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THE HISTORY AND USE OF THE GALESBURG RULE
IN AMERICAN LUTHERANISM

A Thesis Presented to the Faculty of
Concordia Seminary, Saint Louis,
Department of Historical Theology
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Sacred Theology

by

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INTRODUCTION

In October of 1529, at a colloquy of Lutheran and Swiss theologians held in Marburg, Martin Luther refused to extend the hand of Christian fellowship to Huldreich Zwingli when it became clear the latter did not believe Christ's true body and blood were really present in the Sacrament of the Altar. Luther did not do this light-heartedly. Rather, he believed he had to follow this course of action because nothing less was at stake than the Word of God, the Sacrament of Christ, and thereby the existence of the Church. For him, Christ's words: "This is my body given for you," had to be taken seriously and literally, for they conveyed nothing less than the full richness of the entire Gospel.¹ Christ's Real Presence in the Sacrament meant, for Luther, that the Incarnation was more than an historical fact of the past. It was a reality. It meant believers received the God who became man; the whole Christ in His divinity and humanity. It meant the reception of the very body and blood of the Lamb of God, given for us, and present with us. It meant the forgiveness of sins and, with it, life and sal-

¹For a comprehensive discussion and evaluation of Luther's contention for the Real Presence in the Sacrament of the Altar see: Hermann Sasse, This Is My Body, Rev. ed. (Adelaide, S. A.: Lutheran Publishing House, 1975).

vation. The person who denied Christ's Real Presence therefore also denied the benefits of the Sacrament and, in effect, denied the entire Gospel. Altar fellowship with such an individual was, for Luther and his followers, an impossibility.

Four hundred and fifty-eight years later it would seem many Lutherans believe all this has changed. With the merger, in 1988, of five and a half million American Lutherans into The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), any number of new altar fellowship practices also appear forthcoming. The officially sanctioned practice in the three synods which have agreed to form the ELCA, the Lutheran Church in America (LCA), the American Lutheran Church (ALC), and the Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches (AELC), of interim eucharistic sharing with the Episcopal Church is one of these new practices which runs contrary to the traditional Lutheran position of refraining from communing, and communing with, those who reject the Real Presence. More blatant, however, is the American Lutheran Church's 1986 decision to permit joint sharing of the Lord's Supper with the Presbyterian Church (U.S.).²

Practices such as the ones mentioned immediately above seem to indicate that in much of American Lutheranism the traditional altar fellowship boundaries have been removed,

²The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, "ALC, Presbyterian seems hold joint Eucharist," Reporter, October 13, 1986, p. 4.

and that the dominant practice of Lutherans not to celebrate the Eucharist with members of the Reformed Church has changed dramatically. Therefore, this study concentrates on American Lutheran fellowship practices in general, and on American Lutheranism's most generally accepted statement governing altar fellowship practices in particular, namely: The Galesburg Rule.

To be sure, when men like Henry Melchior Muhlenberg and William Christopher Berkenmeyer first planted Lutheranism on American soil during colonial times, they did so with the intention that American Lutheranism would conform to both traditional Lutheran doctrine and practice. Unfortunately, by the time these men arrived the religious customs and traditions of the new world were, for the most part, already entrenched. They would be colored by the influence of Lutheranism only in a very small measure. On the other hand, "the Reformed influence, particularly Calvinism, fashioned the ideals of the nation. The Lutheran Church, therefore, had come to a country that had been colored by Reformed life, literature, and culture."³ The effects this kind of environment had on traditional Lutheran doctrine and practice proved quite dramatic:

. . . with the acculturation and the passage of time, the influence of the American Enlightenment (strengthened by patriotic fervor) made deep inroads on the

³Paul W. Spaude, The Lutheran Church Under American Influence (Burlington, Iowa: The Lutheran Literary Board, 1943), p. 274.

faith of the founders, modifying the firm but practical concern for the historic Lutheran confessions which Muhlenberg and Berkenmeyer had established in Pennsylvania and New York.⁴

Thus, during the first half of the nineteenth century it seemed that Lutheran confessionalism would lose the few eager advocates it had on American soil. It certainly appeared that way when, in October of 1820, delegates from the Ministerium of Pennsylvania, the North Carolina Synod, the Ministerium of New York, and the Maryland-Virginia Synod met in constitutional convention to develop a central, federative body through which they could cooperate in doing the practical work of the Church. Their negotiations resulted in the formation of The Evangelical Lutheran General Synod in the United States of North America.⁵ Unfortunately, however, the synods in convention "could agree on no more than the Lutheran name to show their confessional consciousness, and they made no mention whatever of the historic standards of the faith."⁶ So it was that a decidedly non-confessional foundation was laid for the General Synod, and a very clear statement was made by Lutherans in America as to the importance of their Church's

⁴Sydney E. Ahlstrom, A Religious History of the American People, 2 vols. (Garden City, New York: Image Books, 1975), 1:623.

⁵For this constitution and a description of its adoption see: Richard C. Wolf, Documents of Lutheran Unity in America (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), pp. 65-72.

⁶Ahlstrom, 1:625.

traditional symbols and practices. Still, confessional Lutheranism had not disappeared completely from the face of the new world.

When the Lutheran Church was first planted on American soil, it almost immediately found itself locked in battle with the forces of unionism.⁷ For the most part, the pioneer Church in America failed to check the encroachments of this movement. However, "with the wave of European immigration, particularly from Saxony, Germany, which had inundated the American liberalism in the Lutheran Church, beginning with 1839, a confessional re-action against unionism had set in."⁸ Although found primarily in the western territories and states, this confessionalism soon flowed back towards the east. With the passing years, therefore, "two parties or tendencies became increasingly visible, one deeply affected by American evangelical ideas and practices, the other much more intransigently rooted in Continental ways and Reformation thought."⁹ It was not long, therefore, before the organization formed on the basis of the broadest confessional platform (the General Synod) was caught up in the throes of doctrinal conflict.

⁷"Unionism," as it shall be used in this work, means: The establishment and maintenance of church fellowship which ignores doctrinal differences or declares them a matter of indifference; the pretense of church union where none exists.

⁸Spaude, p. 329.

⁹Ahlstrom, 1:628.

The left wing of the General Synod viewed the conservative reaction mentioned above as a dangerous intrusion. The leaders of this party, therefore, decided to withstand the rising tide of confessional Lutheranism. Because they believed the historic faith was not suited to the American scene at all, they were sure any move back in that direction would have the tendency of depriving the Church already established in the U. S. of its spirituality and vigor. So it is that they proposed to the whole of the General Synod certain modifications of the traditional Lutheran positions in a program they identified as "American Lutheranism."¹⁰ The shape this "American Lutheranism" was to take was carefully laid out by the leader of the American Lutheran movement, Samuel Simon Schmucker. He published anonymously, in 1855, the Definite Platform, Doctrinal and Disciplinarian, for Evangelical Lutheran District Synods; Constructed in Accordance with the Principles of the General Synod.¹¹ This document was a highly polemical statement defending the deletions of certain "errors" said to be found in the historic Augsburg Confession, as well as in the other historic Lutheran symbols. Among other things, the Definite Platform charged the Unaltered Augsburg Confession erred as concerns

¹⁰"American Lutheranism" is described in greater detail in: Vergilius Ferm, The Crisis In American Lutheran Theology (New York: The Century Co., 1927), pp. 131-184.

¹¹The Definite Platform is printed in: Wolf, pp. 100-104.

the Real Presence of the body and blood of the Savior in the Eucharist.¹² By the time Schmucker had revised the Augustana he had a creed to which Protestants of all stripes, save confessional Lutherans, could subscribe. In essence, his efforts, had they proven successful, would have opened up Lutheran altars to every Christian denomination except the Roman Catholics.

The Definite Platform failed miserably in the General Synod. Eight of its constituent synods, including the Pennsylvania Ministerium and Schmucker's own synod of West Pennsylvania, rejected it completely. However, three synods adopted it while six others remained "noncommittal, equivocal or silent. Most of those who opposed it did so less on theological principle than because they wanted ecclesiastical peace or less dogmatism."¹³ Naturally, this meant many of the basic issues at stake between the "Confessional" and the "American" Lutherans within the General Synod remained unsettled. The more conservative forces renewed their efforts to move Lutheranism in America towards a more confessional position. Their undisputed leader, Charles Porterfield Krauth, became editor of a new periodical, the Lutheran and Missionary, which espoused

¹²Samuel Simon Schmucker's attitude concerning the Real Presence in the Lord's Supper may be found in: Samuel Simon Schmucker, The American Lutheran Church (Philadelphia: E. W. Miller, Ranstead Place, 1852), pp. 128-130, 152-153.

¹³Ahlstrom, 1:630.

traditional Lutheran confessional principles. When S. S. Schmucker resigned from the presidency of the theological seminary at Gettysburg in 1864, these same conservatives tried, unsuccessfully, to make Dr. Krauth his replacement. Still, the great events which would eventually divide the General Synod were yet to come.

In 1864, the General Synod experienced two events which proved divisive. First, the Frankean Synod, whose constitution did not acknowledge the Augsburg Confession, was admitted to membership in the General Synod. The Ministerium of Pennsylvania, among others, protested this action. Citing a condition this Ministerium had laid down when it joined the General Synod in 1853, requiring its delegates to protest and withdraw from a General Synod convention should the general body ever violate its constitution, the delegates from the Pennsylvania Ministerium walked out. Secondly, there existed a good deal of animosity between the Pennsylvania Ministerium and the General Synod because the General Synod's seminary at Gettysburg was not graduating enough German-speaking pastors to keep up with the Ministerium's needs. For this reason, the Pennsylvania Ministerium desired to found a theological institution where it could train its own pastors. Had Charles Porterfield Krauth been elected president of the Gettysburg school and the training of future ministers left in his hands, then perhaps all would have gone well. As it

turned out, Dr. J. A. Brown was selected. In 1864, therefore, the Ministerium of Pennsylvania established its own seminary in Philadelphia with Dr. Krauth as its president. Almost immediately the schools at Gettysburg and Philadelphia found themselves in competition.

Both these actions of 1864 were interpreted by the leadership of the General Synod to mean that the Ministerium of Pennsylvania had withdrawn permanently from the General Synod. For this reason the Ministerium's delegates were refused recognition when the general body again convened in 1866, and were subsequently "excluded from the organization of the body and the election of officers."¹⁴ After much debate it became clear the only way the Pennsylvania Ministerium would again be recognized by the General Synod was if it were to give up its self-proclaimed right to walk out of conventions in protest over the constitutionality of General Synod convention actions. Loath to do this, the Pennsylvania Ministerium instead withdrew, and at its 1866 convention declared its connection with the General Synod dissolved.¹⁵

By 1866, due to "the growing confessional trend within the Pennsylvania and New York Ministeriums and other synods over against the confessional and doctrinal laxism of the

¹⁴Wolf, p. 138.

¹⁵The Pennsylvania Ministerium's withdrawal from the General Synod is found in: Ibid., pp. 140-141.

leaders and the majority of the General Synod,"¹⁶ the Ministerium of Pennsylvania withdrew from the General Synod and subsequently took the lead in forming a new general organization which would be based on a "truly Lutheran" principle of union.¹⁷ It therefore issued a call for "all Evangelical Lutheran Synods, ministers and congregations in the United States and Canadas [sic], which confess the Unaltered Augsburg Confession . . . to unite with us in a Convention, for the purpose of forming a Union of Lutheran Synods."¹⁸

In response to this invitation, thirteen synods met in convention at Reading, Pennsylvania, December 12-14, 1866. Present were delegates from five synods which formerly belonged to the General Synod: the Ministerium of Pennsylvania, the Ministerium of New York, the Pittsburgh Synod, the Minnesota Synod, and the English Synod of Ohio. Other delegations represented the German Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Iowa, and Other States, the Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Synod of America, the German Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States, the German Evangelical Ministerium of Wisconsin, the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Michigan and Other States, the English

¹⁶F. Bente, American Lutheranism, 2 vols. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1919), 2:134.

¹⁷Wolf, p. 140.

¹⁸The Pennsylvania Ministerium's Invitation is in: *Ibid.*, p. 141.

District Synod of Ohio, and the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Canada. Represented by letter was The Scandinavian Evangelical Lutheran Augustana Synod in North America.¹⁹

The purpose of this convention was to find grounds upon which a new church union could be founded. Charles Porterfield Krauth, therefore, presented a set of theses he had drawn up entitled the Fundamental Principles of Faith and Church Polity, which, after much debate, were adopted by the representatives of the thirteen synods present.²⁰ These theses, which became the basis for the formation of the General Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in North America, placed the proposed body on stronger doctrinal and confessional ground than the General Synod.

Organizing a general church body grounded firmly on the Lutheran Confessions proved more difficult a task than many of the founders of the General Council first anticipated, however, and a number of synods that attended the Reading conference, the German-speaking synods in particular, never became members of the General Council. One of these, the Joint Synod of Ohio, postponed action on membership until the General Council had taken a stand on four questions, or points, namely: chiliasm, mixed communion, the exchange of pulpits with sectarians, and

¹⁹This list of synods is found in: John H. Tietjen, Which Way To Lutheran Unity? (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1966), p. 44.

²⁰These theses can be found in: Wolf, pp. 143-148.

secret or unchurchly societies.²¹ Because the General Council's 1868 reply to these four points was deemed "inadequate" by the Wisconsin Synod, it withdrew from the Council. Two years later the Minnesota and Illinois synods followed suit.

It was during the discussion of the pulpit and altar fellowship issue at the Lancaster, Ohio, convention in 1870 that the President of the General Council, Charles Porterfield Krauth, made a statement to the effect that Lutheran pulpits were for Lutheran pastors and Lutheran altars were for Lutheran communicants. The Iowa Synod, which had not joined the General Council but nevertheless availed itself of its right of debate, therefore asked at the Akron Convention of 1872 that the President put his clear, succinct statement into writing. Dr. Krauth accordingly submitted the following:

I. THE RULE IS: Lutheran pulpits are for Lutheran ministers only. Lutheran altars are for Lutheran communicants only.

II. The Exceptions to the rule belong to the sphere of privilege, not of right.

III. The determination of the exceptions is to be made in consonance with these principles, by the conscientious judgment of pastors, as the cases arise.²²

This Akron statement was the basic form of what came to be known as "The Galesburg Rule."

²¹The Ohio Synod's Desire for Clarification of the "Four Points" is found in: Ibid., pp. 155-156.

²²Krauth's "Rule" as Written at Akron, 1872 appears in: Ibid., p. 170.

However, a different constituent member of the General Council, the Augustana Synod, passed its own somewhat more comprehensive set of theses on mixed communion just three years after the formulation of the Akron statement.²³ This Synod put forth its own fellowship statement as an example it hoped the General Council might copy. Rather than do this, however, the Council, at its 1875 convention at Galesburg, Illinois, amplified its Akron statement to declare that the rule "accords with the word of God and with the confessions of our Church." The entire "Resolved" reads as follows:

Resolved, That the General Council expresses sincere gratification at the progress of a true Lutheran practice in the different Synods, since its action on communion and exchange of pulpits with those not of our Church, as well as at the clear testimony in reference to these subjects, officially expressed by the Augustana Synod, at its Convention in 1875; nevertheless we hereby renewedly call the attention of our pastors and churches to the principles involved in that testimony, in the earnest hope that our practice may be conformed to our united and deliberate testimony on this subject, viz., the rule, which accords with the Word of God and with the confessions of our Church, is "Lutheran Pulpits for Lutheran ministers only--Lutheran altars for Lutheran communicants only."²⁴

So it is that the statement which, for over 100 years, governed the altar and pulpit fellowship practice of much of American Lutheranism came into being. How The Galesburg Rule was accepted, and the extent to which it was used by

²³The Augustana Theses on Mixed Communion of 1875 are located in: Ibid., pp. 170-171.

²⁴The Galesburg Rule is found in: Ibid., p. 171.

the various branches of Lutheranism in the United States is the topic of this thesis. One of the questions we shall therefore be trying to answer is, "How did American Lutheranism move from the practice fostered by The Galesburg Rule in 1875 to interim-eucharistic sharing with Episcopalians and altar fellowship with Presbyterians in the mid-1980s?" This presentation therefore traces the history and use of The Galesburg Rule in the three major branches which currently exist in American Lutheranism to determine when, where, and how it was used by each. These branches are:

1. The individual synods and/or ministeriums which, over time, united and merged to form the Lutheran Church in America.

2. The individual synods and/or ministeriums which, over time, united and merged to form The American Lutheran Church.

3. The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod and, to some degree, those synods that made up, with Missouri, the Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America.

It should be noted that what follows is both a thematic and, to a certain extent, a chronological presentation. Both of these modes can be used legitimately at the same time since The Galesburg Rule a) originated in synods which, through numerous mergers, belong to the LCA, b) spread into, after some time, and was used by the synods

which today make up the ALC, and c) still is not employed in The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod.

It is not the aim of this presentation to consider all the ecumenical issues and endeavors these three branches involved themselves in during the years 1875 to the present. Rather, this discussion is limited to only those personalities, documents, and events which had a direct relationship to The Galesburg Rule and the kind of ecclesiastical practice it encouraged. In addition to the standard American Lutheran histories, the primary source materials employed are the official convention proceedings and reports of the various synods and ministeriums under consideration. Also utilized are sources of secondary importance, such as the writings of the theological and ecclesiastical leaders from the synods noted above, as well as other pertinent material gleaned from certain independent theological publications of a scholarly nature.

CHAPTER ONE

THE HISTORY AND USE OF THE GALESBURG RULE IN THE LUTHERAN CHURCH IN AMERICA AND ITS ANTECEDENT SYNODS

The General Council

The action of the General Council at Galesburg in 1875 by no means put the altar and pulpit fellowship issue behind it. Rather, a large amount of confusion ensued. It should be remembered that the Council's 1875 resolution included the statement: ". . . the rule, which accords with the Word of God and with the confessions of our Church, is 'Lutheran Pulpits for Lutheran ministers only--Lutheran altars for Lutheran communicants only.'" Thus, many of the General Council's constituent synods believed that the "exceptions" to the rule spoken of in the second and third paragraphs of the Akron declaration were abolished by the later Galesburg resolution. Others, along with the president of the General Council, Charles Porterfield Krauth, maintained that the Galesburg resolution was an amendment to paragraph one of the earlier declaration for the purpose of underscoring the source of the rule, and that paragraphs two and three,

dealing with exceptions, remained in effect.¹ This meant that The Galesburg Rule was the full Akron declaration plus the explanatory clause inserted in paragraph one. The result of all this was a long controversy within the General Council over the original intention of The Galesburg Rule, the meaning of some of the terms employed in it, and the internal consistency of its three paragraphs.

At the General Council's request Dr. Krauth formulated 105 theses on pulpit and altar fellowship in the hopes that they would once and for all settle what the Council meant by its Rule.² These theses were presented to the General Council and discussed at great length during its meetings in 1877, 1879, and 1881. According to Krauth, The Galesburg Rule was not to be applied in a legalistic manner. Rather, he maintained:

In the Galesburg Declaration, the word "Rule" is not used in the sense of "prescriptive regulation," but in the sense of "general principle," a principle of intrinsic validity and right. The Rule is meant to assert, not legislatively, what shall be done, but morally what ought to be held as true. It appeals to conscience, not to disciplinary authority. The whole affirmation, in common with all that preceded it on the same themes, was meant to be educational, not coercive, to prepare the mind of the Church for right action by the nurture of right convictions.³

¹S. E. Oschenford, Documentary History of the General Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in North America (Philadelphia: General Council Publication House, 1912), pp. 340-341.

²All of C. P. Krauth's 105 Theses are printed in: *Ibid.*, pp. 345-377.

³*Ibid.*, p. 345.

Although Krauth defended the principle of allowing exceptions to the Rule, he interpreted what were permissible exceptions in a manner more narrow than many within the Council liked. In Theses 14 - 17 he wrote:

14. Such exceptions, as regards the pulpit, may be defined negatively. They are not cases of "inter-denominational exchange of pulpit," or invitations for the sake of social or personal courtesy, or as a temporary convenience to a church unsupplied with a minister, or of a general opening of pulpits during the session of ecclesiastical bodies.

15. They may also be defined positively as cases of urgent and exceptional necessity, "which arise," as when witnesses for the truth confessed by our Church are raised up of God in another communion, and are silenced and proscribed because of their fidelity to conviction.

16. Exceptions, as regards, the Altar, may also be defined negatively. They are not cases reached by "general invitation" to the Altar, as of "all who love the Lord Jesus in sincerity;" or, "all who are in good standing in Evangelical Denominations," or "in sister churches," or on the ground that "we are all one." Such invitations, whether given publicly or privately, are not covered by a just application of the principle of exceptions.

17. Such exceptions may be defined positively, as cases of peculiar and exceptional necessity "which arise," such as are produced by times of pestilence, by imminent death, by close imprisonment, by extreme peril from persecution, from sanguinary and oppressive laws, or tyrannical governments, from real inability to make public confession, or from degrees of mental feebleness, or of invincible ignorance, which preclude a comprehension of more than the elements of doctrine. In most of such cases there is tacit consent to our faith, in none is there conscious opposition to it. What may be imperatively the Rule in normal cases, becomes impossible in exceptional ones. What the living, the strong, the able must do, the dying, the feeble, the incapable cannot do, and what is demanded of the one class cannot be demanded of the other.⁴

This narrower interpretation of the "exceptions" paragraphs in the Council's Rule was opposed by several

⁴Ibid., p. 348.

prominent clergymen within the General Council, including Joseph A. Seiss of Philadelphia and Gottlob F. Krotal of New York.⁵ Furthermore, it would seem that the views held by men like these who opposed Krauth's narrow understanding of the "exceptions" to The Galesburg Rule are the positions which eventually carried the day in the General Council, for what Henry Eyster Jacobs wrote years later on behalf of the entire Council indeed reveals the broad manner in which the "Rule" generally came to be regarded: "It [The Galesburg Rule] simply means that the Lutheran Church and no other communion is responsible for those who preach and commune in a Lutheran church."⁶ Thus, it would seem that the noted historian, Eugene L. Fevold, is quite right in his evaluation of the effect The Galesburg Rule had on the General Council:

. . . while the General Council's practice regarding pulpit and altar fellowship was tighter than that of the General Synod, there was internal disagreement regarding the issue, with the result that the Galesburg Rule was interpreted and applied strictly by some and flexibly by others. Uniformity could not be expected under such circumstances, particularly since the General Council's

⁵Adolph Spaeth, Charles Porterfield Krauth, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: General Council Publication House, 1909), 2: 206.

⁶Henry Eyster Jacobs, "The General Council" in The Distinctive Doctrines and Practices of the General Bodies of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the United States (Philadelphia: Lutheran Publication Society, 1893), p. 118.

approach was educational and persuasive rather than disciplinary.⁷

This lack of uniformity was evident in the way the General Council refused to take action when confronted with seemingly clear-cut cases of its Rule being broken. For example, in 1877, the Ministerium of New York set the following appeal before the General Council:

We herewith appeal against the practice in regard to the Galesburg Rule within Synods connected with the General Council, and in particular against the special violation of the Rule, which took place in several cases of pulpit fellowship at the last meeting of the Classis of the Reformed Church, at Reading, Pa., between members of the venerable Ministerium of Pennsylvania and members of the Reformed Classis. By instruction of our Synod, we respectfully request a declaration of this body [The General Council] whether such practice is approved.⁸

Again, in 1886, a similar request was made of the General Council by The Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Michigan.⁹ By this time, however, it became clear the General Council was not going to take any disciplinary action, for both the Ministerium of New York and the Michigan Synod received the same answer:

⁷Eugene L. Fevold, "Coming of Age," in The Lutherans in North America, ed. E. Clifford Nelson (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), p. 312.

⁸The General Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in North America, Minutes of the Eleventh Convention of the General Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in North America (Pittsburgh: Bakewell & Marthens, 1877), p. 23.

⁹The General Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in North America, Minutes of the Nineteenth Convention of the General Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in North America (Pittsburgh: Bakewell & Marthens, 1886), p. 65.

Resolved, That while it is the duty of the General Council "to guard the purity of the faith and right administration of the Sacraments" and while it is in accordance with its Confessional principles laid down in the Galesburg Declaration to disapprove and repudiate all practices endangering the purity of the Lutheran Church doctrines and life, nevertheless the Council cannot pass its judgment upon any particular case that may be brought before it, unless such case is specifically defined in the appeal and clearly comes within the compass of the Council's Constitution . . .¹⁰

The discussion concerning altar and pulpit fellowship continued in the General Council into the late 1800s but with less intensity than earlier, and in 1889 the Council made its last pronouncement regarding The Galesburg Rule. It clearly proclaimed once and for all that the Rule consisted of both the original Akron statement of 1872, including the two "exceptions" paragraphs, and the amendment made at Galesburg in 1875.¹¹ This ruling, which ended the fellowship controversy in the General Council, "meant that the council was satisfied to approve the discriminate practice of fellowship without insisting on uniformity of practice."¹²

This is the peculiar thing about the General Council. On the one hand it insisted that its constituent synods unconditionally confess the unaltered Augsburg Confession

¹⁰The General Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in North America, Minutes of the Eleventh Convention of the General Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in North America (Pittsburgh: Bakewell & Marthens, 1877), p. 24.

¹¹Oschenford, pp. 218-220.

¹²Fevold, p. 313.

and all the doctrines contained therein. A majority of its members also came to the conviction that Lutheran witness to the truth of its doctrines must in principle exclude non-Lutherans from Lutheran pulpits and altars. This is why The Galesburg Rule had become a part of its corpus doctrinae. In the end, however, and especially after Dr. Krauth's death in 1883, it became apparent that the General Council was more interested in correct doctrine than in correct actions.

The General Synod

When the constitution of the General Synod was drawn up in 1820, it made clear that this general body was being formed for practical, and not doctrinal reasons.¹³ Nowhere in this constitution was there even a suggestion of a doctrinal basis. Apparently, it was simply assumed the synods which made up the General Synod would bear the Lutheran name and stand in the Lutheran tradition. The General Synod, therefore, was an organization which hoped to further Lutheran and Christian unity on the basis of what John H. Tietjen calls "inclusive confederation." In other words, it tried to be "the framework of uniting all church bodies that stood in the Lutheran tradition, regardless of differences in theology or practice," and required only a "limited avowal of the Lutheran Confessions and was interested in only as

¹³Milton J. Valentine, "The General Synod" in The Distinctive Doctrines and Practices of the General Bodies of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the United States (Philadelphia: Lutheran Publication Society, 1893), p. 38.

much unity in faith as union would allow."¹⁴ Thus, it stands to reason that because the General Synod neither possessed nor desired to possess a strong and distinctly Lutheran confessional statement to govern its doctrine and practice, it would have little, if anything good to say about declarations which limited fellowship practices as did The Galesburg Rule.

Indeed, as early as 1868, only two years after the Pennsylvania Ministerium broke ranks with the General Synod to take the lead in forming the General Council, the General Synod made clear what it thought about brands of Lutheranism more conservative than its own:

That but three entire Synods, and parts of three others, have thus seceded from us, and been led into the narrow and intolerant particularity of Lutheranism now attempted to be combined in this country, in opposition to the true spirit and life of our Church, must be looked upon as one important fact of strength, in a proper estimate of the state of the Church here represented. As the withdrawing portions were, probably, never cordially and fully with us, gladly as the Church would have retained their co-operation, their separation can hardly be considered as a diminution of our power and working efficiency.¹⁵

Furthermore, beside showing little or no remorse over the split, the General Synod also made it clear what its attitude towards altar and pulpit fellowship was, and would continue

¹⁴John H. Tietjen, Which Way To Lutheran Unity? (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1966), p. 10.

¹⁵General Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the United States of America, Proceedings of the Twenty-Third Convention of the General Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the United States of America (Philadelphia: The Lutheran Publication Society, 1868), p. 46.

to be in a series of resolutions on Christian unity offered, discussed, and adopted as here presented:

WHEREAS, Certain bodies, bearing the Lutheran name, oppose the various efforts now being made to form a more intimate visible union of all the followers of Christ, refuse to commune even with those who differ from them only in non-fundamentals, and exclude from their pulpits the ministers of all other denominations

RESOLVED, that in accordance with these principles, and true to our past history, we will continue to cherish towards all Evangelical pastors and churches the spirit of Christian affection and fellowship; will welcome to the Lord's table all who are the sincere followers of Jesus Christ, in good standing in their respective churches; will heartily co-operate with the American Bible and Tract Societies, the American Sunday School Union, and Young Men's Christian Association, and all similar organizations, to promote the spread of the Gospel and the edification of the Church of Christ.

RESOLVED, That the fundamental doctrines of Scripture, which Jesus and his Apostles made the condition of fellowship, which Luther and his co-laborers restored to their purity, and which form the basis of this General Synod, are the necessary condition for the visible organic unity of all Christians, being broad enough for all the true followers of Christ.¹⁶

The basis of the argument voiced immediately above, which justified sharing pulpits and altars with other Protestant Church bodies, rested on the fact that these same non-Lutherans were a part of the Universal Church. Because they, like Lutherans, also held to the "fundamental doctrines of Scripture," there was nothing to stop them from enjoying the fellowship of altar and pulpit with Lutherans. This turned out to be one of the major points in the General Synod's case against the "intolerant" position of the General Council.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 58.

The first in-depth discussion published by the General Synod as part of its immediate reaction to the Galesburg declaration was an anonymously authored critique of both the "Rule" and the 105 Theses Dr. Charles Porterfield Krauth had written in its defense.¹⁷ This critical reaction to the General Council's position on altar and pulpit fellowship consisted of a two-pronged attack. In the first place, the General Synod's critique again took up and used the old, familiar position, which held altar and pulpit fellowship with non-Lutherans to be justifiable on the grounds that all Protestants were part of the one holy, Christian, and Apostolic Church. The fundamental error with Galesburg, as far as the General Synod was concerned, was its denial to other communions "the right to be regarded as true Churches of Jesus Christ; or that others may have the same right to claim Christ as their Head and Lord as the Lutheran Church has."¹⁸ "Christ and His Church are too catholic in spirit for such narrow and sectarian views."¹⁹

In the second place, the General Synod attacked the exclusivism it believed was inherent in the 105 Theses and

¹⁷"Theses on the Galesburg Declaration on Pulpit and Altar Fellowship Prepared by Order of the General Council, by Charles P. Krauth, President of the General Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of North America. Philadelphia, August 28th, 1877. pp. 32." The Lutheran Quarterly 7 (October 1877):595-613.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 604.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 607.

The Galesburg Rule. "These Theses," it argued, "furnish a plea for the intensest sectarianism. Whilst arguing against sects, and even challenging the right of other denominations to exist at all, the narrowest sectarianism is endorsed and advocated."²⁰ The differing views held by Protestants regarding the Lord's Supper, the Synod continued, existed in the early Church without any serious strife or attempt at separate communions.²¹ Therefore, how could Lutherans of the nineteenth century claim to be the only Protestant Church which has pure creeds and pure teachings? How could they refuse fellowship to other Christians on the basis of these creeds? "We believe," said the General Synod, "in an infallible Bible, and an infallible Saviour, but an infallible Creed, and an infallible Church, we do not believe in, whether the pretense is set in the General Council or by Rome."²²

Because it was not yet of a mind to make an unconditional subscription to the Lutheran Symbols, the General Synod was unable to reach the same conclusions made by Dr. Krauth in both the "Rule" and in his 105 Theses. Instead, it preferred to believe he had fallen into the error of solemn trifling, and therefore concluded that his Council's particular teaching on altar and pulpit fellowship was

²⁰Ibid., p. 608.

²¹Ibid., p. 612.

²²Ibid., p. 606.

"simply a matter of inference with some, and this inference so uncertain, that it has been in the past, and may be in the future, subject to a mere minority and majority vote, and may at any time be found 'in minority.' So much for the 'divine Rule.'"²³ Thus, "because of the essential oneness of believers in the one divine Head of the Church," the official practice of the General Synod was to maintain fraternal correspondence, or interchange of courtesies by delegates with all manner of protestant denominations, and to enact "no restrictive law against fellowship in pulpit or at altar. . ." ²⁴

After the initial bad feelings had passed which the General Synod experienced over the splitting of its ranks in 1866, it gradually began to cooperate with both the General Council and The United Synod of the South. (This latter synod had seceded from the General Synod during the Civil War.) Together these three bodies worked to produce a common liturgy and a common hymnal. During all this, however, the stronger confessional character of the General Council and the United Synod had a positive influence on the General Synod. In 1913 it amended its own constitution to include, as did the constitutions of the General Council and the United Synod of the South, direct statements of its position not only on the Scriptures and the Unaltered Augsburg Confes-

²³Ibid., p. 600.

²⁴Valentine, pp. 59-60.

sion, but on the other historic symbols of the Lutheran Church as well. Confessionally, all three synods virtually became of the same mind. Still, the General Synod made it quite clear it would have nothing to do with declarations, such as The Galesburg Rule, which in any way restricted altar and pulpit fellowship. In June of 1909 a special committee of the General Synod ruled:

The third item of this memorial placed in our hands cites an action of the Wartburg Synod which would exclude other than Lutheran ministers from its pulpits and other than Lutherans from participation in the Holy Communion at its altars. We do not recall any action that the General Synod as a body has ever taken on this subject, and inasmuch as we learn that the rule involved in this action is not interpreted as an "iron-clad" rule, and that it leaves the matter in the last analysis to the judgment of individual pastors, we deem no further action advisable than to call attention to these facts.²⁵

Despite its stronger stand on the Lutheran Confessions, then, the General Synod never departed from the position it always held in regard to The Galesburg Rule. This position, succinctly stated again as late as 1914 by the General Synod's president, J. A. Singmaster, vividly portrayed a synodical body which was unwilling to live out its confession in its practical life.²⁶ In this respect the General Synod

²⁵General Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the United States of America, Proceedings of the Forty-Fourth Convention of the General Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the United States of America (Philadelphia: The Lutheran Publication Society, 1909), p. 127.

²⁶J. A. Singmaster, "The General Synod" in The Distinctive Doctrines and Practices of the General Bodies of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the United States. 4th ed. (Philadelphia: Lutheran Publication Society, 1914), pp. 64-65. President Singmaster stated: "The Questions

came to mirror, quite closely, the practice of the General Council. Both bodies had strong confessional statements in their constitutions. Neither of them, however, consistently practiced what they preached. The only difference between them is that the General Synod never had anything resembling The Galesburg Rule in its corpus doctrinae.

The United Synod in the South

The United Synod in the South was a church body made up of three different groups. In the first place it consisted of certain synods which at one time belonged to the General Synod. These were separated from it during the Civil War, and at the war's conclusion found the church body they were formerly associated with divided between the General Council and the General Synod. Secondly, the United Synod embraced synods which had been formed since the above mentioned separation. Finally, the United Synod comprised within its ranks various synods which had never been in the

of pulpit and altar fellowship are also left to the decision of the individual pastor and congregation, or to the determination of the district Synod. As a fact, such fellowship is generally recognized as right in principle, while in practice it is by no means common. The exchange of pulpits and the invitation of non-Lutheran Christians to the Lord's table could be abandoned entirely without seriously affecting our customs or our faith, were it not that such a course would be regarded as an evidence of exclusiveness, and would be interpreted as a breach of fellowship with the Church Universal."

General Synod and even had, from the first, maintained an opposition to it.²⁷

Even in the days before its official inception, both a majority of the individual antecedent synods which united to form the United Synod in 1884, as well as the fully developed United Synod itself, included strong confessional statements in their constitutions. They therefore assumed a doctrinal position which was not reached by the original General Synod until 1913. For this reason it might be expected the United Synod's views concerning altar and pulpit fellowship would also differ from those held by her northern neighbor, the General Synod. And indeed, some of the literature produced by the United Synod's most prominent leaders implied this was the case. For example, in July of 1889 the President of the United Synod, Rev. E. T. Horn, listed a number of convictions, grounded on the Word of God, that the Christian Church had to keep in mind in regard to altar fellowship. President Horn stated:

1. In admitting to the Holy Supper the Church deals with separate communicants, and not with bodies of men, nor with persons as representative of certain bodies.
2. As stewards of the mysteries of God we are not to use the Holy Sacraments as signs of courtesy and kindly feeling; but agreeable to their institution, i. e. primarily, in the use of the Holy Supper, as an application of the forgiveness of sin.
3. The Church is responsible for the proper use of

²⁷E. T. Horn, "The United Synod in the South" in The Distinctive Doctrines and Practices of the General Bodies of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the United States (Philadelphia: Lutheran Publication Society, 1893), p. 168.

the absolution offered and applied in the administration of the Holy Supper. And,

4. She cannot be unmindful of the peril of those, to whom, through the lack of her instruction, the Holy Supper may bring condemnation.²⁸

Although convictions such as these indicated sympathy for an ecclesiastical practice the likes of which The Galesburg Rule encouraged, it must be noted the United Synod was neither ready nor willing to follow such a course.

At the United Synod's 1887 convention a proposed by-law was introduced which stated, among other things, that United Synod pastors would neither foster nor encourage inter-communion or altar-fellowship with non-Lutherans.²⁹ Over the years the introduction of this question caused much unrest within the United Synod. Some of its constituent members stood in favor of adopting the by-law. Others interpreted it as a maneuver to commit the United Synod to what is called "'Close Communion' and complete separation from all other Christian people. . ."³⁰ Because all the questions involved in the altar-fellowship issue were never fully discussed by the United Synod, it found itself unprepared to set forth a final answer. Thus, at its Knoxville convention in 1892 it declared its inability to express a unanimous judgment on these regulations. The

²⁸E. T. Horn, "The Terms of Communion in a Christian Church." The Lutheran Quarterly 19 (July 1889):469.

²⁹This by-law is reprinted in: Horn, "The United Synod in the South," p. 191.

³⁰Ibid.

purport of this action was to leave the question undecided, and to recognize the difference of opinion which existed. Therefore, it may be said that when the United Synod was confronted with a Galesburg Rule equivalent, it decided not to decide. Indeed, it was this very kind of indifference to the whole altar and pulpit fellowship issue that marked the United Synod's official attitude throughout the rest of its history.³¹

The United Lutheran Church in America

In 1918 the General Synod, the General Council, and the United Synod in the South merged to form The United Lutheran Church in America (ULCA).³² According to its constitution, the ULCA's doctrinal basis was the inspired Word of God as

³¹A good example of this "indifference" is found in: A. G. Voigt, "The United Synod in the South" in The Distinctive Doctrines and Practices of the General Bodies of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the United States. 4th ed. (Philadelphia: Lutheran Publication Society, 1914), pp. 187-188. Professor Voigt said: "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."

³²Also commonly called "The United Lutheran Church."

the only infallible rule and standard of faith and practice, the three ecumenical creeds, the Unaltered Augsburg Confession as a correct exhibition of the faith and doctrine of the Lutheran Church, and the other confessions as further elaborations of that same pure Scriptural faith.³³ This constitution made no statement on church fellowship. Nothing which even remotely resembled The Galesburg Rule was included within its paragraphs. This does not mean, however, that the ULCA never gave detailed expression to its fellowship principles. On the contrary, this church body consistently showed, through its official declarations and resolutions, that it believed no barrier to fellowship and merger existed between Lutheran synods that accepted the Word of God as the inspired and infallible rule of faith and the Augsburg Confession as the correct interpretation of the doctrines under dispute at the time of the Reformation.

This is the fellowship principle the ULCA first set down at its second biennial convention in 1920. In what came to be known as its "Washington Declaration," this church body said it recognized "no doctrinal reasons against complete co-operation and organic union" with all church bodies calling themselves Evangelical Lutheran and sub-

³³Richard C. Wolf, Documents of Lutheran Unity in America (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), pp. 272-280.

scribing to the historic Lutheran Confessions.³⁴ Despite its broad openness to all Lutherans, however, the ULCA was not as charitable towards other Christian denominations. With regard to these non-Lutherans, it believed "a clear definition of what is meant by 'Gospel' and 'Sacrament' must precede any organic union of the Churches."³⁵ Thus the ULCA maintained that until greater unity of confession was reached, it was "bound in duty and in conscience to maintain its separate identity as a witness to the truth which it knows; and its members, its ministers, its pulpits, its fonts and its altars must testify only to that truth."³⁶ In other words, the United Lutheran Church in America, from its very beginning, saw no doctrinal barriers whatsoever standing between Lutherans which would prevent them from enjoying full altar and pulpit fellowship with each other. Furthermore, it maintained that all other practical co-operative endeavors which might be carried out with non-Lutherans were possible only if nine criteria fundamental to the Christian message were met.³⁷

³⁴The United Lutheran Church in America, Minutes of the Second Biennial Convention of The United Lutheran Church in America (Philadelphia: The United Lutheran Publication House, 1920), p. 96.

³⁵Ibid., p. 97

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷These nine principles are found in: Ibid., pp. 97-98. Interestingly enough, in the fourth of these nine criteria the ULCA stated: "In common with the whole Evangelical Lutheran Church, we confess the mystery of the

The manner in which the United Lutheran Church employed its fellowship principle can best be demonstrated through an examination of some of the dealings this church body had with the American Lutheran Church (ALC).³⁸ In 1932 this church body was meeting in convention at about the same time as was the ULCA. Hence, the United Lutheran Church sent greetings to the American Lutheran Church acknowledging that both bodies subscribed to the same confessions.³⁹ In return, the American Lutheran Church sent its greetings back to the ULCA in which it also praised the confessional subscription of both bodies and prayed for the day of union under God through the Confessions.⁴⁰ These mutual niceties eventually set off a flurry of activity within the constituent synods of the ULCA.

Real Presence in the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, and we invite all Christians to a renewed study of the teaching of the Holy Scriptures concerning this Sacrament, and the Sacrament of Holy Baptism." Here we see that despite its readiness to share altars and pulpits with each and every Lutheran church body, the ULCA was, at the very least, still cognitive of the one specific doctrine (The Real Presence) that has always set Lutherans apart from the other protestant denominations.

³⁸The American Lutheran Church referred to here came into being in 1930 through the merger of three German-speaking synods. They were: the Joint Synod of Ohio, the Iowa Synod, and the Buffalo Synod.

³⁹The United Lutheran Church in America, Minutes of the Eighth Biennial Convention of The United Lutheran Church in America (Philadelphia: The United Lutheran Publication House, 1932), p. 170.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 542.

At its Ninth Biennial convention in 1934 no fewer than seven of these constituent synods presented memorials to the ULCA requesting it begin to negotiate a union with the American Lutheran Church and the synods it (the ALC) was already in fellowship with in The American Lutheran Conference.⁴¹ In response to these memorials the ULCA convention adopted a number of statements which became known as the "Savannah Resolutions." Among other things, these resolutions described in greater detail the conditions the ULCA believed were necessary for church fellowship and church union to exist. The United Lutheran Church stated, in part:

We recognize as Evangelical Lutheran all Christian groups which accept the Holy Scriptures as the only rule and standard for faith and life, by which all doctrines are to be judged, and who sincerely receive the historic confessions of the Lutheran Church (especially the unaltered Augsburg Confession and Luther's Small Catechism) "as a witness of the truth and a presentation of the correct understanding of our predecessors". . . and we set up no other standards or tests of Lutheranism apart from them or alongside of them.

We believe that these confessions are to be interpreted in their historical context, not as a law or as a system of theology, but as "a witness and declaration of faith as to how the Holy Scriptures were understood and explained on the matters in controversy within the Church of God by those who then lived. . . ."

Inasmuch as our now separated Lutheran Church bodies all subscribe these same confessions, it is our sincere belief that we already possess a firm basis in which to unite in one Lutheran Church in America and that there is no doctrinal reason why such a union should not come to pass. . . .

We direct the President of the United Lutheran Church to bring these resolutions to the official attention of

⁴¹The American Lutheran Conference, founded in 1930, consisted of the American Lutheran Church, the Augustana Synod, the United Danish Lutheran Church, the Lutheran Free Church, and the Norwegian Lutheran Church.

the other Lutheran Church bodies in America and invite them to confer with us with a view to the establishment of closer relationships between them and ourselves. .
 .⁴²

Thus, a special commission was established to discuss the possibility of church union with whichever Lutheran bodies accepted the above invitation.

The "Savannah Resolutions" made it quite clear the United Lutheran Church in America was interested in church union based solely on confessional subscription. The American Lutheran Church, however, only wanted to discuss the possibility of altar and pulpit fellowship. This presented a problem because the United Lutheran Church already granted "full and free pulpit and altar fellowship to the members of the American Lutheran Church."⁴³ The presuppositions each of these church bodies had regarding altar and pulpit fellowship were at odds. The negotiations that eventually did take place might not have, had not the ULCA accommodated the American Lutheran Church at this point by admitting it was "self evident" that anything which prevented pulpit and altar fellowship also prevented church union.⁴⁴ Thus, the

⁴²The United Lutheran Church in America, Minutes of the Ninth Biennial Convention of The United Lutheran Church in America (Philadelphia: The United Lutheran Publication House, 1934), p. 416.

⁴³The United Lutheran Church in America, Minutes of the Tenth Biennial Convention of The United Lutheran Church in America (Philadelphia: The United Lutheran Publication House, 1936), p. 400.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 401.

ULCA's convention of 1936 heard how its commissioners discussed only those obstacles which prevented altar and pulpit fellowship with the American Lutheran Church.

The issues the American Lutheran Church raised regarding church fellowship with the ULCA included the problem of the lodge, unionism, and the doctrine of inspiration. As to the second of these, the two commissions adopted a statement which had to it the ring of The Galesburg Rule. It stated:

That Pastors and Congregations shall not practice indiscriminate pulpit and altar fellowship with Pastors and churches of other denominations, whereby doctrinal differences are ignored or virtually made matters of indifference. Especially shall no religious fellowship whatsoever be practiced with such individuals and groups as are not basically evangelical.⁴⁵

The wording of this statement, much like that of the original Akron-Galesburg Rule which preceded it, also did not condemn any "exceptions" which might arise in its implementation. It would seem no non-evangelical groups, however, could even be considered as "exceptions."

Was The United Lutheran Church in America here making a bold new statement regarding its ecclesiastical practice? Apparently not. Even though this rather direct pronouncement, which later came to be called the "Pittsburgh Agreement," seemed to regulate more carefully the altars and pulpits of the ULCA, it did not, in the end, change this body's original principle of fellowship. When it was presented to the entire

⁴⁵Ibid.

general body for adoption in 1940, the convention did so only after it declared the Pittsburgh Agreement's articles were "not contrary to or contradictory of the positions set forth in the Washington Declaration of 1920, the Savannah Resolutions of 1934, or the Baltimore Declaration of 1938."⁴⁶ In other words, the convention once again said that the only thing necessary for the establishment of altar and pulpit fellowship between church bodies was a common confessional subscription to the Augsburg Confession. Thus it could declare: "The United Lutheran Church in America has not recognized heretofore, and does not recognize now, any obstacle to the establishment of pulpit and altar fellowship or even to organic union with the American Lutheran Church."⁴⁷

The long awaited merger with the American Lutheran Church failed to materialize. The ALC proceeded cautiously in its dealings with the ULCA. Those within the United Lutheran Church charged with the task of inter-Lutheran relations grew impatient. In its 1944 report to the fourteenth biennial convention of The United Lutheran Church in America, the Special Commission On Relations To American Lutheran Church Bodies reported on a set of theses proposed by The American Lutheran Conference designed to establish a

⁴⁶The United Lutheran Church in America, Minutes of the Twelfth Biennial Convention of The United Lutheran Church in America (Philadelphia: The United Lutheran Publication House, 1940), p. 265.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 278.

minimal basis for altar and pulpit fellowship. These Theses, the commissioners stated, were "built around the old Chicago Theses and Minneapolis Theses," and were deemed "neither forward-looking, fruitful, nor necessary as an approach to our common problem."⁴⁸ Instead of dealing with the American Lutheran Conference's document, then, the commission recommended that the convention reiterate the position the ULCA had taken in its Savannah Resolutions which favored union on the basis of common subscription to the Augsburg Confession in addition to which no test of Lutheranism should be imposed or submitted to. It also urged the ULCA not only continue to regard itself in full fellowship with all other Lutheran Church bodies in America which accepted the established Confessions, but also persist in inviting declarations to the same effect on the part of all those bodies which had not already made such declarations.⁴⁹ Once again the United Lutheran Church in America showed its great unwillingness to narrow in any way, shape, or form, the platform it always believed was adequate for pulpit and altar fellowship.

⁴⁸The United Lutheran Church in America, Minutes of the Fourteenth Biennial Convention of The United Lutheran Church in America (Philadelphia: The United Lutheran Publication House, 1944), p. 241. The "Minneapolis Theses," which included the designation of The Galesburg Rule (only part one, however) as regulative of relations with non-Lutherans, served as the doctrinal basis of the American Lutheran Conference.

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 241-242.

Such a broad platform, however, also had its pitfalls. The United Lutheran Church in America believed a common confessional subscription to the Scriptures and the Augustana was all two church bodies needed to be in fellowship with each other. This much agreement in doctrine, and no more, was its only prerequisite for establishing altar and pulpit fellowship with other church bodies. Throughout its history, therefore, the ULCA said little about what it believed was correct Lutheran ecclesiastical practice regarding altar and pulpit fellowship. For this reason it often found itself in the embarrassing position of being a Lutheran Church that had pastors and congregations which behaved in very non-traditional ways. This was certainly the case when the ULCA's Committee on Interdenominational Relationships reported the following in 1949:

It is deeply disturbing to learn that about one-third of the local [church] councils reported on admit non-evangelicals. A way must be found to sensitize the consciences of our pastors at this point and to encourage them to help their local councils of churches become councils of evangelical churches or to let their congregations' refusal to join stand as a protest against loose affiliation of evangelicals with non-evangelicals.

. . .
The admitted participation of some 62 of our congregations in interdenominational communion services while serious enough perecentagewise, is an evidence that we have an important educational task before us. Surely the pastors and councilmen who are directly responsible do not fully appreciate the significance of our Church's doctrine of the Lord's Supper if they reduce

it to a service promoting interdenominational good will, or the sentimental sign of fellowship.⁵⁰

Like the General Council, the General Synod, and the United Synod in the South before it, the United Lutheran Church in America was unwilling to regulate, in any legislative or disciplinary way, the practice of its members. It is not surprising, therefore, that a plethora of practices existed within its constituent synods.

Much to its credit, however, the United Lutheran Church did take some measures to insure that its pulpits and altars might continue to be pure witnesses to the truth of the Gospel. Printed in the minutes of its nineteenth biennial convention was a "Guide to principles governing local interdenominational relationships of U.L.C.A. congregations, their auxiliaries and ministers."⁵¹ For the most part this "Guide" was a compilation of excerpts taken from past Executive Board statements and presidential reports. Some of the more important principles and applications it commended included the following:

The United Lutheran Church cannot authorize any relationships on the part of Synods, Boards, pastors, congregations or societies which would compromise loyalty to its confessional position or imply any abatement of

⁵⁰The United Lutheran Church in America, Minutes of the Seventeenth Biennial Convention of The United Lutheran Church in America (Philadelphia: The United Lutheran Publication House, 1950), p. 493.

⁵¹The United Lutheran Church in America, Minutes of the Nineteenth Biennial Convention of The United Lutheran Church in America (Philadelphia: The United Lutheran Publication House, 1954), pp. 498-504.

its jealous guardianship of the faith. The Executive Board believes that to co-operate in good faith with others in any organization which purposely works with eyes closed to confessional differences, would necessarily involve in practice that which would amount to "the surrender of our interpretation of the Gospel, the denial of conviction, or the suppression of our testimony to what we hold to be true. . . ."

Care is always to be exercised that such co-operation does not involve denial of conviction, or the suppression of our testimony to what we hold to be truth. Typical activities which would imply such 'denial of conviction' include. . . .interdenominational or 'non-denominational' services at which the Sacrament of the Altar is administered. . . .

Interdenominational services in which the Sacrament of Holy Communion is included and even 'featured,' whether they occur on Holy Thursday, at Easter sunrise, on 'World-Wide Communion Sunday,' or at any other time in the year, clearly deny Lutheran conviction and suppress our testimony to what we hold to be the truth. . . .⁵²

Although this "Guide" contained strong recommendations designed to encourage correct practice, it was, in the end, merely a "guide" filled with "recommendations." It had no binding authority upon the pastors and congregations of the United Lutheran Church. The ULCA's doctrinal basis for practicing church fellowship remained the same as before.

In 1940, the United Lutheran Church in America adopted a statement regarding corporate communion. This statement said, in part, that the ULCA believed its teaching on the Sacraments was invalidated when its practices became loose. It also said: "A local congregation cannot authorize communion services for groups not under its pastoral jurisdiction. The church-at-large, as the congregation of congregations, cannot authorize communion services for groups

⁵²Ibid., pp. 499-502.

which are not in accord with its confessional standard."⁵³ This statement is probably as close to The Galesburg Rule as the ULCA ever got in that it limited Lutheran altars to people who were under the direct pastoral care of Lutheran ministers. It also showed this church body's unwillingness to commune those not in accord with the Lutheran Church's confessional standards. Unfortunately, however, this "pronouncement" on corporate communion was rescinded by the ULCA in 1960.

At the twenty-second convention of the United Lutheran Church in America, the Commission on the Sacrament of the Altar and its Implications recommended its report replace the 1940 "pronouncement." This report, as it was adopted by the convention stated:

The time is ripe for Lutherans to initiate theological discussion with other Church bodies regarding intercommunion.

No blanket judgment should be expressed in the meantime about the celebration of the sacrament in interdenominational assemblies. . . .

The celebration of the Lord's Supper in the context of the community of faith indicates that strictly speaking there is no such thing as an "open" communion. The sacrament must not be distributed indiscriminately. The Order for Public Confession helpfully indicates the nature of the obedience which the sacrament itself carries with it. . . .

Therefore, the sacrament is open only to those who respond in faith and in willing, thankful obedience to the gospel. . . ."⁵⁴

⁵³The United Lutheran Church in America, Minutes of the Twenty-second Biennial Convention of The United Lutheran Church in America (Philadelphia: The United Lutheran Publication House, 1960), pp. 933-934.

⁵⁴Ibid., pp. 931, 1066.

Absent from the adopted version of these communion practice guidelines was any mention of the Real Presence of Christ's body and blood in the Sacrament of the Altar. As noted above, this doctrine is one of the major issues which has historically kept Lutherans from welcoming members of the Reformed Church at their altars. However, when the ULCA was confronted with the opportunity to amend the above report by removing the word "indiscriminately" and adding the words "but only to those who discern the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ under the bread and wine, and who believe the words 'given and shed for you for the remission of sins,'" the motion was defeated.⁵⁵ Thus the ULCA practically said the historic Lutheran position no longer applied in its circles.

The consistency with which the United Lutheran Church in America followed its principles regarding unity and church fellowship presents an uncomplicated picture. Despite declarations like the "Pittsburgh Agreement" and the 1940 "pronouncement" on Corporate Communion, the ULCA continually maintained that simple agreement in the Scriptures and the Augsburg Confession was sufficient for union of organization, church fellowship, and full spiritual cooperation. On the basis of this single principle the ULCA sought to unite all Lutheran bodies in North America. This does not mean, however, that as a church body it was open to all sorts of

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 1066.

sweeping proposals for interdenominational church fellowship. On the contrary, throughout most of its history the United Lutheran Church in America tended to be rather protective of its altars and pulpits in this regard. By the early 1960s, however, it is evident a change was taking place, for by this time the ULCA was clearly considering interdenominational celebrations of the Lord's Supper. At the very least, it became a church body which pronounced no "blanket judgment" on such celebrations. Thus we see in the history of the United Lutheran Church in America not only an absence of The Galesburg Rule and an aggressive application of the kind of ecclesiastical practice it encouraged, but also, during its twilight years, a greater openness to the idea of allowing joint communion services with other non-Lutheran protestants.

The Augustana Evangelical Lutheran Church

The Augustana Evangelical Lutheran Church, also known as the Augustana Synod, was first organized in June of 1860. It was a church body which, at the beginning of its existence, displayed a rather "conservative" tendency regarding its fellowship principles and practices. For example, as a member of the General Council it subscribed whole-heartedly to The Galesburg Rule. Prior to this, it had even adopted a set of theses on mixed communion which were more strict than the Council's Galesburg declaration. These theses said, in part:

Fellowship in the Supper with those who have and hold a doctrine differing from our Confession. . . is in a greater or less degree a denial of our own faith and confession, and is making little account of the Supper itself.

No others, therefore ought to be allowed to partake of the Lord's Supper within the Church, than those who belong to the Church or have the same faith and confessions with our Church.⁵⁶

In its early years, therefore, the Augustana Synod appears to have been very concerned with maintaining the kind of ecclesiastical practice encouraged by The Galesburg Rule.

Indeed, as one of its own historians stated: "Our present research proves conclusively that the spirit of the 'Galesburg Rule,' not only preexisted, but was enforced in the Augustana Synod before it became formulated as a written law of the General Council."⁵⁷

When the General Synod, the General Council, and the United Synod of the South merged, in 1918, to form the United Lutheran Church in America, the Augustana Synod decided not to become a part of the new church body. Its decision not to join "was based not on doctrinal factors, but rather on language and cultural factors inherent in its strong Swedish background."⁵⁸ That cultural, and not theological factors should keep the Augustana Synod out of the United Lutheran

⁵⁶Wolf, p. 171.

⁵⁷G. S. Ohslund, "The 'Galesburg Rule.'" The Augustana Quarterly 5 (June 1926):159.

⁵⁸Fred W. Meuser, "Pulpit and Altar Fellowship Among Lutherans in America" in Church In Fellowship, 2 vols., ed. Vilmos Vajta (Minneapolis: The Augsburg Publishing House, 1963), 2:40.

Church in America seems rather surprising, especially when the Augustana's earliest positions on altar and pulpit fellowship contrasted so sharply with the position the ULCA adopted. Could the Augustana Synod, "as far as theological position goes," really have entered the United Lutheran Church "without any doctrinal compunction"?⁵⁹ Had its position regarding altar and pulpit fellowship changed so by the early 1900s? Apparently it had. As early as 1926 one of its own theologians noted in the Augustana Quarterly: ". . . the popular opinion to-day of our leading clergy seems to be that the 'Galesburg Rule' is an adiaphoron, non-essential, a dead letter law. This at least is true in present-day practice of Pulpit and Altar Fellowship."⁶⁰ Again, by 1929, it was being debated within the pages of this same theological journal whether or not the Augustana Synod should rid itself of the Galesburg declaration altogether.⁶¹ It would seem, therefore, that once the Augustana Synod became a member of the General Council, the former body adopted whole-heartedly the doctrine and practice of the latter general body to which it belonged. The Galesburg Rule and declarations like it were a part of the Augustana Synod's

⁵⁹Vergilius Ferm, "The Present Status of Lutheran Theology in America," The Augustana Quarterly 6 (September 1927):256.

⁶⁰Ohslund, p. 159.

⁶¹P. Arthur Johnson and C. E. Holmer, "Shall The Galesburg Rule Be Abolished?" The Augustana Quarterly 8 (January 1929):1-10.

corpus doctrinae, but a corresponding and consistent practice was not always present.

In October of 1930, however, it appeared as though all this was about to suddenly and dramatically change. The Augustana Evangelical Lutheran Church subscribed to the "Minneapolis Theses" and thus became a member of The American Lutheran Conference.⁶² This federation of church bodies occupied the theological territory which lay between the "conservative" Missouri Synod, and the "liberal" ULCA. Along with the rest of the American Lutheran Conference, the Augustana Synod appears to have believed that by walking this middle road they would become the catalyst for unifying all Lutherans in America. Determined to help set things right in American Lutheranism, the leadership of the Augustana Synod therefore called for a unified effort in obtaining this great goal. In 1936 President P. O. Bersell exclaimed:

It is my opinion that nothing is to be gained by such conversations with other non-Lutheran church bodies on the part of our Synod as a fractional part of the Lutheran Church in America. First let us set our own house in order as Lutherans. Let us find each other in full fellowship and co-operation, and then unitedly approach other communions to attain to the fullest possible measure of comity. Any other approach becomes a divisive rather than a unifying factor.⁶³

⁶²As mentioned above, the "Minneapolis Theses" included the designation of The Galesburg Rule (only part one, however) as regulative of relations with non-Lutherans.

⁶³The Augustana Evangelical Lutheran Church, Report of the Seventy-Seventh Annual Convention (Rock Island: Augustana Book Concern, 1936), p. 22.

It seems clear from this that the Augustana Synod was so eager to be about the task of uniting American Lutheranism, that it would do whatever the "median" position between the United Lutheran Church in America and the Missouri Synod demanded.

True to its past history of reflecting in its own doctrine and practice the fellowship principles of the federative body to which it belonged, the Augustana Synod again began to urge its pastors and congregations to be true to the covenant (the "Minneapolis Theses") into which they had entered. In 1937 President P. O Bersell pleaded:

. . . it gives us real joy to note the sound confessional loyalty of our Synod as reflected in the preaching from our pulpits, the teaching in our colleges and seminary, and in the printed publications of our Church. We are Evangelical Lutheran without any suspicion of uttered heresy among us, except--indirectly.

I refer to a rather distressing symptom which has become quite annoying by its increasing manifestation, and that is the disregard of the so-called "Galesburg Rule." Perhaps there is no such rule any more, for the general church body that adopted this rule is no more. It is more fitting that we call this code the "Minneapolis Theses." This constitutes a holy covenant into which we as a Synod have entered together with four other Lutheran general bodies. We must respect this concordat, for it is not only a promise given to brethren, it is also an expression of our faith. Some of the pastors and churches of the Augustana Synod have already given offense and have compromised their Synod in the eyes of fellow Lutherans by their loose practices in regard to secretism or unionism concerning which the Minneapolis Theses are very explicit. Such loose practices, though they be labeled with charitable and liberal names, or whatever the motives be, are a denial of our Lutheran faith. May the day soon come when it may be said of the Augustana Synod churches, without

exception, that their pulpits are for Lutheran pastors only and their altars only for Lutheran communicants.⁶⁴

President Bersell's admonition concerning The Galesburg Rule and the "Minneapolis Theses" apparently had a wholesome effect. No disturbances in the Augustana Synod's relationships with the American Lutheran Conference or the National Lutheran Council were reported the following year. Once again, therefore, he called his synod to keep up the good work. He stated:

It is my observation that the more we learn to know the real spirit of these covenants as expressions of confessional loyalty, the more we also discover that we are quite harmonious in our attitudes. The 'offence' of these regulations lies not in their use, but rather in their abuse by extremism.⁶⁵

The middle path the Augustana Synod walked along with the rest of The American Lutheran Conference seemed to hold great promise. The Synod rejoiced, in 1938, over the steps the American Lutheran Church and the Missouri Synod were taking toward mutual altar and pulpit fellowship. Augustana believed, along with the rest of the American Lutheran Conference, that altar and pulpit fellowship was possible with both the Missouri Synod and the United Lutheran Church in America. It said as much when it adopted the American Lutheran Conference's "Basis For Pulpit And Altar Fellowship

⁶⁴The Augustana Evangelical Lutheran Church, Report of the Seventy-Eighth Annual Convention (Rock Island: Augustana Book Concern, 1937), pp. 20-21.

⁶⁵The Augustana Evangelical Lutheran Church, Report of the Seventy-Ninth Annual Convention (Rock Island: Augustana Book Concern, 1938), p. 19.

Of All Lutherans."⁶⁶ This document said, in part, that the "Minneapolis Theses," the Missouri Synod's "Brief Statement," the ALC's "Declaration," and the ULCA's "Pittsburgh Agreement" were in essential accord with each other and therefore should serve as the basis for the immediate establishment of pulpit and altar fellowship among Lutherans.⁶⁷

However, the proposed declaration of church fellowship never took place. Missouri was greatly dissatisfied with the ULCA's position. The ULCA, as already noted above, subordinated its "Pittsburgh Agreement" to its "Washington Declaration" which said all Lutherans in America were already in pulpit and altar fellowship with each other. Furthermore, the ULCA's Commission on Relations To American Lutheran Church Bodies had determined that the American Lutheran Conference's "Basis For Pulpit And Altar Fellowship Of All Lutherans" was "neither forward-looking, fruitful, nor necessary" as an approach to the problem of Lutheran union.⁶⁸ The "middle road" was not working out as the Augustana Synod expected.

From its American Lutheran Conference days on, the evidence suggests that the Augustana Synod believed it was

⁶⁶The Augustana Evangelical Lutheran Church, Report of the Eighty-Fifth Annual Convention (Rock Island: Augustana Book Concern, 1944), p. 295.

⁶⁷Ibid., pp. 294-295.

⁶⁸The United Lutheran Church in America, Minutes of the Fourteenth Biennial Convention (Philadelphia: The United Lutheran Publication House, 1944), p. 241.

one of the driving forces behind the Lutheran unity movement in America. It therefore tended to employ whichever church fellowship principles and practices it believed would speed up the process of Lutheran unity. It adopted The Galesburg Rule when it adopted the "Minneapolis Theses," and its theological leaders exhorted it to live out the terms of this covenant in its practical life. Once, however, it appeared the American Lutheran Conference was not the vehicle which would bring the desired unity, and once the members of the American Lutheran Conference started talking about organic merger only amongst themselves, then the ecumenically minded Augustana Synod was quick to part company. In 1952 it expressed itself as unwilling to continue in unity discussions which were not open to all Lutheran general bodies and which did not include the consideration of the subject of ecumenical relations.⁶⁹ Furthermore, it maintained its traditional position had always been that adherence to the historic Confessions of the Lutheran Church was sufficient for Lutheran unity.⁷⁰ Absent here was any mention of its subscription to The Galesburg Rule as contained in the "Minneapolis Theses." Now the Augustana Synod was obviously looking towards the church fellowship principles of The

⁶⁹The Augustana Evangelical Lutheran Church, Report of the Ninety-Third Annual Convention (Rock Island: Augustana Book Concern, 1953), p. 374.

⁷⁰Ibid., p. 375.

United Lutheran Church in America to provide the desired union of all American Lutherans.

In 1955 the delegates at the Augustana Synod's ninety-sixth convention heard from its Commission On Ecumenical Relations how similar their church body's doctrinal positions were to those held by the ULCA. This convention therefore resolved to accept a proposal made by the ULCA to join with it in inviting all Lutherans Church bodies in America to participate in merger discussions looking toward organic union. At the same time, the Augustana Synod opted to enter into negotiations looking toward organic union with the ULCA.⁷¹ As a result of these actions, a Joint Commission On Lutheran Unity comprising representatives from the four church bodies who responded to the above invitation was established.⁷²

At its very first meeting, the Joint Commission On Lutheran Unity came to the decision that there already was sufficient ground of agreement in the common confessions of the four churches involved to justify further procedure in finding a basis for the organic union of these same

⁷¹The Augustana Evangelical Lutheran Church, Report of the Ninety-Sixth Annual Convention (Rock Island: Augustana Book Concern, 1955), pp. 439-446.

⁷²The Joint Commission On Lutheran Unity was comprised of representatives from the American Evangelical Lutheran Church, the Augustana Evangelical Lutheran Church, The Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Church (Suomi Synod), and The United Lutheran Church in America.

churches.⁷³ The Augustana Synod, at its convention in 1958, rejoiced at the progress being made by the Joint Commission, and concurred with both the Commission's findings, and efforts toward merger.⁷⁴ In June of 1960, therefore, the Augustana Synod in convention resolved to merge with the other three church bodies it had been negotiating with.⁷⁵

Unlike the United Lutheran Church in America, then, the church fellowship principles of the Augustana Synod were far from being consistent and clear. An examination of these principles reveals the tendency of this synod to bounce from one position to another. In 1875 it adopted its own, rather strict, "Theses on Mixed Communion." In the same year it also accepted The Galesburg Rule, and like the General Council to which it belonged, eventually adopted an altar fellowship practice comparable to that of the ULCA. In the 1930s, however, the Augustana Synod subscribed to the "Minneapolis Theses;" the doctrinal basis for church fellowship among the bodies of the American Lutheran Conference. It also adopted the report of its president which called the "Minneapolis Theses" a "concordat" and a "confession of our faith." Yet in 1952, the convention declared that the

⁷³The Augustana Evangelical Lutheran Church, Report of the Ninety-Ninth Annual Convention (Rock Island: Augustana Book Concern, 1958), p. 464.

⁷⁴Ibid., p. 108.

⁷⁵The Augustana Evangelical Lutheran Church, Report of the Onehundred-First Annual Convention (Rock Island: Augustana Book Concern, 198), p. 423.

Lutheran Confessions were sufficient for union and consequently for church fellowship. It would appear, therefore, that the Augustana Evangelical Lutheran Church was generally more concerned with the cause of Lutheran union and merger than it was with the kind of ecclesiastical practice encouraged by The Galesburg Rule.

The American Evangelical Lutheran Church
and the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran
Church of America (Suomi Synod)

Neither The American Evangelical Lutheran Church nor the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Church of America have any significant documents on fellowship.⁷⁶

The Lutheran Church in America

In 1956, Franklin Clark Fry, the president of the United Lutheran Church in America, issued a statement on Lutheran unity which eventually came to be considered the official position of the Joint Commission on Lutheran Unity. One of the points Dr. Fry made in this statement was the importance true doctrine must have in any venture for church union. He stated:

We Lutherans have tended to emphasize Truth. . . . Insistence upon agreement in doctrine as a precondition for church fellowship is the distinguishing mark of Lutherans among all Protestants and should never be relaxed. Allegiance to Christ as the Truth rules out indifference, or even a casual attitude, to the truths about Him that have been revealed. . . .⁷⁷

⁷⁶Meuser, "Pulpit And Altar Fellowship," 2:41.

⁷⁷Wolf, p. 547.

What this statement indicated was that what the men entrusted with the task of negotiating the merger between the ULCA, the Augustana Synod, the Suomi Synod, and the American Evangelical Lutheran Church were concerned with, is that the new church body they were creating would be founded on a carefully laid and unanimously agreed upon doctrinal foundation. When the time finally came for the new church to come into being, however, the same Joint Committee on Lutheran Unity admitted:

From the very beginning we accepted each other as Lutherans, differing, perhaps in tradition, but not in doctrine. Without a doubt it was this agreement in the common confession of our faith which made possible the rapid progress in merger negotiations. Apart from this initial agreement, there would have been a long and frustrating examination of the confessional correctness of each of the four bodies.⁷⁸

Here again the old ULCA's fellowship principle of "confessional subscription" was being employed. All that was needed for church fellowship and church union was a common subscription by all involved to the Scriptures, the three ecumenical creeds, and the Unaltered Augsburg Confession. Despite its stated concern for pure doctrine, then, it appears the four bodies which united to form The Lutheran Church in America never thoroughly discussed their doctrinal positions, but merely "accepted each other as Lutherans" from the beginning. Content to have a good

⁷⁸Lutheran Church in America, Minutes of the Constituting Convention (Philadelphia: Board of Publication of the Lutheran Church in America, 1962), p. 40.

confessional statement in their constitution, neither the men on the Joint Commission, nor the church bodies they represented concerned themselves greatly with the doctrinal details. Thus, when the LCA's constitution was adopted, it exclaimed, "this church. . . acknowledges as one with it in faith and doctrine all churches that likewise accept the teaching of these [the Unaltered Augsburg Confession and Luther's Small Catechism] symbols."⁷⁹ Once again it was made clear no statement similar to The Galesburg Rule would find a home in a church body which descended from the old General Synod.

Because it was primarily interested in having the right words in its constitution and not extremely concerned about right practice, the LCA was forced, only two years after its founding, to adopt some kind of communion practices policy which could serve as a practical guide for its churches, synods, congregations, and individual members. This it did at its Second Biennial Convention. Because this 1964 statement served as the primary guide for all LCA communion practices until 1978, it is here quoted at length:

B. Intercommunion: The following standards are based on the premises a) that our ministry should be a full ministry wherever possible; b) that no practice should be encouraged which uses the sacrament of the Lord's Supper to imply a unity which is not a reality in other realms of faith and order; c) that such services shall set forth without reservation the church's doctrine of the Lord's Supper; d) that it shall be assumed that ministers of the LCA will use the rite of the LCA for

⁷⁹Wolf, p. 567.

such services; e) that consequently no mixture of rites or ministries shall be allowed; f) that a minister of the LCA shall officiate only at a service authorized by the president of the synod on whose territory the service is held or by the president of the church when the service is held beyond the territorial limits of the church, but that g) eucharistic hospitality can and should be encouraged as follows:

1. Within Lutheranism: The time-honored practice of intercommunion within Lutheranism, at home and abroad, should be encouraged wherever the host church allows such a practice. . . .

2. Chaplaincy Under Non-Lutheran Auspices: When serving as a chaplain in the armed forces, in hospitals, in educational or other non-parochial institutions, a pastor may celebrate the Lord's Supper under the authority given him in his call. A positive statement of the Lutheran understanding of the Lord's Supper shall be made with an invitation to baptized Christians who desire to receive the sacrament.

3. Ecumenical Gatherings at Home and Abroad:

a) Officiants

When invited, the LCA may celebrate or its pastors officiate at the Lord's Supper in an ecumenical setting, with the understanding that the pastor will normally officiate according to the rite and order of the LCA. A positive statement of the Lutheran understanding of the Lord's Supper shall be made with an invitation to baptized Christians who desire to receive the sacrament.

b) Communicants

In view of the highly varied situations in which a member of the LCA may find himself invited to receive Holy Communion in other (non-Lutheran) churches, the individual must decide for himself when and where such participation is in order. He should know that Christ's presence does not depend upon the liturgical orders used, or the ministers in charge. Aware of his duty to witness to the truth as he has received it, a member of the LCA should understand that he is accepting the hospitality of another tradition, should be grateful for that hospitality, but should be aware that such practice is and must be the exception, not the rule.⁸⁰

What exactly the LCA meant when it told its pastors to "make a positive statement of the Lutheran understanding of the

⁸⁰Lutheran Church In America, Minutes of the Second Biennial Convention (Board of Publication of the Lutheran Church In America, 1964), pp. 672-673.

Lord's Supper" is nowhere defined in this document. What seems to be the case, however, is that LCA pastors were being told it was alright to extend invitations to non-Lutheran baptized Christians to receive the Sacrament of the Altar without first making sure all those invited understood and believed that Christ's real body and blood were physically present and actually being distributed. This absence of body and blood talk betrays in the LCA an incomplete understanding of the Lord's Supper. The traditional emphasis on the Supper being a Means of Grace whereby the Holy Spirit comes to Christians in Christ's very body and blood for the forgiveness of their sins and strengthening of their faith is not stressed. In place of this, the only thing the LCA did affirm was:

The Lord's Supper is the church's corporate act of praise and thanksgiving called for by the objective fact of God's redemptive action. In the sacrament the communicant and the worshiping community participate in the life of the universal church of every land and of every age. Whatever hinders this sense is to be avoided: whatever enhances it is to be encouraged.⁸¹

In 1978 the LCA re-worked its communion practices guidelines. The new version, entitled, "Recommendations For Practice," was an improvement over the old in that while it still endorsed intercommunion with non-Lutherans, it did say that participation in these eucharistic celebrations for both pastors and laymen was a matter of personal judgment. Such judgment was to be informed by the following considerations:

⁸¹Ibid., p. 676.

"a. That the participants be baptized Christians; b. That the Real Presence of Christ in the Sacrament be publicly affirmed; c. That the Sacrament be celebrated as a Means of Grace."⁸² Despite its somewhat stronger stand concerning the conditions under which intercommunion celebrations were advisable, the LCA nonetheless made very clear what it thought about ecclesiastical practices advocated by doctrinal statements the likes of The Galesburg Rule.

When the Galesburg declaration was first formulated, it was understood that non-Lutherans should not commune with Lutherans because the two groups did not believe, teach, and confess the same things. Even with the occasional exception, the standards for admission to Lutheran altars were still rather high. These high standards may not have always been evident in the practice of the General Council, but at least there was a partial awareness of the differences which existed between the Lutheran doctrine of the Lord's Supper and other protestant understandings of the Sacrament. By and large these differences were judged great enough to make intercommunion inadvisable under most conditions.

With the ULCA and its declaration requiring nothing more than a subscription to the Unaltered Augsburg Confession for church fellowship and church union to exist, a change of attitude was evident. The emphasis switched from the

⁸²Lutheran Church In America, Minutes of the Ninth Biennial Convention (Board of Publication of the Lutheran Church In America, 1978), p. 333.

differences which existed between church bodies to the things they already had in common. In the ULCA, these doctrines held in common became the basis for altar and pulpit fellowship.

The LCA finally took one more step. Church fellowship with all Lutherans was a given, just as it had been in the ULCA. Now, however, the ground the LCA believed it held in common with other non-Lutherans was judged adequate for altar fellowship to occur on a formal and sanctioned basis. The distinctive doctrines of the historic Lutheran faith were played down as being time-bound. Doctrinal differences between protestants were not discussed in depth. Rather, a broad platform based on a teaching of the Gospel judged "sufficiently compatible" was what eventually made possible Interim Eucharistic Sharing between the LCA and the Episcopal Church.⁸³ Thus, the LCA, like most of its antecedent church bodies, also did not recognize as valid the kind of ecclesiastical practice advocated by The Galesburg Rule.

⁸³The actual LCA resolution which initiated Interim Eucharistic Sharing is found in: Lutheran Church In America, Minutes of the Eleventh Biennial Convention (Board of Publication of the Lutheran Church In America, 1982), p. 182.

CHAPTER TWO

THE HISTORY AND USE OF THE GALESBURG RULE IN THE AMERICAN LUTHERAN CHURCH AND ITS ANTECEDENT SYNODS

The Evangelical Lutheran Church

The Evangelical Lutheran Church (ELC) technically came into existence in 1917, the fruit of years of merger negotiations conducted between various groups of Norwegian Lutherans.¹ Up until 1883 the primary Norwegian Lutheran church body in America had been The Norwegian Synod. This church body became a member of the Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference in 1872 and adopted the Conference's position that agreement in doctrine and practice was the necessary prerequisite for all declarations of altar and pulpit fellowship.

The unity of the Synodical Conference was broken in 1880, however, by the predestination controversy. The two main figures pitted against each other throughout this bitter battle were C. F. W. Walther of the Missouri Synod and F. A. Schmidt of The Norwegian Synod. Any hopes of realizing an

¹From 1917 to 1946 the Evangelical Lutheran Church was known as the Norwegian Lutheran Church of America.

amicable peace were shattered when The Norwegian Synod withdrew from the Conference in 1883. This action, however, did not silence the agitation within The Norwegian Synod over predestination and what that Synod's relationship to the Missouri Synod would be. In 1887, therefore, the followers of Schmidt left The Norwegian Synod and formed the "Anti-Missouri Brotherhood."

In 1890 the Anti-Missouri Brotherhood, the Conference of the Norwegian-Danish Evangelical Church, and the Norwegian Danish Augustana Synod united to form the United Norwegian Lutheran Church in America.² No mention of The Galesburg Rule was made in either the articles of union or the constitution of this new church body.³ From its very inception this new church seems to have regarded as its special task the unifying of all Norwegian Lutherans in America, for by 1911 it was deeply involved in doctrinal discussions with both The Norwegian Synod and Hauge's Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Synod in America.⁴

Between the years 1906 and 1912 the United Synod, The Norwegian Synod, and Hauge's Synod slowly hammered out articles of agreement. On the basis of a document which came

²Also commonly called the "United Synod."

³The Constitution and Articles of Union of the United Norwegian Lutheran Church in America are found in: Richard C. Wolf, Documents of Lutheran Unity in America (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), pp. 222-227.

⁴Also commonly called "Hauge's Synod."

to be known as the "Madison Agreement," their opposing views concerning the doctrine of predestination were allowed to stand side by side. In essence, they agreed to disagree. This cleared the way for the formulation of articles of union in 1914 which were finally adopted by all three bodies in 1916. In 1917, therefore, Hauge's Synod, The Norwegian Synod and the United Synod merged to form The Norwegian Lutheran Church of America. In 1946 the name of this body was changed to The Evangelical Lutheran Church.⁵

Although no specific mention of The Galesburg Rule appeared in its articles of union, the new church body nevertheless stated: "The three bodies promise one another in all seriousness to observe the rule not to carry on churchly cooperation with the Reformed and others who do not share the faith and confessions of these bodies."⁶ Before Hauge's Synod allowed itself to become a part of the merger, however, it first insisted that this statement on "unionism" be defined less strictly. Accordingly, this interpretation, approved by both The Norwegian Synod and the United Norwegian Church, permitted some contacts with non-Lutheran Christians and so interpreted the Articles of Union as to permit broad fellowship with other Lutherans. Nevertheless, Hauge's Synod

⁵A minority of the Norwegian Synod refused to enter the merger and later organized as the Norwegian Synod, 1918-1955.

⁶Wolf, p. 237.

still held that altar and pulpit fellowship with non-Lutherans was a practice to be avoided:

When it is stated in . . . the Union Articles "and others who do not share the faith and confession of these bodies," we understand thereby only those who do not accept the confessional writings named in the constitution of the new body. . . . The word, "cooperation" we understand to mean organized and continuous activity of a churchly character or also incidental and occasional reciprocal relations in the preaching of the Gospel and administration of the Sacraments. . . .⁷

If not the letter, then at least the spirit of The Galesburg Rule was present at the very founding of The Evangelical Lutheran Church.

By 1926 both the spirit and the letter of the Rule became a part of the ELC's corpus doctrinae. In that year President J. A. Aasgaard reported to his synod that fruitful discussions between it and the Ohio, Iowa, and Buffalo synods had taken place in Minneapolis, Minnesota. "Our Church has regarded these synods as brethren in the faith," President Aasgaard stated, "but the correct principle is an official and definite agreement as to altar and pulpit fellowship."⁸ "At this meeting," he continued, "we came to complete agreement and understanding in all essential things."⁹

⁷The Church Council of The Evangelical Lutheran Church, "Statement On Fellowship," Lutheran Herald, July 15, 1958, pp. 6-7.

⁸Norwegian Lutheran Church of America, Report of the Third General Triennial Convention of the Norwegian Lutheran Church of America (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1926), p. 76.

⁹Ibid.

The agreement these church bodies reached was based on a document which eventually became known as the "Minneapolis Theses." In regard to church fellowship, these theses said in part:

1. These synods agree that true Christians are found in every denomination which has so much of divine truth revealed in Holy Scripture that children of God can be born in it; that according to the Word of God and our confessions, church fellowship, that is, mutual recognition, altar and pulpit fellowship and eventually cooperation in the strictly essential work of the church, presupposes unanimity in the pure doctrine of the Gospel and in the confession of the same in word and deed.

Where the establishment and maintenance of church fellowship ignores present doctrinal differences or declares them a matter of indifference, there is unionism, pretense of union which does not exist.

2. They agree that the rule "Lutheran pulpits for Lutheran pastors only, and Lutheran altars for Lutheran communicants only" is not only in full accord with, but necessarily implied in, the teachings of the divine Word and the confessions of the evangelical Lutheran Church. This rule, implying the rejection of all unionism and syncretism, must be observed as setting forth a principle elementary to sound and conservative Lutheranism.¹⁰

The Galesburg Rule thus became an integral part of the confession of those mid-western Lutheran synods which were not connected with the Synodical Conference.

At this same convention the ELC also declared itself ready to enter into altar and pulpit fellowship with the United Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church in America¹¹

¹⁰Norwegian Lutheran Church of America, Report of the Third General Triennial Convention of the Norwegian Lutheran Church of America (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1926), p. 81.

¹¹The United Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church in America changed its name in 1946 to the United Evangelical Lutheran Church (UELC).

provided this latter body also adopt "the aforementioned theses on doctrine and practice" at its upcoming convention.¹² In 1926, therefore, it seems clear that unlike the trend popular among the eastern Lutheran bodies, more than a common confessional subscription was being required by the ELC for establishing altar and pulpit fellowship with Lutheran church bodies. Agreement in both doctrine and practice appears to have been essential.

In 1930 the Lutheran church bodies which adopted the "Minneapolis Theses" officially became the constituent members of The American Lutheran Conference. One of the aims of this organization was to unite all Lutherans in America. Thus The American Lutheran Conference tried to occupy the theological ground which lay between the "conservative" Synodical Conference and the "liberal" United Lutheran Church in America in the hopes that by so doing it would become the peacemaker through which church fellowship between all American Lutheran bodies was established. By 1944, therefore, the ELC was faced with the American Lutheran Conference's "Overture" which suggested that the Confessions and loyalty to the fellowship documents already extant were sufficient for declaration of altar and pulpit fellowship. Here the ELC not only agreed with its American Lutheran

¹²Norwegian Lutheran Church of America, Report of the Third General Triennial Convention of the Norwegian Lutheran Church of America (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1926), p. 223.

Conference partners, but went one step further by being the first member of that Conference to initiate the practice of selective fellowship. The synod stated:

Because of the confidence born of association, conference and cooperation through many years, we extend our hand of fellowship to all American Lutherans, who adhere to the historic standards and confessions of the Lutheran church. We find their doctrinal declarations to be in essential accord with our own. We believe no additional theses, statements, or agreements are necessary for fellowship among American Lutherans. Wherever our congregations and pastors find those ties that bind Lutheran Christians, and that teaching and practice conform to official declarations, they may in good conscience selectively practice fellowship both in worship and work.¹³

Despite its great openness to other Lutherans, it must be noted that the ELC did not forsake the position it took when it subscribed to The Galesburg Rule as contained in the "Minneapolis Theses," for the selective fellowship it was advocating included only Lutheran Christians. Non-Lutherans were still being denied free and easy access to its altars and pulpits.

The desired union of all American Lutherans was slow in coming. The individual members of The American Lutheran Conference therefore turned their attention toward the possibility of organic union among themselves. In 1952, the Joint Union Committee of the five churches of the American Lutheran Conference achieved the first major step toward actual merger. The "United Testimony on Faith and Life"

¹³Norwegian Lutheran Church of America, Annual Report, Sixteenth General Convention (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1944), p. 405.

stated their "common Christian faith," and witnessed to "their understanding of the historic Lutheran confessions and to the theological agreement which has been found to exist among them . . ."14 This document, which served as the foundation for the merger of the American Lutheran Church, the United Evangelical Lutheran Church, and the Evangelical Lutheran Church, was adopted by the ELC in 1952. In so doing, the ELC again pledged itself, in a round about way, to The Galesburg Rule, for Article 6.6 of the "United Testimony" stated:

Article III, Church Fellowship, "Minneapolis Theses," has been formulated as a result of century-long experience of the Lutheran Church, has been accepted by our church bodies in 1930, and furnishes the correct principles on fellowship for our Churches. It is recognized that, the application of these principles, situations calling for exceptions will arise. The individual Christian, the conscientious pastor, the local congregation, and the church bodies, in determining their attitudes in such situations, must earnestly seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the instruction of the inspired Word.¹⁵

Unlike the original "Minneapolis Theses," the "United Testimony" included a statement of the way the "exceptions" to The Galesburg Rule were to be dealt with. What these "exceptions" were, it never said.

Prior to 1936, pulpit and altar fellowship with the Evangelical Lutheran Church seemed to depend on agreement in doctrine and practice. Not only the Lutheran Confessions,

¹⁴Wolf, p. 499.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 511.

but other commonly accepted documents which defined correct Lutheran practice, such as the "Minneapolis Theses," needed to be agreed upon. From 1936 on, however, the ELC recognized basic agreement among all major Lutheran bodies in America. Instead of insisting on agreement in doctrine and practice for full altar and pulpit fellowship with other Lutheran church bodies, it adopted, in 1944, the principle of selective fellowship, that is, pulpit and altar fellowship with those pastors and parishes demonstrating loyalty to the Confessions and to their own additional doctrinal statements.

In general, the Evangelical Lutheran Church never departed from its pledge to the kind of ecclesiastical practice encouraged by The Galesburg Rule. From its first years to the time it merged with three other church bodies to form The American Lutheran Church, this Rule, embodied in the "Minneapolis Theses" and the "United Testimony on Faith and Life," was part of its corpus doctrinae. However, as Theodore Graebner pointed out in 1935, the ELC was born of compromise, and you "cannot unite on a compromise platform without creating a psychology which prepares the ground for more compromises."¹⁶ Indeed, this does seem to be the case with the Evangelical Lutheran Church, for it not only compromised its earliest insistence that agreement in doctrine and practice was essential for church fellowship

¹⁶Theodore Graebner, The Problem of Lutheran Union and Other Essays (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1935), p. 73.

among Lutherans, but it also eventually compromised itself concerning its acceptance of The Galesburg Rule. In subscribing to the "United Testimony on Faith and Life" and the undefined "exceptions" to The Galesburg Rule this document allowed, the ELC left open the possibility that one day non-Lutherans would generally be welcomed in the pulpits and at the altars of the churches it once called its own.

The American Lutheran Church

The church body under consideration here is that which came into existence when three conservative Lutheran synods merged in 1930 to form the American Lutheran Church (often referred to as the "old ALC").¹⁷ The origins of the old ALC go back to the Iowa Synod, the Joint Synod of Ohio, the Buffalo Synod, and the dealings these three had with each other.¹⁸ As regards the present discussion, however, it may be stated briefly that the church fellowship practices of each of these three bodies conformed to a rather strict understanding of The Galesburg Rule. Indeed, as Fred W. Meuser points out, all three of these bodies "were confessionally conservative, anxious for doctrinal agreement with Missouri, and suspicious of the kind of self-confident

¹⁷The "old" ALC should not to be confused with The American Lutheran Church which was formed in 1960.

¹⁸A full account of the formation of the old American Lutheran Church is found in: Fred W. Meuser, The Formation of the American Lutheran Church (Columbus, Ohio: The Wartburg Press, 1958), pp. 37-226.

'at-homeness' among American Protestants which they thought they saw in the United Lutheran Church."¹⁹

From 1870 to 1918 the Iowa Synod held partial membership in the General Council. Accordingly, it adopted The Galesburg Rule in 1875. When the principle set forth by the Rule began to draw fire from many of the most influential people within the General Council, the noted Iowa Synod professor, Sigmund Fritschel, hopeful that the Council "might still declare in favor of unmixed communion and pulpit fellowship," wrote: "Whatever this final decision may be--this principle [as set forth in The Galesburg Rule] is the indispensable condition of all church union for the Iowa Synod, in accordance with its position to the Confessions."²⁰ One of the major reasons the Iowa Synod severed its relations with the General Council, then, is found in the way this latter body scuttled its own Rule when it merged with the General Synod and the United Synod of the South to form the United Lutheran Church in America.

Unlike the Iowa Synod, the Joint Synod of Ohio was, from almost the very beginning, disenchanted with the General Council due to the position it took during the "Four Points"

¹⁹Fred W. Meuser, "Facing the Twentieth Century" in The Lutherans in North America, ed. E. Clifford Nelson (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), p. 447.

²⁰Sigmund Fritschel, "The German Iowa Synod" in The Distinctive Doctrines and Usages of the General Bodies of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the United States (Philadelphia: The Lutheran Publication Society, 1893), p. 83.

controversy. For this reason the Ohio Synod became one of the prime movers in the formation of the Synodical Conference in 1872. As a constituent member of this body, Ohio adopted the Synodical Conference's position that agreement in doctrine and practice was essential for the establishment of church fellowship with other church bodies. Regarding pulpit and altar fellowship, Professor Matthias Loy of the Ohio Synod wrote in 1893:

Even if preachers of other denominations would, in order to gain access to our pulpits, give satisfactory assurances that they will teach nothing at variance with our faith, they could not, as long as they declare their adherence to a different confession, be permitted to preach to our congregations. That act of pulpit fellowship itself would be understood as a declaration on our part that the differences between their churches and ours are not of such a nature as to necessitate separate organizations, and therefore as an admission that we are maintaining divisions which have no ground in faith and conscience, and for that reason are sinful. . . .

The same rule applies to the other question of altar fellowship. Admitting members of other denominations to communion in our churches would be practically declaring that the differences between them and us do not pertain to the faith, but are mere matters of human opinion; that therefore the Lutheran Church has grievously erred in putting her distinctive doctrines into her Confession as a part of the Christian Creed; and that by asserting agreement in these, as well as in the other parts of her Confession, to be requisite to true unity, and therefore a necessary condition of membership and fellowship, she has made needless divisions in the Church.²¹

The Joint Synod of Ohio left the Synodical Conference in 1881 because of its opposition to the position the

²¹Matthias Loy, "The Joint Synod of Ohio" in The Distinctive Doctrines and Usages of the General Bodies of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the United States (Philadelphia: The Lutheran Publication Society, 1893), pp. 22-23.

Conference took regarding the doctrine of predestination. A few years later the Ohio Synod officially invited the Iowa Synod to a series of meetings to see whether or not both church bodies might be able to recognize each other as orthodox. In 1907 these two bodies reached doctrinal agreement on the basis of a set of propositions which came to be known as the "Toledo Theses." These theses said in part:

1. All doctrines clearly and plainly revealed in the Word of God are, by virtue of the divine authority of that Word, dogmatically fixed as true and binding upon the conscience, whether they have been symbolically defined or not.

2. There is within the Church of God no authority whatever for departing from any truths clearly revealed by the Scriptures, whether they are considered fundamental or non-fundamental, important or seemingly unimportant.

3. Complete agreement in all articles of faith is the indispensable condition of church fellowship. Persistent error in an article of faith always causes division.

4. Complete agreement in all non-fundamental doctrines cannot be attained here on earth, but is nevertheless the goal after which to strive.

5. Those who oppose the Word of God knowingly, persistently, and stubbornly, even in subordinate points, thereby overthrow the foundation of the faith and must be excluded from church fellowship."²²

When the Buffalo Synod adopted these "Toledo Theses" in 1920, the way was made clear for it, the Joint Synod of Ohio, and the Iowa Synod to merge. Together they would found the American Lutheran Church.

One other factor played a measurable role in the formation of the American Lutheran Church, however. This

²²Wolf, pp. 217-218.

was the failure of the synods of Buffalo, Iowa, Missouri, Ohio, and Wisconsin to reach an agreement in doctrine on the basis of the "Intersynodical (Chicago) Theses" of 1928.²³ The Galesburg Rule was incorporated in the Church Fellowship section of these theses, which in general, were approved by all concerned. However, there were too many shortcomings in the other parts of the Chicago Theses for them to serve as an adequate unity document. As a whole, therefore, they were formally adopted only by the Buffalo Synod, and when, in 1929, the Missouri Synod completely rejected them, they ceased to be an effective tool for bringing about greater Lutheran unity. Thus the merger between the Iowa, Ohio, and Buffalo synods which had up until this point been put on hold, again gained momentum. Despite a five year battle waged between the Iowa Synod and the Ohio Synod over the doctrine of the inspiration of the Scriptures,²⁴ the three negotiating synods nevertheless united and formed the American Lutheran Church in August of 1930.

In its earliest days, the American Lutheran Church sharply opposed unionistic practices of all kinds, and therefore gave The Galesburg Rule a prominent position in its constitution. Article II, Section 3 of this document read:

The Synod regards unity in doctrine and practice the necessary prerequisite for church fellowship, and

²³The Chicago Theses are printed in: Ibid., pp. 361-369.

²⁴The Inspiration controversy started in 1926 and was resolved in 1930.

therefore adheres to the rule, "Lutheran pulpits for Lutheran pastors only, and Lutheran altars for Lutheran communicants only," and rejects unionism in all its forms.²⁵

With this statement the American Lutheran Church showed that at the time of its founding it had requirements for the establishment of church fellowship quite like those maintained by the Missouri Synod and the other members of the Synodical Conference. All these bodies held that agreement in doctrine and practice was essential before any declarations of altar and pulpit fellowship could be made. An additional subscription to The Galesburg Rule was made by the ALC when it adopted the "Minneapolis Theses" discussed above, In so doing it also became a member of The American Lutheran Conference.

Already by 1934 the ALC's constitutional position on church fellowship was put to the test. Earlier that same year the ULCA had published its "Savannah Resolution" as a concise statement of the standards and tests it deemed requisite to true Lutheran unity and union. This document held that because all Lutherans in America already subscribed to the Augsburg Confession there existed no doctrinal reason why they all could not unite to form one Lutheran Church in America. The ULCA therefore invited all Lutheran bodies in America to confer with it in the hopes of establishing closer relations.

²⁵Wolf, p. 336.

Faced with the question of future concrete relations with the United Lutheran Church in America, President C. C. Hein of the ALC told the delegates at his church body's 1934 convention that "it is not a difference in doctrine that separates us from the United Lutheran Church in America, but a difference in practice." Many pastors within the ULCA were members of the Masonic Lodge. Many others practiced "indiscriminate altar and pulpit fellowship with representatives of other denominations." Before the ALC and the ULCA could officially declare pulpit and altar fellowship they would have to "come to an agreement on these matters which are of vital importance to the life and work of the Church."²⁶ The delegates at this convention agreed with their president and therefore resolved:

Until such time as pulpit and altar fellowship is officially established between the United Lutheran Church and the American Lutheran Church the Church holds that fellowship between pastors and congregations of these two bodies as a common practice is inconsistent with the principles of our Constitution, but the Church does not regard joint services at historical Lutheran anniversaries and other cooperative activities . . . as a violation of the spirit and principles of the constitution so long as the united testimony given in such services and through such activities promotes conservative Lutheranism.²⁷

Between 1936 and 1938 committees made up of official representatives from the ULCA and the ALC met repeatedly to

²⁶American Lutheran Church, Official Minutes of the Third Convention of the American Lutheran Church (Columbus, Ohio: The Lutheran Book Concern, 1934), p. 23.

²⁷Ibid., p. 235.

determine if the two bodies could reach doctrinal agreement. The ULCA did so in the hopes of an organic union. The ALC only desired to establish altar and pulpit fellowship between the two bodies. Steps forward appeared to be taken with the formulation of the "Pittsburgh Agreement" which, among other things, held that pastors and congregations "shall not practice indiscriminate pulpit and altar fellowship with pastors and churches of other denominations, whereby doctrinal differences are ignored or virtually made matters of indifference."²⁸ The ALC made full communion contingent upon the actual acceptance and enforcement of the "Pittsburgh Agreement" within the ULCA. Yet when the United Lutheran Church adopted the "Pittsburgh Agreement" it did so with the understanding that the "Agreement" was to be understood in light of the "Savannah Resolution." Because the "Savannah Resolution" recognized no tests of Lutheranism other than the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions, it practically rendered the "Pittsburgh Agreement" null and void. Therefore, no declaration of full church fellowship with the ULCA came from the ALC.

As noted above, in 1944 the Evangelical Lutheran Church became the first synod in the American Lutheran Conference to adopt the principle of "selective fellowship." This resolution permitted ELC pastors and congregations to practice

²⁸American Lutheran Church, Official Minutes of the Fourth Convention of the American Lutheran Church (Columbus, Ohio: The Lutheran Book Concern, 1936), p. 6.

fellowship with all Lutherans whose teaching and practice conformed to their own synod's official declarations. Although this resolution did not alter the ELC's subscription to The Galesburg Rule and the pledge it had thereby made not to establish altar and pulpit fellowship with non-Lutherans, it nevertheless carried with it grave consequences. Although the ELC members could now express their unity with like-minded Lutherans without being deterred by intersynodical barriers, it became impossible to determine how conscientiously the condition of the resolution on selective fellowship was applied, namely, that teaching and practice had to conform to the official declarations of the respective synods.

Two years later, when the American Lutheran Church decided to adopt the practice of selective fellowship, its version of this practice was somewhat more restrictive than the ELC's. Fellowship was permitted with members of other synods whose doctrine and practice conformed to the ALC's constitution.²⁹ Because The Galesburg Rule was a part of this constitution, it would seem the ALC was here unwilling to allow selective fellowship with those Lutherans whose practice did not conform to the likes demanded by the Rule. By 1956, however, a new statement on selective fellowship was accepted by the ALC which extended the hand of fellowship

²⁹American Lutheran Church, Official Minutes of the Ninth Convention of the American Lutheran Church (Columbus, Ohio: The Lutheran Book Concern, 1946), p. 23.

to all Lutheran Church bodies who faithfully adhered to the Word of God and the Confessions of the Lutheran Church.³⁰ Now the reference to The Galesburg Rule as contained in its own constitution was gone. Selective fellowship thus became possible with all Lutherans.

Despite the fact that Lutherans found easier access to ALC altars and pulpits, it must still be remembered that while the practice of selective fellowship may have rightly been branded by many as a new hindrance to true unity,³¹ it technically did not alter the American Lutheran Church's stand regarding the correctness of The Galesburg Rule. Altar and Pulpit fellowship with non-Lutherans was still viewed as a practice which compromised the truthfulness of Lutheran doctrine and faith.

Throughout the rest of the 1940s, the ALC continued to work for and encourage greater unity among Lutherans. In this regard it remained true to its original constitutional plea for pure Lutheran altars and pulpits. By 1952, however, the American Lutheran Church, along with most of the other members of The American Lutheran Conference, had taken a

³⁰American Lutheran Church, Official Minutes of the Fourteenth Convention of the American Lutheran Church (Columbus, Ohio: The Lutheran Book Concern, 1956), p. 356.

³¹For a comprehensive discussion and evaluation of the manner in which the ecclesiastical practice of selective fellowship as employed by the American Lutheran Church hindered true Lutheran unity, see: Hermann Sasse, "Selective Fellowship," The Australasian Theological Review 28 (September 1957):45-62.

giant step toward organic union when they all subscribed to the "United Testimony on Faith and Life." Although this document reaffirmed The Galesburg Rule, it also recognized that "in the application of these principles, situations calling for exceptions will arise."³² Content not to enumerate exactly what these exceptions might be, a way was left open for The Galesburg Rule to meet the same fate in the merged American Lutheran Conference bodies as it had when the General Council merged with the General Synod and United Synod of the South to form the ULCA. Indeed, this is what eventually did happen.

Throughout its history, then, the old American Lutheran Church showed great interest in inter-Lutheran relations. While bodies like the United Lutheran Church were primarily interested in organic union, however, the ALC tended to be more interested in establishing pulpit and altar fellowship on the basis of agreement in doctrine and practice. After years of attempting to achieve such fellowship with the major Lutheran bodies through doctrinal discussion and theological declarations, the American Lutheran Church adopted the principle of selective fellowship: pulpit exchange and intercommunion with those Lutheran parishes and pastors who subscribe to the Confessions and doctrinal statements of their own body and apply their subscription loyally to their church practice. Negotiations leading

³²Wolf, p. 511.

toward organic union with any other Lutheran church body, however, had to begin with a discussion of doctrine and practice.³³

To a certain degree, then, the ALC was much like the Missouri Synod. Both of these church bodies believed church fellowship with other Lutherans on a synod-wide basis was possible only after agreement in matters of doctrine and practice had been reached. They differed from each other regarding the number of doctrines this agreement had to include. Unlike Missouri, the ALC allowed for differences in doctrine to exist where so called "non-fundamental" articles of the faith were concerned.

As regards church fellowship with non-Lutherans, however, the old American Lutheran Church was generally true to the subscription it made to The Galesburg Rule in the second article of its constitution. Although its requirements for church fellowship with other Lutherans broadened with time, its acceptance of the kind of ecclesiastical practice encouraged by The Galesburg Rule appears unflinching. Only after the ALC signed the "United Testimony on Faith and Life," could its loyalty to the Rule be questioned, for this document, while it still hearkened back to the "Minneapolis Theses," not only allowed for

³³American Lutheran Church, Official Minutes of the Eleventh Convention of the American Lutheran Church (Columbus, Ohio: The Lutheran Book Concern, 1950), p. 288.

exceptions to the Rule, but never defined what these exceptions were.

The United Evangelical Lutheran Church

In 1896 two generally conservative Danish Lutheran groups merged to form the United Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. In 1946 this same church body eliminated the word "Danish" from its name and officially became the United Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (UELC). Besides the fellowship documents this body adopted when it became a constituent member of The American Lutheran Conference, and again, when it merged with the old ALC and the ELC to form The American Lutheran Church of 1960, the UELC made no other official utterances on fellowship.³⁴

In 1930 the United Evangelical Lutheran Church in America subscribed to the "Minneapolis Theses" and thereby became a member of The American Lutheran Conference.³⁵ As noted above, a subscription to these theses meant, among other things, a subscription to The Galesburg Rule and an acceptance of the kind of ecclesiastical practice it encouraged. That the UELC agreed Lutheran pulpits were for

³⁴Fred W. Meuser, "Pulpit and Altar Fellowship Among Lutherans in America" in Church in Fellowship, 2 vols. ed. Vilmos Vajta (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1963), 2:51.

³⁵United Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church, Yearbook of the 34th Annual Convention of The United Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church (Blair, Nebraska: Danish Lutheran Publishing House, 1930), p. 117.

Lutheran pastors only, and Lutheran altars were for Lutheran communicants only, was made even more explicit when in 1935 it approved a pronouncement made by The American Lutheran Conference which clearly spoke out against the practice of "unionism" as defined in the "Minneapolis Theses." In part, this American Lutheran Conference pronouncement on unionism said:

b. Unionism is not necessarily implied in every type of joint endeavor within the community where pastor and congregation may participate.

c. While the character and extent of such community co-operation must in large measure be determined by the local congregation and its pastor, this guiding principle should be kept in mind: That under no circumstances shall the clear purpose of the Lutheran Church be obscured or compromised. In the words of the Washington Declaration, that Church is bound in duty and in conscience to maintain its separate identity as a witness to the truth which it knows; and its members, its ministers, its pulpits, its fonts, and its altars must testify only to that truth.³⁶

Regarding this American Lutheran Conference pronouncement, the Church Council of the UELC said:

It is our opinion that many pastors and congregations would welcome such a statement as a guide in determining the course to pursue when pressure is brought to bear on them to join in various union services. The statement is in harmony with the Galesbury [sic] Rule, embodied in the Minneapolis Thesis: "Lutheran Pulpits for Lutheran Pastors Only. . . ."³⁷

Even though the name of the city from whence the Rule originated was misspelled, it is quite clear from this report

³⁶Ibid., p. 27.

³⁷United Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church, Yearbook of the 39th Annual Convention of The United Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church (Blair, Nebraska: Danish Lutheran Publishing House, 1935), p. 20.

that the UELC well understood and was willing to follow the kind of practice encouraged by both The American Lutheran Conference's pronouncement on unionism and The Galesburg Rule.

In 1952 the United Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, along with the other members of The American Lutheran Conference, adopted the "United Testimony on Faith and Life." On the basis of this document the UELC, the ELC, and the old ALC merged in 1960 to form The American Lutheran Church. As has already been pointed out, the "United Testimony" appealed to the "Minneapolis Theses" as the correct guiding principle on fellowship for the Lutheran Church, but also declared certain exceptions to the Rule were bound to arise. Like the ALC and the ELC, the UELC apparently was not concerned enough with what these "exceptions" might include as to seek any kind of definition concerning their character. Its earlier strong stand on the "Minneapolis Theses" was thereby rendered equivocal.

The Lutheran Free Church

The Lutheran Free Church (LFC), a relatively small body of Norwegian origin, was known for its emphasis upon congregational autonomy which militated against the adoption of any rules that would bind the local congregation and pastor. George Sverdrup, one of the LFC's founders, felt that the proper doctrinal basis for union was the simple faith of the Lutheran people as expressed in their cate-

chisms, not full agreement of synods on the further theological elaborations of the faith.³⁸ For this reason the LFC hesitated to commit itself to any document which would limit the church fellowshp its individual congregations engaged in. It did not mean, however, that the congregations which made up the Lutheran Free Church were eager to exchange altars and pulpits with any and every Christian denomination. On the contrary, these local churches took a firm stand "upon the three Ecumenical Creeds, the Unaltered Augsburg Confession, and Luther's Small Catechism, as basis for cooperation with other church bodies . . ."³⁹ "This," as one of its few public spokesmen maintained, "is a sufficient basis of faith, doctrine and life. . . . Any additional doctrinal theses are unnecessary for mutual recognition of the congregation."⁴⁰

Even though the Lutheran Free Church subscribed to the "Minneapolis Theses" when it became a member of The American Lutheran Conference in 1930, and again when it approved the "United Testimony" in 1952, evidence suggests that in so doing it was not departing from its policy of adopting

³⁸Meuser, "Pulpit and Altar Fellowship," 2:51.

³⁹Journal of Theology of the American Lutheran Conference 6 (1941):23, quoted in Fred W. Meuser, "Pulpit and Altar Fellowship Among Lutherans in America" in Church in Fellowship, 2 vols. ed. Vilmos Vajta (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1963), 2:51-52.

⁴⁰A. B. Betalden, Our Fellowship (Minneapolis: Messenger Press, n.d.), pp. 10-11.

doctrinal statements beyond the Lutheran Confessions.

Rather, these extra confessional documents seem to have been regarded as nothing more than witnesses to the world of a common faith than a reformulation of doctrinal theses.⁴¹

Regarding The Galesburg Rule, no primary source material available spoke directly to the issue. One secondary source, however, deserves close attention:

Many Lutheran groups in America have upheld in rather extreme form the doctrine of complete separation between Lutheran churches and non-Lutheran church groups. Under the name of "unionism" they have bitterly denounced and condemned every form of fellowship with non-Lutheran Protestants. . . . If the so-called Galesburg Rule . . . be interpreted quite rigidly, and if every form of united spiritual activity is to be condemned, it would be difficult, to say the least, to find that this accords with the historic practice or the fundamental principles of the Lutheran Free Church. . . . The Galesburg "rule" was originally meant to be not a command but rather a general statement of what was commonly practiced and that to this general rule there would normally at certain times and under certain circumstances, be exceptions. Interpreted in this way, of course, the "Galesburg rule" is a good and practical working formula. . . . But to refuse the hand of brotherhood and fellowship upon proper occasions to our fellow-Protestant pastors, in order not to offend certain Lutheran groups, may well involve a denial of the essential unity of the whole Body of Christ.

It would seem that it is not asking too much for Lutheran pastors and congregations who are spiritually awake and sensitive, that they should be permitted to exercise some degree of discretion as to what might best further the interests of the Kingdom of God in their midst, without being suspected of being disloyal to their own Lutheran faith and confession. . . . Certainly this problem deserves further clarification among American Lutherans, especially in the interest of those church groups who have their roots in the Scandinavian Lutheran churches of Europe, and who have inherited a freer practice than some others in regard to this matter of fellowship. At any rate, it is difficult to

⁴¹Meuser, "Pulpit and Altar Fellowship," 2:52.

understand how the Lutheran Free Church could accept and follow a literal understanding of the "Galesburg rule" without being untrue to its own heritage.⁴²

In the end, therefore, it would appear that despite its fellowship with the American Lutheran Conference, and eventual merger into The American Lutheran Church,⁴³ the LFC's principles of church fellowship were very similar to those of the United Lutheran Church. A common confessional subscription was all that was needed for two church bodies to enter into church fellowship with each other.

The American Lutheran Church

In 1958 representatives from the old American Lutheran Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church, and the United Evangelical Lutheran Church drew up and adopted articles of union for the proposed "The American Lutheran Church." These articles bound the new church body to The Galesburg Rule to the extent the Rule was embodied in the "Minneapolis Theses" and the "United Testimony on Faith and Life."⁴⁴ In 1960, the delegates attending the constituting convention of The American Lutheran Church affirmed these articles of

⁴²Bernard Christensen, "The Idea of the Lutheran Free Church" in Freedom and Christian Education (Minneapolis: Augsburg College Board of Trustees, 1945), pp. 42ff, quoted in Fred W. Meuser, "Pulpit and Altar Fellowship Among Lutherans in America" in Church in Fellowship, 2 vols., ed. Vilmos Vajta (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1963), 2:52-53.

⁴³The Lutheran Free Church did not merge into The American Lutheran Church until 1963.

⁴⁴Wolf, p. 528.

union but went on to state that "wherever congregations of The American Lutheran Church are mutually agreed in confession and practice with congregations of other Lutheran churches, they are encouraged to practice fellowship both in worship and work."⁴⁵ Unsurprisingly, The American Lutheran Church inherited a church fellowship doctrine and practice identical to that of its parent church bodies. It maintained a rather conservative approach with regard to non-Lutherans, while encouraging its individual congregations to practice selective fellowship with other Lutherans whenever, and wherever possible.

A more comprehensive statement of The American Lutheran Church's position regarding church fellowship was adopted at its 1964 convention. Among other things, this new document discussed the historical context out of which The Galesburg Rule was born. Here it was implied that the "Minneapolis Theses" were first formulated, and therefore always should be viewed in light of the original Akron Rule of 1872 which included two paragraphs regarding "exceptions" to the Rule. This interpretation overlooked the fact the "Minneapolis Theses" never mentioned any exceptions, but only said the Rule, "Lutheran pulpits for Lutheran pastors only, and Lutheran altars for Lutheran communicants only" was in accord

⁴⁵The American Lutheran Church, Reports and Actions of the Constituting Convention of The American Lutheran Church (Minneapolis: Office of the Secretary of The American Lutheran Church, 1960), p. 84.

with the Word of God and the Confessions of the Lutheran Church.

Furthermore, the ALC's new statement on fellowship went on to affirm that the General Council never meant anything more by its adoption of The Galesburg Rule than what Henry Eyster Jacob's said of the Rule in 1893: "'The Lutheran Church and no other communion is responsible for those who preach and commune in a Lutheran Church.'"⁴⁶ In so saying, the new ALC opted for the later (1893), much milder interpretation of The Galesburg Rule preferred by Jacobs rather than adopt the kind of ecclesial practice Charles Porterfield Krauth attempted to foster through The Galesburg Rule of 1875 and the 105 theses he wrote in its explication.

By adopting a position towards The Galesburg Rule like that espoused by the General Council during the late 1890s and early 1900s, the framers of the new ALC's statement on church fellowship endeavored to soften the tone of the "Minneapolis Theses." This they succeeded in doing as the following was adopted by The American Lutheran Church as its official altar and pulpit fellowship practice:

A contemporary European observer has commented on the Akron-Galesburg statement as follows: "The principle of observing 'Lutheran communion tables exclusively for Lutheran Christians' could only apply if the words 'Lutheran' were really understood in the sense of the Augsburg Confession VII (and not in the legal sense)."

⁴⁶The American Lutheran Church, Reports and Actions of the Second General Convention of The American Lutheran Church (Minneapolis: Office of the Secretary of The American Lutheran Church, 1964), p. 147.

This is the manner in which The American Lutheran Church affirms it. Consequently, if a pastor is assured that a visitor in his congregation accepts the words of institution as explained by Luther's Small Catechism, he is presiding over the Lord's Table responsibly.

. . . The Galesburg Rule is not a doctrine. It is a principle of action for the Church. To apply it rigidly will be to destroy its original intention, and, in our day, to hinder our witness to the world which must be a witness to both truth and love. The evangelical paradox in our documents would imply that a pastor and a congregation are not irresponsible stewards of the Gospel if they participate in interdenominational pastoral conferences, city and state councils, doctrinal dialogue with other Christian churches, and in occasional evangelical services where a community-wide testimony is made to the Saviorhood and Lordship of Christ. On the other hand, the evangelical paradox in our documents also requires continuing and alert concern that the faith be not denied, and that genuine doctrinal differences be not ignored.⁴⁷

Although this statement made it easier for non-Lutherans to commune at ALC altars than they might have in some of The American Lutheran Church's parent bodies, an obvious concern was still recognizable within the new church that its altars continue to witness to the truth of Lutheran doctrine.

In 1966 the convention delegates of The American Lutheran Church were presented with a set of doctrinal recommendations favored by a number of Lutheran and Reformed theologians who had been meeting with each other since 1962. Those theologians who participated in these conversations proposed the following:

A number of differing views and emphases remain to be resolved, but we are encouraged to believe that further

⁴⁷The American Lutheran Church, Reports and Actions of the Second General Convention of The American Lutheran Church (Minneapolis: Office of the Secretary of The American Lutheran Church, 1964), pp. 147-148.

contacts will lead to further agreement between the churches here represented. We regard none of these remaining differences to be of sufficient consequence to prevent fellowship. We have recognized in each other's teachings a common understanding of the Gospel and have concluded that the issues which divided the two major branches of the Reformation can no longer be regarded as constituting obstacles to mutual understanding and fellowship. . . .

As a result of our studies and discussions we see no insuperable obstacle to pulpit and altar fellowship, and, therefore, we recommend to our parent bodies that they encourage their constituent churches to enter into discussions looking forward to inter-communion and the fuller recognition of one another's ministries.⁴⁸

This report was accepted by the delegates of The American Lutheran Church, who in turn commended the above proposal to their own Church Council so that it might take appropriate action.⁴⁹ Because The ALC was at that time engaged in altar and pulpit fellowship discussions with The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, however, the leadership of The ALC feared damage would be done to these endeavors if it acted in accordance with the Lutheran-Reformed dialogue proposals. For this reason no positive action towards further Lutheran-Reformed church fellowship relations was taken by The American Lutheran Church until fellowship had first been established with the LC-MS.⁵⁰

⁴⁸The American Lutheran Church, Reports and Actions of the Third General Convention of The American Lutheran Church (Minneapolis: Office of the Secretary of The American Lutheran Church, 1966), pp. 155-156.

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 575.

⁵⁰The American Lutheran Church, Reports and Actions of the Fifth General Convention of The American Lutheran Church (Minneapolis: Office of the Secretary of The American Lutheran Church, 1970), p. 949.

By 1968 The American Lutheran Church found itself reevaluating its historic position regarding the Lord's Supper. At this time the traditionally Lutheran belief that the Sacrament of the Altar was primarily Christ's giving and man's receiving of Jesus' very body and blood for the forgiveness of the recipient's sins gave way to a different view. As one paper delivered to the Church Council of The ALC stated:

. . . . Both our theology and practice have become one-sided. This is not due to our confessional heritage, but is the result of a series of historical circumstances which modifies that heritage.

We have come to think of the Lord's Supper too narrowly in terms of forgiveness of sins, and we have made of it an occasional event rather than the weekly chief act of congregational worship. We are on the way to more frequent use of the Sacrament and to recovering the fullness of its meaning. But we are only on the access ramp which will eventually lead us back into mainstream life in these particulars. We need to shake off the sectarian mentality which the Reformation fathers took such pains to avoid. And we need to bring our people along, step by step.

. . . . Theologically, forgiveness is that which all forms of the gospel share; it is not uniquely connected to the Lord's Supper.

. . . . Unworthy eating is not primarily connected with personal weakness or with one's theological understanding. To be unworthy is to breach the fellowship on the human level, and then to presume that this had had no effect upon one's relationship with Christ.⁵¹

On the basis of arguments such as this, important Lutheran doctrines like the Real Presence of Christ's body and blood in the Lord's Supper were said to be of less import for

⁵¹The American Lutheran Church, Reports and Actions of the Fourth General Convention of The American Lutheran Church (Minneapolis: Office of the Secretary of The American Lutheran Church, 1968), pp. 509-515.

Lutherans than previously believed. Theological statements the likes of The Galesburg Rule were judged "sectarian." The American Lutheran Church appeared to be moving slowly away from its "Minneapolis Theses" as well as from the statement on communion practices it adopted in 1964.

Indeed, The American Lutheran Church of 1968 was changing its communion practices. It adopted a new statement that very year which was far more open to both inter-Lutheran and inter-denominational altar fellowship than any position The ALC had previously accepted. It stated:

Since all Lutheran bodies are agreed in the doctrine of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments, it shall be the practice of The ALC that there be intercommunion within the Lutheran family.

Since Lutherans are engaged in theological discussions with other Christian bodies regarding the Lord's Supper, no blanket judgment should be expressed about the celebration of the Sacrament in interdenominational assemblies, when Lutherans desire to commune in non-Lutheran churches, or when non-Lutherans desire to commune in Lutheran churches. The decision in each instance should be arrived at in the light of whether the proclamation of the Gospel is compromised or enhanced.⁵²

Like the Lutheran Church in America, then, The ALC had here adopted the position which held all Lutherans to be in altar and pulpit fellowship with each other on the basis of their common confessional subscription. In addition to this, this new statement on communion practices also showed The ALC more open than ever to intercommunion with non-Lutherans.

⁵²Ibid., p. 660.

All vestiges of the old "Minneapolis Theses" were quickly disappearing.

In the spring of 1974, the Lutheran Church in America proposed a joint American Lutheran Church--Lutheran Church in America study of communion practices. Noting the significant number of questions relating to communion which had arisen since the adoption of The ALC's 1968 Statement on Communion Practices, The ALC accepted the LCA's invitation. In 1976 the report of the ALC--LCA Committee to Study Communion Practices was presented to the general conventions of both church bodies. Both churches acted to receive the new statement as a working document and both sought to strengthen it by suggesting a number of amendments. As discussed in the last section of the previous chapter of this work, the practice encouraged by this new statement was one of full intercommunion between all Lutherans, and occasional reception of the Lord's Supper in certain non-Lutheran settings when a number of considerations were first met. No blanket proclamation regarding altar and pulpit fellowship with non-Lutheran denominations was included.

In responding to this new statement on communion practices, the following resolution was presented from the floor of The American Lutheran Church's 1976 convention:

WHEREAS, The Galesburg Rule and Minneapolis Thesis have been a part of the accepted tradition and literature of The American Lutheran Church and are to be found in the original Handbook for information; and

WHEREAS, The present document could be understood to be either denying, abrogating, or altering in both

theology and practice what was stated in the Minneapolis Thesis; and

WHEREAS, This understanding has equally far reaching effects in the church as lowering communion age did, and in that action we did have an excellent study document which became a great teaching aid; therefore be it

Resolved, That before presenting this paper on communion practices for passage of the convention or the council, a) the Galesburg Rule and Minneapolis Thesis should be dealt with directly as to how this new understanding and recommendation does in fact alter or interpret, or applies what has been accepted in the past (i.e., if we are going to repeal the previous statement let us do it openly and intentionally); and be it further

Resolved, That this matter be sent to congregations before the fact, not after, for study and information, and so that the convention, both clergy and lay, can vote as informed people.⁵³

This resolution was adopted by the general convention. It showed that many within The American Lutheran Church still remembered the kind of ecclesiastical practice encouraged by The Galesburg Rule and "Minneapolis Theses." Whether or not these delegates favored this kind of practice did not matter. It was still a practice which had been adopted by The ALC in 1960. If it was to be changed, then the above resolution ensured it would be changed openly and knowledgably.

Still another concern voiced by ALC delgates regarding this joint ALC/LCA Statement on Communion Practices was the complete absence throughout its pages of the phrase, "the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ." These words were essential, one concerned delegate maintained, for they communicated to Christians of other denominations that while

⁵³The American Lutheran Church, 1976 Reports and Actions of the Eighth General Convention of The American Lutheran Church (Minneapolis: Office of the Secretary of The American Lutheran Church, 1976), p. 955.

Lutherans are accepting and loving of them they (Lutherans) cannot depart from the words of Jesus.⁵⁴

The fact that all body and blood talk was left out of the new statement on communion practices indicates the extent to which The ALC and the LCA had gotten away from describing and explaining the Lord's Supper in traditional orthodox Lutheran/Christian terms. It almost appears as though the framers of the document were actually embarrassed by the traditional Christian terminology. Whatever the case, the ALC delegates got their way in this instance, for when the ALC/LCA statement on communion practices was reworked by a review committee, body and blood talk was sprinkled throughout its pages.

At its 1978 convention The American Lutheran Church unveiled the reworked version of the new statement on communion practices. Despite the 1976 resolution requesting that The Galesburg Rule and "Minneapolis Theses" be dealt with directly as to the manner in which they were or were not altered or interpreted in the light of the new communion practices statement, no such explanation was included. Instead, the new statement, as it was adopted by both the ALC and the LCA, said:

Participation as a visitor in non-Lutheran congregations, proper because of the universal nature of the church, places one in the role of guest. As a visitor one should respect the prevailing practice of hospitality. On such occasions and at ecumenical gatherings,

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 967.

in parish and nonparish settings, both pastoral and lay participation as communicants is a matter of personal judgment.

Such judgment should be informed by the following considerations: a) That the participants be baptized Christians; b) That the Real Presence of Christ in the Sacrament be publicly affirmed; c) That the sacrament be celebrated as a means of grace; d) The the words of institution be proclaimed; and e) That the elements associated with our Lord's institution be used.⁵⁵

Thus, while the Real Presence of Christ and His words of institution remained the theological touchstones for determining when a Lutheran may or may not practice inter-communion with other Christians of other denominations, The Galesburg Rule and the "Minneapolis Theses" were, for all practical purposes, no longer even nominally operative within The American Lutheran Church. In any case, an assertion such as this could no longer be questioned by 1982, for in that year The ALC, along with the Lutheran Church in American and the Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches, began to practice interim eucharistic sharing with members of the Episcopal Church.⁵⁶

Between The American Lutheran Church and its antecedent synods the entire gamut of altar and pulpit fellowship practices popular among American Lutherans was run. The

⁵⁵The American Lutheran Church, 1978 Reports and Actions of the Ninth General Convention of The American Lutheran Church (Minneapolis: Office of the Secretary of The American Lutheran Church, 1976), p. 910.

⁵⁶The American Lutheran Church, 1982 Reports and Actions of the Eleventh General Convention of The American Lutheran Church (Minneapolis: Office of the Secretary of The American Lutheran Church, 1976), pp. 1174-1175.

synods which merged to form the old ALC deemed agreement in doctrine and practice necessary before any declaration of church fellowship with another church body could be made. By these groups, both The Galesburg Rule and the kind of ecclesiastical practice it encouraged were taken to heart. After the old ALC began to cooperate with the Norwegian bodies in The American Lutheran Conference, however, a slow but perceptible change began to occur. Church fellowship practice grew looser while theological language concerning the Conference's position regarding the same grew more imprecise. Selective Fellowship with other Lutherans was practiced and encouraged. Undefined exceptions to The Galesburg Rule were allowed for in the "United Testimony on Faith and Life." This led to communion practice statements which legitimized intercommunion with non-Lutherans, and culminated in The American Lutheran Church's declaration that the basic teaching of the Episcopal Church "is sufficiently compatible with the teaching of this church [The ALC] that a relationship in Interim Sharing of the Eucharist is hereby established between these churches in the U.S.A. . . ." ⁵⁷ Thus one can see in the life and history of The American Lutheran Church, the adoption, use, decline, and eventual demise of The Galesburg Rule.

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 1175.

CHAPTER THREE

THE HISTORY AND USE OF THE GALESBURG RULE IN THE LUTHERAN CHURCH-MISSOURI SYNOD

The constitution of the German Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States placed the church body which eventually came to be known as The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (LC-MS) on a foundation which was solidly Lutheran.¹ The original document, which is essentially the same as the Missouri Synod's present-day constitution, was adopted in 1847. In its paragraphs the Missouri Synod clearly spelled out what would be required of all qualified individuals and congregations that desired to become members of Synod. Among other things, the following was demanded:

1. Acceptance of Holy Scripture, both the Old and the New Testament, as the written word of God and as the only rule and norm of faith and life.
2. Acceptance of all the symbolical books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church (these are the three Ecumenical Symbols, the Unaltered Augsburg Confession, the Apology, and Smalcald Articles, the Large and the Small Catechism of Luther, and the Formula of Concord) as

¹The German Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States officially changed its name to The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod in 1947. Hereafter, when neither this synod's full and proper name nor its accepted abbreviation (LC-MS) is employed, it will be referred to as the "Missouri Synod."

the pure and unadulterated explanation and presentation of the Word of God.

3. Separation from all commixture of Church or faith, as, for example, serving of mixed congregations by a servant of the Church; taking part in the service and Sacraments of heretical or mixed congregations; taking part in any heretical tract distribution and mission projects, etc. . . .²

From its inception, then, the Missouri Synod made it clear that church fellowship with both Lutheran and non-Lutheran church bodies was possible only when these bodies both confessed the true scriptural faith and then consistently lived out their confession in their ecclesiastical practice (see point three above).

This position, which pre-dated The Galesburg Rule by nearly thirty years, was never relinquished by the Missouri Synod. Despite the Rule's popularity and wide acceptance among other American Lutherans, Missouri maintained that agreement in doctrine and practice was essential before any declarations of church fellowship could be made with any other synods or ministeriums. The Galesburg Rule, therefore, played a less significant role in the history of the LC-MS than it did in most other American Lutheran church bodies. Nevertheless, because Missouri has always been committed to the cause of Lutheran unity, it constantly came into contact with those Lutheran church bodies which had, to one extent or another, adopted The Galesburg Rule. Thus, from 1875 on,

²Herman Otto Alfred Keinath, Documents Illustrating the History of the Lutheran Church in America With Special Emphasis on the Missouri Synod (River Forest, IL: Concordia Teachers College, 1947), pp. 35-36.

Missouri operated in a milieu in which The Galesburg Rule was an important factor. This chapter chronicles, therefore, the extent to which The Galesburg Rule influenced the altar and pulpit fellowship practices of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. Discussion will be divided into three parts: 1) The Missouri Synod from 1847 to 1944. 2) The Missouri Synod from 1945 to 1969. 3) The Missouri Synod from 1970 to the present.

The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod
from 1847 to 1944

Any discussion of the Missouri Synod's early church fellowship positions and practices must of necessity begin with a discussion of C. F. W. Walther's position on church fellowship, for it was this man's theological views that had the greatest influence upon the doctrine and practice of the Missouri Synod.³ Indeed, years before the church bodies associated with the General Council began arguing over the kinds of "exceptions" The Galesburg Rule permitted, and with whom Lutheran churches could be in altar and pulpit fellowship, Walther had already made clear that a concern for doctrinal agreement was essential in any discussion of church fellowship. Any error, however insignificant, could disrupt a fellowship relationship:

³C. F. W. Walther served as president of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod from 1847 to 1850, and again from 1864 to 1878.

What we maintain is this: On the one hand, a non-fundamental error, even if it is contrary to the clear Word of God, must not be treated as a heresy, but in patient instruction it must be shown to be untenable, be refuted, opposed, and criticized. On the other hand, however, if a church has exhausted all means of bringing such an erring brother to the acknowledgment of the truth and his adherence to the respective error evidently is not due to insufficient intellectual understanding of Scripture-teaching, and hence through this non-fundamental error it becomes manifest that he consciously, stubbornly, and obstinately contradicts the divine Word and that accordingly through his error he subverts the organic foundation of faith, then such an erring person, like all others that persevere in mortal sins, must no longer be borne with, but fraternal relations with him must be terminated. The same thing applies to a whole church-body which errs in a non-fundamental doctrine. It is very true that in this life absolute unity in faith and doctrine is not possible, and no higher unity than a fundamental one can be attained. This, however, by no means implies that in a church-body errors of a non-fundamental nature which become manifest and which contradict the clear Word of God must not be attacked and that a church can be regarded as a true church and be treated as such if it either makes such non-fundamental errors a part of its confession and, with injury to the organic foundation, in spite of all admonition, stubbornly clings to these errors or in a unionistic fashion and in a spirit of indifference insists that a deviation from God's clear Word in such points need be of no concern to us.⁴

Although Walther and the Missouri Synod were willing to bear with the weaker brother in matters of non-fundamental articles, this by no means meant that the prerequisite of complete agreement in doctrine was ever to be compromised when the fundamentals of the Christian faith were at stake.

⁴William Arndt and Alex Guebert, translators, "The False Arguments of the Modern Theory of Open Questions. A Translation of Dr. C. F. W. Walther's article entitled 'Die falschen Stuetzen der modernen Theorie von den offenen Fragen,' Lehre und Wehre, XIV (1868)." Concordia Theological Monthly 10 (April-November 1939):261-262.

In such an instance the correct principle was clear. Walther stated:

But of course, it is a different matter when it comes to those fundamental articles of faith that are clearly and plainly revealed in God's Word. In regard to these we do indeed demand full agreement for entering into church fellowship. But we demand it because, according to the Word of God, 1. there is only one church (John 10:16); 2. because this one church is not built upon human ideas but solely on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, that is, upon Christ and His Word (Ephesians 2:20); 3. because there is only one faith, which the church has and through which it is one body and one Spirit (Ephesians 4:4-5); 4. because also the seemingly smallest error, like a little leaven, can pervert the whole doctrine that is otherwise pure (Galatians 5:9); and finally 5. because every error with regard to an article of faith is a departure from God's Word and command and hence a serious sin which can never, never be granted any sort of right to exist in the church.⁵

Thus, as far as Walther and the Missouri Synod were concerned, all differences in doctrine, fundamental and non-fundamental alike, were injurious to the fellowship of the visible church on earth. None of these differences were, therefore, to be ignored for the sake of a quick and easy declaration of altar and pulpit fellowship with another church body.

When the constituent synods of the General Council became embroiled in a heated discussion over the kinds of "exceptions" the second and third paragraphs of The Galesburg Rule allowed, it soon became clear that the Rule was being interpreted strictly by some, and flexibly by others. It was

⁵Aug. R. Suelflow, gen. ed., Selected Writings of C. F. W. Walther (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1981). Editorials from "Lehre und Wehre". Translated by Herbert J. A. Bouman, p. 90.

in the context of this ongoing controversy, therefore, that Walther's Theses on Communion Fellowship With Those Who Believe Differently must be understood, for there were many within the General Council who ridiculed the Missouri Synod's practice of altar fellowship.⁶ Therefore, beginning with the biblical doctrine of the church, Walther argued that communion fellowship without agreement in doctrine is contrary to a scriptural understanding of the Sacrament and totally inconsistent with the historic practice of the Lutheran Church. "I admit," he wrote, "that our Lutheran accusers do not want to have anything to do with the wretched theory which holds that everyone should be admitted to Communion just as they are to preaching. . . .

But nevertheless they are still willing to admit anyone to Holy Communion who is not openly unchristian regardless of his particular confessional position. This unionistic error is defended by the spokesmen of the so called "Church Council," among others, who wrongly appeal to a passage from our symbols. They say we must admit all those who are proven to be dear Christians to Holy Communion. This basic principle of unionism originates in a perverted doctrine of the church. Our opponents do not really believe that there is one true visible church on earth in an absolute sense.⁷

Dr. Walther was concerned because his adversaries operated as though the Lutheran Church was not the true visible church in an absolute sense; that she was not the

⁶These theses were delivered at the 1870 convention of the Western District of the Missouri Synod.

⁷C. F. W. Walther, Theses on Communion Fellowship With Those Who Believe Differently, trans. Laurence L. White (Pittsburgh: 1980), pp. 1-2.

orthodox contrasted to the heterodox, but was merely the best among many goods. To them the distinction between it and other church bodies was a matter of degree and not substance. They held this view because, according to Walther, they regarded it as arrogant, intolerable presumption for any church to insist it possessed and taught the pure Gospel. On the contrary, it was quite clear to Walther that only those who held to the word of Christ were the true church in which God himself dwelt. "The Lord of heaven and earth lives among them not only as he does everywhere according to his essence, but also according to his gracious presence."⁸ Once a church body had forsaken or compromised this sure word, it became, according to Walther, "a sect--with which we will have no fellowship."⁹ This is why Walther insisted that pulpit or altar fellowship with the orthodox Lutheran Church was possible only when one's confession and life witnessed to the fact that one was truly a part of that church.

The sacraments should gather the Church and mark its members. A communicant comes forward as a preacher in that he confesses the true church to be there where he eats the sacrament. The spokesmen of the "Church Council" would also admit that Baptism and Holy Communion are the distinguishing marks of the orthodox church. This being the case, it is a most grievous fraud and a deception in the name of God to impress the seal of orthodoxy upon those who believe differently, in that they are received at holy communion. In an attempt to justify themselves the spokesmen of the "Church Council"

⁸Ibid., p. 12.

⁹Ibid.

accuse us of treating those Christians who believe differently the same as those who are excommunicated and banned. But this charge is thoroughly false. We have often said and we say it now again, that there are still true Christians in heterodox churches. But they stand under a false banner and label. Now we cannot and will not give them the true spiritual banner until they also confess to it from their hearts with us. In fact, our opponents object that the Sacrament and even the mutilated Sacrament of the sects is to be a distinguishing mark of confession of Christianity generally over against the heathen, the Jews, and the Turks, and therefore Christians should very well cultivate communion fellowship among one another. But this is also in error. If the Sacrament is a mark of confession, as it is, then it is a mark of pure confession. If anyone comes to our altar we must first ask him: Do you also believe and confess what we Lutherans believe and confess? And if someone would answer, Whether the Lutheran or the Reformed faith is correct I do not know and I will not judge. It should be known that he is either an unworthy hypocrite or an epicurean skeptic. We for our part know that we Lutherans alone have the correctly administered communion. But if we were to suppose that there might also be others, it would still always be valid that wherever anyone participates in Communion he thereby confesses as his own the doctrine which prevails there. Our communion is our banner. He who in his heart does not stand with us Lutherans should also not stand under this banner, and he who does this nevertheless we declare to be a traitor.¹⁰

Indeed, Lutheran altars were for Lutheran communicants only, and Lutheran pulpits were for Lutheran pastors only. Yet, if this kind of practice was to work, one had to be certain one knew exactly what a "Lutheran" was. Because the General Council could not render a unanimous definition, their Galesburg Rule was, according to Walther and other Missouri Synod leaders, quite inadequate.

As early as 1876, only one year after the General Council's adoption of The Galesburg Rule, Martin Guenther, a

¹⁰Ibid., pp. 41-42.

professor at Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, rendered an opinion of the Rule which appears to have been generally accepted throughout the Missouri Synod. Guenther was gravely disappointed by the way many within the General Council were interpreting the two "exceptions" paragraphs of The Galesburg Rule. He feared that pastors within the General Council who were openly unionistic would interpret these "exceptions" as giving them a blank check by which they would continue to carry on their unorthodox practices while still garbed in a false cloak of Lutheran respectability. Because The Galesburg Rule so quickly and easily settled a burning dispute within the General Council, it was, from the beginning, a suspect document. Guenther stated:

A declaration which satisfies such varied parties, as also [between] those men, which defend pulpit and altar fellowship with heretics and defame rejection of such as stiff exclusivism, and those who have spoken against unionism--such a declaration which satisfies such varied parties without the enemy party declaring that it has come to a different opinion, condemns itself; it is not worthy of a true Lutheran. Such a foul peace cannot please God and it is of no use to the church. A sincere fight is better.¹¹

Thus, because The Galesburg Rule could be interpreted in a variety of ways, the leadership of the Missouri Synod could not view its adoption by the General Council as a sure proof of the Council's orthodoxy. For the Missouri Synod, then, the Rule, as it was originally adopted, served as neither a

¹¹Martin Guenther, "Die Galesburger Regel," Lehre und Wehre 22B (1876):237.

mark of the true Church nor as a sure guideline for ecclesiastical practice.

That the General Council's Rule left much to be desired was again made clear when the Missouri Synod, along with the Wisconsin, Ohio, Norwegian, Illinois and Minnesota synods, established The Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America in 1872. As far as these founding members were concerned, they had been forced to organize a new general body due to the lack of confessional loyalty found in the other general Lutheran organizations. Although the General Council's public confession of faith looked very good on paper, it meant, according to the men of the Synodical Conference, absolutely nothing if a corresponding ecclesiastical practice was absent.

Herewith our church openly and gladly declares no fellowship not only with the crass Zwinglians but also his [sic] Calvinists. And whoever has fellowship with them says in vain that he subscribes unreserved to his Confessions. In its best days, our church did not consider a stated subscription of its symbols a sufficient proof of orthodoxy and unity. More than that, those who were suspect of false teaching and still assumed subscription were nevertheless not considered fellow subscribers. A formal confession is not only worthless when corresponding action does not follow, but it can also become a shield with which one wants to cover himself from just attacks. How much our church requires from another church in order to have fellowship, it declares clearly and pointedly in the words of our Confession: "We believe, teach, and also confess that no church should damn the other when one has fewer or more external ceremonies which are not commanded by God. This is so because the other has kept unity in doctrine and in all other articles as well as in the correct

usage of the Holy Sacrament." (Formula of Concord, Epitome. Art. 10).¹²

From its beginning, then, both the Missouri Synod, as well as the Synodical Conference to which it belonged, objected to the manner in which the General Council's ecclesiastical practice did not truthfully reflect the confession to which the Council had subscribed. Missouri and its fellow Lutherans argued that one could develop a caring and evangelical altar and pulpit fellowship practice only after one was grounded firmly in evangelical doctrine. Then, both a church body's doctrine and practice bore witness to the kind of church it was. When it became clear the General Council's interpretation of its Galesburg Rule allowed two contrary church fellowship practices to stand side by side, it became equally clear to the Missouri Synod and the other members of the Synodical Conference that the General Council was a church body unsure of its own Lutheranism. With such a body church fellowship was impossible since it could be said: They have as many confessions as they have men.

Approximately twenty years after the formation of the Synodical Conference, Franz Pieper of Concordia Seminary in St. Louis again set forth the Synodical Conference's position

¹²Denkschrift, enthaltend eine eingehende Darlegung der Gründe, weshalb die zur Synodical-Conferenz der evangel.-luther. Kirche von Nord-Amerika zusammentretenden Synoden sich nicht an eine der hiezulande schon bestehenden lutherisch benannten Verbindungen von Synoden haben anschliessen koennen (Columbus, Ohio, 1871), pp. 25-26.

regarding the altar and pulpit fellowship issue.¹³ Again it was made clear that simply because a church body called itself "Lutheran," did not mean that body was indeed an orthodox Lutheran church. Rather, as Pieper put it:

A Church which conforms to the command of Christ, that is, a Church in which the Gospel is taught in its purity and the Sacraments are administered according to the Gospel, is by right called an orthodox Church; on the other hand, a Church which does not conform to the will of Christ, but allows false doctrine to be taught in its midst, is justly called a heterodox Church. As ours is an age of indifference to doctrine, Christians must take special heed that the difference between orthodox and heterodox Churches be not obliterated. And it should be distinctly understood that the character of the Churches as to their orthodoxy, is determined by the doctrine which is actually taught [Pieper's emphasis], not by the "officially acknowledged confession" kept perhaps in the archives only; for Christ commanded all the articles of the Christian faith to be taught, and not kept on record only.¹⁴

Lutheran altars for Lutheran communicants only and Lutheran pulpits for Lutheran pastors only meant nothing if in practice little or no distinction was made between Lutherans and other Christians. Rather, as Pieper maintained in the name of both the Synodical Conference and the Missouri Synod, the question was one of orthodoxy being opposed to heterodoxy.

For both the Synodical Conference and the Missouri Synod, then, the whole church fellowship issue revolved

¹³Franz Pieper served as president of the Missouri Synod from 1899 to 1911.

¹⁴Franz Pieper, "The Synodical Conference" in The Distinctive Doctrines and Practices of the General Bodies of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the United States (Philadelphia: Lutheran publication Society, 1893), p. 126.

around the doctrine of the Church. Once it was granted that there was a true visible church on earth, the church fellowship practices of this church became clear-cut. Or, as Pieper put it:

All Christians are commanded to avoid those who teach doctrines contrary to the Scriptures (Rom. xvi. 17); teachers, therefore, who in any way proclaim false doctrines, are not to be admitted into, but to be excluded from our pulpits. As this rule is taken from the Word of God, it admits of no exception, but applies to every case and occasion. The practice of pulpit-fellowship with errorists cannot be excused on the plea of its being demanded by love. For it is contrary to both the love toward God who bids us "avoid" false teacher and not to invite them into our pulpits and the love toward our fellow-men, as it is our Christian duty to warn them against error, and not to confirm them in it. Moreover, it is patent that by the practice of "exchanging pulpits" the dissensions in the Church, caused by false teachers, are not removed, but continued and ratified.

. . . . In regard to altar-fellowship the same reasons hold good which forbid Church-fellowship with errorists. Altar-fellowship certainly is Church-fellowship.¹⁵

Simply because the Missouri Synod would not enter into altar and pulpit fellowship with another church body until agreement in doctrine and practice existed between the two, does not mean Missouri was unwilling to expend much energy in the pursuit of church fellowship relations with other Christian bodies. On the contrary, the history of the Missouri Synod is marked by numerous attempts to further the cause of Lutheran unity in America. For example, in 1916 various pastors from the Missouri, Ohio, Iowa, Wisconsin, and Michigan Synods met unofficially to explore and seek to

¹⁵Ibid., pp. 128-129.

resolve the problems of unity which existed between some of them.¹⁶ They produced a document entitled "Zur Einigung," and 550 pastors affixed their signatures to it. Enthusiasm for this venture became contagious throughout the Missouri Synod. Consequently, the Synod at its 1917 convention accepted a proposal to appoint an official committee that was to seek to bring about complete unity of doctrine between Missouri and those synods with which Missouri was not already in fellowship.

The venture produced results. Together with the above mentioned synods the Missouri Synod produced the "Inter-Synodical (Chicago) Theses" in 1925. Among other things, these theses adopted the church fellowship principles and practices found in the first paragraph of The Galesburg Rule. The Intersynodical (Chicago) Theses stated: "The Rule is: 'Lutheran pulpits for Lutheran pastors only; Lutheran altars for Lutheran communicants only.' Pulpit- and altar-fellowship without unity in doctrine is a denial of the truth and a sin committed against the erring."¹⁷ Because the Chicago Theses did not adequately address the main points at controversy between all the synods involved, however, they

¹⁶It will be remembered that as a result of the predestination controversy, the Ohio Synod, in 1881, and The Norwegian Synod, in 1883, both broke fellowship with the Missouri Synod and the other members of the Synodical Conference.

¹⁷Richard C. Wolf, Documents of Lutheran Unity in America (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), p. 365.

were judged by most, including Missouri, to be an insufficient basis for union.

Almost immediately after rejecting the Intersynodical Theses, however, the Missouri Synod decided to set forth in a rather comprehensive way a statement of its own doctrinal position. This statement, known as the "Brief Statement," was adopted in 1932. It was designed to become a basis for negotiating fellowship relations with other Lutheran church bodies. Since this document summarized the position of the Missouri Synod--a position which again emphasized both doctrine and practice, it must be quoted at length.

28. On Church Fellowship.--Since God ordained that His Word only, without the admixture of human doctrine, be taught and believed in the Christian Church . . . all Christians are required by God to discriminate between orthodox and heterodox church-bodies . . . and, in case they have strayed into heterodox church-bodies, to leave them. . . . We repudiate unionism, that is, church-fellowship with the adherents of false doctrine, as disobedience to God's command, as causing divisions in the Church . . . and as involving the constant danger of losing the Word of God entirely . . .

29. The orthodox character of a church is established not by its mere name nor by its outward acceptance of, and subscription to, an orthodox creed, but by the doctrine which is actually taught in its pulpits, in its theological seminaries, and in its publications . . . a church does not forfeit its orthodox character through the casual intrusion of errors, provided these are combated and eventually removed by means of doctrinal discipline. . . .¹⁸

Thus the Missouri Synod again held to the position on church fellowship which it first adopted in 1847. It was a position based upon complete commitment to the Scriptures and the

¹⁸Ibid., p. 388.

Confessions and exemplified in an earnest desire to preserve the truth. It was a position which took note of the fact that ecclesiastical practice had to be consonant with doctrine. It was a position which maintained that a church could not profess one thing and do another. By its actions a particular synod showed whether or not it was faithful to its confessional stance. Once again it was made clear that rather than employ The Galesburg Rule, the Missouri Synod would continue to insist that agreement in doctrine and practice be the basis by which all God-pleasing declarations of church fellowship were enacted.

By 1938, it appeared some success for maintaining its position might at last be realized by the Missouri Synod. Doctrinal discussions with the American Lutheran Church had culminated in this latter church body's acceptance of the "Brief Statement" in the light of its own "Declaration." Together these two documents were to be "regarded as the doctrinal basis for future church-fellowship between the Missouri Synod and the American Lutheran Church."¹⁹ An immediate declaration of church fellowship was impossible at this time, however, because agreement in certain non-fundamental doctrines had not yet been reached. Furthermore, the Missouri Synod continued to maintain:

¹⁹The Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States, Proceedings of the 37th Regular Convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1938), p. 231.

That, since for true unity we need not only this doctrinal agreement but also agreement in practice, we state with our synodical fathers that according to the Scriptures and the Lutheran confessional writings Christian practice must harmonize with Christian doctrine and that, where there is a divergence from Biblical, confessional practice, strenuous efforts must be made to correct such deviation. We refer particularly to the attitude toward the anti-Christian lodge, anti-Scriptural pulpit- and altar-fellowship, and all other forms of unionism.²⁰

The American Lutheran Church, however, saw no need to amend any of its ecclesiastical practices. Instead it continued to practice church fellowship with its fellow members in The American Lutheran Conference, and even worked out a church fellowship agreement with the United Lutheran Church in America on the basis of the "Pittsburgh Agreement." By 1941, therefore, the Missouri Synod, confused by the actions the ALC had taken since 1938, decided to take no further steps toward the establishment of church fellowship beyond those it had taken in 1938. Instead, it again committed itself to the principle that agreement in doctrine and practice was essential to all declarations of church fellowship and instructed its members that "no action is to be taken by any of our pastors or congregations which ignores the fact that we are not yet united [with the ALC]."²¹ Once

²⁰Ibid., p. 232.

²¹The Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States, Proceedings of the 38th Regular Convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1941), p. 303.

again the Missouri Synod's ecclesiastical practice had mirrored its church fellowship principle.

One year later the President of the Missouri Synod, John W. Behnken,²² explained the reasoning behind his church body's altar and fellowship practices to the members of the National Lutheran Council. Here it again became clear that the same doctrine of fellowship which dominated the Missouri Synod at its formation still held sway in the church body President Behnken represented. Indeed, Lutheran unity was one of the highest goals the Missouri Synod aspired to, admitted Behnken, yet there were other things more important than unity:

While we are most eager to have Lutherans united, there is one thing which we want more than union, and that is loyalty, steadfast and persistent loyalty, to divine truth as God has revealed it in the precious Bible. We are so vitally concerned about this, because true union can exist only where there is true loyalty to God's Word. Even world emergencies emphasize the need of solid foundations and warn earnestly against flimsy compromises. Any union based upon any deviation from God's Word or any compromise in matters of biblical doctrine is doomed to deterioration and ultimate failure. For that reason we plead for an earnest re-study of Biblical doctrine and Scriptural practice before any efforts are put forth to effect any new alliance or new organization.²³

If true unity among all the Lutheran churches in America was ever to be realized, President Behnken continued,

²²John W. Behnken served as President of the Missouri Synod from 1935 to 1962.

²³John W. Behnken, "Address Delivered in Columbus, Ohio May 15, 1942." Concordia Theological Monthly 14 (April 1943):289.

then the terms of this unity would have to be complete, where all involved were "united in faith, united in doctrine, united in unswerving loyalty to every truth of God's Word, united in sound Lutheran practice!"²⁴ To be united outwardly while being disunited inwardly would fall short of the God-pleasing goal of a united front in the Lutheran Church.

Thus, Behnken concluded:

Because the history of the Church furnishes irrefutable evidence that compromises or disregard for doctrinal unity carry within them the seed of division, disruption, and decay, we plead once more for a thorough re-study of doctrine and practice in our Lutheran Church, and, if God wills, a sound agreement in faith and confession and practice, before we consider the advisability or possibility of any new organization. There is no doubt that our Lutheran Church in America faces tremendous responsibilities. To meet them adequately we must build on solid foundations. . . . We shall serve the cause of our blessed Redeemer only if we hold fast tenaciously to the truth of Scripture and reject error in every form, both in doctrine and practice. That is soundly Biblical. That is soundly Lutheran.²⁵

From its very foundation, and up until approximately 1944, therefore, the Missouri Synod consistently maintained that church fellowship was possible with other Christians, Lutherans included, only after agreement in doctrine and practice had been reached. This position was clearly and repeatedly set forth not only by the Synod's elected officials, but also by its adopted convention resolutions. When confronted with altar and pulpit fellowship principles the likes of which The Galesburg Rule is an example, the

²⁴Ibid., p. 290.

²⁵Ibid., pp. 290-291.

Missouri Synod, rather than adopt an ambiguous practice (The Galesburg Rule meant different things to different Lutherans), instead opted for the clarity its historic position afforded. To be sure, there were many within Missouri who yearned and voted for a church fellowship practice which would have made altar and pulpit fellowship with other American Lutherans easier. By and large, however, these voices had little effect on the workings of the general church body. Only with the coming of the post-World War II era did these same voices begin to exert pressure and eventually exert an influence upon the church fellowship practices of the Missouri Synod.

The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod
from 1945 to 1969

The first real impetus for a formal review of the Missouri Synod's historic church fellowship principles came in 1945 with the issuance of "A Statement" by forty-four members of the Synod. This controversial document stirred up considerable tumult within the Synod and was the first concrete indication that the spirit of shifting theological practice was in the air. Although no official action was taken on the matters presented by "A Statement,"²⁶ it

²⁶After much consideration between the signers of the document and the officials of the Synod, "A Statement" was withdrawn from discussion. See: The Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States, Proceedings of the 40th Regular Convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1947), pp. 520-524.

nevertheless set the tone for many formal and informal debates regarding the correctness of the Missouri Synod's church fellowship principles and practices. While the document generally deplored what was considered a legalistic attitude within the Synod, it also addressed itself specifically to issues relating to church fellowship.

Shortly after the issuance of "A Statement," an explanatory booklet entitled Speaking the Truth In Love was published. Because this document amplified the theses contained in "A Statement," its pages were filled with the theological arguments many "A Statement" sympathizers within Synod believed were legitimate reasons for changing their church body's historic church fellowship position. Of these arguments, two are of note. In the first place, theses six of "A Statement" asserted:

We affirm the historic Lutheran position concerning the central importance of the una sancta and the local congregation. We believe that there should be a re-emphasis of the privileges and responsibilities of the local congregation also in the matter of determining questions of fellowship.

We therefore deplore the new and improper emphasis on the synodical organization as basic in our consideration of the problems of the Church. We believe that no organizational loyalty can take the place of loyalty to Christ and His Church.²⁷

The explanatory essay of this thesis held that the question of fellowship was an obligation which belonged to the congregation and which, for that reason, "must not be assumed

²⁷Speaking the Truth In Love: Essays Related to A Statement, Chicago, Nineteen-forty-five (Chicago: Willow Press, 1946?), p. 8.

by Synod or Synodical officers and boards."²⁸ The establishment of fellowship was said to occur neither by the congregation nor by Synod but by the Holy Spirit. "A mere resolution on the part of Synod declaring that our Synod is henceforth in pulpit and altar fellowship with another church body cannot legislate for a given congregation."²⁹ What this essay was saying, then, was that if a Missouri Synod congregation decided the Holy Spirit had established fellowship between it and another congregation not in fellowship with Missouri, the congregation's decision took precedence over the Synod's because the congregation is divinely instituted while the Synod is merely a human institution.³⁰ In essence, this essay was a declaration of congregational independence and an argument for the adoption of the practice known as "selective fellowship."

The second thesis of "A Statement" deserving special attention was thesis number eleven. Here it was stated:

We affirm our conviction that in keeping with the historic Lutheran tradition and in harmony with the Synodical resolution adopted in 1938 regarding Church fellowship, such fellowship is possible without complete agreement in details of doctrine and practice which have never been considered divisive in the Lutheran Church.³¹

²⁸Ibid., p. 48.

²⁹Ibid., pp. 48-49.

³⁰Ibid., pp. 47-49.

³¹Ibid., p. 9.

The essayist who explained this thesis began by stating that what was meant here was not the toleration of error, but rather that it was possible "to deal with certain aberrations in either doctrine or practice without disrupting, or severing or denying Church fellowship on their account."³² Unfortunately, this explanation was not entirely faithful to the text of thesis eleven. A basic and fundamental shift from the 1938 Resolution, which stated deviation in the doctrine of the Anti-christ "need not be divisive of church-fellowship,"³³ and the position of "A Statement," which held that certain details of doctrine and practice "have never been considered divisive in the Lutheran Church,"³⁴ had occurred. Apparently, the framers of "A Statement" had either overlooked, or were trying to down-play the fact that the 1938 Resolution had again asserted that agreement in doctrine and practice was essential for the true unity of the church. Still, the focus of thesis eleven illustrates the new direction in which the authors of "A Statement" were trying to lead the Missouri Synod. To be sure, no ecclesiastical practice the likes of The Galesburg Rule had yet been mentioned. However, the possibility of

³²Ibid., p. 69.

³³The Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States, Proceedings of the 37th Regular Convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1938), p. 229.

³⁴Speaking the Truth In Love, p. 69.

the Synod adopting some kind of selective fellowship practice had been raised. Forces bent on changing the Missouri Synod's historic church fellowship principles and practices were speaking louder than ever.

The supporters of the Missouri Synod's historic fellowship position were by no means silent throughout all this, however. On the contrary, the traditional position of the Synod still had important advocates. For example, in February of 1946, President John Behnken, speaking on behalf of the Missouri Synod, addressed the American Lutheran Conference in a manner which again clearly emphasized how essential agreement in doctrine and practice was for the establishment of church fellowship:

We are vitally interested in the cause of Lutheran fellowship. We pray for it. We want to put forth every effort toward its achievement. However, it must be on sound, solid, Scriptural foundations. . . .

Today efforts are being put forth toward fellowship via co-operation. Co-operative efforts have been proclaimed and heralded as harbingers of Lutheran fellowship and Lutheran union. Let me speak very frankly. If such co-operation involves joint work in missions, in Christian education, in student welfare work, in joint services celebrating great events, then co-operation is just another name for pulpit, altar and prayer fellowship. Without doctrinal agreement, this spells compromise. It means yielding in doctrinal positions. Such fellowship will not stand in the light of Scripture. You realize, of course, that Missouri has been co-operating in externals in matters which do not involve pulpit, altar, and prayer fellowship. Such co-operation should not and must not be interpreted as a step toward fellowship or a method of bringing about fellowship among Lutherans. Fellowship among Lutherans is possible and Biblical only where there is agreement in Biblical doctrine and Scriptural practice. Where such agreement has been reached, pulpit, altar, and prayer fellowship will necessarily follow.

. . . . Another important feature which we must heed if fellowship among Lutherans is to be achieved is that church bodies practice thorough Scriptural discipline, brotherly discipline both in matters of doctrine and in matters of practice. . . .

Furthermore, doctrine definitely must be followed by practice. Indescribable harm has been done the cause of Lutheran fellowship when men become guilty of unionistic services, whereby they create impressions that after all there is no difference or that the differences are of little moment. Then, too, laxity and indifference over against the Christless secret orders should be mentioned. Irreparable damage is done not only to individual souls but to the cause of Lutheranism wherever a lax and indifferent practice obtains. Such practice definitely delays and hinders fellowship among Lutherans. I realize that most Lutherans subscribe to the principle: "Lutheran pulpits for Lutheran pastors, and Lutheran altars for Lutheran communicants." However, it is common knowledge that only too often there are violations of this principle and no disciplinary action is taken. That hurts. That places barriers before the efforts toward genuine Lutheran unity. That shuts the door.³⁵

This was a tremendous presentation of the Missouri Synod's historic fellowship principles. Furthermore, President Behnken had served notice that where the words of The Galesburg Rule were accepted, but a corresponding practice was absent, real barriers were placed before the cause of genuine Lutheran unity.

The position so forcefully presented by President Behnken was, by 1947, still the official position of the Missouri Synod. At its convention of this same year the Synod not only reaffirmed that agreement in doctrine and

³⁵John W. Behnken, "Fellowship Among Lutherans," Concordia Theological Monthly 18 (February 1947):121-123.

practice was necessary for church fellowship,³⁶ but also spoke to a number of issues raised by "A Statement." Since wide divergence of opinion in the Synod concerning the 1938 resolutions calling for church fellowship with the ALC indicated insufficient clarity regarding the true meaning of these resolutions, the convention resolved that "the 1938 resolutions shall no longer be considered as a basis for the purpose for establishing fellowship with the American Lutheran Church"³⁷ Furthermore, the convention clearly spoke out against the practice of selective fellowship. When a New York congregation memorialized the Synod for permission to adopt such a practice (Memorial 615), the convention responded by saying:

Since adoption of the principle of selective fellowship by any pastor, teacher, or congregation of our Synod must therefore be regarded, as our Committee on Doctrinal Unity declares: "as hindering the earnest, patient, and God-pleasing endeavor of Synod to establish fellowship" with any other synod, your Committee recommends that the request of Memorial 615 be denied.³⁸

Once again the Missouri Synod had clearly and publicly set forth its church fellowship position and practices. That this was the only voice speaking in Missouri at this time, however, was not the case.

³⁶The Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States, Proceedings of the 40th Regular Convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1947), p. 501.

³⁷Ibid., p. 510.

³⁸Ibid., p. 520.

The early 1950s brought the last attempt, for some time at least, of the Missouri Synod to reach fellowship by the use of its historic fellowship principles. Great effort was consumed in the production of the Common Confession Parts I and II.³⁹ This effort also failed, first because of arguments raised against the Common Confession by those within the Missouri Synod and in the Synodical Conference, and secondly, because of the American Lutheran Church's decision to pursue a merger with the member churches of The American Lutheran Conference. At any rate, the Common Confession was an honest attempt to work toward fellowship on the basis of agreement in doctrine and practice. However, the fact that at certain key places the document made rather general statements concerning doctrines which in the past had been disputed did not satisfy those within the Missouri Synod who were gravely concerned about a compromise in the doctrinal stance of their church body.

The early 1950s also produced an agreement, reached between the Missouri Synod and the Bureau of Service to Military Personnel of the National Lutheran Council, which set forth an official fellowship practice more closely resembling The Galesburg Rule than anything the Synod had ever adopted before, or since. This agreement made sure that under the most trying circumstances, Missouri Synod

³⁹For the text of the Common Confession see: Wolf, Documents of Lutheran Unity in America, pp. 408-428.

military chaplains would still be able to exercise responsible pastoral care. The document stated:

In the matter of admission to the Lord's Supper. . . the normal procedure shall be that members of each group attend the Communion Service conducted by representatives of that particular group. . . .

In exceptional situations, where a member of one group earnestly seeks admission to the Lord's Supper conducted by . . . the other group, the individual case in each instance will be considered by the pastor concerned. It is agreed that in such cases particular synodical membership of a Lutheran in the armed forces shall not be a required condition for admission to the Lord's Supper.

It is agreed that the chaplain or pastor may commune such men and women in the armed forces as are conscious of the need of repentance and hold the essence of faith, including the doctrines of the Real Presence and of the Lord's Supper as a Means of Grace and profess acceptance thereof.⁴⁰

Here, one must again note, the Missouri Synod's historic church fellowship principles were not being nullified. Rather, this agreement did nothing more than insure that under the most trying circumstances responsible pastoral care for military personnel would be provided.

The rest of the 1950s may be viewed as a time during which the Missouri Synod was caught between two opposing tendencies. On the one hand, Synod was being pulled in one direction by the fearful hearts of many from its sister synods in the Synodical Conference. These sister synods

⁴⁰Articles of Agreement between the Armed Service Commission of the Missouri Synod and the Bureau of Service to Military Personnel of the National Lutheran Council (1951), quoted in Fred W. Meuser, "Pulpit and Altar Fellowship Among Lutherans in America," in Church in Fellowship, 2 vols. ed. Vilmos Vajta (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1963), 2:62.

tended to view Missouri's negotiations with the ALC as attempts to gloss over past differences. This produced a group in the Missouri Synod which was made up of people who were primarily concerned with pure confession. On the other hand, there were an equal number of Missouri Synod members, frustrated perhaps by past failures to attain altar and pulpit fellowship agreements, who were adopting a witness and outreach emphasis. Martin Franzmann, professor at Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, spoke of these two tendencies and the false alternatives they presented in a short study entitled "Der Baum Ist Nicht Dick Sondern Gruen." In this article Franzmann painted a rather clear picture of the tensions building up in the Missouri Synod:

Each of us is therefore inclined to emphasize more strongly one or the other of the two alternatives sketched above; and that is good so [sic]. God uses us in our diversity to help one another and to further His work. But it is not good, and it is a sin when we seek to make our emphasis the exclusive emphasis and the all-controlling emphasis, in effect asserting that God has led only us and has opened only our eyes and as a result refusing to listen to our brethren in their equally Scriptural, equally holy, and equally necessary emphasis. And how shall we answer for it if we as brethren do not meet and share, but collide--and each drives the other and provokes the other, not to love, but to a rigid and opposition-tempered fixity in his way? Unless we learn to say A and B, instead of the easier A or B, we shall all of us, each in his own isolated way, become theomachoi, fighters against God; even Gamaliel did not want to be answerable for that.⁴¹

Thus, by the end of the 1950s the Missouri Synod had two principles being advocated within its ranks. Neither one of

⁴¹Martin Franzmann, "Der Baum Ist Nicht Dick Sondern Gruen," Concordia Theological Monthly 23 (1952):924.

these principles was, at that time, mutually contradictory of the other. Yet the possibility of internal strife and discord within the Synod loomed larger than ever before. Eventually, Missouri's church fellowship principles and practices were affected.

Ever since the 1945 publication of "A Statement," almost every convention of the Missouri Synod had been confronted with at least one memorial asking the synod to change its church fellowship principle from agreement in doctrine and practice to either some type of selective fellowship or, perhaps, to a variation of the kind of ecclesiastical practice encouraged by The Galesburg Rule. With the coming of the 1960s, however, the voices for change grew far louder. Once the Wisconsin and Evangelical Lutheran Synods withdrew from the Synodical Conference and broke fellowship with the LC-MS, Missouri at once began to restudy its own theology of fellowship "unencumbered by the traditions of its former sister synods."⁴² Again, a major effort to establish altar and pulpit fellowship with the American Lutheran Church was launched.

The way toward the establishment of church fellowship with the ALC was made clear by a study of the theology of fellowship completed by The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod's Commission On Theology and Church Relations. This document

⁴²Arthur Repp, "Changes in the Missouri Synod," Concordia Theological Monthly 38 (July-August 1967):477.

re-interpreted many of the Biblical texts the Synod had traditionally used to justify its historic church fellowship position. Now, however, these texts were said to speak only of non-Christians. They could not be used as means to regulate Christian fellowship. For example, the authors of the Theology of Fellowship stated: The church "will be misusing these passages if she uses them to hinder the church's ongoing attempts to heal the schisms in the church and to foster the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."⁴³ Unfortunately, this argument did not take into consideration the way Christ and His Apostles warned the faithful about those within their midst who were causing divisions and offenses, who, like wolves in sheep's clothing, were the false prophets within the congregation that were leading others astray.

Another point where the Theology of Fellowship strayed from the historical Missouri Synod understanding of church fellowship was in its interpretation of Article VII of the Unaltered Augsburg Confession.⁴⁴ Here it was maintained that Article VII had always been "the basis for pulpit and altar fellowship, as it has been understood in the Lutheran Church

⁴³The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod Commission on Theology and Church Relations, Theology of Fellowship (St. Louis: The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, 1965), p. 26.

⁴⁴Augustana VII reads: "And to the true unity of the church it is enough to agree concerning the doctrine of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments."

where it was loyal to the confessions. . . ."45 This was a new interpretation of Augustana VII, and it implied a far broader basis for church fellowship than anything the Missouri Synod's Commission on Theology and Church Relations had previously stated.⁴⁶ Thus, the Theology of Fellowship provided arguments for dismissing the traditional scriptural and confessional concerns the Missouri Synod had about its historic fellowship principles. Once these arguments were accepted as valid by the leadership the Missouri Synod, the way was opened for the adoption of broader fellowship principles and practices. Indeed, this is what happened.

Before the 1967 convention of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, an agreement reached between official representatives from The American Lutheran Church, the Synod of Evangelical Lutheran Churches, and the LC-MS was put forward as a basis for the establishment of church fellowship between the three church bodies. This "Joint Statement and Declaration" stated:

The members of the committee are unanimous in asserting that where Lutheran bodies have been granted and have discovered a consensus in the preaching of the Gospel "in conformity with a pure understanding of it" and in the administration of the sacraments "in accordance with

⁴⁵The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod Commission on Theology and Church Relations, Theology of Fellowship, p. 18.

⁴⁶Augustana VII should not be employed in this manner, for it speaks only of unitas (unity), and not of concordia (fellowship). Augustana VII is, therefore, descriptive, rather than prescriptive. It describes the marks of the true church, but does not endeavor to set down the basis for church fellowship.

the divine Word" (A.C. VII), they not only may but should enter into pulpit and altar fellowship.⁴⁷

Here a very real change in the Missouri Synod's church fellowship principles and practices was quite evident. According to the commissioners, all that was necessary for church fellowship was "a consensus in the preaching of the Gospel." Gone was the historic insistence on agreement in doctrine and practice. Once the 1967 convention got underway, therefore, it was only a matter of time before this same line of argumentation was adopted. Resolution 3-23 of that convention stated:

WHEREAS, Diversities of practice which do not constitute a denial or contradiction of the Gospel can be understood better, and agreement can be developed more easily toward a consistent evangelical practice for mutual edification, when Christians are united in the work of the Lord under Word and Sacraments. . . .

Resolved, That the Synod recognize that the Scriptural and confessional basis for altar and pulpit fellowship between The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod and The American Lutheran Church exists, that the Synod proceed to take the necessary steps toward full realization of altar and pulpit fellowship with The American Lutheran Church, and that the Synod invite the Synod of Evangelical Lutheran Churches to join us in the same. . . .⁴⁸

Hence, the Missouri Synod agreed to disagree, and looked forward to its 1969 convention when altar and pulpit

⁴⁷The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, Reports and Overtures of the 47th Convention of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1967), pp. 421-422.

⁴⁸The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, Proceedings of the 47th Convention of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1967), pp. 102-103.

fellowship with The American Lutheran Church would be officially declared.

Still, it must be noted that even though Missouri's traditional church fellowship practices had been tampered with, the doors to unrestrained altar and pulpit fellowship had not been thrown open. On the contrary, the same convention which passed the above Resolution 3-23, also urged its members "to refrain from selective pulpit fellowship with Lutherans not in fellowship with us."⁴⁹ Furthermore, the Synod again made clear its determination not to accept the kind of ecclesiastical practice fostered by The Galesburg Rule when it resolved that pastors and congregations of the Missouri Synod, "except in situations of emergency and in special cases of pastoral care," should "commune individuals of only those Lutheran synods which are now in fellowship with us."⁵⁰ Thus it is quite true that while the historic church fellowship principles and practices of the Missouri Synod were in a state of flux, this church body still displayed a great unwillingness to adopt the altar and fellowship practices so popular among most other American Lutherans.

The actions the Missouri Synod took in 1967 set the stage for its next convention held in Denver in 1969. In order to prepare the church for the declaration of church

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 92.

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 93.

fellowship with The ALC that the leadership of Synod felt sure would come at Denver, the President's Office published a document entitled Toward Fellowship.⁵¹ This document contained many statements which illustrated the extent to which the Missouri Synod's understanding of church fellowship had changed. The document itself took note of this fact:

Some brethren have not understood the fuller development of the understanding of church fellowship that has taken place in the Synod. All must be prepared to minister to one another in our own Synod in order that we demonstrate how these changes in the practice of fellowship are in agreement with the Holy Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions.⁵²

Instead of demanding agreement in doctrine and practice, the Synod was now content to let the "diversities" which existed between it and The ALC stand side by side. Such diversities, so the argument went, "even though they may be disturbing, should not be divisive of fellowship so long as they do not constitute a denial or contradiction of the Gospel."⁵³ Thus, Toward Fellowship never addressed issues such as whether or not these "diversities" could entail a denial of the Scriptures and not, at the same time, deny the Gospel. Rather, this document redefined what was necessary for pulpit and altar fellowship. It asserted: "When the

⁵¹Oliver Harms, who served as President of the Missouri Synod from 1962 to 1969, desired, and actively pursued, church fellowship with The ALC.

⁵²The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, Toward Fellowship (St. Louis: The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, 1968), p. 19.

⁵³Ibid.

Holy Spirit leads two churches to wholehearted consensus in the Gospel, then various diversities and difficulties can properly be understood and resolved in a God-pleasing manner."⁵⁴ In such a manner the Missouri Synod's earlier concern regarding "open questions," and even "non-fundamental doctrines" was displaced by a mere concern for "consensus in the Gospel."

The 1969 Synodical convention brought the long-awaited declaration of fellowship with The ALC for which many in the Missouri Synod had yearned. As noted above, this fellowship was based on a "consensus in the Gospel." Despite its passage, however, the fellowship declaration did not bring peace to the Missouri Synod. Some wanted more freedom in the areas of altar and pulpit fellowship. President Harms had to appeal to The Galesburg Rule in order to dissuade these people from inviting other Christians to share in open Communion for the rest of the convention.⁵⁵ Others yearned to return to the Synod's historic altar and pulpit fellowship principles and practices. This group submitted a minority report to the ALC fellowship resolution. This minority report stated that the Synod should refrain from declaring altar and pulpit fellowship with The American Lutheran Church since, among other things,

⁵⁴Ibid.

⁵⁵The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, Proceedings of the 48th Regular Convention of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1969), p. 20.

Extensive contacts and discussions have shown a wide divergence between The American Lutheran Church constitutional statements and the teaching and preaching practices in the areas of Scripture, ecumenical principles, and lodgery; and. . . .

The Constitution of the Synod, Article VI, point 2, and the Brief Statement of our Synod have made it obligatory that there be full agreement in doctrine and practice before declaring pulpit fellowship. . . .⁵⁶

Although the Synod failed to act on this minority report, it nevertheless once again resolved to urge all its members to refrain "from practicing altar and pulpit fellowship with congregations of church bodies with whom the Synod has not yet declared fellowship."⁵⁷

From 1945 to 1969, therefore, the Missouri Synod slowly moved away from its historic altar and pulpit fellowship principles and practices. While no ecclesiastical principles the likes of The Galesburg Rule were adopted by the Synod, the need for agreement in doctrine and practice before declarations of church fellowship were made was replaced by the desire to reach nothing more than a "consensus in the Gospel." This does not mean, however, that the members of the Synod had found a new church fellowship principle with which they were unanimously content. Indeed, many in the church yearned for a return to the Synod's traditional position. When Oliver Harms lost the presidency to a more conservative man, J. A. O. Preus, it seemed possible such a

⁵⁶Ibid., p. 99.

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 101.

return would be forthcoming.⁵⁸ Nothing towards this end could be accomplished by Preus' new administration, however, until it had first addressed the theological problems which were brewing at Concordia Seminary in St. Louis. The president and a majority of the faculty at that institution were promoting methods of biblical interpretation which ran contrary to the Missouri Synod's formal confession of faith. From 1969 until 1975, therefore, the Missouri Synod's convention delegates were so preoccupied with their church's internal problems that the fellowship issue received little attention. Change, if it was to come, would have to wait.

The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod
from 1970 to the present

As noted immediately above, the Missouri Synod was so busy addressing the theological problems posed by a majority of the faculty at Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, that little or nothing could be done during the early 1970s regarding its fellowship practices or principles. From 1969 to 1977, therefore, the Synod continued to be in altar and pulpit fellowship with The American Lutheran Church. Once the St. Louis seminary problems had been addressed, however, the church found itself re-evaluating its 1969 actions. A return to the historic fellowship principles and practices of the Missouri Synod was set in motion.

⁵⁸J. A. O. Preus served as President of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod from 1969 to 1981.

At the Missouri Synod's 1977 synodical convention, the delegates present heard two important reports. First, the Synod's Commission on Theology and Church Relations reported that doctrinal agreement did not exist between The American Lutheran Church and the Missouri Synod. Differences existed between the two bodies in areas such as a) the inspiration, inerrancy, and authority of the Scriptures, b) the ordination of women to the pastoral office, c) the nature and basis of fellowship, and d) membership and participation in ecumenical organizations. Secondly, the ALC--LCMS Commission on Fellowship reported that no substantial progress had been made in resolving these differences. To many within the Synod these reports came as no surprise. It was well known there were doctrinal differences between The ALC and the Missouri Synod back in 1969 when the two bodies first entered into a church fellowship relationship. The difference in 1977, however, was that a majority within the Missouri Synod now desired to get back to their church body's historic position regarding doctrine and practice and the establishment of altar and pulpit fellowship with other churches. Still, there were numerous reasons for not immediately and totally breaking off fellowship relations with The ALC.

Although at the synodical level full agreement between The ALC and the LC-MS had not been realized, there was some evidence of agreement in doctrine and practice between members of the two bodies at the local level. Furthermore,

it was clear that not all members of the ALC shared the objectionable positions and practices of the ALC and some of its officials and theologians. For these reasons, and because it was evident many within the LC-MS were unaware of the serious differences that existed at the church body level, the Synod resolved:

That the LCMS declare itself to be in a state of "fellowship in protest" with the ALC on account of doctrinal disagreements as indicated above. Such a state of "fellowship in protest," as the CTCR stated in a 1970 document, "is not tantamount to the breaking of fellowship. If, however, the circumstances which called forth the protest are not corrected in due time, the implication is that the protest will lead to the severance of fellowship relations (1971 CW, p. 39)." This would mean that the LCMS officially recognizes that its relationship of altar and pulpit fellowship with the ALC has been disrupted by positions and practices of the ALC. It would allow pastors and congregations of the Synod to practice fellowship with the pastors and congregations of the ALC. . .⁵⁹

Thus the Missouri Synod gave public notice that agreement in doctrine and practice would have to be reached if its church fellowship relation with The ALC was to continue. At the same time, however, Missouri also made equally clear that it would not sever already established church fellowship relations in a careless or loveless manner.

Relations between the Missouri Synod and The American Lutheran Church as described in the above paragraph remained unchanged for approximately four years as official representatives from each body endeavored to iron out the

⁵⁹The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, Proceedings of the 52nd Regular Convention of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1977), p. 126.

doctrinal differences which separated their respective church bodies. By 1980, however, it became clear that the two churches were simply no longer speaking the same theological language.⁶⁰ For example, after long discussions with official ALC representatives, Missouri Synod officials on the LCMS/ALC Commission on Fellowship concluded:

. . . theologians of The American Lutheran Church generally affirm the appropriateness of the historical-critical method for use in the study of Holy Scripture, whereas The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod has rejected this method because it is inconsistent with the Scriptures' revelatory character as the Word of God and frequently results in conclusions that challenge Biblical authority, truthfulness, and unity . . . whereas ALC theologians generally understand agreement on the Gospel in a narrow sense as the sufficient basis for church fellowship, the LCMS holds that because all articles of faith are integrally related to the Gospel in its narrower sense, agreement in doctrine and all its articles is necessary for the establishment of church fellowship.⁶¹

Thus it not only became clear The ALC and the Missouri Synod differed on certain theological points, but also that Missouri regarded these differences as injurious to altar and pulpit fellowship. Once again agreement in doctrine was designated as the all important ingredient for church fellowship relations.

⁶⁰For a complete account of the doctrinal differences which existed between The American Lutheran Church and The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod at this time see: "The American Lutheran Church and The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod: A Statement of Doctrinal Differences" in The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, Reports and Overtures of the 54th Regular Convention of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1981), pp. 397-402.

⁶¹Ibid., p. 401.

Approximately six months after the statement on doctrinal differences quoted immediately above was published, the Missouri Synod's Commission on Theology and Church Relations published a report entitled: The Nature and Implications of the Concept of Church Fellowship. This report removed all doubt that at the very least, the leadership of the Missouri Synod had re-adopted the historic altar and pulpit fellowship principles their church body had earlier espoused. In part this very important document concluded:

The Commission on Theology and Church Relations . . . is convinced that The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod should continue to seek to carry out the Scriptural principles of fellowship at the church-body level by means of ecclesiastical declarations of altar and pulpit fellowship based on agreement in doctrine and practice.⁶²

This opinion, as published by the Commissioners, did not mean they believed their church body should be rigid and legalistic in its dealings with other Christians. On the contrary, the members of the Commission cautioned:

At the same time, it must also be recognized that unusual and difficult situations can and do arise in this world. Responsible commitment to our mutually agreed-upon fellowship policies does not mean legalistic slavery to rules. Rather, this very commitment itself demands freedom for responsible pastoral ministry. When, in certain unusual circumstances, our regular ways of proceeding would get in the way of a ministry of Word and sacrament to a person in spiritual need, then an alternate way of proceeding must be sought. In such

⁶²The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod Commission on Theology and Church Relations, The Nature and Implications of the Concept of Church Fellowship (St. Louis: The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, April 1981), p. 42.

cases the advice and counsel of brothers in the ministry can be of inestimable value. It should also be recognized that individuals equally committed to the Scriptural principles of fellowship may not always come to identical conclusions regarding specific ways of proceeding in administering pastoral care in such exceptional cases. It is imperative that pastors show a mutual respect for one another's ministry. Uninformed and judgmental criticism of actions which appear to be violations of mutually agreed-upon ways of proceeding are destructive of the trust and confidence which fellow members of the Synod should have in one another. It should go without saying, however, that Christian love includes the exercise of loving admonition and doctrinal oversight, especially by those to whom this responsibility has been entrusted.⁶³

The Commission on Theology and Church Relations had reached some very important conclusions regarding the nature and implications of Church fellowship; conclusions which were theologically defensible and lovingly evangelical at one and the same time. The Nature and Implications of the Concept of Church Fellowship was a report which called the Missouri Synod to take some kind of action regarding its relationship with The ALC. By the time the Synod next met in convention, a majority of its official delegates were ready to take this action.

The primary topic of concern during the Missouri Synod's fifty-fourth regular convention was whether or not the Synod would break fellowship with The American Lutheran Church. It was an emotion packed subject. In his address to the convention, President J. A. O. Preus included guidelines which could be employed by the Synod in the event ALC

⁶³Ibid., p. 46.

fellowship was suspended. These guidelines said that both "joint worship services and/or pulpit exchanges with congregations of church bodies with whom we are not in altar and pulpit fellowship," as well as "a general invitation to commune, extended to individuals of a church with whom we are not in altar and pulpit fellowship" were both "inappropriate."⁶⁴ At the same time, however, these guidelines also urged that pastors and congregations could, as circumstances warranted, "provide responsible pastoral care, which may include the administration of Holy Communion, to individuals of the ALC," and that such pastoral care was "in harmony with long-established practices in our Synod."⁶⁵ Once again the Missouri Synod displayed a desire to apply conscientiously its church fellowship principles and practices in an evangelical manner.

When the time came for the Synod to decide whether or not to break fellowship with The ALC, O. H. Cloeter, the Chairman of the Committee on Theology and Church Relations, introduced the proposed resolution in the following manner:

Mr. Chairman and Delegates: First of all I would like to underscore again the fact that your committee regrets the necessity for a resolution of this kind: It was a very solemn group which voted to present this resolution, but I want you to know that it was passed unanimously by your committee. The atmosphere was somber. The statement was made at the time that it was not a happy

⁶⁴The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, Proceedings of the 54th Regular Convention of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1981), p. 83.

⁶⁵Ibid.

occasion. And let me assure you, we do not rejoice now.

Furthermore, let me make very clear what we are not doing with this resolution: Number one: We are not talking about those situations which require pastoral care and decisions. We are not talking about grandpa and grandma from the ALC who come to visit their children and wish to commune with them at one of our altars.

Number two: We are here not talking about the fellowship of faith which binds all Christians together in the Una Sancta, the holy Christian church. Nor are we talking about differences in the understanding of doctrine which may and do exist among members of the same church body. We are talking about agreement in doctrine and practice on the church body level, which we have always said must be the basis for altar and pulpit fellowship between church bodies.

Number three: We are by this proposed action not excommunicating the ALC as has been claimed by some. Obviously a Synod cannot excommunicate anyone from the holy Christian church. Nor does our resolution propose to cut off contact and sever all relations with the ALC. In answer to the request of Dr. David Preus and the ALC Church Council, we propose ongoing and most serious doctrinal discussions on every level, yes, even to make such discussions more imperative.

And finally, I would remind the delegates that four years ago when we declared fellowship in protest with the ALC, we clearly said that this fellowship in protest implied an ultimate severance of fellowship if there was no progress toward the resolution of our differences. Two years ago the continuance of our fellowship in protest implied that this situation could not drag on interminably if we were to maintain our confessional integrity.

It is against this background that your committee with deep sorrow presents this resolution.⁶⁶

With this, Resolution 3-01 was read. After much discussion the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod in convention voted to declare itself no longer in altar and pulpit fellowship with The American Lutheran Church.⁶⁷ In principle and in practice Missouri had officially returned and pledged itself anew to

⁶⁶Ibid., p. 122.

⁶⁷Ibid., p. 154

its historic church fellowship position: Agreement in doctrine and practice is necessary for declarations of altar and pulpit fellowship.

In the years that followed the 1981 convention, the Missouri Synod explained and solidified its church fellowship position. In 1983 The Commission on Theology and Church Relations published yet another study document. This one was entitled: The Theology and Practice of The Lord's Supper. Here the Commission made plain that if agreement in doctrine and practice was necessary before two separate Lutheran church bodies could be in church fellowship with each other, then certainly altar and pulpit fellowship with non-Lutherans required just as much agreement. A practice which overlooked important theological differences denied the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Thus the Commission spoke out against practices the likes of interim eucharistic sharing which were, at that time, coming into vogue among the other American Lutheran bodies.

Since fellowship at the Lord's Table is also confession of a common faith, it would not be truthful for those who affirm the Real Presence and those who deny it to join one another. Their common Communion would indicate to the non-Christian community that the last will and testament of Christ could be interpreted in contradictory ways. Indeed, the non-Christian might rightly ask whether it was Jesus' word which determined the church's position and practice or simply a human consensus.

Therefore it is true that "no one who truly accepts the Real Presence as the very Word of God can grant a person the right to deny it and to commune with him at the same table. Just so, no Presbyterian, for example, who declares that there can be no real eating and drinking of the body and blood of Christ, could really

want to receive the Supper at an altar where just this impossible thing to him is confessed and taught.⁶⁸

Instead of following the trend being set by the ALC and LCA of communing with Episcopalians on an interim basis, then, The Commission on Theology and Church Relations had instead urged its Synod to continue in the practice of "close communion."⁶⁹ That the Missouri Synod would do so was made clear in 1986 when the Synod again resolved that its pastors and congregations would "continue to abide by the practice of close communion, which includes the necessity of exercising responsible pastoral care in extraordinary situations . . ."⁷⁰

By 1986, therefore, it was evident the Missouri Synod was again officially operating with its historic church fellowship principles. Agreement in doctrine and practice was necessary if altar and pulpit fellowship was to exist between the Synod and another Christian church body. Along with this principle, however, it must be remembered that Missouri continued to protect and defend the exercise of

⁶⁸The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod Commission on Theology and Church Relations, The Theology and Practice of The Lord's Supper (St. Louis: The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, May 1983), p. 21.

⁶⁹The Commission on Theology and Church Relations defined "close Communion" as being the practice of refusing Communion to certain Christians and the general population at Lutheran altars.

⁷⁰The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, Proceedings of the 56th General Convention of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1986), p. 143.

responsible pastoral care in certain cases when extraordinary situations arose. Thus, as far as the topic of this thesis is concerned, The Galesburg Rule was a fellowship principle which never found an official home in The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod.

Unofficially, however, it must be stated that the kind of ecclesiastical practice The Galesburg Rule encourages does have its share of strong advocates within the Missouri Synod. To be sure, no District of the Synod has ever officially sanctioned the use of The Rule. Yet the available evidence suggests that many pastors and congregations in certain districts of the Missouri Synod employ The Rule. They do so either because their district has a kind of oral tradition which states "we've always done things that way," or because they represent the only Lutheran church around for miles. As one District President explained:

The practice however [of employing The Rule] is long standing in many of the districts of the Synod, particularly in the frontier districts or the salt water areas where the strength of Missouri Synod Lutheranism was not very dominant. . . .

My own description of the Florida-Georgia District's altar fellowship policy would be that most of the congregations of the district follow the Galesburg Rule. They don't necessarily call it that, but they follow the practice of welcoming to their altars all of those who are in doctrinal agreement with the congregation on the matter of the real presence in the Sacrament of the Altar. Generally the policy of "Lutheran altars for Lutheran communicants" is followed. . . .⁷¹

⁷¹L. Lloyd Behnken, President of the Florida-Georgia District of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, to William Utech, St. Louis, 3 April 1987, Personal Files of William Utech, St. Louis, Missouri.

Thus, if not officially, then at least practically, The Galesburg Rule is being employed to some extent in certain areas of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. When and where this occurs because the situation is such that responsible pastoral care needs to be exercised, then the Synod, its Districts, and its pastors must support one another. Where, however, such a practice is employed due, perhaps, to neglect, or because the pastor in that place disagrees with the church fellowship practices and principles of his Synod, then it behooves the Synod, its Districts, and its pastors to supply the correct kind and amount of brotherly admonition.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Of the three branches of American Lutheranism discussed above, only one, The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, never adopted The Galesburg Rule in any form as a means for regulating its altar and pulpit fellowship practices. Instead, the Missouri Synod followed the course set by historic Lutheranism and made agreement in doctrine and practice the necessary prerequisite for church fellowship. In this respect, the Missouri Synod remains unique among the larger American Lutheran bodies. The other two major branches in American Lutheranism, however, have each played a major role in the history and use of The Galesburg Rule.

The Galesburg Rule itself was formulated by the General Council, an ancestor body of the present day Lutheran Church in America. Once The Rule's author, Charles Porterfield Krauth, had died, however, and his influence in the General Council had subsided, the Council's interpretation of The Rule grew lax. As a document which regulated ecclesiastical practice, it soon ceased to be authoritative. Instead, the General Council, the General Synod, and the United Synod in the South merged to form the United Lutheran Church in America, and a common confessional subscription was the sole requirement this new body deemed necessary for altar and

pulpit fellowship to exist between it and other Lutherans. Not long after the ULCA merged with The Augustana Synod, The American Evangelical Lutheran Church, and the Suomi Synod to form the present day Lutheran Church in America, it became clear that even a common confessional subscription was no longer necessary for altar fellowship. The LCA's 1983 declaration of interim eucharistic sharing with the Episcopal Church clearly demonstrates this. As far as the LCA is concerned, then, The Galesburg Rule is nothing more than a non-binding, historical document.

More recently, The American Lutheran Church has, by its actions, pronounced a similar judgment upon The Rule. This organization, like a great majority of its antecedent bodies, incorporated The Galesburg Rule and the kind of ecclesiastical practice it encouraged into its corpus doctrinae. The "Minneapolis Theses" and "The United Testimony on Faith and Life" bound the new ALC to The Rule. Over time, however, and after the fashion of the LCA, The American Lutheran Church adopted a new communion practices statement which legitimized intercommunion with non-Lutherans. As with the LCA, so the ALC also entered into an interim eucharistic sharing relationship with the Episcopal Church. With this, The Galesburg Rule officially vanished from the face of American Lutheranism.

What, then, is left to say? If The Galesburg Rule no longer influences the ecclesiastical practice of the Lutheran

church bodies which once adopted it, then why speak or write about The Rule at all? Why bother? The answer to questions like these is quite simple. One "bothers" out of love and concern. Confessional Lutherans are bound to speak about The Galesburg Rule and the ecclesiastical practice it encouraged as long as there is any chance of calling two-thirds of American Lutheranism back to the doctrines and practices; back to the faith which is genuinely Lutheran. Only in this way will true Christian unity ever be realized. For instance, it was obviously a deep concern for Christian doctrine and Christian unity which motivated Ralph A. Bohlmann, President of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, to write the following in response to the ALC/LCA pronouncement of interim eucharistic sharing with the Episcopal Church:¹

Many in our day will nevertheless applaud this action between Episcopalians and Lutherans for breaking down traditional walls of separation and bringing us a step closer to the visible unity of Christendom that we all desire. They will point out that the presence of the body and blood of our Lord is not dependent on the faith and confession of those who commune, stressing that it is the Lord's table, not ours.

But such opinions, well-intentioned as they are, fail to come to terms with the implications of Holy Communion as a confessional act. In addition to the magnificent benefits it bestows on individual believers, the Eucharist is at the same time a public corporate statement by all communicants that they share the faith and confession of those who celebrate and host the Sacrament. When celebrants and communicants represent divergent confessional positions, the confessional aspect of the

¹Ralph A. Bohlmann was elected President of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod in 1981 and has served in that capacity since.

Eucharist for both participants and observers is at best blurred and confused.

Some will surely counter that several Lutheran and Episcopalian theologians have reached a measure of agreement concerning the Lord's Supper and other theological topics. We thank God for every theological agreement based on the Word of God, particularly after centuries of doctrinal divergence. But those same theologians have openly acknowledged that they are not agreed on a number of key doctrinal issues. Moreover, it must be questioned whether the limited theological agreement expressed by a few theologians is truly representative of the common public doctrine of their church bodies. Perhaps it is, but this has not yet been widely tested by the churches themselves, and this is especially important in view of the doctrinal diversity traditionally found within the Episcopalian church.

By jointly celebrating the Eucharist while acknowledging continuing differences in confession, Lutherans and Episcopalians risk causing confusion, if not offense, for many Christians. Moreover, any action that blunts our confession and impedes our efforts to overcome doctrinal differences on the basis of the Word of God, no matter how well-intentioned it may be, does not promote but hinders true Christian unity.²

Unfortunately, words of caution and concern such as these have, for the most part, gone unheeded. Rather than returning to the doctrines and practices of historic Lutheranism, at least one of the major American Lutheran bodies, The American Lutheran Church, seems bent on running in the opposite direction.

Between 1962 and 1966, theologians from the Lutheran and Reformed traditions met to discuss the doctrinal differences which existed between their church bodies. As a result of their studies and discussions, these theologians judged there no longer existed any insuperable obstacles to pulpit

²Ralph A. Bohlmann, "Interim eucharistic sharing," The Lutheran Witness 101 (October 1982):414.

and altar fellowship, and therefore recommended to their parent bodies that they "encourage their constituent churches to enter into discussions looking forward to intercommunion and the fuller recognition of one another's ministries."³ In March of 1973, some of the Lutheran and Reformed churches in Europe, along with a number of the Union churches that grew out of them, adopted a statement of concord which came to be known as the "Leuenberg Agreement." The church bodies which signed this document declared, among other things, "that they accord each other table and pulpit fellowship; this includes the mutual recognition of ordination and the freedom to provide for intercelebration."⁴ Joint Lutheran/Reformed statements such as these added large amounts of fuel to American Lutheran ecumenical initiatives. Surprisingly, it is in the once conservative ALC that these ecumenical developments have had the most impact.

In 1984, on the basis of theological/ecumenical developments the likes of those discussed immediately above, David W. Preus, the presiding bishop of The American Lutheran Church, made the following statement: "The time has come for people of the American Lutheran Church to consider

³Paul C. Empie and James I. McCord, eds., Marburg Revisited (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1966), p. 191.

⁴James E. Andrews and Joseph A. Burgess, eds., An Invitation To Action (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), p. 71.

changing ALC policy regarding altar and pulpit fellowship."⁵ Contrary to the position of the historic Lutheran Church, Preus asserted that "debate with the Reformed churches as to the mode of Christ's real presence in the sacrament can continue without separation at altar and pulpit."⁶ If The Galesburg Rule had been shoved aside with the coming of interim eucharistic sharing with the Episcopal Church, then this new proposal from Bishop Preus gave evidence that the ALC was not only moving away from the kind of ecclesiastical practice encouraged by The Rule, but also from the kind of altar and pulpit fellowship principles always employed in the Lutheran Church. Indeed, it was exactly in this new direction that Bishop Preus wanted to move his church body.

In January of 1986 Preus stated it was apparent that Lutherans "should not play truth and unity off against each other, but should let their expressions of unity emerge from their grasp of truth."⁷ This unity, Preus explained, was possible through a process called "unity in reconciled diversity," or, the expression of "our unity in Christ while continuing to witness to the truth amidst significant theo-

⁵David W. Preus, "Fellowship with other Christians," The Lutheran Standard, January 20, 1984, p. 29.

⁶Ibid.

⁷David W. Preus, "Lutheran Ecumenical Identity--Unity in Reconciled Diversity," speech delivered at Luther Northwestern Convocation, Minneapolis, 7 January 1986.

logical differences."⁸ Preus here maintained that U.S. Lutherans needed to make a "course correction" in regard to their relations with other Christians. No more than a "fundamental consensus" regarding the Gospel and the Sacraments, he argued, was necessary for two Christian bodies to be in pulpit and altar fellowship with each other. The theological issues which historically kept church bodies apart were no longer of such great import.

. . . It is not clear to me why the differences between Luther and Calvin, for instance made necessary the withholding of the sacramental cup from each other. A biblical mandate for so doing is tough to come by. . . .

. . . We can recognize the historical reasons for withholding altar and pulpit fellowship from other Christians without being bound to that pattern. We can see that it is possible to be faithful to our gospel heritage without having to sanctify for all time every position taken by our forebears in the faith. . . .

. . . Lutherans need not insist on complete doctrinal agreement before welcoming altar and pulpit fellowship with other Christians. Agreement in the gospel and sacraments does not require total doctrinal agreement.⁹

Once they had set themselves free from their historic church fellowship principles and practices, Bishop Preus argued that Lutherans not only could, but should be in altar and pulpit fellowship with certain Reformed churches even though the two denominations disagreed regarding Christ's presence in the Lord's Supper.¹⁰ Preus here stated:

While there will be continuing debate on the mode of Christ's presence, it is the judgment of the dialogue

⁸Ibid.

⁹Ibid., pp. 3, 6, 13.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 9.

group that no further clarity is needed to determine that there is sufficient agreement to mandate the declaration of altar and pulpit fellowship between the churches.¹¹

The contemporary church scene, Preus stressed, demanded actions such as this.

That U.S. Lutherans have arrived at a time to establish new fellowship patterns is attested to by contemporary movements in our congregations, seminaries, and other churchly communities. Many, I believe most, of our congregations have left the "Lutheran altars for Lutherans only" tradition of yesteryear. They have done this out of right theological instincts. It is not a sign of theological weakness or instability. In pluralistic America we have recognized that it is the Lord's Table, that he invites and we join in welcoming family members at the communal meal. Further, there is the deep awareness that Christian altars ought exclude only those who deny the presence of the forgiving Lord Jesus Christ. In a transient society such as ours altar exclusiveness inevitably smacks of religious elitism rather than of Christ's redemptive presence.¹²

So it is that Bishop David Preus of the American Lutheran Church called his church body to forget about The Galesburg Rule, to forget about the actions Martin Luther took at the Marburg Colloquy in 1529, to forget about the fellowship principles and practices the Christian Church has always abided by, and instead to enter into altar and pulpit fellowship with a denomination where the real presence of Christ in the Sacrament of the Altar is denied. This was a call of historic proportions. It was a call which would have met with Samuel Simon Schmucker's approval.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Ibid., pp. 6-7.

To be sure, the new church fellowship principles advocated by Bishop Preus alarmed many American Lutherans. Quite understandably, President Ralph Bohlmann of the Missouri Synod was dismayed by Preus' novel approach and reacted to it by stating:

Bishop Preus's proposal represents a radical departure from the traditional Lutheran conviction that agreement in Biblical doctrine should precede church body declarations of fel- [sic]

If altar fellowship between Lutheran and Reformed Christians meant that we had overcome several centuries of disagreement in doctrine, that would indeed be cause for rejoicing! But such is not the case. . . .

The most recent official Lutheran/Reformed dialogue report also openly acknowledges continuing doctrinal disagreements, including "the mode of Christ's real presence" in the Lord's Supper. That difference alone was enough to cause Dr. Martin Luther and our Lutheran Confessions to affirm that there could be no fellowship at the altar between adherents of such divergent viewpoints--and to assert that the Gospel itself is at stake in the question!

But today, Lutherans are in fact urging a basis for establishing fellowship that is radically different from our historic Lutheran practice. . . .¹³

Even theologians from the Lutheran Church in America were less than impressed by the direction in which Preus was leading the ALC. William Rusch, LCA director for ecumenical relations announced that "virtually not one major theologian in the LCA, not one theological faculty in the LCA has judged that the recommendations of the last series of [Lutheran/Reformed] dialogue are substantiated by the dialogue's

¹³Ralph A. Bohlmann, "Lutheran Reformed Fellowship?" The Lutheran Witness 105 (April 1986):96.

work."¹⁴ Glenn C. Stone, editor of the rather liberal Lutheran Forum was equally distraught. He therefore pointed to certain fundamental shortcomings in the position assumed by Bishop David Preus.

First, and least important, is the metaphor "course correction." We understand that to be a minor adjustment in what is an approximately correct movement, a fine tuning to put it even more on target. Full altar-and-pulpit fellowship would be a major revision in our interchurch relations. Perhaps "180 degree turn" would also be an inaccurate metaphor, but it would be nearer the truth than "course correction."

A second concern is Bishop Preus' citation of a change of practice in congregations as validating the new fellowship arrangements. He is probably right that the "Lutheran altars for Lutherans only" tradition has been widely abandoned in ALC and LCA churches; under the Communion Practices Statement this is legitimated but with careful safeguards. But admission to communion on a case-by-case basis is far different than undifferentiated extension of communion to all members of a church body just by virtue of their membership. And the practice of joint celebration, unlimited exchange of pulpits, even automatic transfer of clergy is implied by the fellowship proposals he endorses.

Bishop Preus is a bit too cavalier in by-passing doctrinal unity as a prerequisite for church fellowship. Here is how he puts it: "Lutherans need not insist on complete doctrinal agreement before welcoming altar and pulpit fellowship with other Christians. Agreement in the gospel and sacraments does not require total doctrinal agreement." The question, however, is the point at which doctrinal disagreement actually signifies disagreement in the Gospel and the Sacraments. In Lutheran-Reformed relations, fundamental differences on Christology, for example, have been historically understood to be intimately related to sacramental disunity. And the doctrine of the nature and use of the sacraments themselves is clearly not, by Lutheran reckoning, a secondary matter on which we can agree to disagree. The sacraments are not one step removed from the Word of the Gospel and "validated" by it. The sacraments are the Gospel, just as the Gospel is sacramental. . . .

¹⁴Quoted in Michael Root, "Communion With the Reformed?" The Lutheran, August 1986, p. 18.

. . . Lutherans dare not forget the lessons learned from the 19th century "Prussian Union" which resulted in such an erosion of our doctrinal heritage. It would be ironic indeed if, having struggled for a century-and-a-half to resist that erosion, we should now succumb to an ill-prepared "Preus-ian union."¹⁵

Despite warnings from throughout American Lutheranism, The American Lutheran Church nevertheless heeded its presiding bishop's call for fellowship with certain Reformed church bodies. Thus, at its thirteenth general convention in 1986 the ALC resolved to enter into a new relationship with the Presbyterian Church (USA) and the Reformed Church in America. This new relationship meant the ALC and these two Reformed church bodies would:

a. Recognize one another as churches in which the gospel is proclaimed and the sacraments administered according to the ordinance of Christ.

b. Recognize as both valid and effective one another's ordained ministries which announce the gospel of Christ and administer the sacraments of faith as their chief responsibility.

c. Recognize one another's celebrations of the Lord's Supper as a means of grace in which Christ, truly present in the sacrament, is given and received, forgiveness of sins is declared and experienced, and a foretaste of eternal life is granted.¹⁶

What this meant in terms of the practical life of the church was made clear as the above resolution continued by urging all ALC congregations to provide for "occasional joint services of the Lord's Supper where appropriate and

¹⁵Glenn C. Stone, "Shall We Have a Preus-ian Union?" Lutheran Forum 20 (Lent 1986):4.

¹⁶The American Lutheran Church, Thirteenth General Convention of the American Lutheran Church (Minneapolis: Office of the General Secretary of the American Lutheran Church, 1986), p. 1226.

desirable, and in accord with the disciplines of our several churches," as well as for "the sharing of pastors between our two traditions . . ."17 In other words, even though diverging views as to Christ's presence in the Lord's Supper still existed between the ALC, the Presbyterian Church (USA), and the Reformed Church in America, Lutheran/Reformed altar and pulpit fellowship had nevertheless become an officially sanctioned practice in The American Lutheran Church. A dangerous new precedent had been set.

In the end, then, American Lutheranism has not been affected so much by the loss of The Galesburg Rule as it has been by the loss of the doctrinal foundations upon which The Rule was formulated. The history of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod clearly shows that The Galesburg Rule is not the essential ingredient for possessing and maintaining doctrinally sound church fellowship principles and practices. However, once the Scriptural doctrine of fellowship is lost, then no manner of statement which seeks to preserve church fellowship practices that are truly scriptural, and therefore truly evangelical, will last. The history and use of The Galesburg Rule in American Lutheranism shows this right well. As one contemporary Lutheran theologian has noted:

. . . a faithfulness to the Bible in other matters comparable to that of "close Communion" has always characterized periods of orthodoxy throughout both testaments and throughout the history of the church. Conversely, laxity in admission to the Lord's table has

17Ibid.

always paralleled some kind of general indifference about true doctrine. The current form of that indifference usually marches under some ecumenical banner or the other.

To summarize, open Communion signals indifference to doctrine. Either it implies that "faith" involves doctrine only in a minor way, if at all, or else it testifies to a conviction that various doctrines are only different expressions of some mystical entity.

Attendance at Communion always witnesses to something. Nobody really disagrees with that statement as such. The question is: What are we witnessing to? Liberals often argue that open Communion testifies to "the unity we already possess" (whatever that may be), or that communing together will aid us in achieving full unity. But it is impossible to see how that can be, if it is assumed in advance that doctrine is of little or no importance, or if differences in doctrine are swept under the rug. We argue on the basis of Scripture that common Communion must and does testify to a common faith that has already been agreed on, and that must be upheld.¹⁸

The fact that not only The Galesburg Rule, but also the doctrine upon which The Rule was founded has been lost by two-thirds of American Lutheranism is cause for grave concern among confessional Lutherans everywhere. There are basically three reasons why this is so. First of all, the establishment and practice of altar fellowship with Christians who do not accept the confessional understanding of the real presence of Christ's body and blood impairs the ability of all Lutherans to be strong confessional witnesses within Christendom with respect to the meaning and power of the Lord's Supper. Secondly, in forsaking the confessional position that fellowship is to be based on "mutual agreement in doctrine and in all its articles as well as in the right

¹⁸Horace Hummel, "Close(d) Communion II," Affirm 11 (March 1986):7.

use of the Holy Sacraments,"¹⁹ those who have abandoned The Galesburg Rule and the doctrine upon which it rests are encouraging a minimalistic understanding of the basis for fellowship among Christians, and confessing that the true doctrine of God's Word is of lesser importance than practicing forms of external unity. In the third place, the doctrinal gulf between confessional Lutherans and those who have forsaken the historic Lutheran fellowship positions and practices has become so wide that virtually all hope of achieving closer doctrinal agreement in the near future has been destroyed.

The fact that not only The Galesburg Rule, but also the doctrine upon which The Rule was founded has been lost by two-thirds of American Lutheranism indicates that many modern Lutherans either no longer know, or no longer care about what it means to be truly Lutheran. As President Ralph Bohlmann of the Missouri Synod has pointed out, "intercommunion between Lutherans and those who do not share our doctrinal position can only render our own Lutheran identity ambiguous."²⁰ Being Lutheran does not simply, or even primarily mean we identify ourselves with the great theologian, Martin Luther. Nor does "Lutheran," as Bohlmann

¹⁹See: Formula of Concord, Epitome, Article 10, Paragraph 7 in Theodore G. Tappert, ed., and trans. The Book of Concord (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), p. 493.

²⁰Ralph A. Bohlmann, "Our Lutheran Identity," The Lutheran Witness 105 (October 1986):240.

explains, refer to some particularity or unique teaching, for then we would be a sect rather than a church.

No . . . we call ourselves "Lutheran" because that name stands for nothing less than the true church of Jesus Christ as it has existed since Adam and Eve. That name identifies the church that accepts and teaches the whole Word of God, proclaims Christ and distinguishes His Gospel from every legalistic aberration, and rejects all contrary teachings. And no other name . . . does it so clearly.²¹

Thus The American Lutheran Church's model of "unity in reconciled diversity" shows that perhaps at no time since the Reformation have such radical changes in what it means to be a confessional Lutheran church taken place. For this reason it is imperative that the remaining one-third of American Lutheranism that is still committed to the Scriptural principles and practices of church fellowship, also commit itself more deeply and fully to the articulation of the historic Lutheran understanding of the Christian faith and to the strengthening of confessional Lutheran ties throughout the world.

The fact that not only The Galesburg Rule, but also the doctrine upon which The Rule was founded has been lost by two-thirds of American Lutheranism also means that confessional Lutherans who are now in the minority must spend a great deal of time praying that the majority will one day soon adopt church fellowship principles and practices which are once again derived solely from the Word of God and the

²¹Ibid.

Lutheran Confessions. That such a return to the standards of the Lutheran faith is needed is especially evident from a recent editorial in the LCA's official publication, The Lutheran. Here Edgar R. Trexler, in bemoaning the fact that there was so much confusion between the ALC, the AELC, and the LCA regarding joint communion with the Reformed churches, looked forward to when this "ecumenical muddle" would be straightened out once the three Lutheran bodies had merged to form the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA).

. . . . The first regular ELCA convention in 1989 is to vote on a new relationship with the Reformed based on conclusions from additional study. . . . The new study will allow new people to play key roles, and a final, uniform outcome--even if delayed--will be clearer and more responsive to what most people really want [emphasis added].²²

Here, it would seem, Mr. Trexler has said a lot more than he intended.

From the above example it would appear as though many within the LCA, the ALC, and the AELC have adopted the idea that declarations of altar and pulpit fellowship are made on the basis of "what most people really want," instead of on the basis of "what do the Scriptures say." If this is the case, and the evidence collected above suggests that it is, then a gross misunderstanding of Whom the Church follows, and what the Church is and does has been allowed to filter into the hearts and minds of many, many laypeople. Where did the

²²Edgar R. Trexler, "Confusion, caution on joint communion," The Lutheran, October 15, 1986, p. 34.

sheep get such notions if not from the shepherds themselves? In a very real sense, then, the words of the prophet Jeremiah describe all too well what has happened throughout most of American Lutheranism during the past century: "My people have been lost sheep; their shepherds have led them astray, turning them away on the mountains; from mountain to hill they have gone, they have forgotten their fold."²³

This is why confessional Lutherans pray for the two-thirds of American Lutheranism which has forsaken not only The Galesburg Rule, but also the doctrine upon which The Rule was founded. They pray for the great merger of Lutheran bodies that will soon take place, and for the new church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, that will be formed by that merger. They pray the ELCA will desire to be involved in the type of doctrinal discussions that will result in its becoming a truly confessional Lutheran church body. And finally, they pray that one day soon the voice of one like Charles Philip Krauth will be heard and heeded by both the shepherds and the sheep of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

Too ignorant have we been of our own doctrines, and our own history, too little have we known of the fountain from which we sprang, and we have taken pride in times past in claiming a paternity in every reputable form of Christianity, and have denied our proper parentage, in our mendicancy for foreign favors. Shame that it has been so! We should leave these cisterns and return to the source of living waters. Let us go back to our father's house, let us see what it has, make ourselves

²³Jeremiah 50:6.

acquainted with its structure and furniture, let us sit down at its table and partake of its viands. They will better suit our appetite than the crumbs which we have gathered elsewhere. . .²⁴

²⁴Charles Philip Krauth, "The Lutheran Church in the United States." Evangelical Review 2 (July 1850):14.

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