denouncing it, Paul only needs to hint at it gently and with affectionate entreaty. This was a want of unity between some of its female members, especially Euodia and Synthyche, whom Paul begs to become reconciled to each other, and whose feud, and any partisanship which it may have entailed, he tacitly and considerably rebukes by the constant iteration of the word 'all' to those whom he can only regard as one united body." In support of this observation read Phil. 1, 3-8 and note beside the steady repetition of this word the reference to their *fellowship* in the Gospel and the statement that they *all* were *partakers of his grace*.

The other circumstance is a peculiar word used by Paul, which occurs only once more in the New Testament outside of this letter. The A. V. translates it as "conversation." We would now say "conduct," the manner in which men carry themselves. Luther's word is *Wandel*. But the interesting thing is that Paul does not use the common Greek word which would merely suggest the thought of walking or living, but introduces a word with an entirely different background (*politeuomai, politeuma*), related to our "politics," indicating "conduct touched with the connotation of living together as a community or unit body. It is asked why Paul used this word instead of the commoner 'To walk,' and the answer is given that he just prefers '*politeuomai*.' But here, at any rate, the reason for the preference is evident; this *politeuma* has 'adversaries,' and they must thus keep together as a unit to stand against them." (Lenski)

So at least one trend of the letter to the Philippians stands revealed and, I hope, the choice of the passage running from 1:27 to 2:11 is thereby justified as a basis for the discussion of our topic. My procedure will be to try to unfold the line of thought of this passage, taking the pertinent applications to our ordinary congregational and synodical life in stride as we go along (I), but reserving for separate discussion the bearing which these principles may have on the current problem of Lutheran Union (II).

### **Philippians 1:27-2:11**

The usual outlines take the last verses of the first chapter as telling the Philippians how to stand firm against their opponents, the first four of the second chapter as stating how they are to be minded toward their brethren, and finally 5-11 as showing this by the example of Christ. This does not quite satisfy. I would prefer to say that the first section shows the need for unity; the second calls for the perfecting of unity; the third shows the spirit which will remove the causes of disunity. All of this is a development of what Paul had in mind when he wrote (v. 27) that their conversation, that is, their joint conduct as a community, be as it becometh the Gospel of Christ.

#### *A. The Need for Unity.*

Phil. 1:27-30: Only let your conversation be as it becometh the Gospel of Christ: that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the Gospel; and in nothing terrified by your adversaries: which is to them an evident token of perdition, but to you of salvation, and that of God. For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on Him, but also to suffer for His sake; having the same conflict which ye saw in me, and now hear to be in me.

The thoughts which lead up to this portion of the letter may be summarized quite briefly, after the customary salutation in which Paul joins with Timothy in greeting his beloved Philippians there follows the passage of thanksgiving which we have already heard, with more than a little indication of the exceptionally intimate relationship which existed between Paul and this Macedonian church. Beginning with v. 12 the letter takes on a more personal character. The apostle sends news concerning his imprisonment in Rome, also of a petty rivalry in which some had sought to exploit his misfortunes in order to build up their own importance and position. But all this information is given merely that they may understand that the things which had happened to him had fallen out rather to the furtherance of the Gospel. While evidently quite confident of his eventual vindication, Paul is still balancing the two possible outcomes against each other,

life and death, and even considering the latter as something which really would be far better, when he becomes conscious of the churches which still need him. “Nevertheless, to abide in the flesh is more needful *for you* . . . . I know that I shall . . . continue with you all for *your furtherance* and joy of faith; that *your rejoicing* may be more abundant in Christ Jesus for me by my coming to *you* again.” So the thought of his own situation passes entirely from his mind. His attention centers on his congregation, to the exclusion of all else.

Now follows the first admonition, evidently the thing which was uppermost in the mind of the apostle, which he wanted them to note above all else: *Only let your conversation be as it becometh the Gospel of Christ*. They should be guarded in their conduct, ever mindful of the fact that they are members of a community of high privilege and honor, created by, and standing for the Gospel of Christ. The individual is not on his own, not a free agent to follow his personal whims and inclination. His every word and action have some bearing, for good or ill, on those who are united with him in fellowship of faith. Because of the Gospel committed to us we should be “wise as serpents.” All members of the entire body should remember that their joint conduct should be of such a nature as to match the blessed saving gifts they have received. Let us not fail to note what a high standard is thereby set for our personal as well as synodical life. Not only does this mean that we must scrupulously avoid any type of conduct by which, severally or jointly, we would bring reproach upon the Gospel of Christ. There we should be keenly conscious of the peril of giving offence, “For it must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh.” But we should also let this thought give positive color to our actions.

Let our conduct be as it becometh the Gospel of Christ, let us apply this high standard, then sloth and indifference will be replaced by eagerness and sincere concern for the constant progress of our synodical work. Then we shall not need to be urged, driven, or coaxed, but will give ourselves freely and wholly to our sacred calling. And that willingly, without constraint, “Whether I come and see you, or else be absent,”—Paul looks for worthy conduct on the part of his Philippians in either event.

So far Paul’s remarks have still been of a general nature. He has not yet broached the subject of unity. But now it comes: “that I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in *one* spirit, with one mind striving *together* for the faith of the Gospel.” It will be observed that the apostle here takes certain things for granted, or at least lets them go without saying, namely that this one spirit be the true Christian spirit, the one mind likewise. We shall follow this example. If in the development of this essay there will follow repeated appeals for the cultivation and practice of unity, let it be said once for all that this, of course, must be a unity based upon and governed by the Word of God. Thereby we not only are assured of a sound foundation, upon which we can really “stand fast,” but we shall also be drawing upon that one source of Truth by which the Holy Spirit works that oneness of spirit and mind which otherwise is so foreign to our natures. If it this were not for this unifying factor of the Word, true harmony would be unattainable. At best there could be only accidental agreement. Here, however, we have the power which molds opinion and creates unity.

The effort which is to be put forth is described as “striving together,” (*synathlountes*). The picture is that of an athletic event, where contenders frequently put forth greater efforts than in the chores of daily work, often drawing on the last ounce of their reserve, putting into practice the principles of teamwork, willingly subordinating their own personalities and each carrying out his own particular assignment, each giving his utmost, and all for a single purpose,—which in the case of the Christian is described as “for the faith of the Gospel.”

For the faith of the Gospel! Can a higher motive be named to spur us to put forth our best efforts and combine them in the most effective manner? Think of what the Gospel gives us to believe; a gloriously comforting assurance of forgiveness of our manifold sins and of reconciliation with a God who was justly displeased! Think of what this Gospel gives us to preach: a wondrous message of life and salvation for men perishing in their sins! Remember how these things were made possible: only by the fact that God spared not His only-begotten Son, but delivered Him up for us all; that this Son did not spare Himself, but gave His life a ransom for many. That is the content of the Gospel, the preaching of which is sum and substance of all our congregational and synodical work, the very reason for the existence of these various bodies. That surely justifies the admonition to “stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together.

That such work in behalf of this great cause will not pass unchallenged in this world of sin we may be sure. The apostle has already hinted as much by speaking of striving, our contending. Now the full force of the opposition is revealed and we hear him calling upon his Philippians not to be terrified by their adversaries. Now it becomes clear just why there is need for unity, why Christians should not fritter away their strength by needless friction among themselves. They will need all of it for the struggle in which they find themselves engaged, the nature of which is such that it may well strike terror to a heart not thoroughly fortified with trust in its Lord. It can surely be no trifling matter which is touched on here. It must be the purpose of these adversaries to undermine and destroy the faith of these Christians, to nip the life of this young congregation in the bud. For this purpose they have aligned themselves squarely against “the faith of the Gospel,” Therefore, and only therefore, Paul is justified in speaking of their “perdition.” They are opponents which clearly are outside of the church.

This makes it necessary to settle at once a very important question, namely whether we are justified in applying the principles laid down in the foregoing to such opponents who admittedly are not outside the pale of the Christian Church, whose purpose, as we will freely grant, is not to overthrow the Gospel and undermine Christian faith. We may find ourselves separated from them by some question of doctrine, perhaps by quite a few; we may even find ourselves as widely apart as Lutherans and Catholics, or Lutherans and members of the various sectarian churches. Yet we not only gladly concede the possibility but the fact that there are Christians there also. The less marked the doctrinal differences become, the more we become conscious of this truth, does that mean that this admonition of Paul does not apply in these cases?

We hold that it does. It should be noted that the admonition to stand fast, to strive together for the faith of the Gospel stands independently, a complete statement in itself. The reference to adversaries and their perdition is introduced by a new and subordinate thought, “in nothing terrified.” Clearly Paul is mentioning some extreme instances here, instances drawn from real life and personal experience (cf. v. 30). But that is far from outlining the *only* conditions under which these general principles shall find application. In other words, while the clause illustrates, it does not restrict. Plain common sense should also show that the call to stand fast and strive together will apply equally well whether the entire Gospel or only some particular doctrine be at stake. Unity will always make for strength.

The remaining thoughts in the first chapter are designed to reconcile Christians to the inevitability as well as the trying nature of these struggles. Paul is building courage in his Christians by showing that when, trusting in their Lord, they stand unterrified, this resoluteness of their faith is a sign which must strike terror to the hearts of their adversaries, even as the same faith to the Christian is a renewed assurance of his salvation, at the hands of God. He reminds them of how much has been given them, namely to bear the name of Christ, and while that

implies the privilege of believing in Him, it also includes suffering for his sake, yet not as an unwelcome burden, but rather also as something which is given us. So Paul concludes by pointing out that the persecution which had fallen to the lot of the Philippians was of the same cloth as his own sorrows, part of which at least had been endured in their own behalf.

### *B. The Perfecting of Unity.*

Phil. 2, 1 - 4: If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies, Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves, look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.

It would seem as though in the last verses of the foregoing chapter, where he showed the Philippians that the troubles they were experiencing were but the same conflict which they had once seen in him and now heard of him, Paul was even using these joint harrowing experiences for the purpose of strengthening the feeling of Christian solidarity. They are joined not only in their faith, but even in their sorrows. This thought at least provides the perfect setting for what follows in v. 1. In the face of such experiences there will certainly be need of admonition among Christians, where they urge each other to stand firm or perhaps even reprove some tendency toward weakness; there will be need for consolation for the hurts they may have to suffer; there will be need for real fellowship, for manifestations of tender mercy and compassion. Hence the best methods for supplying these mutual ministrations are now outlined.

This advice of the apostle is not very clearly rendered by the accepted translations, the A. V., as given above, nor the Revisions. Without going into a long technical discussion of the reasons advanced by Dr. Lenski. I would like to present his translation which brings out the thought much more clearly: "If accordingly there is any admonition, (let it be) in connection with Christ; if any solace, (let it be) of love; if any fellowship, (let it be) of spirit; if any, (such fellowship, let it be) of tender mercies and compassion." There will be need for admonitions in our circles also. That can be a repulsive thing, perhaps doing more harm than good, especially if done in a nagging manner, with a sickening show of superiority, in a spirit that loves to find fault. But we need not go far afield for an example of that other kind of which the apostle commends, "in connection with Christ." For we shall presently come to that glorious passage where we read of the Savior as the perfect pattern of the spirit which will produce the unity toward which Paul is leading; "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus, who humbled Himself, etc. Let us, both in our synod and our congregations, take the hint. Then we'll have real "brotherly" admonition.

Let our consolation be "of love." Let us first learn to become interested in each other, shedding our cold reserve, becoming attached to each other as fellow Christians (for it's that relationship which is under discussion), developing a real spirit of brotherly love, and then our ministrations at the sickbed or the grave, our counsel for the afflicted and discouraged will become convincingly sincere and correspondingly more effective.

Let our fellowship be "of spirit." There is in man an instinctive and wholesome craving for the company of his kind, especially in sorrows, in the face of danger, or in the performance of a task which would overawe him if he stood alone. The tendency to crave away into solitude to lick one's wounds or brood over one's troubles is often in evidence. But it is an unnatural,

morbid tendency, the opposite of that spirit of Christian fellowship which Paul is advocating.— But here a word of caution is needed, and is supplied by the apostle. Not indiscriminate fellowship, not association merely for its own sake: That may result in a companionship which does more harm than good, dragging down instead of lifting up. Lenski puts it this way: “Outward fellowship is not enough, spirit must fellowship spirit.” In other words, we should see to it that any fellowship upon which we may enter be the real thing, a fellowship of faith, concerned about purity of faith. Then the manifestations of tender mercies and compassion will follow as a natural fruit of this spirit.

Now we find Paul girding himself for the climax of his admonition, “*lowly-mindedness*,” (v. 3) . Describing it as something which would fill his cup of joy to overflowing, he calls upon them to think the same thing, to have the same love, to be closely joined in soul, to have their minds on the one thing. Again the apostle is taking it for granted that we understand that it is not merely enough to think the *same* thing; it must naturally be the *right* thing. Nothing but the Gospel of Christ, to the preaching of which he was devoting his whole life, and which he had mentioned in the beginning of our study as the thing which should govern their entire living, walking, and thinking, both individually and jointly, that must be the source and also the standard of their unity. Let this infallible Word of God cast their thoughts into a single mold, inspire a love which, arising out of the same source of God’s love toward fallen man and directed toward a common goal by His Word, really is a love which is *the same*. Then they will be closely and harmoniously joined, not only according to the outward appearance, but also in their souls, and this harmony will not be in the service of some baneful purpose. The one thing to which their thoughts will be jointly directed and for which they will be striving together will be that glorious salvation which their Lord has set before them in His Word. In this single-mindedness the strength of Christian unity begins to shine forth in all its splendor, surely a condition most earnestly to be desired, and at the same time one which lets it be seen that clear, unmistakable unity of doctrine is a matter of prime concern for every congregation and synod, whether there is a union movement afoot or not. As soon as indifference in doctrinal matters sets in, this singleness of mind is cast to the winds, inner unity is sacrificed, and the strength wasted which would result there from.

For the sake of safeguarding this precious inner unity Paul adds the warning, “Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory.” So read the commonly accepted translations. If one remembers how much harm has been done through a spirit of partisanship, by giving free rein to the inborn quarrelsomeness and combativeness which still resides in the flesh of every Christian, one is only waiting for an opportunity to assert itself, how much division has been caused by the simple fact that when we have taken our stand on a question we find it hard to admit even to ourselves that we may have erred, then we see how natural and right this translation must have seemed. But there appears to be evidence that the word “*eritheia*,” derived as it is from a word which means to work for wages, should be translated as self-seeking or self-interest. Goodspeed’s version is, “Do not act for selfish ends or from vanity.” That opens up even a wider field for thought. When men seek to advance their own interests, when they decide matters which bear on congregational or synodical life according to their own selfish ends or in the interest of personal ambition, then indeed the interests of others are ruthlessly sacrificed and inner unity becomes impossible. Aims are established and means employed which are treacherously misleading and dangerous. Let us ever keep this in mind when either here or in our meetings with the delegates of other districts or synods we are deliberating self-interest

upon the policies of our church. Then indeed “let nothing be done in self-interest or vainglory.” “*In maiorem Dei gloriam*” should not only be a beautiful motto, but the very life and spirit of all our discussions and decisions. The same principle holds good for our congregations in the management of their home affairs. Many of the major mistakes there made, and the list is a long one, are directly traceable to the fact that in a spirit of false self-interest and of vanity they have overreached themselves to their lasting disadvantage. Building programs especially, whether in larger congregations, or mission stations, should be carefully scrutinized from just this angle. Nor should we fail to see that this principle applies to our personal ministry as well. Faced with the ever-present opportunity to use the sacred office to which we are called as a pedestal to display the importance of our persons, to exhibit our various talents, to build popularity and bid for a personal following, let us recognize these things as the temptations which they are and banish them with a resolute “Get thee behind me, Satan.” For even though we may plan to use such popularity and personal following in the interest of our work, we should still be falling into the grave error of building our congregations around ourselves rather than around the Lord and the Savior. Finally, let me say with all frankness but without the least desire to hurt, I am sure that most instances of strained relations between pastors and teachers will be solved if we learn mutually to submerge our own personalities and each one of us see to it that “nothing be done through self-interest or vainglory.” Let us learn constantly to search our hearts for even the slightest traces of these faults. Far from being mere personal foibles, they are a persistent threat to the unity of Christians.

Now Paul suggests the remedy: “But in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on things of others.” These are the opposites of the dangerous tendencies described before, “lowly-mindedness” being the reverse of “vainglory,” and “looking not upon one’s own things” the opposite of “self-interest.”

Let us first look at the practical nature of these recommendations. If I may point to one of our cardinal faults, so characteristic of our Wisconsin Synod, it is the fact that we do not accept leadership very well. Time and again we have seen plans for action presented to our body, often very good plans, for the accomplishing of a given task. But how often have they not been scuttled through lack of co-operation. Some of us have followed the lead, others have stood on their constitutional right to criticize and (here is the serious fault) declined to follow through with any corresponding effort of their own. Take our current Debt Retirement Campaign as an illustration of the paralyzing effect of this sort of thing. Or recall the many instances where congregations in the calling of new pastors have willfully refused to be guided by the advice of their District President and declined to accept his well-meant suggestions, often to their later keen regret.

Now, every earnest student of Church History will grant that there have been occasions without number when a corrupt and arrogant leadership made it most necessary to resist its vicious trends. If we should face similar conditions in our circles, let us be resolved to stand to the last for the freedom of the individual Christian and the sovereignty of the congregation and reject emphatically such dangerous leadership. But wherever this is not the case (and let us think soberly here), let us remember how much harm is done by our failure to comply. In the end that becomes the road to anarchy and ruin. For, unless we would drift aimlessly with the tides, we need leadership, after all, and strong, able leadership. We look and pray to our Lord to send us such. Any group, whether national, political, military, church, or any other kind, suffers untold harm when it lacks leaders, when its leaders lack ability and inspiration, or are too timid to

assert themselves, or are so concerned about maintaining their popularity and position that they are constantly looking back to see whither the movement is going, in order to keep in front of it.

If these things be true, then let us apply the prescription of Paul and cultivate just this “lowliness of mind” toward each other, -- true Christian humility, For then it will on the one hand become easy to accept leadership, even has on the other thin same spirit will make for a leadership which is truly evangelical, considerate, brotherly, and therefore bearable and acceptable. To yield to such leadership is, of course, not in the least a surrender of any one’s liberty or independence. It is in the highest degree consistent with the royal character of the priesthood of all believers (I. Pet, 2, 9), a sovereign exercise of that thoroughly Christian function, voluntarily and without compulsion to assume that sphere in the Kingdom which our Lord in His infinite wisdom has assigned to us. There lies the strength of Christian unity.

Nor should Christians fear to put each other’s interests beside or even before their own (v. 4). That every one mind his own business is a good rule, -- when it refers to the faithful discharging of one’s responsibilities and duties. It’s deceptive and brutal motto, however, if construed as relieving us of responsibility toward our fellow-men and particularly fellow Christians. “Every man for himself, and the devil take the hindmost” is just as callously pagan as it sounds. But when Christians really put the apostolic rule into practice, the apparent loss which may threaten because the individual gives his time and effort in behalf of others is more than compensated for by the fact that others are concerning themselves about his interests. Any disadvantages appearing here are due not to the principle, but to our failure to apply it. Our Lord has withdrawn no part of His promise of Luke 6: “Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For that with the same measure ye mete withal it shall be measured you again.”

But still our flesh continues to have misgivings about the soundness of this advice, we are told that the word for “lowliness of mind “ (*tapeinophrosyna*), does not occur in secular Greek literature. It seems to have been something for which at least the classical Greeks did not have a word. Where it does occur in later authors, it is as a slurring remark. It would seem even now that by cultivating this true Christian spirit of humility we are casting every natural advantage to the winds. Modern psychologists could easily write a book against such a procedure. That is why the apostle, complying with his own suggestion of v. 1 (if there is any admonition, let it be in connection with Christ), now caps his line of thought and removes our misgivings by showing from the example of the Savior himself that this spirit of humility is not weakness, but strength of the highest order.

### *C. Removing the Causes of Disunity.*

Phil. 2:5-11: Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God but made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above every name that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

“Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.” With these simple words Paul introduces one of the grandest passages in all New Testament writings, one which deals with the



very heart of the Gospel. In our study of the systematized teachings of Scripture it is indispensable for supplying the key to an understanding of the person and work of Savior. Books have been written on it in this connection. But it should be recognized that this is but a secondary use of these words. The primary purpose for which they were written is revealed by the line of thought which we have been following. They are to serve as a demonstration of what Paul has been preaching, that "lowliness of mind" is not only the best way of preserving the unity of Christians, but also the way of strength and success.

Let this mind be in you. The apostle is concerned with the actions of his people, but he refers here to their thoughts because he knows that if only the mind will be right, if his Christians will only think in the manner which we may learn from our Lord Jesus Christ, then the problem of his whole admonition will be solved and the desired action will follow. It therefore becomes necessary to observe the mind and mode of thinking which is revealed in the life of our Savior. One circumstance is mentioned immediately which will make all the difference in the world when one is appraising the work of Jesus Christ and His personal attitude toward it. Men go apart today in their estimate of Christ's death on the cross because they are not agreed on this important point. But Paul states it very definitely. Speaking of Jesus Christ, the same whom John and the other disciples had known so intimately through those three years of the ministry that they could call Him that Word (*logos*) "Which was from the beginning, Which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, Which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled" (I John 1:1), speaking of the same Jesus whom (under other circumstances, it is true) Paul had met on the way to Damascus, he tells us that He "was in the form of God." A great deal seems to depend on this, for the apostle declares that the Savior did what He did *although* (Luther: '*Obwohl*') He was in this "form." We find this term strange. We would catch the thought more easily if the translation would read that He had the character of God, or was in the type or nature of God. The point is that this man, and true man He was, with whom we are so familiar was still more than mere man. He belonged into another group of beings, into the category of "Godbeings," if I may be permitted such a word. He had all, the qualities of God. He was almighty, perfect, holy, of absolute wisdom, all-knowing, omnipresent, eternal. Everything was at His command. Yet He did not consider it "robbery" to be equal with God. If we think what the Savior could have made of Himself had He chosen to employ these powers in His own behalf; if we think how any other man, how we would grab and snatch at such an opportunity if it should offer, then the reason for the choice of this second strange word becomes more clear.

All these likely and natural things he did not do. Rather, he "emptied himself," denied himself these privileges, laid aside this equality with God (Goodspeed). All these translations are better than the A.V., "He made Himself of no reputation." He who as man could have chosen to dazzle the world with the "God-form" which was so truly his, deliberately decided to forego this privilege by taking the "servant-form," becoming truly like other men, common, ordinary men who do not have these God-qualities.

Let us pause for a moment and reflect how truly this describes the life of our Lord. There were occasions, many of them, when he used his divine powers for the sake of helping the poor and suffering. But never did he employ them in his own behalf. The use which He did make of them was so simple and unassuming as far as any personal glory was concerned that his followers had constant difficulty in remembering his true greatness. Facing the hungry multitude, we find them making their microscopic calculations on bread, even as in the storm they yielded to a craven fear which was the first thing the Lord had to quiet when they awakened Him. Thus we find a Peter considering it necessary to advise the Savior to spare himself the danger and

suffering which had just been foretold, just as later he felt called upon to draw the sword for the Savior's protection.

But all this is only the prelude of greater things to come. Being, through all this naturalness of his mode of life, found in fashion as a man, thoroughly human in the "schema" the pattern or make-up of his daily contacts, he who had consistently declined to use his "God-form" to make himself higher than men now did the very opposite: He humbled or lowered Himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

A number of important elements immediately stand forth out of this statement. Not one of the things which happened to our Lord and which contributed to his suffering and shame was an inescapable blow of fate. He assumed all these things willingly. He humbled himself: They did come about, though, through one certain quality which we will do well to note as something which showed the mind which was in Christ Jesus. He became obedient: that it was not an easy obedience which was asked appears when we hear that with the certainty of an eternal decree of God it led to a death, the shame and horror of which is emphasized when it is described as the "death of the cross." The fullest sense of the word "became" begins to appear. It is as though we are made witnesses of the sacred moments when our Savior steeled himself for the trial which stood before, even as in Gethsemane, when it began to appear what this obedience would cost the flesh which he had assumed for our sake. Even now we are not fully aware of all that is implied here if we fail to remember what is brought out by the earlier part of this statement with its "although," (v. 6a): that through out all these experiences the swift and sure way of escape was ever at hand. For he was, after all, in the form of God. All the prerogatives and powers of a God-being were at His constant beckon call. If he did not choose to use them himself, he need only to pray his heavenly Father and he would send the rescuing hosts. Even at the last he could still have grasped, snatched at this thing of being equal with God, and the pending calamity would have been averted. But he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

Do we need any farther demonstration of a mind which was not looking on its own things, but also on the things of others? We know that it was our peril, our need of salvation which moved him to bring the sacrifice. And if lowliness of mind consists in this (v. 3) that each esteem other better than themselves, do we not see that in operation in him to whom the one thing of importance was what should become of fallen man, that we be saved, and to whom what became of himself was so gloriously unimportant that he not only braved, but willingly endured the agony of the cross?

Half of Paul's argument must certainly be granted, when Christians look to the example of their Lord Jesus Christ, then nothing, absolutely nothing, may be done through strife, out of self-interest, through vain-glory. Lowliness of mind is the only quality which under such circumstances is at all becoming to the Christian. But there still remains to be answered the objection raised by a flesh which stoutly maintains that nothing will ever be achieved by such methods.

And it is answered. For *therefore* God also hath highly exalted Him and graciously given him that name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. I shall refrain from going into the details of this grand close which has all the exalted qualities of a doxology, and draw your attention only to the one word which shows the relation between this glorious outcome and the suffering and shame which had gone before. The one did not merely come *after* the other, it

followed *because* of it (*dia*). The humble obedience of the Savior proved to be the hidden source of the strength which gained the victory, Let this ever be remembered by the church which owes its very existence to this fact. Just plain common sense teaches us the folly of being disunited. The need of unity makes itself felt most strongly in many ways. The history of congregations and synods offers many texts for driving home this point. But unity is not produced by any set of resolutions, however carefully they may be drawn, Nor can true harmony ever be created by the “now-let’s-all-pull-together-boys” type of speech. Only when strife, self-interest, and vanity are recognized as the carnal sins which they are and eradicated by sincere repentance, only when through the hallowing influence of God’s Spirit true Christian humility begins to fill our heart and we learn unselfishly to put the interests of others before our own, only then will the specter of disunity begin to disappear, together with its crippling results. Then we can safely set our misgivings about future success aside as littleness of faith, for true humility will above all make itself felt in our relation at toward our God. It will take the form of implicit obedience to His will. Then we shall find ourselves following him who is the only trustworthy guide even in the most perplexing situations and who not only van, but will crown such obedience with final victory.

There lies the strength of Christian unity. To have it, “let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.”

### **The Question of Fellowship with the American Lutheran Church**

For two years this question has been before Lutherans of America, having been brought to the attention of Synodical Conference members by the action of the 1938 convention of the Missouri Synod which heard and favorably received a “Declaration” of the American Lutheran Church which was the outgrowth of a number of meetings between representatives of the two bodies, with the specific proviso, however, that “as far as the Missouri Synod is concerned, this whole matter must be submitted to the other synods constituting the Synodical Conference.” It is therefore not only a pertinent and practical subject for our discussion but, in view of the nearness of the next sessions of the Synodical Conference, a most urgent one. In addition, it offers a field where the principles developed above should find a most practical application and our faithfulness to them be most thoroughly tested.

#### *A. The History of the Movement.*

The American Lutheran Church constituted today is an amalgamation of three organizations with which the synods now making up the Synodical Conference have been in constant contact, in one way or the others, for many years even before this latter body was formed. Two of them, the synods of Iowa and Buffalo, were consistent opponents of, and as consistently opposed by, Dr. Walther and other early leaders of the Missouri Synod. Against them particularly the Iowa Synod raised the charge of an ever-strict confessionalism, maintaining that for the sake of a larger unity a considerable number of non-fundamental doctrines should be considered “open questions,” where a difference of opinion could and should be tolerated as being non-divisive of church fellowship. Needless to say, these two bodies did not take part in the founding of the Synodical Conference in 1872, as this group, which even then included our Wisconsin Synod, took the more conservative Missouri position.

The history of the Ohio Synod is different. Older than the Missouri Synod by some thirty years, it took a very similar stand for confessional Lutheranism. A cordial relationship was maintained for many years and also cleanly demonstrated to all interested observers when this

synod, in marked contrast to its present associates, took an active part in the founding of the Synodical Conference. It was not until ten years later that a controversy over the doctrines of election and conversion caused the Ohio Synod to sever its connections with the larger body.

After a lapse of some twenty years a number of inter-synodical conferences were held in the hope of reconciling the differences between the two camps, but without any tangible results. Similar negotiations were carried on by means of committees of the different synods during the period of 1915-28. This resulted in the drawing up of tentative articles of agreement, the "Chicago Theses." At about this time the synods of Ohio, Iowa, and Buffalo declared fellowship with each other and perfected the organization of the American Lutheran Church. When this new body almost immediately (1929) affiliated with the Norwegian Lutheran Church, the Swedish Augustana Synod, and others to organize the American Lutheran Conference on the basis of the rather vague "Minneapolis Theses," many of us looked at that as a definite trend, not toward conservative Lutheranism, but away from it.

The union movement was revived with renewed vigor in 1935, when an invitation went forth from the United Lutheran Church, that group of synods where the spirit of liberalism is most firmly entrenched. Our Wisconsin Synod at its convention in New Ulm declined to enter upon these negotiations on the ground that the invitation was based upon the premise that no real difference existed between the various Lutheran bodies of America. We have had no cause to regret this decision. A Missouri committee which did enter upon these discussions has reported that "a point of serious difference concerned the definition of inspiration, particularly the doctrine of verbal inspiration as given in the Brief Statement of the Missouri Synod" (*Quartalschrift*, '38, 213). Under such conditions it will be seen that there is no sound basis for profitable discussion. But even while taking this stand at New Ulm our synod not only accepted the principle that where existing differences in the Lutheran field are frankly recognized we should willingly share in efforts to remove them, but specifically and publicly mentioned the need of taking up the abandoned efforts toward inter-synodical agreement at the point where they were dropped and stated our readiness for such a step at any time (Wis. Joint Syn. Report, 1935, p. 39 and 41). This was with special reference to negotiations with the American Lutheran Church (hereafter ALC, similarly ULC).

If therefore, as actually happened during the following years, negotiations were resumed between committees of the ALC and the Missouri Synod without any representation from our body, it was entirely without our fault. Our Wisconsin reply to the ULC invitation not only did not apply to the ALC, but specifically distinguished between the two. Nor was any ALC invitation rejected by our Synod. None was received. When these statements are made, I know whereof I speak, having been in closest contact with the developments of that time. Any other version of these events is based on incomplete knowledge of the facts.

Out of these meetings grew the "Declaration" of the representatives of the ALC referred to above. The contents of this document will be discussed later. For the moment it will be enough to follow its course through the various steps necessary to insure general acceptance. Of these the St. Louis convention was only the beginning. It must be remembered that this was a so-called Delegate Convention, similar to our sessions of the Joint Synod, but where the ratio of representation is even steeper than our scale of one delegate for each ten pastors, teachers, and congregations. That makes a second step imperative, whereby the agreement which has been endorsed by the representatives of the various districts and congregations is relayed to them for their approval—a very vital matter, of extreme importance. Then the make-up of our Synodical Conference calls for the additional step, specifically provided for by the St. Louis Resolutions, of

submitting such an agreement to the sister synods, the Norwegian and Slovak beside our own. Similar steps must be allowed for the other side of the picture. The ALC representatives must submit their action to the convention of their joint body, as was done in Sandusky, Ohio. There also will be home districts and congregations which must be informed and whose approval must be gained for the actions which their representatives have taken in their behalf. And finally, the ALC is affiliated with other Lutheran synods in the AL Conference, referred to before. And these must not only be consulted but satisfied, unless indeed the ALC should be willing to break off these associations for the sake of the new fellowship it has resolved to establish.

Thus it will be seen that the St. Louis agreement is not the final, but rather the first step in a long series, each of which must be taken with the greatest of care and patience. Since the direction of movement is from the top down, rather than from the ground up, the process may be compared with one by which a builder lowers a large and important section of structural steel into its assigned place. If it has been perfectly designed and is handled with proper skill, all will be well. But should there be any flaw in the plans, any imperfection in the fitting, serious consequences will appear in the form of strains or gaps which will defeat the purpose which was to be served. If that be the case, a wise builder will take time to remedy the defects before going any farther at the risk of doing permanent harm. It is our considered judgment that this is the point at which the union movement now stands. But because of the importance and carrying power of the whole matter, let us before going any farther look at

#### *B. The Principles Which Apply*

In seeking to define the principles which apply to this question of fellowship with an other, hitherto separate Lutheran body, we shall draw on the fruits of our previous study of the passage from Philippians. In so doing we do not wish to imply that all such principles have here been covered. But we do feel that some which we have found are very pertinent.

So particularly the leading admonition, "Only let your conversation, your conduct, be as it becometh the Gospel of Christ." A very general bit of advice, but also very wholesome, indeed. Regardless of what opinion we may hold in this question now before our synods, whether pro or con let us remember that we are dealing with a question which involves the Gospel of our salvation. We are not faced with a matter that can be dealt with lightly, like some unimportant trifle. Nor is it a matter of business to be disposed of with cold calculation. We are not engaged in some game of ecclesiastical politics played either for the pleasure of practicing skillful maneuvering or for the sake of some immediate practical advantage. Rather, we are dealing with the Gospel of Christ as it is proclaimed and confessed by our Lutheran Church. The Gospel of Christ! That means that there is no room here for "give and take." We have no right either to add or subtract a single syllable of this Truth. Nor dare we offer a single word of this Gospel in a spirit of compromise or concession, as we not only might, but perhaps should if some minor, less sacred matter were at stake. It would be different if we were disposing of what is our own. But here we are dealing with the Word of God. Let us hold that as a sacred and inviolable trust.

This indicates the need of taking a firm, definite stand. But here the history of past controversies should serve as a warning, for that speaks eloquently of the harm done when men let bitterness creep into the words and try to win points by personal recrimination rather than sound argument, to gain a following by appealing to the emotions rather than to calm reason. Any one who is at all familiar with what has been written on this matter of union within the last two years will admit that there is at least a strong tendency to let history repeat itself. Let us be

determined to curb this spirit, at least in our own circles. "Let your conversation be as it becometh the Gospel of Christ!", where this admonition is heeded our speech will show the influence, we will practice moderation and courtesy.

Some will call this a counsel of weakness. But let us note that we can stay well within the terms of the apostle's words and still find good ground for taking a firm stand, not in the least lacking in conviction: "Stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the Gospel." Far from being in any way contrary to the Gospel of Christ, a strong, positive, fearless testimony to the Truth is the only kind which is worthy of it.

One might expand this general admonition to where it would cover the entire field of our discussion. It is not necessary to do so, however, because Paul has provided an abundance of specific statements for just that purpose. As the apostle was an eminently practical man, so they are of the same nature. Take for instance the repeated call to be of *one* mind, to stand fast in *one* spirit, to be striving *together* for the faith of the Gospel. If we read into these words, as we should, an exhortation to conserve the unity of our own ranks and thus to keep ourselves at maximum strength for the struggle to which we are called, then let us be fair enough to see that they also apply to an expanding of this unity and the resultant union—*wherever this can be done without sacrifice of truth.*

Because of our conservative traditions we need that reminder. It is so easy to lean over backward on this union question, to turn our thumbs down without taking the trouble to look into the matter or to think it through. One can become quite pharisaic in such an attitude, condemning out of hand every such effort at achieving unity as gross unionism. Or one may be conservative through sheer inertia rather than through conviction. Let us watch our step. It would be a terrible responsibility if through such an attitude we should perpetuate existing divisions as when the underlying differences have actually been removed. If our Missouri brethren should prove to be successful in removing these ancient obstacles to a true unity, then let us be big enough to admit it ungrudgingly and welcome it as a material addition of strength to the testimony of the truth in our land. But if on the other hand it should become clear that true unity has not yet been achieved by these negotiations, then let us throw our whole influence in the direction of preserving the unity which we now have, which through all these negotiations is certainly under a considerable strain, and let us do so without jeers and reproaches for the efforts that failed. Let us realize that the one way as well as the other is a "contending for the faith of the Gospel," as long as we only remain loyal to its truth.

But if we have thus roused ourselves to an awareness of the evil of being prejudiced against legitimate efforts toward the establishing of unity, we should be equally aware of an even greater danger lying in the other direction, of being so strongly attracted by the prospect of union that we become eager to attain it at any price. It is not going too far to say that in some quarters the thought of church union has become so popular that any step in this direction is hailed as a great advance. These people do not see why there should be more than one, or at most two churches in our land. That this would be an automatic denial of religious liberty seems to trouble them not at all.

In citing this attitude the purpose is not to imply that we have groups in our the circles which hold this view, but rather to show of what extremes the flesh is capable. This flesh which we all share is highly susceptible to the arguments which make themselves heard as soon as the possibility of union beckons. There is e. g. the pleasure which it finds in the contemplation of numbers, particularly when they suggest greatness. They speak so persuasively of increased prestige and power. We who have long been one of the lesser churches of the land have in many

cases been chafing under a sense of inferiority, starved for a greater measure of recognition. We would like to be great. Then there is also such a splendid opportunity to make our influence felt in the political field that it seems a pity not to wield the power that goes with an impressive voting strength. So the demand for union grows, heedless of the fact that true unity must always be a question of teaching and the Word. When this unpleasant reminder is brought up, there comes a tendency to become impatient of the slow processes of building up true unity with the help of the Word and one is tempted to create unity, or at least the semblance of it, by compromise. Practical considerations begin to assert themselves. The pocketbook begins to speak, making the claim which, though so often disproved by actual experience, still crops up again and again, namely that mergers, consolidations, and amalgamations will result in a reduction of the total cost of church work. There is no escaping the fact that for the flesh the question of union has a glamour all its own. But let us be guided by the voice of the Spirit: "Let nothing be done through self-interest or vainglory."

Self-interest and vainglory. Paul knew well whereof he spoke, Who can estimate the damage done by these twin spirits of evil in the church all because they turn the eyes and hearts of men away from the Word? Let us heed the admonition which, to say it once more, is not that we sweepingly condemn all efforts toward fellowship and union, but that we keep out all considerations of the flesh, particularly selfishness and pride, and let the Word alone rule.

After the foregoing it will be obvious that our course must lie somewhere between these two extremes, avoiding both the attitude which rejects every endeavor toward union, sight unseen, and the one which would have union at any price. We must learn to put aside all considerations of self-interest and pride, to learn the "lowliness of mind" which will be necessary for this. Even as the Savior in single-minded devotion to the work entrusted Him by His heavenly Father thrust aside the constant temptation to take advantage of His opportunity to "be equal with God," so we should become willing in the interest of the Kingdom to relinquish what may be ours by right. We may feel that we have not been consulted in these matters as we should have been, that our motives have been most wilfully misconstrued and our position unfairly interpreted and distorted by attacks published against us in irresponsible quarters, giving us the full right to answer in kind; yet we must learn calmly to weigh whether the interests of the Kingdom will be truly served by such a procedure. If not, then we must willingly forego the things which seem our right. That may involve humiliation, but should we not bear this gladly after the manner in which our Lord humbled Himself for our sake?

Still, there will also be cases when it will not be the proper thing to yield, when it would be positively wrong to do so. There the call applies to stand fast, to contend or strive together for the faith of the Gospel. It would put our judgment to quite a strain if it were for us to decide just when those cases arise. But we shall be relieved of this unpleasant necessity if we will only observe one additional word in Paul's presentation of the example of Christ; "He became *obedient*." If we will but learn to bow absolutely before the Word of God, if we will but let the decisions which we eventually make in this union matter be governed entirely by that same authority, if we will learn to eliminate all other considerations from our argumentation and thinking—then we shall be safely guided. Nor need we then fear for the final outcome. Humanly speaking we may seem to be acting unwisely, foolishly, weakly. But so was the Savior when he humbled himself and became obedient. But let us not forget the continuation, "Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, etc." God's strength still is made perfect in weakness, as we shall also find if we but follow his leading. "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus."

### *C. A Review of Our Synod's Course.*

It is here that these principles must, as far as we are concerned, find their first and foremost application. For there the responsibility rests squarely upon our shoulders. If we should find ourselves guilty of some misstep in the course we have so far followed, we would not only have the opportunity but the duty to rectify the error. Here we face a real test of our sincerity. It will be remembered that our Wisconsin Synod had no part in shaping the agreement. It has also been shown that this was due to no neglect or unwillingness on our part. If I mention this once more it is not because we are being seriously reproached on this in such quarters where the facts are known, but because there is a lamentable lack of clear information on this question, to some degree even in our own circles. Such minds should be put at ease by a simple re-statement of these facts.

Soon after the ALC Declaration had been submitted to and favorably received by the St. Louis Convention of the Missouri Synod, our body had to take its first stand on the question. Pursuant to one of its own resolutions adopted at St. Louis, the whole matter was submitted to the other synods of the Synodical Conference. A committee was named to represent our Synod in studying the submitted material, met in July of 1938, and reviewed the Declaration of the ALC at length. The result was drawn up in a "Summary" which gave the committee's evaluation of the "Declaration." This did not pass final judgment on the doctrinal statements presented there. Rather, it took the form of questions which were designed to help in determining whether the old doctrinal controversies had really, as is claimed, been settled beyond all doubt. In this connection it should be stated that on some of the old disputed doctrines, particularly of election and conversion, the Declaration revealed surprising concessions. These were not rejected or discredited by the "Summary," but the tendency of the questions was to show that there were nooks and corners which were still unexplored and where error could still lie hidden. This probing has also been the policy of the *Quartalschrift* and has led a Missouri critic to complain of the frequent recurrence of the expressions, "here error can hide," "here false doctrine finds protection." This procedure on our part has been challenged as evidence of an unduly suspicious mind, as a harboring of "evil surmisings." It was pointed out that these statements do not attack the committee reports and synodical resolutions as actually containing error. Thereby it was at least suggested to the reader that we actually have no case.

Are we guilty as charged? We feel not. Let it not be forgotten that searching, careful searching of such matters, is a sound Biblical principle, "If there be any fellowship, let it be of spirit," To which Lenski adds the significant note, "outward fellowship is not enough." The need of discriminating judgment is already implied. Elsewhere Paul says, "Prove all things," in other words, test them, weigh them carefully. We also have the apostolic warning not to believe every spirit, but to try the spirits, whether they are of God (I John 4, 1). This obviously means that this procedure shall be applied in all cases, even to such spiritual products of men which may be good and sound. If this last be the case, there is nothing to fear; they will stand the test unharmed. If on the other hand they can not stand the test, it is so much the better that this fact be brought to light. In no case should such a searching, questioning procedure be branded as suspiciousness or "evil surmising." That, to say the least is to create confusion. Let the questions which have been asked in the "Summary" be answered on their merits. If that will prove that no error lurks where as a simple matter of fact it *could* find shelter, if that will show that the last remnants of the old actual errors have actually been removed, when no one will be happier than the author of the questions. Let members of our synod be careful not to disavow this method of conscientious searching. Let us remember that it is indispensably necessary to be



thorough if we are to be sure that we can travel his new road without violating our obedience to the Word.

Now, what about the criticism that our statements do not attack the committee reports and synodical resolutions as containing error? What about the implied challenge to prove the actual presence of false teaching? Unconsciously—we hope—our critic has fallen into an old trick of argument, to shift the burden of proof. It is always good strategy to lead the other party into making the attack, but it isn't always fair logic. Take our case: The Missouri Synod has come to its sister synods bearing an agreement negotiated between itself and a third church body. It has already given it substantial endorsement, is submitting it to us for our approval, and is now, if I may be pardoned the commercial term, trying to sell us on the agreement. We all subscribe to the principle that this agreement must be sound to the core if it should be acceptable. Now we have pointed out places “where error can hide,” not a vague, mysterious, undefined error, if you please, but the old familiar ones which in time past have played such an important part in the controversies. We have not yet passed judgment, are not charging that there is error, but have pointed to places where it is desirable to have complete assurance that the old fault no longer lingers. Does not the burden of proof now clearly lie with those who have claimed that the agreement constitutes “a settlement of the doctrinal controversies?” We are waiting, open to conviction.

An example will serve to show the need for such clarification as these questions seek. When the controversy on election broke, it resulted from an effort to say why some men, by the grace of God, are saved, others lost. The answer offered by the then opponents of the Synodical Conference was that this eternal election was “in view of their future faith.” When it was shown that this faith itself is a gift of God, a result of this election, and not in any degree man's contribution toward his own salvation, the debate shifted to the doctrine of conversion. It was claimed that where this change from unbelief to faith actually takes place in response to the working of the Spirit it is because of the fact that such men have conducted themselves better toward the grace of God—in other words, that man has again made his contribution toward his own salvation. Now these two errors have been corrected by the Declaration, but we find a new statement which at least is very puzzling: that God purposes to justify those who have come to faith, etc. Does not this call for definite assurance, at least, that this is not again the old error that somehow and somewhere man must be making some contribution toward his own salvation? If we wish to rest assured that the proposed agreement is sound, surely we must explore this matter fully, until no doubt remains. Nor should there be any reproach for those who ask such an explanation and propose the necessary investigation. It's a fair question, It deserves a fair answer.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> That the need for such clarification has also been felt and voiced by the Missouri representatives is apparent from the “Reply of the ALC Commissioners” published in the Concordia Theological Monthly, Dec. 1939. The section dealing with our point reads: “The first question referred to the statement in our Declaration (II,A): ‘To this end He also purposes to justify those who *have come* to faith.’ It was asked just when this justification takes place, whether immediately later after man has come to faith or later. The answer was, of course, in the same moment in which man comes to faith.” Since the point at issue (which has “aroused much apprehension,” C. T. M.) is the doctrine of objective justification, where the consistent and unanimous teaching of the Synodical Conference has been that when Christ rendered his perfect satisfaction on the cross, God *then* and *there* justified *all* men, it would appear that the question is beside the mark when it asks a decision between “immediately after man has come to faith or *later*.” We have no fault to find with the answer, which is a perfectly correct statement on subjective justification. But we do feel that the question has not produced, as indeed it could not produce, the necessary clarification on the stand of the ALC toward *objective* justification.

So much for the course followed by our Wisconsin committee and the editors of the *Quartalschrift*. There still remains the official stand taken by our synod in its last joint convention, August, 1939, the "Watertown Resolutions." The essential points follow:

We hold"

- a) that the Sandusky resolutions and the Pittsburgh Agreement have made it evident that there was no real doctrinal basis for church fellowship between the Honorable Synod of Missouri and the American Lutheran Church;
- b) that under existing conditions further negotiations for establishing church fellowship would involve a denial of the truth and would cause confusion and disturbance in the Church and ought therefore to be suspended for the time being;
- c) that when the implications of these Sandusky resolutions and Pittsburgh Agreement, as mentioned in "A" and "B" have thus been officially recognized and made known to those within and without our synodical Conference, confidence will be restored to a point where negotiations can be resumed, first to remove these obstacles and then to establish true doctrinal unity.

Because of the plainness of their speech and the drastic nature of the remedy proposed these resolutions have become the target of severe criticism and a cause of uneasy misgivings for at least some of our own members. Are we at fault? We obviously are if these resolutions were born out of contentiousness, selfish interests, and the spirit of vain pride. If on the other hand it can be shown that the interests of others, of the Kingdom at large, have received due consideration and that the striving is really a contending "for the faith of the Gospel," if the presence of Christian humility is proved, not necessarily by diplomatic smoothness of the words, but by our bowing in sincere and unquestioning obedience to the Word of God in its every syllable, then we can not only claim to sit acquitted, but can take comfort from the further assurance that the God Who crowned the humble obedience of His Son with final victory will be with us also in our endeavors.

The case must therefore be studied on its merits. There one fact stands out to begin: that our synod has not been playing the part of a self-constituted critic, but has spoken because our sister synod has submitted this matter to us. Under such circumstances, our convictions being what they are, silence on our part would have been a denial of the truth. Expediency dare not be the deciding factor here.

The next thing which should be noticed is that our Watertown Resolutions represent a verdict at which our synod arrived when two developments which occurred *after* the St. Louis convention supplied much additional material on which to base an opinion: the Sandusky Resolutions and the Pittsburgh agreement. The latter, taken first here for convenience in

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The question should be reformulated to bring out with unmistakable clearness that both synods agree in teaching that through the atonement of Christ on the cross God then and there has justified all men. Until and unless that can be done, it will not be enough to repeat the statement which one reads so often in the writings of friends of the agreement, namely that the ALC has accepted the Missouri Brief Statement. We would like to know whether they have, *on this point*, or whether the ALC clause constitutes another exception which must be added to the others which are listed when the ALC commissioner with commendable frankness write, "With *the other points* (emphasis is mine) of doctrine presented in the Brief Statement of the Doctrinal Position of the Missouri Synod we are conscious of being in agreement." (Decl. as quoted in *QS* 1938, p. 212) .

For a comprehensive treatment of this entire subject see the article on "Objective Justification" in the *Quartalschrift* of April, 1940, where also (page 116) a question is formulated which strikes the heart of the issue: "What is the function of faith in subjective justification?"

arrangement, is a document in which the results of negotiations between the ALC and the ULC were published. It makes one thoughtful, for here a committee of the same church body, consisting to some extent even of the same men, which only a few months before had wholeheartedly endorsed the statement in which the Missouri Synod declares its belief in the inerrancy of the Bible, now shows itself capable of signing another statement in which just this confession is clearly lacking. Where such things are possible, it is clear that we are not yet agreed on what really constitutes doctrinal unity. Surely, obedience to God's Word in the case of this important doctrine justifies holding up the proceedings until this disturbing condition has been rectified.

The Sandusky Resolutions are the answer of the ALC to the proceedings at St. Louis, where it was resolved to "declare that the Brief Statement of the Missouri Synod together with the 'Declaration of the Representatives of the ALC' *and* (the emphasis here is mine) *the provisions of this entire report* of Committee No. 16 now being read and with Synod's action thereupon be regarded as the doctrinal basis for future church-fellowship between the Missouri Synod and the ALC." Although in point 6(a) the "Report of this Committee" was once more emphatically mentioned as one of the things which would have to be included in the final agreement, it is plainly missing in the Sandusky Resolutions. That may be mere oversight. On the other hand, this report draws attention to a number of issues in such characteristic Synodical Conference language ("We refer...to the attitude toward the antichristian lodge, anti-Scriptural pulpit and altar-fellowship, and all other forms of unionism"), that the *o* of this; vital document should again bring matters to a halt until the error has been corrected by the only body which can do this, the ALC in joint convention assembled. Surely, no business organization would proceed to perfect a merger when one of the express terms of the preliminary agreement has been ignored by the other party, whether that was done intentionally or not. Nor would it accept the mere explanation of representatives on this. The organization itself would have to speak, the same body which committed the error. There is no substitute for that.

When the articles of agreement were approved in St. Louis it was felt by all that the ALC would now either have to convert or disavow its lax and liberal associates in the AL Conference. While considerately leaving the obvious stern second alternative unmentioned, the Report says church-fellowship will depend on the ALC's establishing this doctrinal agreement with those church bodies with which it is in fellowship. To which the ALC replies that, while it is ready to submit the doctrinal agreement to the other members of the AL Conference for their official approval and acceptance, *it is not willing to give up this membership*. Note that the conversion of these synods to a conservative stand is not called for as something essential, nor is the hope expressed that it is likely to result. Add to this the peculiar slant which the whole matter acquires when the paragraph from which the above quotation is taken opens as follows: "We believe that the Brief Statement (Missouri), viewed in the light of our Declaration (ALC) is not in contradiction to the Minneapolis Theses, which are the basis of our membership in the AL Conference" (the liberal body—The parentheses are mine). Would the rank and file of the ALC (I do not mean the commissioners) speak thus if its face were turned toward Missouri, its convictions already conservative?

Then there is the question of "non-fundamentals," The ALC Declaration lists four non-fundamental doctrines and one which is not so classed by the St. Louis Report, concedes that on these points there is not perfect agreement in their ranks, and asks the Missouri Synod to tolerate this condition. The St. Louis Report shows a\$ some length, though not convincingly to many, that conditions obtain which justify such tolerance. Much has been written and said since to show, that this is not again the old Iowa proposal that in the interest of unity the Lutheran

bodies of America should not ask for more than agreement in fundamentals only and designate certain troublesome non-fundamentals as “open questions” on which they would grant each other the right to disagree. But when one reads the list which is now specified (the Church, Anti-Christ, the final conversion of Israel, the physical resurrection of the martyrs, the thousand years of Rev. 20), it is startling, to say the least, to read the following bit of early Synodical Conference history in the Lutheran World Almanac for 1921:

The Iowans held that there were certain subjects that were “open questions,” and with regard to which difference of opinion might be tolerated. Among these were the doctrine of the ministry, eschatological opinions concerning the millennium, the first resurrection, the conversion of Israel, and the antiChrist. (p. 109)

When one further reads in the Sandusky Resolutions, “We are firmly convinced that it is neither necessary nor possible to agree in all non-fundamental doctrines,” and adds the explanation of these words given in the “Reply:”

(While we are ready to continue the discussion on these points, certainly the erection of church fellowship should not be made contingent on the result of the deliberations; church-fellowship is justifiable and can be practiced even if no agreement is reached in these points)—the question forces itself upon us: If this is not the old Iowa position, where is the difference? We are open to conviction, but not yet convinced.

So the warnings multiply. Were we going too far when in our Watertown resolutions we said that these documents have made it evident that there was no real doctrinal basis for church fellowship between the two bodies? Was it going too far when we said that to ignore these obvious warnings and to continue as though nothing were amiss would involve a denial of the truth and would cause confusion and disturbance in the Church? This last prophecy has come true, and nowhere more so than within the Missouri Synod itself. Were we going too far in suggesting that therefore negotiations ought to be suspended for the time being? (Not: “demanding that we break off all negotiations with the ALC and renounce the union agreement of 1938,” as our chief critic misquotes us.)

Our Wisconsin proposal to suspend negotiations for the time being is, the most practical and constructive, the sanest and most sensible suggestion before the Lutheran Church of our land today. It does nothing radical or destructive. It does not only leave the way open for resuming negotiations, but suggests ways and means for arriving at the final goal of true unity. For it provides for a much needed interval during which these complicated and confusing issues may to a great extent clarify themselves. It takes into consideration the fact that the events of Sandusky and Pittsburgh have indeed filled the minds and hearts of a good many Lutherans with a profound uneasiness, and allows time for the rebuilding of much needed confidence. The establishing of true unity will not suffer from this proposal. The only type of union which will be endangered thereby is the setting up of a hasty, immature, superficial, and unsound alliance.

It is impossible to say what course our sister synod will follow, what the next few years may bring, what the future may have in store for the Synodical Conference. Let us be concerned about one thing only, that in simple obedience to the Word of our God we walk the ways in which He leads us, fulfilling faithfully those particular functions which in His wisdom He may from time to time assign to us. Only let us do that in such a way which is worthy of the Gospel of Christ. Let us stand and strive and work together, in true Christian unity. Let us, particularly in our Wisconsin circles, guard against the demoralizing effects of disunity. Then the testimony

which we must render will not be weakened by internal contradiction. Then any adversities which may result (“for unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on Him, but also to suffer for His sake”) will become easier to bear through our meeting them jointly, through the mutual comfort we can give each other. But above all, let our course always be determined by implicit obedience to the Word. That may be the way of humiliation. But it is also, by the grace of God, the way of final victory.

“Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.”

Amen.