
THE TENNESSEE SYNOD'S CONTENTION FOR THE
"FOUR POINTS" IN THE UNITED SYNOD IN THE SOUTH

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"FOUR POINTS" IN THE UNITED SYNOD IN THE SOUTH

The tendency of the Lutheran bodies in the United States during the latter half of the nineteenth century was toward a stricter confessionalism. As the Lutherans grew closer together doctrinally on the basis of their historic confessions, developing an ever keener awareness of their identity over against the other protestant denominations, they began to discuss their relationship toward those other denominations. The question arose whether it would be a denial of cherished Christian doctrine to exchange pulpits with preachers who held to divergent teachings, or to welcome people of other confessions to the altar for communion. During this period when the Masonic Lodge enjoyed increasing popularity, Lutherans also discussed whether a Christian were not denying the Triune God and His way of salvation by grace alone by joining in the ^edistic, moralistic worship of secret societies. In addition, some Lutherans were divided over the question of millennialism, or chiliasm, the belief that Jesus will return to earth to reign here for a thousand years. These questions came to be known as the "four points." They were formulated as such by the synods of Ohio and Iowa as they urged a conservative stand in the newly formed General Council during the 1870's.

On a less spectacular scale than the larger bodies to the north, the Tennessee Synod contended for a conservative stand on the four points in the United Synod. Some observers discount Tennessee as a conservative force as early as 1886 when she joined the United Synod. Some others give her credit for a

confessional stand as late as 1904. While it is certain that Tennessee lost bargaining power at several critical junctures, and that she was for many years operating at odds with her own position by cooperating with the United Synod, still it can be shown that she was demonstrating in some way her position on the four points until 1921. This will be the subject of the present study.

The Tennessee Synod is of particular interest because she arrived at her stand on the Lutheran confessions independently of the Mid-Western synods - in fact, years before the notoriously confessional Missourians arrived in the New World. A study of Tennessee could also prove valuable to present-day Lutherans in that, quite against her will, she let slip a heritage she was consciously intent upon preserving.

We shall pursue the study of Tennessee's contention for the four points in the following segments: First, a look at Tennessee's confessional stand with special reference to her leading spokesman for the period under consideration, Dr. Robert Yoder. Second, a look at the United Synod's attitude concerning the four points as presented by Dr. E.T. Horn and Dr. A.G. Voigt. And third, a chronological report of the Tennessee Synod's efforts to bring the United Synod to share her conservative position.

I. Tennessee's Position

Many in the United Synod felt that the controversies about close communion and secret societies were being imported from the North as students for the ministry trained at the rival seminaries at Gettysburg (General Synod) and Philadelphia (General Council).¹ A.G. Voigt of the United Synod's seminary

in Columbia, S.C. observed:

It was peculiarly difficult for the Tennessee Synod with its distinctive development to become adjusted to perfect cooperation in the practical work.... The discussion of the questions connected with pulpit and altar fellowship, with Chiliasm and with secret societies, which had started in the middle West, and from there had spread to other parts of the country, also penetrated the South. Not many years before the organization of the United Synod the Tennessee Synod had taken its position moderately, yet firmly, on these questions in favor of a strict practice.²

This could be a bit misleading. Although the four points first made their appearance as such in the middle West, and while Tennessee had only in 1879 taken a stand on them as the "four points," yet the position taken by Tennessee since 1823 made her eventual decision on the four points inevitable. In her third year of existence the Tennessee Synod put several questions to the Pennsylvania Synod in an effort to determine the latter's orthodoxy. The fourth question asked, "Ought the Evangelic Lutheran Church endeavor to be united with any religious denomination whose doctrines are contrary to the Augustan Confession of faith? Or, is it proper for Lutherans to commune with such?"³ Obviously, Tennessee was interested in the question of altar fellowship from the outset.

In 1837 the eminent Bachman, President of the South Carolina Synod, voiced the following remarks against Tennessee, among others, showing that the issue of both altar and pulpit fellowship was alive: "Our pulpits have ever been open to the servants of every Christian communion, and we invite to our communion tables the followers of Jesus regardless of what particular denominations they belong to."⁴

But to the Tennessee Synod, the very reason for having

confessions of faith was so that people may know with whom to enjoy Christian fellowship. In the remarks connected with their subscription to the Augsburg Confession in their 1828 Constitution, we find:

Hence as all do not explain the Scriptures alike, it could not be known what each body of Christians believed; consequently others could not know whether they should fellowship them: provided they had not a formal declaration of their views on the points of doctrine contained in Scriptures.⁵

Consequently the idea of strict practice regarding fellowship was inseparable from the idea of confessing Christ in a Scriptural way. To overlook a misinterpretation of Scripture by having fellowship with non-Lutherans was, as Tennessee perceived it, a denial of Scripture.

Perhaps the most telling factor in locating the Tennessee Synod doctrinally is the event at "Old Gravelton" in 1872, the birth of the English Conference of Missouri. C.F.W. Walther came down from St. Louis with sixteen doctrinal theses, testimonies, and confessional writings of the Lutheran Church, and met with P.C. (Polycarp) Henkel and Jonathan Moser of the Tennessee Synod. Walther wanted all concerned to have a clear understanding of Missouri's position, which by this time certainly included a strict stand on the four points, so that union might be established along confessional and doctrinal lines. After what must have been a gruelling colloquy they found themselves in agreement. It is reported that "those who met at this conference recognized each other as brethren, shook hands, joined in worship, and assured each other of love and unity of faith."⁶ Knowing Walther's style, certainly this leaves no doubt about

the position of the Tennessee Synod (although a difference on the doctrine of election became evident years later). This event has particular significance for the present study, since P.C. Henkel, son of David and grandson of Paul, was the theological father of R.A. Yoder, of whom we shall hear more later.

So, when the issue arose, Tennessee's conservative stand on the four points was predictable. She had followed a strict practice of fellowship from her inception and had seen gratifying fruits of her confessionalism. Historians agree that "the Tennessee Synod was the main factor in bringing about the change in the confessional attitude of the Southern synods."⁷ In fact, by 1873 Tennessee and the North Carolina Synod had worked out a Basis of Union and were on the verge of joining hands, but because of two factions in the N.C. Synod - one desiring union with the General Synod and the other with Tennessee - the union never coalesced.⁸

The Tennessee Synod began moving to make her stand on the four points an element of her constitution in 1879. P.C. Henkel, in his President's Report to the Synod, issued the following request:

I gave notice through Our Church Paper that I intended to recommend to Synod the prayerful consideration and investigation of the doctrine of worship of secret societies, as well as the subject of altar and pulpit fellowship and Chiliastic views.

As it is one of the duties of Synod "to detect and expose erroneous doctrines;" and as I am grieved in conscience at the thought of being partaker in any way with those who knowingly hold a doctrine at variance with our confessions of faith, and worship God otherwise than...as our noble Athanasian Creed demands; I beg Synod not to cause distress of conscience by delaying an investigation of the false worship and doctrine practiced and held by secret societies,

and with which some of our ministers are probably affiliating and we with them.

He asks synod to "...remove the grounds by which such evils may be imputed unto us."

In response to this request, Socrates Henkel and the Committee on the President's Report recommended a statement on these issues.¹⁰ In 1880 a committee composed of S. Henkel, P.C. Henkel, and R.A. Yoder proposed that the statement be adopted and it was attached to the By-Laws of the 1883 revised constitution as the "Summit Rule:"¹¹

Resolved 1. That this Synod, as we have, so far as we know, no minister now in affiliation with such societies, we advise all who may be looking to the office of the ministry in connection with this Synod, not to associate or hold fellowship with any societies that practice a deistic worship or service, to the disparagement of the adoration due Jesus Christ, or that comes in conflict with the orthodox worship of the Church, or that sets up a plan of salvation coming in conflict with that set forth in Divine Revelation, through the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, as the Mediator between God and man; as it is the sentiment of this Synod that such could not be received.

2. That we regard these matters as subjects for investigation and instruction, and our ministers are advised to give such information as they may deem proper, when it is desired.

3. With respect to altar and pulpit fellowship, it is the sentiment of this Synod, that our ministers and people adhere to the practice set forth in the Confessions of the Church, using all necessary precaution, prudence, and judiciousness in the exercise of such privileges, lest the sacredness of the altar and pulpit be violated, or the consciences of some be oppressed, and reference should always be had to the preparation, designated in the Augsburg Confession, article eleven, and in Luther's Catechism, where it is said. "Let a man examine himself," etc.; and "He only is truly worthy and well prepared, who has faith in these words," etc.

4. In regard to Chiliasm, we would simply say, it is clearly rejected in the 17th article of the Augsburg Confession.¹²

The people of the Tennessee Synod took their position seriously even when it cost. In 1885 we find the somewhat veiled, but poignant words of P.C. Henkel in his report as

delegate to the Holston Synod (The Holston Synod was composed of congregations in eastern Tennessee which belonged to the Tennessee Synod until 1861, after which time the Tennessee Synod had no Tennessee congregations):

In the Holston Synod we are very much reminded of the old Tennessee Synod. I, however, felt myself much embarrassed in the higher act of fellowship, which I was not able to render.... My views and feelings are extensively known in the Church in regard to the "Four Points...."¹³

From P.C. Henkel the aegis of the Tennessee Synod passed to R.A. Yoder. Yoder was baptized by Henkel, confirmed by A.J. Fox, and later studied for the ministry privately (as was the custom) under Henkel, Fox, and J.M. Smith.¹⁴ He also attended Philadelphia Seminary 1883-84, for which he drew considerable criticism from some who thought he should have been satisfied with the training commonly received by other local pastors.¹⁵ In a letter to his brother, Yoder wrote from Philadelphia, "I am now trying to load up some Theology to carry away with me. We have a fine school here. Four professors, Schaeffer, Mann, Spaeth, and Jacobs."¹⁶ Yoder held the office of President of the Tennessee Synod in 1886, Vice President of the United Synod 1900-1901, President of the United Synod 1902-1906, and President of the Board of Home Missions, United Synod, 1909-1910.¹⁷ In addition he was a founder of the Tennessee Synod's Lenoir College and its President from 1891-1901.¹⁸ Dr. Yoder's importance for the period of time under consideration (1886-1921) is attested by this sentiment expressed at the time of his death in 1911, "...We doubt if any other man has so profoundly impressed his character and worth upon any community as Dr. Yoder has done upon the Tennessee Synod."¹⁹

Dr. Yoder's teaching on the four points mirrored that of his predecessors.' In an essay presented to the Tennessee Synod in 1898 entitled, "What Type of Lutheranism Should Prevail in the South," Yoder defends the synod's position on the issues on the basis of the Augsburg Confession. From Article IV Yoder draws the following conclusion:

All societies for moral or religious ends, which do not rest upon the supreme authority of God's Word; or recognize our Lord Jesus Christ as true God and the only Mediator, or which assume to themselves what God has given to his Church and its ministers; or which require undefined obligations to be assumed by oath," should be shunned as rationalistic in tendency, dangerous to souls, and subversive to Christianity.²⁰

From Article X he concludes:

"Lutheran altars for Lutheran communicants." Unity in faith is an essential condition for this highest fellowship in the Church. If others will not unite with us in confessing the truth, we dare not unite with them in confessing error. The principle that only those who are of the same household of faith may partake of the Lord's Supper, while those of another faith must be excluded is nothing else than the "we believe, teach, and confess," and the "we reject and condemn" of the Formula of Concord itself.²¹

And from Article VII Dr. Yoder concludes:

"Lutheran pulpits for Lutheran ministers." Certainly the Lutheran church would not be consistent, nor loyal to her Confessions, if she permitted men to teach in her congregations, who do not even profess to believe her doctrines, and who even condemn her distinctive Articles of Faith. For, all Christians are commanded to avoid those who teach doctrines contrary to Scripture - Rm 16:17.²²

More will be said of this essay later.

Like Polycarp Henkel before him, Dr. Yoder took these issues seriously, practicing them in his own ministry. The following observations have been made concerning the practice of the four points in the Tennessee Synod:

Exchange of pulpits:

The ministers of the Tennessee Synod did not invite ministers of other denominations either to preach or to take part in leading the service. They, on the other hand, refused to enter the chancel of any other churches than the Synod's. Promiscuous Communion or Altar Fellowship: only members of the Tennessee Synod who were in good standing were allowed to take communion. Yoder simply passed non-members and reprobates by when he distributed the bread and wine.

Secret Society Worship: any and all societies which did not rest on the supreme authority of God's Holy Word, which taught doctrines or had usage condemned by it, and which required undefined obligations to be assumed by oath were forbidden.

Chiliasm: The Tennessee Synod did not believe in the doctrine of the millenium, or the reign of Christ on earth for a thousand years.²³

Having established the Tennessee Synod's position on the four points, we might add that she was determined to maintain her stand against all odds. To set the stage for the contest to be observed in part III, mark the challenge Dr. Yoder offered his Synod in 1898:

We, as the custodians of the heritage, bequeathed to us by the advocates of true Lutheranism in 1820, in the formation of the Tennessee Synod, and by their firm adherence to these principles, were, by the grace of God, enabled to preserve them, and transmit them to us in their purity, owe a duty -- a solemn, sacred duty to maintain them now and transmit them to generations to come. Shall we prove recreant to our duty? Shall we let these principles slip away from us, in yielding them in the hope of a closer union with other Lutheran bodies, who claiming to confess these principles, yet deny them in practice?²⁴

II. The United Synod's Attitude

Even those in the United Synod who disagreed with the Tennesseans over the four points acknowledged the debt southern Lutheranism owed to Tennessee's conservative influence. E.T. Horn observes, "For a while the strength of the Tennessee Synod was given to the maintenance of Orthodoxy; nor are we able to deny that their championship was needed and has been effectual."²⁵

Horn expresses the integrity of the doctrinal unity of the United Synod in these terms:

It can be said of the doctrinal basis of the Southern Synods that it is the sincere and intelligent Confession of the Churches. By this I do not mean that the Lutheran Churches in the South have pondered all the controversies in which the Symbols originated and to which they gave the answer, nor that they have accepted all the inferences which sincere Lutherans now draw from the confessions and even may be justified in urging. But it is true that no teacher is acceptable among US who rejects any of these Confessions, or of whose sincere belief²⁶ of them and thorough knowledge of them we have any doubt.

Although the doctrinal unity in the United Synod is fairly sound, Horn acknowledges that when it comes to the practical question of the four points there is not agreement. His observations show that part of the problem arises from misunderstanding the purposes and significance of close communion:

The introduction of this question has caused great unrest. ...Some have interpreted these "four points" as an attempt to commit the whole United Synod to what is called "Close Communion" and complete separation from all other Christian people, and this is held to be a denial that Christians not of the Lutheran Faith are of the Christian Church and within the pale of salvation.²⁷

Of course, close communion is precisely what Tennessee was urging, but by practicing close communion she intended to say nothing at all about the genuineness of the non-Lutheran's Christianity. What she did intend to say was that differences in doctrine exist, and until agreement is reached on the basis of God's Word it would be a denial of God's Word to join in fellowship. The misunderstanding Horn describes was compounded by unwillingness on the part of the United Synod to discuss the matter. Dr. Horn continues:

...Many are put into a serious dilemma; for while they disapprove of "promiscuous communion," and exchange of

pulpits, and of "secret societies of a doubtful or deistic character," they are far from unchurching those of more or less divergent faith. The questions involved have never been fully discussed, and the churches in the South are not prepared to set forth their final answer; and therefore either an adoption or a summary rejection of this By-Law cannot but prove a serious disaster to all of them.²⁸

The comments of Dr. A.G. Voigt are helpful in determining the attitude and practice of the United Synod. Because of their value for depicting the theological climate of the body, they are included here at some length:

Firm as they are in their convictions, Southern Lutherans are generally averse to controversy. This is probably the true explanation of the conservative attitude of the United Synod towards the questions connected with pulpit and altar fellowship and secret societies. There are differences of view on these questions existing in the United Synod. But the disposition has always been not to fight the differences out, but to wait for time to bring about unanimity in regard to them. In the formation of the United Synod peculiar circumstances thrust these questions upon the notice of the body; but it declined to legislate in regard to them because it was unwilling to go through the throes of controversy which a decision upon them involved. Combined with this aversion to controversy there exists an evangelical impatience of legal constraint, which impels men to act upon principle rather than by rule. As a matter of fact and actual practice Lutheran ministers in the United Synod do not invite others to occupy their pulpits indiscriminately; and, although in some churches the custom of extending a general invitation at communion still continues from earlier times, the practice is diminishing and in most churches it has passed away with the introduction of the Common Service. As to secret societies, there is not much agitation against them except in the Tennessee Synod, and a number of United Synod ministers are known to be members of such orders; but the sentiment of most ministers is unfavorable to them. It has already been stated that the Tennessee Synod is unique among the Synods constituting the United Synod in having rules against pulpit and altar fellowship and secret societies; and the United Synod has pledged itself not to employ in its general work, in its theological seminary, in its mission operations, in the editing of its official organ, any person who would foster secretism or unionistic fellowship.²⁹

Voigt had more sympathy for Tennessee's thinking than did most. At the time of the United Synod's founding, the majority

were "New Lutherans" who adhered to the looser sort of Lutheranism characteristic of the General Synod. The remainder, including Voigt, leaned toward Krauth and the General Council. Voigt's biographer reports that "so strong was the dislike of the 'New Lutherans' for their stricter brethren that one young man who wished to study theology refused for a time to enter the theological department at Newberry because he considered Voigt a 'Four Pointer.'"³⁰

With these bits of background the stage is set to observe the results of Tennessee's union with the United Synod.

III. The Contest

The doctrinal basis for union of the Southern synods was worked out at the "Southern Lutheran Diet" in Salisbury, N.C., 1884. The document was soundly confessional but as the matter was being discussed by the Tennessee Synod in 1885 it proved deficient. Revs. P.C. Henkel and A.L. Crouse requested that it be stated in the records of the synod that they approved the the Constitution so far as it went, but that they declined to vote for its adoption because it was "silent in regard to Pulpit and Altar Fellowship, Secret Societies, and Chiliasm."³¹

In 1886 at Roanoke, Va., the United Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the South was formed on the basis determined at Salisbury. This body brought together eight synods, the largest of which was the Tennessee Synod (whose strength resided primarily in western North Carolina, but who was also represented in Virginia, South Carolina, et.al.) with 100 congregations and 9630 communicants; next was the South Carolina Synod with 53 congregations and 6705 communicants; and then the North

Carolina Synod with 49 congregations and 5483 communicants.³²

At their 1886 synod convention, the Tennessee men heard the following report from the delegates who had represented them at Roanoke:

The Scriptural premises have, in this way, been laid down and agreed to, and by prudence, brotherly love, and the influences of the Holy Spirit, the conclusions must be, ultimately, inevitable. But it will require patience and much judicious work, to attain that higher and more churchly plain in regard to doctrine and practice.³³

(When Tennessee spoke of "doctrine and practice" she generally was referring to the practice of the four points.) This report announcing Tennessee's new connection with her sister synods was adopted with the following resolution:

1. That it be adopted;
2. That, in adopting it, as the Evangelical Lutheran Tennessee Synod rejects all ecclesiastical union and co-operation which is not based on the pure Lutheran teaching and faith; as, the Exchange of Pulpits, Promiscuous Communion or Altar Fellowship, Secret Society Worship, and Chiliasm, we the ministers and lay-delegates, in Synod assembled, do hereby recommend or advise the Committee or the Chairman of the Committee, appointed by the United Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the South to prepare by-laws for its government, in drafting such by-laws so to formulate them, as to require every teacher or professor who may be appointed as a teacher or professor in any Theological Seminary that she may establish or put into operation, to take an obligation not to teach, practice, or inculcate anything that comes in conflict with these principles, or the doctrines of the Church;
3. That, we trust the said United Synod will feel the importance of acquiescing in this precautionary request, with a view to the good of the Church; especially as this is desired only in work, for which each Synod will be held responsible in its united efforts, and which it should be able to defend and maintain according to the pure doctrines and practices of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, as over against sectarian innovations and corruptions, leaving each Synod in connection with the United Synod, in its individual, Synodical transactions, so to shape its course, as ultimately to attain that higher plain in doctrine and practice, so characteristic of the true Church.³⁴

As recommended in resolution two, the United Synod formed

a committee headed by Socrates Henkel to formulate By-Laws for the regulation of the general work. The controversial portion came at the very end of the proposed document as section III under "Regulations in Regard to Work." It read:

Every minister, teacher, professor, or missionary, in any institution or enterprise under the supervision or control of this United Synod, before entering on the performance of the duties of his office, shall make an affirmation that he will...not foster nor encourage intercommunion or altar fellowship with non-Lutherans, or unionistic services,³⁵ or any secret society of a doubtful or deistic character.

The entire Report of the Committee on By-Laws was printed in the minutes but consideration of it was postponed until the United Synod's next convention.³⁶ All the delegates went home anxious to see what would be done in '89. Especially anxious were the Tennessee men who wanted to see the statement on the four points enacted, and the North Carolina men who as eagerly wanted to see it defeated. Tennessee's delegates reported back to their synod alerting their colleagues to the matter:

The third regulation in regard to the work of the United Synod, is a matter of vital importance to the Church, especially at this age, in which the general tendency is to a higher and more churchly plain in doctrine and practice.... There is a principle of the highest interest to the Church, involved in that regulation, Theory without consistent practice, can avail little.³⁷

Because the matter was left hanging, Tennessee adopted "Resolutions Setting Forth the Relation of the Tennessee Synod to the United Synod." These resolutions (proposed by C.H. Bernheim, R.A. Yoder, and W.P. Cline) established that until the principles involved in article III of the "Regulations" were adopted, "the Tennessee Synod cannot cooperate with the United Synod in her work."³⁸

There was some excitement at the opening of Tennessee's

meeting in connection with the seating of the delegate from the N.C. Synod. Apparently a certain Rev. B.S. Brown had been refused transfer from the N.C. Synod into the Tennessee Synod because of his lax position on the four points. At any rate, Tennessee had gotten wind of the following action of the N.C. Synod:

Resolved, that we have heard with pleasure the very excellent and able address of Rev. B.S. Brown, regarding his non-reception into our sister Synod, the Tennessee Synod, and that we rejoice to find that he stood so firmly on the confessions of the church and refused to go beyond them in accepting opinions or practices that are nowhere required or distinctly stated in the symbols of our church.³⁹

The welcome extended to the visiting delegate from the N.C. Synod was consequently somewhat chilly and his seating contested. Such minor skirmishes promised ^{an} interesting United Synod convention.

1889 came, the Synod convened, and nothing was done. Consideration of the By-Laws was again postponed until the 1892 convention. North Carolina was understandably exasperated:

We, the delegates of the N.C. Synod, having come to this convention under special instruction, by an almost unanimous vote of our Synod on a matter of deep interest to our church and people, kindly and respectfully ask permission to express our disappointment at the action taken....⁴⁰

At this point N.C. made her future cooperation with the United Synod contingent upon the defeat of article III of the "Regulations," whereas Tennessee had made future cooperation contingent upon adoption. The lines were drawn.

True to her threat, when the request for support for the Seminary came from the United Synod in 1890, Tennessee directed the Board to read her 1886 and 1888 Minutes.⁴¹

Finally 1892 arrived, the United Synod convened, and N.C. won. The By-Laws and Rules were adopted without the controversial "Regulations" article III regarding the four points. The

committee on By-Laws announced, "It is our persuasion that this body is not prepared to express a unanimous judgment on these regulations."⁴²

Tennessee went home and resolved at her convention "that this body enters its protest against said action, and requests the United Synod to again consider and adopt the regulations..."⁴³ Tennessee withheld support from any United Synod projects in the following years.

The 1894 convention was crucial in the history of the Tennessee Synod. Nine different congregations had written petitioning Synod to sever connection from the United Synod of the South. The following reasons were listed:

- I. The United Synod of the South has refused to adopt item No. 3 of By-Laws, submitted to the Synod for adoption, relative to the so-called Four Points.
- II. The Tennessee Synod has protested in vain against the failure of the United Synod of the South to take said action.
- III. The Tennessee Synod is thereby placed in the position of belonging to a general body with which she does not co-operate in church work, nor with which she can consistently co-operate on account of previous action.⁴⁴

Rev. Yoder, who read the petition before the Synod, said "...We recommend that the Synod grant the petition, and that we do now by this action withdraw."⁴⁵

Synod President I. Conder recommended:

We do not consider it expedient to dissolve our connection at this time with the United Synod South. ...we should ponder well before we take this backward step, but endeavor to make it what its name imparts, united....⁴⁶

Here was a crossroads for Tennessee. The action most consistent with her historic stand for confessional Lutheranism would have been Rev. Yoder's. The action recommended by Rev. Conder would lead to years of compromising principles and

vainly pursuing the educative approach to fellowship. The motion to sever connection with the United Synod was defeated by a vote of 31-20.⁴⁷

For the next years nothing changed. Tennessee withheld cooperation from the United Synod and continued expressing her desire for unity in "doctrine and practice."

Dr. Yoder was a man who, once a course was set, would pursue that course with all determination. If he had had his way, Tennessee would be out of the United Synod; but as long as the course had been set to unify the United Synod, he would work for that goal with all his energy. In 1898 he produced the most powerful piece of polemic to come from the Tennessee Synod in decades. In his essay, "What Type of Lutheranism Should Prevail in the South," he returned to themes reminiscent of David Henkel. He challenged the Lutherans of the South to be Lutherans in more than name. He describes three types of Lutheranism. Of the first type he writes:

The adherents of this type of Lutheranism, which we designate as the weakest type, who profess to accept the Augsburg Confession, but who are not willing to accept the other Confessions of the Lutheran Church, lay themselves open to the suspicion that they do not believe nor practice what is contained in the Augsburg Confession.⁴⁸

Then, another type of Lutheranism is that whose adherents accept the Lutheran Confessions in their entirety, the whole Book of Concord, but whose teaching and practice are not in conformity with the doctrines there in set forth.... And anyone subscribing the Confessions of the Lutheran church...and then not conforming his teaching and practice to these confessions, is, to say the least, not honest. He is sailing under false colors; not loyal to his conscience, his church, or his God; and has no right to the name Lutheran.⁴⁹

The third type of Lutheranism is characterized by sincere acceptance of all the symbolical books without reservation, and

strict conformity to them in teaching and practice: "This is the type which should prevail not only in the South but everywhere else in the world."⁵⁰ The following excerpts are worthy of close attention:

There can be no greater wrong to any cause, nor anything that will sooner destroy principles in the minds of men, than a pretense of external union, when there is not internal unity.⁵¹

Men must be honest in their differences if they are ever to be honest in their agreement.⁵²

If others will not unite with us in confessing the truth, we dare not unite with them in confessing error.⁵³

Yoder charges the Lutherans in the South with attempting an external union by merely suppressing differences. He expresses his conviction that there had not been sufficient internal unity to justify an attempt at external union.⁵⁴ Evidently, in saying this he places blame also at the feet of his own synod and says once again, in effect, that Tennessee does not belong in the United Synod.

In 1900 the United Synod met at Winston-Salem, N.C. and made the following resolution:

Resolved, That in view of the position heretofore occupied by the Tennessee Synod with regard to full and active cooperation with this body, this United Synod does now assure the Tennessee Synod that it is most sincerely desirous, in the prosecution of our common work, that nothing may be done calculated to burden the consciences of any of our synods. All our synods are founded on the Word of God, and the confessions of the Church in accordance with it, and all are equally bound to frame their practice and fulfill their duty in accordance with a candid and conscientious conviction of the true and proper sense of that Word, and our Confessions on it founded.⁵⁵

At this convention Dr. Yoder was also elected Vice-President. Apparently Tennessee's posture and publications were noted by the other synods and there was a determined effort to smooth

ruffled feathers. When the Tennessee delegation returned home to their own convention, Dr. Yoder gave this report:

Resolutions in recognition of our conscientious convictions were unanimously passed, giving our Synod the assurance that in the general work of the United Synod nothing should be done that would in any way conflict with our conscientious convictions.

In view of these facts, and as we are just closing the first century of our history as a Lutheran church in the South, and entering upon a century of renewed activity in all church interests, it seems to us that the time has arrived for our Synod to cooperate more fully and heartily in all the general work of the United Synod.⁵⁶

True to the Lutheran Confessions, Tennessee put the best construction on this action of the United Synod. The words of the resolution that nothing be done "calculated to burden the consciences..." were ingenuously accepted by Tennessee to mean that "nothing should be done that would in any way conflict with our conscientious convictions." Tennessee began to participate energetically in the work of the United Synod.⁵⁷ In 1902 the United Synod made Dr. Yoder president and Dr. Voigt vice president.

But it did not take long to perceive the lack of substance in the Winston-Salem resolution. At the 1903 convention of the Tennessee Synod, W.P. Cline offered the following self-explanatory resolution:

Whereas, That at the meeting of the United Synod at Winston-Salem, May, 1900, resolutions were passed assuring the Tennessee Synod, that no Synod in connection with the United Synod should do anything that would in any way burden the conscience of any other synod in her connection, and

Whereas, The position of the Tennessee Synod on the question of Pulpit and Altar Fellowship is well known to all other synods in connection with the United Synod, having contended earnestly for the adoption of a by-law regulating general work, embodying these principles, and having patiently hoped and waited for some recognition of these principles; and

Whereas, the South Carolina Synod did in its last convention pass certain resolutions in violation of the conciliatory

measures adopted at Winston-Salem, thereby burdening the conscience of the Tennessee Synod; therefore, be it Resolved, That this Synod earnestly requests that the United Synod at her next convention clearly and unmistakably define her position on the Pulpit and Altar Fellowship question.⁵⁸

This request was made of the United Synod at its 1904 convention. When the delegation returned home they made this report:

In reference to the request sent up by this body at its meeting last year, for the United Synod to define its position on the subject of Pulpit and Altar Fellowship, the answer of the Synod was not satisfactory to our delegation. The only position taken by the Synod was, that the definition as to doctrine and practice on Pulpit and Altar Fellowship, as set forth in the Common Service, is adequate, and is the position of the United Synod. We believe that the different district synods of this body are gradually understanding each other better, and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit will eventually grow into unity of doctrine and practice.⁵⁹

This defeat would have discouraged many, but it merely served to strengthen the resolve of the Tennessee Synod to influence her sister synods. In 1904, to one of N.C.'s repeated overtures for merger, Tennessee replied:

...It is the sense of this body that the integrity of the organization of the Evangelical Lutheran Tennessee Synod remain for the present intact; believing that the time has not yet arrived that organic union of this body, or any part of it, with other synods in contiguous or overlapping territory, should be hastily attempted, that this Synod has yet a very important work before it in maintaining the principles which led to its organization, and for which it has earnestly contended for almost a century.⁶⁰

If nothing else, Tennessee would make her confession by retaining her identity as a separate synod side by side with N.C., while cooperating fully in the work of the United Synod.

Meanwhile, the attempt to educate continued rather forcefully. Dr. Yoder watched for opportunities to stress consistent confessionalism. In his essay of 1902, "The Call to the Work of the Gospel Ministry," he wrote:

It is extremely important that a clear statement is made in the call with reference to the confessional position

of those extending the call; for not all congregations who call themselves Lutheran, desire a truly Lutheran pastor, either in doctrine or practice.

He cites instances where pastors were asked to resign because they refused to offer the Lord's Supper to non-Lutherans.

If a congregation does not want Lutheran doctrine and practice and will not tolerate them, then it ought to say so in its call, and extend that call to someone else than a Lutheran pastor.⁶¹

These words are not without a polemical tone.

As President of the United Synod, Dr. Yoder authored an article in the Lutheran Church Visitor, the official paper of the body, entitled, "Present Problems of the United Synod" (1906). He observes:

From the view-point of the writer, one of the most important, and we may say, the problem above all others is, How shall we, as a UNITED SYNOD, become UNITED in deed and in truth, as well as in name? In other words, How shall we become homogenous throughout the entire body, BELIEVING the same things, SPEAKING the same things, and PRACTICING the same things?...If it were homogenous, a pastor could be called from any one of the synods into any other, without any question as to whether he is too much Lutheran, or too little Lutheran.⁶²

As a solution to this problem, Yoder suggests firm, faithful, and conscientious adherence to the Confessions of the Lutheran Church in doctrine and practice.⁶³

Dr. Yoder perhaps went closest to the root of Christendom's maladies in an address to Lenoir College when he warned against spiritual indifference:

One great problem of the future which is looming up on the horizon, and which must be met in the near future is the wide-spread and alarming spiritual indifference which comes along with our material prosperity. Here is the field for work in the home, in the pulpit, and especially in our school here, teaching, preaching, inculcating, "line upon line, and precept upon precept"⁶⁴ the great principles of the Church of the Reformation.

In 1911 Dr. Yoder died, but the confessional drive of his church body was still alive. One of the tributes to Dr. Yoder which appeared in the Lutheran Church Visitor ran:

Thirteen years ago he prepared for the meeting of the Tennessee Synod a paper entitled, "The Type of Lutheranism Which Should Prevail in the South." This paper was published in the minutes of the Tennessee Synod for that year, and would make excellent reading at this time. (emphasis mine)⁶⁵

In 1911 Tennessee was still making her distinctive contribution to southern Lutheranism as evidenced by that year's edition of her Constitution - still a strict stand on the four points.⁶⁶ In 1913 her minutes record that "Synod heard with pleasure the Rev. E.H. Kohn on the assigned subject, 'The Evils of Unionism.'" It was requested that the paper be given over to the Lutheran Church Visitor for publication.⁶⁷

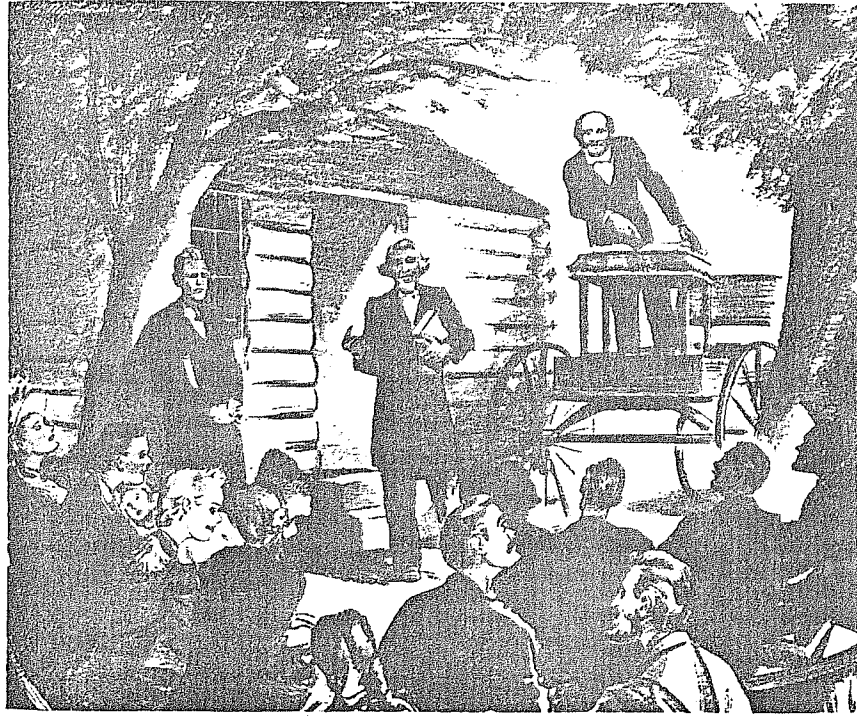
And then in 1914 a very interesting thing happened. At this convention the upcoming 400th anniversary of the Reformation was discussed and the desire expressed that it could be celebrated by consolidating the Tennessee Synod into her sister state-synods. Commissions were appointed to meet with N.C., Virginia, and S.C. But the interesting thing is that amid the hoopla, when it looks like Tennessee has capitulated completely to the other synods, the following resolutions appear:

Whereas, There is a misunderstanding among some of the pastors of the district synods as to the meaning of the resolution offered by Dr. L.G.M. Miller at Winston-Salem, N.C., in 1900; and
 WHEREAS, If there is to be hearty cooperation, frankness must mark conduct, life, and legislation - no mental reservation whatever; therefore, be it
 RESOLVED, 1. That this session of the United Synod be asked to give a clear, concise, and definite interpretation of resolution 3 offered by Dr. G.L.M. Miller, at Winston-Salem, in 1900.
 RESOLVED, 2. That the district synods be asked to spread upon their minutes for 1915 the original resolutions and

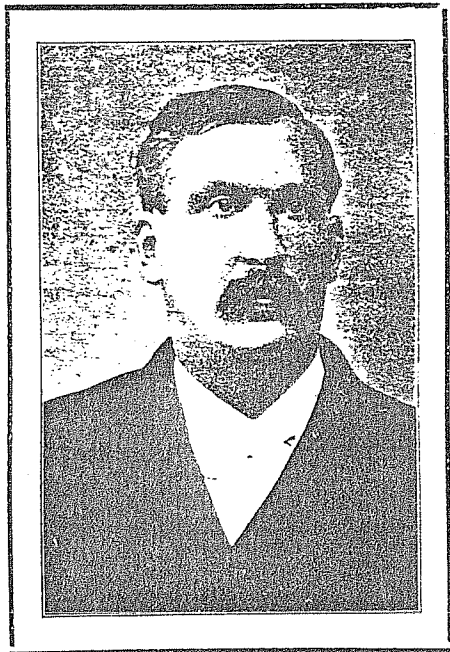
the interpretation.

RESOLVED, 3. That the President of the United Synod be instructed to call the attention of the pastors to this action.⁶⁸

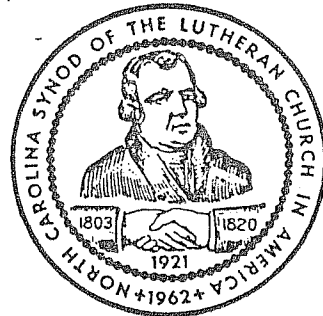
Tennessee was still playing the gadfly to the United Synod. Her sons were still willing to bear the reproach of "Old Tennessee" by bringing up again the terribly unpopular question of the four points. In 1914 the Winston-Salem resolutions appeared, though without the requested explanation and clarification, among the standing resolutions of the United Synod,⁶⁹ and there they stayed - to the best of my knowledge - until the United Synod passed out of existence in 1918. Tennessee continued as a distinct body until 1921 when she merged into the N.C. Synod. Still Tennessee did not disappear without a trace. She appears on the seal of the N.C. Synod of the L.C.A. as an arm with the date 1820 on the sleeve. If a person is willing to take a little trouble, he can discover that something awfully important began in American Lutheranism on that date, something needed in Christendom today.



Drawing of the Historic Service at Gravelton, Missouri. C. F. Walther, preaching. Jonathan Moser, translating into English, and Polycarp Henkel, pastor of Zion Church, standing beside "The Meeting House"



REV. ROBERT ANDERSON YODER, D. D.
Six years Principal of Conover High School.
Three years President of Concordia College.
Ten years President of Lenoir College.



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