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SHORT TITLE

WISCONSIN-MISSOURI SYNODS UNFIL 1925

A Thesis Presented to the Faculty
of Southern University, St. Louis,
Department of Historical Theology
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Sacred Theology

Author

June 1925

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J. A. Childs
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THE HISTORY OF THE RELATIONSHIP
OF THE WISCONSIN SYNOD TO THE MISSOURI SYNOD
UNTIL 1925

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by

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CHAPTER I

STARTING LIFE IN AMERICA

The casual observer in the fifties of the last century could hardly have imagined two more disparate groups of Lutherans than the Wisconsin and Missouri Synods. The one was the product of a normal development, the sending of missionaries to a new field by an established church. The other stemmed from an unusual movement, a rebellion of Lutherans against the existing union of Lutherans and Reformed in Germany. Yet in the course of about twenty-five years these two groups had acknowledged each other as sister synods and during the ensuing twenty-five years had been the protagonists in an abortive attempt to realize an organizational unity. The purpose of this thesis will be to examine the events and, as much as possible, the motives that finally led to fellowship between the two synods; in addition the fifty-odd years of struggle for complete union will be surveyed with a view to indicating the zeal of the attempt, the frustrations, and some possible reasons for the ultimate failure.

Although the Wisconsin Synod is at present by far the smaller of the two, the emphasis will be placed on it rather than on Missouri. The reasons for this will be obvious to anyone who is acquainted with the two synods. Up until 1925 the Missouri Synod was the more stable of the two; it came as an organized movement, with a polity and a confession that was clearly defined quite early in its life; it displayed a singleness of purpose which contributed to its growth into a

huge body. If the Missouri Synod in its developmental period was characterized by an overwhelming steadiness, the Wisconsin Synod by contrast displayed a pronounced vacillation for almost the first twenty-five years of its existence; even after it had come under the steadying influence of Missouri, Wisconsin was the group in question in most of the joint endeavors, particularly those which tended to unite the two synods even more closely. One senses that the others usually waited with bated breath until Wisconsin's verdict was in. This is not to say that Wisconsin was necessarily the black sheep of the Synodical Conference; there were often good reasons for its hesitation.

It has already been indicated that the Missouri Synod stemmed from a segment that broke away from the united church of Germany. This group had come under the sphere of influence of Stephan, the pastor of a church in Dresden. After a series of scuffles with the local authorities, and because of the unsalutary conditions prevailing in Germany, Stephan was able to gather nearly seven hundred people who were willing to make the trip to America. These sailed with him from Bremerhaven in 1838. Shortly after arriving in Perry County, near St. Louis, Missouri, the settlers were disillusioned when their leader was shown to have been deceiving them in various ways. Stephan had established himself as something of a pope, and the Saxons, now leaderless, were struck by the question whether they actually were a church with the right to preach the Gospel and administer the Sacraments. One of their younger ministers, C. F. W. Walther, rose to the occasion and in a debate managed to dispel the doubts of the settlers. The group emerged strong from this crisis, with a sturdy confessionality which was to carry them on in

establishing a powerful synod. At Chicago, on April 26, 1847, they organized formally into the "German Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio and other States."

Even before the coming of the Saxon immigrants, another group had sailed from Hamburg and had found their way to Wisconsin in October of 1839. A few of them stayed in Milwaukee, while most of the Pomeranians among them settled at Freistadt. In 1843 they were augmented by people from the vicinity of Stettin, Treptow and Kolberg in Pomerania, and from sections of Brandenburg. These people settled in Kirchayn, Lebanon and Cedarburg, Wisconsin.¹

The very people from whom the Saxons wanted to escape had now begun to be concerned for these other settlers, who were practically without pastoral care. Eagerly they set about preparing missionaries to aid them. The first of these men, John Muehlhaeuser, founded a church in Milwaukee in October of 1848. Muehlhaeuser had no liking for the "Old Lutherans," the Missourians; he felt that doctrinal controversy was mere zealotry and a striving about words. The congregation which he now organized in Milwaukee was at first named "Trinity," but this was soon changed to "Grace Church" because Missouri already had a "Trinity" in Milwaukee.² Muehlhaeuser was to become the first president of the Wisconsin Synod.

¹J. L. Neve and Willard D. Allbeck, History of the Lutheran Church in America (Third revised edition; Burlington, Iowa: The Lutheran Literary Board, 1934), pp. 224-25.

²Centennial Committee of the Joint Synod of Wisconsin a. o. St., M. Lehniger, Chairman, Continuing in His Word (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, c. 1951), p. 14. Hereafter cited as CNW.

Another man from the Langenberg Society had preceded him, however. John Weinmann had arrived a year or two sooner after having completed work at the Barmen Mission School,³ and had started a congregation in Town Oakwood on the Kilbourn Road near Milwaukee. He had been in contact with Muehlhaeuser, and was largely responsible for the latter's coming to Milwaukee.⁴

The third of the Wisconsin Synod's founding fathers was Wrede. Shortly after his arrival in December of 1849 he, Muehlhaeuser and Weinmann founded the "First Ev-Luth. Synod of Wisconsin." On December 8, 1849, the synod was organized, with Muehlhaeuser as president, Weinmann as secretary and Wrede as treasurer.⁵

It was soon apparent that this synod would have little in common with the Saxon "Old Lutherans." Because of the mixture of Lutherans and Reformed in some of the first Wisconsin Synod congregations, and also because of the background of these men, the spirit of unionism was in evidence. The prominence of the minister as set forth in the first constitution betrayed the mistaken notion of the office of the ministry held by the synod.⁷

The organization which developed from these beginnings was later to be augmented by union with similar groups in other states. Although

³CHW, pp. 13-14.

⁴CHW, p. 14.

⁵CHW, p. 14.

⁶CHW, pp. 16-17.

⁷CHW, p. 15.

we have to deal specifically with the Wisconsin Synod proper, the other synods which gradually came in to form the Joint Synod of Wisconsin & Missouri were nevertheless of some importance in the synod's relationship to Missouri. It will therefore be necessary briefly to trace the development of these synods and the growing bond between them and the Wisconsin Synod. The final organizational unity was not achieved until 1917, but for practical purposes in relation to Missouri, this had been achieved at least twenty-five years before.

The Minnesota Synod had its beginnings among early Lutheran settlers who received a good deal of aid from Dr. Passavant.⁸ The synod was formally founded at St. Paul on July 6, 1860.⁹ At an early date both Wisconsin and Missouri began to take an interest in the Minnesotans; the latter gravitated more toward Wisconsin than toward Missouri and expressed their doctrinal unity with Wisconsin at a colloquium held at La Crosse in 1869.¹⁰

The Michigan Synod was originated by a group of Swabians who settled near Ann Arbor in 1830.¹¹ The first Michigan Synod was formed in 1840,¹² under the auspices of Loehle.¹³ Its history from its inception until the final amalgamation with Wisconsin in the Joint

⁸Neve-Allbeck, *op. cit.*, pp. 236-37.

⁹*Ibid.*, p. 239.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, pp. 229-30.

¹¹*Ibid.*, pp. 242-43.

¹²*Ibid.*, p. 243.

¹³*Ibid.*

Synod is extremely involved.

The Nebraska District was founded by dissenters from the Buffalo Synod, largely people who moved from Watertown and Luona, Wisconsin, to Nebraska. The district was organized in 1901.¹⁴

The Dakota-Montana District and the Pacific Northwest were added at a later date. Final amalgamation took place in 1917.¹⁵

The Synods of Wisconsin, Minnesota and Michigan became a Joint Synod in 1892.¹⁶ These three, together with the other districts mentioned, amalgamated into one synod with various districts in 1917.

The picture of the early Wisconsin Synod is not complete without the introduction of John Bading, who was to play a major role in subsequent developments. Bading was a wheelwright by trade who was won for the Gospel while in Berlin. After studying at Hermannsburg under Louis Harms and receiving further training at Barzen under the auspices of the Langenberger Verein, he was sent to America in 1852.¹⁷ From Harms he had learned a more determined Lutheranism than that commonly found in Germany at the time, and he brought this advanced confession-alism with him to Wisconsin.¹⁸ Already at his installation he clashed with Muehlhaeuser, thus presaging the coming conflict in the Wisconsin Synod. When Muehlhaeuser and Conrad came to Calumet, his first parish,

¹⁴Ibid., pp. 247-48.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 248.

¹⁶CHW, p. 32.

¹⁷Joh. Ph. Koehler, "The History of the Wisconsin Synod," Faith-Life (revised and translated), Vol. XII, No. 3, 12.

¹⁸CHW, p. 16.

to ordain him, Bading demanded that he be pledged to the Lutheran Confessions, which Muehlhaeuser called "paper fences." The latter finally capitulated and even preached an installation sermon on the importance of the confessions.¹⁹ A further hint at friction is to be found in the original copy of the Wisconsin Synod Constitution. Bading and two others evidently added postscripts when they signed the document. These have been obliterated, and the evidence indicated that Muehlhaeuser was responsible. Significantly, Bading told Joh. Ph. Koehler that his comment was an emphasis on the Lutheran Confessions.²⁰

These incidents are only hints, however, and for the most part Wisconsin still appeared to be utterly opposed to Missouri. They stood as enemies on the threshold of their relationship. Even Bading was at this time no lover of the "Old-Lutherans." Like his brethren in the Wisconsin Synod, he had strong ties with the German mission societies who had really founded the Wisconsin Synod, and who continued to support it. Still, he was to be one of the key figures in the change that was to be wrought in his synod, largely by the efforts of Missouri.

¹⁹Koehler, op. cit., Vol. XII, No. 3, 12.

²⁰Ibid., pp. 12-13.

CHAPTER II

MISSOURI GAINS A CONVERT

The early position of the Wisconsin Synod was a contradictory one. When in 1861 they stated their confessional stand, they vowed "strict adherence to the Lutheran Confessions, yet voiced their intention to bear with weak individuals and congregations of the Reformed conviction, as long as they abstained from making propaganda for their error. They even acknowledged special gifts of Christ in 'other confessions.'¹ Despite the obvious error in this attitude, it would not be quite fair to accuse these people of not being Lutheran. It was indeed unfortunate that they at times forgot the confessional principle, but this was due to their zeal for spreading the Gospel. The insufficient theological training of these men was also partly at fault; they were mission-trained and had not been introduced to all the niceties of theology.

As was to be expected, the Wisconsin Synod's strongest ties in its early period were to the people who had trained and sent their ministers and who were still helping to support them. As late as 1863 Fading was sent to Germany to collect funds for the proposed seminary.² On the other hand, Wisconsin's relationship with its spiritual fathers was

¹Centennial Committee of the Joint Synod of Wisconsin a. o. St., M. Lehninger, Chairman, Continuing in His Word (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, c. 1951), p. 66. Hereafter cited as CHW.

²CHW, p. 65.

beginning to fray a little around the edges. Reports had been getting back to Germany that the children in Wisconsin were becoming squeamish about unionistic activities. In November of 1863 Eichler of Berlin reminded the Wisconsin brethren that they should be willing to serve a United Church if necessary. Wisconsin's reply was calculated to retain both the synod's principles and the financial support of the Germans. Eichler was told that the situation was different in America than in Germany; here doctrinal positions must be clearly defined. Furthermore, Synod maintained that its pastors had not been "prohibited from serving a United congregation but rather from teaching Lutheran doctrine in one congregation and United doctrine in another." Koehler considered this bluffing and refused to sign. At the same time Eading, still in Germany, was unable to settle the matter satisfactorily.³ Despite these difficulties, the ties with the mission societies were still strong. The Wisconsin people were trying to walk a tightrope between satisfying their supporters and practicing the more strongly confessional Lutheranism that was necessary in America.

In the meantime Wisconsin was associating with other synods in America to some extent. There was considerable contact with the Iowa Synod in the early days. Special conferences were held in 1866, but the differences still proved too great for union.⁴ The Synod of Northern Illinois also broached a plan for cooperation, but no definite steps

³CHW, pp. 20-21.

⁴J. L. Neve and Willard D. Allbeck, History of the Lutheran Church in America (Third revised edition; Burlington, Iowa: The Lutheran Literary Board, 1934), pp. 228-29.

were taken.⁵ By far the strongest connection was with the Pennsylvania Ministerium, a group which, like Wisconsin, worked in harmony with the German mission societies. For nearly twenty years Wisconsin pastors received \$200-\$400 annually from the Ministerium. The connection stemmed largely from Muehlhaeuser's early days with that body.⁶

Although there was relatively good feeling between Wisconsin and most of the other Lutheran bodies in America, contact with the Missouri Synod usually brought trouble. Missionary Fachtmann, who got along with the "Old Lutherans" better than most, wrote the following to Muehlhaeuser in 1858:

The scattered Old-Lutherans are full of fury and gladly receive me as an ally; after all, they in part are the real stock of the church people, too bad that they are held fast so under the yoke of partisanship. At the Red River the council of a Lutheran congregation, said to number over a hundred members, would not let me preach because our Wisconsin Synod had been described to them as United. I made a futile arduous trip thence and back, even though they had not heard a sermon since Pentecost and there were many children to baptize.

Fachtmann admitted that the opposition usually disappeared once he had spoken.⁷

If the people with whom Fachtmann came into contact presented an uncertain opposition, in other areas there was real antagonism between the synods; this took the form of fights over parish rights in several places. In Princeton, for example, an ex-Missourian named C. Diehl began to serve a congregation formerly belonging to a Pastor Martin

⁵Ibid., p. 226.

⁶Ibid., p. 228.

⁷Joh. Ph. Koehler, "The History of the Wisconsin Synod," Faith-Life (revised and translated), Vol. XII, No. 6, 16.

Stephan, who had taken a call to Michigan. When Stephan suddenly returned to resume his work in Princeton, Diehlmann naturally did not care to make room for him. Stephan composed a stinging letter to Muehlhseuser which concluded with this piece of sarcasm:

Finally, I would, in keeping with the truth, attest my good, Christian, and charitable intentions in these lines; for I love sincerity and hate insincerity, especially that abominable piracy which sails under Lutheran colors. Would that, in prospect of the general Lutheran conference, at long last all those who call themselves Lutherans might be imbued with a Lutheran, brotherly spirit, and that it be considered a disgrace to call yourself a Lutheran when you are not.⁸

One of the first invasions of parish rights occurred in Milwaukee. The real cause of the dispute was Missouri's boundary set-up. St. John's congregation of the Wisconsin Synod wanted to follow their pastor, Dulitz, into the Missouri Synod. Missouri requested that the congregation merge with Trinity. A good share of the membership balked at this, and St. John's split. After Dulitz resigned in 1856, the majority called Streiszguth the following year and joined Wisconsin. The Missouri Synod took exception to this; Trinity accused Streiszguth of having violated the office of the former pastor, and Preeses Fuerbringer of Missouri's Northern District protested against the congregation's being allowed to join the Wisconsin Synod. The minority, which joined Trinity, kept the church books and the rights to the cemetery. These were not returned until 1868.⁹

Five hotbeds of intersynodical strife, which led to difficulties even after 1868, were Racine, Milwaukee, Town Hexman in Dodge County,

⁸Ibid., p. 12.

⁹Ibid., No. 4, p. 15.

Watertown and Oshkosh.¹⁰ The case in Watertown led to one of the hottest conflicts between the two synods. It is not possible to go into all the ramifications of this very unpleasant affair here. Briefly, segments of Missouri Synod congregations in Lebanon and Watertown left their congregations and were served by Bading, who came over from his charge at Theresa. Two new congregations were started in this way, St. Matthew's at Lebanon and St. Michael's at Watertown.¹¹ Praeses Pfothenhauer of Missouri's Northern District referred to Bading's action as Rottiererei. (This was at the 1858 meeting of that district.) The affair ultimately led to numerous charges and counter-charges, which usually found Pfothenhauer attacking, and Praeses Streiszguth defending, the actions of the Wisconsin Synod. The mutual hostility is indicated by the remarks of Bading in regard to the case, and by the harsh counter-charge of Missouri:

It was high time that our Synod came to Watertown. On the one hand, Methodist enthusiasm was rampant, on the other there was the rigoristic exclusivism of the (Missouri) Old-Lutherans, in between stood my unworthy predecessor Sans--the poor hungry soul didn't know where to turn.¹²

In the "Lutherischer Kirchenbote" of July 18, 1862, Missouri answered Bading's assertion:

So, according to Mr. Bading's judgment, a preacher of the Missouri Synod does not offer souls the bread of life; the congregation of such a preacher is nothing but a mob; where Missourians preach, souls are like sheep that have no shepherd and must famish! . . . That's the way these gentlemen carry on: they accuse the Missourians right along, because of their unrelenting adherence

¹⁰Ibid., Vol. XIII, No. 5, 6.

¹¹Ibid., Vol. XII, No. 7, 6ff.

¹²Ibid., No. 11, p. 15.

to Lutheran doctrine and practice, of unchristian exclusivism, then they themselves deny the possibility that a starving soul may satisfy its hunger under Missouri preachers: this being possible only with them. Can there be a worse exclusivism than this?¹³

There had been a definite change in the Missouri Synod's attitude toward Wisconsin during the years 1857 and 1865. Missouri was at first not really aware of the Wisconsin Synod's existence as a Lutheran synod. It was only after the publication of Wisconsin's synodical reports was begun that the Lutheran character of this group became evident to Missouri; only then did the real opposition begin. Now that they had become opposition synods, Missouri felt that the Wisconsin Synod had no right to be in the State of Wisconsin. The only correct thing for them to do would be to disband, to give up the State of Wisconsin to Missouri, or to join that synod.¹⁴ This attitude forms a significant background for the developments of the years 1868-1880.

When the Missouri Synod began to realize that these others were really Lutherans too, Der Lutheraner and Lehre und Wehre proceeded to spout a constant stream of vituperation, which was sometimes answered in kind by Wisconsin. Der Lutheraner of March 5, 1861 commented:

These gentlemen are bound to have their comfortable living assured, in order to missionize where the Gospel already is being preached. . . . The preachers of the Wisconsin Synod like to gather to themselves a crowd of all kinds of people; the worst of it is that they are not very scrupulous in the choice of means to augment their numbers. . . . That (outside support) is what the Wisconsin Synod depends upon for spreading the kingdom of God on the south side of Milwaukee . . . for such members do not contribute very liberally to the kingdom of God.¹⁵

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 3.

¹⁵CHM, p. 66.

Der Lutheraner, under the leadership of Walther, could also become humorous at times. When a young Wisconsin minister, a recent graduate of Gettysburg Seminary, pontificated in the New York Lutherischer Herald on Missouri's "un-Lutheran exclusiveness" and Romanizing tendencies, Walther headed his rebuttal, "An Awful Prognosis."¹⁶

The worst examples of inter-congregational feuding and also the height of the Missouri Synod's vituperation against Wisconsin occurred during the years 1862-3. In its November 12 and December 10, 1862 issues, Der Lutheraner presented a general survey of Wisconsin's sins, citing Muehlhaeuser's background, the case of St. John's congregation in Milwaukee, the incidents in Watertown, Lebanon and several other cities, and also the work of Fechtmann and Waldt in the Oshkosh area. This was followed by the comment:

Even though the Wisconsin Synod be guilty of ever so many invasions of our congregations and continue in this church wrecking practice, that, of course, would not warrant our resorting to counter encroachments. Rather, we say: If we could honestly recognize the Wisconsin Synod as a genuinely Lutheran Synod, we would not as yet have accepted the Racine people, even though they wanted to separate on account of the doctrine and the unionistic, muddled practice of their pastor, but would have directed them to file complaint and seek redress with their synod. But we cannot recognize the same as a genuine Lutheran synod. It is rather a synod to which, in spite of all its pluming itself with the Lutheran confessions, we must very firmly proclaim that significant saying of Luther's: You have another spirit than we . . . (a synod) that more and more, sometimes under cover, sometimes openly exercises its syncretistic (uniting different creeds), hence unionistic nature.¹⁷

One more example of Missouri's bitterness will suffice. This is from

¹⁶Koehler, op. cit., Vol. XIII, No. 4, 10.

¹⁷Ibid., Vol. XII, No. 11, 15.

Der Lutheraner of January 21, 1863:

It is terrible, for a fact, to have this synod pretend indignation and resent as an insult whatever testimony is offered to the effect that it isn't Lutheran but unionistic. Evidently it does so only to entrap ignorant and unsuspecting Lutherans and make of them well-paying members of its congregations, just as it, on the other hand, to obtain German money, drops its Lutheran mask in Germany. The worst of this, however, is that it does not only seek to attract those, say, who still go on without the Word of God, but with great relish pursues the capture of just those souls and whole congregations which already have been ministered to by other servants of Christ, such as that who preach the Word of God in its purity and truth, and which have evaded discipline of doctrine and life. Cf. 2 Corinthians 10, 16.¹⁸

These outbursts came at a time when inter-congregational strife was at its height. Walther did not ordinarily care to indulge in such attacks. In this instance he failed to edit as evangelically as he usually did. Actually, the relationship between Wisconsin and Missouri was not wholly bad. Almost from the beginning there had been indications that the situation might improve. Facknass, the object of a good deal of Missouri's hard feelings, for the most part got along rather well with the Missourians with whom he came into direct contact. There were instances of fine cooperation among men of both synods. At one time, for instance, a Missouri man was requested to serve the Wisconsin Synod's congregation at Fort Washington; he complied, although his services were limited because there were Reformed people in the congregation.²⁰

There were in fact two parties in the Wisconsin Synod, one of

¹⁸Ibid., Vol. XIII, No. 4, 10.

¹⁹Ibid., Vol. XII, No. 6, 13.

²⁰Ibid., No. 5, p. 14.

which had a tendency toward the Missouri Synod; this despite the fact that even the men who had such leanings were involved in a good deal of the calumny. Eading, who had figured so strongly in the Lebanon-Watertown case, had already in 1855 applied to Preeses Fuerbringer for membership in Missouri's Northern District; he had been led to do this when he became disgusted with the rationalists in his Calumet charge. At that time Fuerbringer had advised him to stay with his synod and strive to raise its doctrinal standards. Eading took this advice and soon moved to St. Jakobi church near Theresa.²¹ Here he subsequently became involved in the Lebanon-Watertown dispute.

Weinmann, one of the three co-founders of the Wisconsin Synod, was also friendly with Missouri. When he left his charge in Racine to go to Baltimore, his people in Racine applied for membership in the Missouri Synod. Weinmann had done the spade work for this move, although when he was accused of having engineered it from Baltimore, he denied this emphatically and requested the congregation to rescind its action.²²

It has already been mentioned that certain remarks written in the original version of the Wisconsin Synod's constitution have been tampered with. Some further patch-work in that same document gives further indication that the conflict was between Muehlhaeuser and those who were more confessionally inclined, in this ^{case} ~~case~~ Weinmann and Wrede. References to the Unaltered Augsburg Confession and the other Lutheran Symbols have been crossed out, and the phrases "reines Bibelchristentum"

²¹Ibid., No. 3, p. 12.

²²Ibid., No. 1, pp. 11-12.

or "reines Bibelwort" inserted. The latter are the terms regularly used by the Baseler Christentumsgesellschaft. It would seem as though Weinmann and Wrede had overruled Muehlhaeuser in favor of a more confessional stand, and Muehlhaeuser had inserted the words that he preferred.²³

The difference came to the fore in the middle 1860's with the establishing of a somewhat isolated coterie of confessionally-minded men in Dodge and Washington counties. The main men in this group were Bading, Koehler and Reim; Koehler seems to have been the spokesman.²⁴ Later events show that he was on the extreme Missouri fringe of the Wisconsin Synod, so much so that he even came into conflict with Bading on that score. Koehler also served for a time near Manitowoc, and during his stay there influenced the Northern District in favor of the Missouri Synod. Another man who now entered the picture was Adolph Hoenecke, a university trained theologian whom Bading brought back with him when he returned from his trip to Germany. Hoenecke was stationed at Farmington, well within reach of the group that was becoming more and more favorable to the Missouri Synod.²⁵

The tension came to a head at the 1864 convention, which showed distinct leanings toward a unionistic attitude.²⁶ At this meeting Bading, who had become president of the synod in 1862, indicated that he

²³Ibid.

²⁴Ibid., Vol. XIII, No. 3, 9-10.

²⁵CHW, p. 20.

²⁶Koehler, op. cit., Vol. XIII, No. 3, 9-10.

was by no means ready to give up the old ideal. In a letter to Reim shortly after the convention he expressed the wish that "Koehler und Consorten" would come back into line.²⁷ At about the same time Brockmann was writing to Reim and wishing that the union could be left behind: "May the gracious God grant that our Synod gradually become such a one that not only may boast of the Lutheran name but of teaching and conduct that are really true to the confessions."²⁸

Koehler had in the meantime moved to the Northern Conference and had succeeded in leading the people there into a position highly favorable to Missouri. He emerged now as at least the most outspoken, if not the leader, of those who would ultimately steer Wisconsin into doctrinal agreement with Missouri. To Reim, who was himself no strong unionist, Koehler wrote the following with the approval of the Northern District:

Now then, act according to your insight and your conscience. If you are bound to steer Synod's little ship into the Union's roomy harbor for Mennon's sake, then the men at the helm must assume the responsibility, I'll rather jump overboard and keep my conscience clean. I have already informed Brother Bading of the matter.²⁹

A few months later, in March of 1864, he again wrote to Reim:

Your opinion of Missouri, Buffalo, Iowa, etc., I find much too harsh and unjust, and so cannot agree with it. Now you'll probably get to think that I am Missouri or otherwise minded; but you would be mistaken if you were to think so. However, I am not so Wisconsin minded either as many of us.³⁰

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹Ibid., No. 2, p. 16.

³⁰Ibid.

The period from 1864 till 1868 was crucial. All that had gone before was rather ill-defined. It cannot be denied that the majority in the Wisconsin Synod were tending to a separation from the German union; on the other hand, the leaders were definitely not in favor of a sudden transfer of affections to Missouri. This is evident from the attitude of some of the others toward Koehler. Koehler was at times not satisfied with the way Synod handled its affairs. When Hoenecke wrote a rather firm official letter to Germany in regard to the union problem, Koehler took it upon himself to follow this up with a letter of his own, in which he stated that "We love the Reformed fellow believers, but we hate their errors. We do not deny their chance for salvation, but we cannot enter into church fellowship with them."³¹ Demmann evidently wrote a similar letter.

The rift between Bading and Koehler was soon healed. Already in March of 1865 Koehler wrote to Bading expressing his sorrow that he had attached so much weight to a rumor about the letter, and rejoicing that this had been false information. (This no doubt pertained to the union question.) The extent of the breach is indicated by the closing words of the letter: "When the bond of brotherly love is once loosened, one is only too prone and willing to give credence to such reports. Now, dear brother, let everything be buried that has come between us."³²

By 1867 Koehler was back in Dodge County, in Hustisford, where he associated closely with the Missourian Multanowski of Town Hubbard.

³¹Ibid., Vol. XIII, No. 4, 7ff.

³²Ibid., p. 10.

Strangely, the entire area, which once had been rocked by one of the bitterest of inter-synodical fights, had in several years become the main center of good relations between Wisconsin and Missouri men. The Missouri pastors Link of Lebanon, Strasen of Watertown, and Engelbert were on good terms with Bading, Hoeneck^e and Meumann of the Wisconsin Synod. They conducted private discussions regularly.³³

The conventions of 1865 and 1866 yield little by way of definite indication of what was happening. In 1865 Moldehnke read a paper in which he supported a quia subscription to the Lutheran Symbols.³⁴ But in 1866 it was apparent that the relationship with the German societies was highly valued by the majority of the membership of the Wisconsin Synod. The relationship was to continue as usual, and the Pennsylvania Synod was also to continue its contributions to the salaries of Wisconsin Synod pastors.³⁵ In the spring of 1866, at a conference of Iowa Synod professors and pastors to which Bading and Martin were invited, Bading agreed to a set of theses which were quite "soft." That this attempt at union with Iowa never got off the ground is probably due to the efforts of Hoenecke.³⁶

It is worthy of note that as late as 1867 Wisconsin still maintained its vacillating position. One of the main events on the program was a discussion of open questions with a delegation from the Iowa Synod

³³Ibid., No. 5, p. 12.

³⁴Ibid., No. 4, p. 11.

³⁵CHW, p. 22.

³⁶Koehler, op. cit., Vol. XIII, No. 6, 3-4.

led by Fritschel. The Wisconsin Synod was clearly in basic agreement with Iowa, and both were opposed to the Missouri Synod. The men from Iowa maintained that their synod worked within the doctrinal bounds of Luther and the confessions and that Missouri was trying to go further. Fritschel in particular was listened to with a great deal of respect by many of the Wisconsin Synod representatives.³⁷

But the most important matter before the synod that year was that of the German union. Under the leadership of Professor Benedict, the majority of the committee which had been selected to prepare a report came up with a strong rejection of union in doctrine and church administration; the reason given was the great harm that such an arrangement had done to the church in Germany. Professor Meumann countered with a minority report calculated to keep the synod on the receiving end of German funds. He maintained that as long as there were solid, protesting Lutherans in union circles, the synod could accept help from such groups.³⁸ The resulting debate ended in what amounted to a draw. The minority report was accepted, but the whole debate was to be precised so that the position of Synod would be clear. The decision amounted to a rejection of unionism tempered by a hesitancy to speak too harshly about Synod's friends.³⁹ Thanks were again tendered to the various agencies, especially the Langenberger Verein, for the help

³⁷Verhandlungen der Deutschen Ev.-Luth. Synode von Wisconsin u. a. St. (Milwaukee), 1867, pp. 13-15. Hereafter cited as Wis. Report.

³⁸Wis. Report, pp. 22-23.

³⁹Wis. Report, p. 23.

followed this up with commendation on a larger scale:

We have just now read in the Christlicher Botschafter, organ of the Evangelicals, of April 29, how violently the Neue Ev. Kirchenzeitung in Berlin is assailing the Wisconsin Synod, because it is most earnestly trying to extricate itself from the embrace of the Prussian state church and live up to the name of a Lutheran synod, which it bears. We feel it incumbent on us to publish this information here, inasmuch as we previously have often voiced our misgivings regarding the stand of this synod to the confession. The reproach which it will now have to suffer will be its highest honor. We can't but pray God for His rich grace upon its further fight and faithfulness in the confession.⁴⁵

In July, the same publication produced the Wisconsin Synod's explanation of secret societies.⁴⁶

Ending's opening address to the convention of 1868 made it clear that a great change had indeed taken place in Synod in the last year or two. He was outspoken in his admission that the Wisconsin Synod had been vacillating:

Unsere Stellung, es ist wahr, war laengere Zeit eine schwankende. Auf der einen Seite das offene Bekenntnis zu saemtlichen Bekenntnisschriften der lutherischen Kirche, wie dies die Synod fast alle Jahre ausgesprochen, auf der andern die Beziehung zu Vereinen, die in der inirten Kirche stehen und die Union fuer etwas Gutes halten.⁴⁷

Ending continued with a plea that this vacillation now cease:

In solchen Zeiten grosser und gemeinsamer Gefahr ist auch die Synode von Wisconsin verpflichtet, das Schwert aus der Scheide zu ziehen, einen deutlichen Ton durch die Posaune zu geben.⁴⁸

This plea was soon backed up by an ultimatum to the General Council that

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Lehre und Wehre, herausgegeben von der Deutschen Ev.-luth. Synode von Missouri, Ohio, u. a. St., redigiert von Lehrkollegium des Siminars zu St. Louis (1868), p. 223.

⁴⁷ Wis. Report, 1868, p. 3.

⁴⁸ Ibid., pp. 3-4.

unless it would take the position of the Wisconsin Synod or one acceptable to it, Wisconsin would sever its connection.⁴⁹

Meanwhile the German mission societies had been sending letters which bespoke hurt and bitterness at the actions of the daughter synod. Pastor Schuermann of the Langenberger Verein wrote:

We have the impression that the Synod did not deal with us according to truth and righteousness. You know how we stood to the Union and that we expected our emissaries to work in that spirit over there. Under the circumstances we can send no more workers.⁵⁰

Schroeter from the Berlin Mission Society accused Synod of a "lack of moral sense" and continued: "Your resolutions have been a slap in the face to our Society and have made it impossible for us to send further help."⁵¹

To such accusations Bading replied in March that "the ruthless procedure of the United Church in Prussia against Lutherans is hardly [blutvenig] of a nature to produce a sentiment favorable to unionism among Lutherans in America."⁵² The Wisconsin Synod followed this up in its convention with the following decision, which was accepted almost unanimously:

Die Synode wolle beschliessen, dass sie mit der ganzen rechtgläubigen lutherischen Kirche alle und jede Abendmahls- und Kanzelgemeinschaft mit Irr- und Andersgläubigen als der Lehre und Praxis der lutherischen Kirche wider-sprechend, verwerfe.⁵³

⁴⁹CHW, pp. 23-24.

⁵⁰CHW, p. 23.

⁵¹CHW, p. 23.

⁵²CHW, p. 23.

⁵³Wis. Report, 1868, p. 17.

This was the denouement of the Wisconsin Synod's relationship to the German mission societies and other unionistic groups.

Prior to the 1868 convention definite steps had been taken toward union with the Missouri Synod. In his presidential address Bading spoke of a meeting between Missouri and Wisconsin pastors in which both groups had shown their desire to be on good terms with each other.⁵⁴ In view of this the responsible committee recommended that steps be taken toward mutual recognition between Missouri and Wisconsin. The committee admitted that the calumnies of the two synods had more often taken on "den Ton der Gehaeszigkeit und des Hohnes, als den herzlichen Betruebnisz ueber solche Missstaende und liebevoller Zurechtweisung." The president was authorized to work toward the establishing of peace and brotherly relations between the memberships of both synods, in the spirit of truth and on the basis of pure doctrine.⁵⁵ This recommendation was adopted with only one change: "divisive of church fellowship" was substituted for "difference in doctrine." Dr. Hoenecke objected strongly to the change; he feared that this might be a concession to the Iowa Synod, since it was their pet phrase.⁵⁶

By the end of the 1868 convention the Wisconsin Synod had decisively severed its connections with its parent church and was on the verge of establishing a new connection with the Missouri Synod.

Shortly after the convention, Bading wrote to the Missouri leaders

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 9.

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 28.

⁵⁶Koehler, op. cit., Vol. XIII, No. 5, 12.

suggesting that representatives of both bodies meet to discuss their differences.⁵⁷ Bading was of the opinion that no doctrinal discussion was necessary since both sides were known to be orthodox. Walther answered in such a way as to disagree without causing hard feelings:

Reverend Sir: We cannot dispense ourselves from our instructions. So we would have to submit the matter once more to our Synod. -- But the conversation should not be understood or carried on as though we were the judges or schoolmasters, but a heart-to-heart talk to determine whether we are devoted to the Word of God without guile. If we found ourselves on common ground in this then the practical matters will easily adjust themselves. No halo of glory for us and humiliation of the others.⁵⁸

This satisfied Bading, for he wrote to Lochner:

After Walther has expressed himself thus, I can well take it upon myself over against my Synod that there be a discussion of doctrine as far as suitable, and therefor (sic!) I suggest October 29 in the assembly room of our seminary at Watertown.⁵⁹

All concerned agreed that this should be a private meeting; only the participants would be allowed in the room.⁶⁰

For some reason the place and date suggested by Bading were changed.

The meeting was held in Milwaukee on October 21-22. The following men were present:

From the Missouri Synod: Praeses Walther, Professor Brauer, Pastors Lochner, Sievers, and Stresen; as guests, Pastors Engelbert, Link and Steinbach.

From the Wisconsin Synod: Praeses Bading, Professor Hoenecke,

⁵⁷CWM, p. 73.

⁵⁸Hoehler, op. cit., Vol. XIII, No. 8, 4.

⁵⁹Ibid.

⁶⁰Ibid.

Pastors Kochler, Dammann and Gausewitz; as guest,
Pastor Jaekel.⁶¹

The conversation centered around Walther's Open Questions (printed in Lehre und Wehre, October, 1868).⁶² Some of the main topics considered were: Church and Ministry, Ordination, Inspiration, the Office of the Keys, the Symbols, the Millennium and the Anti-Christ. Both sides were in agreement on these subjects.⁶³

The main product of this meeting was a set of eight points which were to provide a basis for agreement between the synods:

1. Beide Synoden erkennen sich mit Freuden gegenseitig als rechtgläubige lutherische Kirchenkörper an.
2. Zwischen beiden Synoden findet Kanzel- und Abendmahlsgemeinschaft statt.
3. Die brüderliche Gemeinschaft wird durch gegenseitige Beschickung der Synodal-Versammlungen und Teilnahme an der Pastoral-Conferenzen gepflogen.
4. Falls Pastoren oder Gemeindeglieder aus der einen Synode in die andere eintreten, soll die Aufnahme nicht anders, als auf Grund eines guten Entlassungszeugnisses geschehen können.
5. Die Kirchenzuchtfälle innerhalb der einen Synode werden von der andern Synode respectirt. [This point was developed further. In cases where there was suspicion of improper procedure in church discipline proper authorities were to be consulted.]
6. Wo Gemeinden beider Synoden in Opposition stehen, soll von beiden Seiten alles gethan werden, dass die Opposition in christlicher Ordnung beseitigt und ein brüderliches Verhältniss hergestellt werde.
7. Beiden Synoden verbleibt das Recht, nach Bedürfniss irgendwo neue Gemeinden zu gründen. Hierbei soll jedoch der Grundsatz möglichst im Auge behalten werden, dass die Gemeinden örtlich abgegrenzt sein sollten. In streitigen Fällen wird jedenfalls derjenige als rechthandeln angesehen werden, welcher die Grenzlinie beachtet, die von beiden Synoden als

⁶¹Synodal-Bericht der Allg. deutschen ev.-luth. Synode von Missouri, Ohio, u. a. St. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House), 1869, p. 87. Hereafter cited as Mo. Report.

⁶²CIN, p. 73.

⁶³Wis. Report, 1869, p. 16.

die angemessene erkannt worden ist.

8. Teucht in der einen oder andern Synode ein Irrthum in der Lehre auf, so ist jede Synode gehalten, denselben mit allen ihr zu Gebote stehende Mitteln abzurufen und soll, so lange dies geschieht, die Rechtgläubigkeit der einen oder andern Synode nicht in Frage gestellt werden.⁶⁴

It is truly amazing that two such groups should join hands, and that the final process of getting together should come so easily. The real cause was finally the working of the Holy Spirit; only He could have led these enemies to see that they were really brothers. Yet He worked through tangible factors which become quite evident as one considers the sequence of events leading to the union. One of the most important, and one often overlooked, is the influence of Wallmann, Richter's successor as Inspector at Barren. Wallmann had a strong confessional bent for his time and place, and he exerted a powerful influence on such men as Bading and Koehler.⁶⁵ The influence of Muehlhaeuser was relatively short-lived. Since the Wisconsin Synod's association with the German mission societies depended largely on his personal connection with these people, his death marked the end of that relationship. It is significant that Muehlhaeuser's death was announced in that same presidential address in which Bading declared that the time of vacillation must now cease.

Not the least of the factors in the Wisconsin Synod's gravitation toward Missouri was the intensification of the latter's polemics in the early 1860's. In his History of the Wisconsin Synod Koehler makes the point that Missouri's polemics, which were largely brought on by the

⁶⁴Mo. Report, 1869, p. 16.

⁶⁵Koehler, op. cit., Vol. XII, No. 4, 14.

Wisconsin Synod's connections with the East, "made for better acquaintance and brought about the agreement between Wisconsin and Missouri sooner than both parties expected it. But that--in incongruous phrasing--spelled the orientation of Wisconsin away from the East."⁶⁶

⁶⁶Ibid., Vol. XIII, No. 5, 8.

CHAPTER III

THE STATE-SYNOD CONTROVERSY

Now that the Missouri Synod recognized the Wisconsin Synod as an orthodox Lutheran body and Wisconsin had severed connections with the German and Eastern churches, the stage was set for further negotiations toward union. This attempt was to prove in part very successful and in part abortive. The failure was superficially due to Wisconsin's fear of being assimilated and Missouri's tendency to override other synods in its drive for the extension of the church; a more fundamental cause was the difference of opinion between the synods in regard to the outward aspects of the church.

But the partial failure must not be allowed to obliterate the successful founding of the Synodical Conference and its subsequent work. The first proposal that such a conference of separate church bodies be established was made by the Eastern District of the Joint Synod of Ohio, in conference at Youngstown, Ohio, in June of 1870.¹ The Ohio Synod then approached Missouri, Wisconsin, Illinois and the Norwegians with a plan to meet in Chicago on January 11-13, 1871.² At this meeting a form for union was proposed and accepted. It is summarized here from the version found in the Wisconsin Report of 1871:

¹Roy Arthur Suelflow, The History of the Missouri Synod During the Second Twenty-Five Years of its Existence, unpublished doctoral dissertation, Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, 1946, pp. 38-39.

²Ibid.

1. The new organization is to be called the Evangelisch-Lutherische Synodalconferenz.
2. Its confession: the canonical Old and New Testaments and the confessions contained in the Book of Concord.
3. Its purpose is to be: mutual strengthening in faith and confession, the preservation of unity in doctrine and practice and mutual activity for common purposes; it is to strive for for the delineation of synodical territory according to territorial or language boundaries, and the union of all Lutheran synods of America in a "rechtgläubig" American Lutheran Church.
4. The Synodical Conference is to have only advisory authority unless in a given situation all synods give it deciding authority; all synods must agree before another body is admitted; no member synod may join with other bodies without the consent of the other member synods.
5. Its areas of activity are to be: church doctrine and practice; relations between members of the various synods; the relation of member synods to other groups; joint work in emigrant missions, orphanages, literature and education.
6. Its general structure: allowance is made for both voting and advisory delegates. Each synod has the right to send two delegates for every forty voting members. A convention is to be held every year in July.
7. The constitution is to go into effect as soon as the member synods ratify it. This is also the only way in which changes may be made. The Synodical Conference is to have the right to make amendments which do not oppose the constitutions of member synods or infringe on the rights of a synod.³

The time was ripe for such an arrangement, and both Missouri and Wisconsin were in a very friendly state of mind. Both synods approved the formula; Missouri's annual report even states that it was "accepted without discussion."⁴

After a second, preliminary meeting of the committees at Sihler's church in Fort Wayne,⁵ the first real meeting of what now actually was

³Verhandlungen der Deutschen Ev.-luth. Synode von Wisconsin u. a. St. (Milwaukee), 1871, pp. 29-30. Hereafter cited as Wis. Report.

⁴Synodal-Bericht der Allg. deutschen ev.-luth. Synode von Missouri, Ohio, u. a. St. (St. Louis), 1872, p. 16. Hereafter cited as Mo. Report.

⁵Suelflow, op. cit., p. 41.

the Synodical Conference was held in Milwaukee.⁶ With a spirit of rejoicing, heralded by Walther's opening sermon ("O gesegneter, seliger Tag! Von ihm werden einst noch unsere Kinder und Kindeskinde sich mit Freuden erzählen."⁷), the delegates went about the business of constructing the organisation. Walther was elected president; Prof. W. F. Lehmann, vice-president; Pastor P. Beyer, secretary; and Mr. J. Schmidt, treasurer.

A host of practical matters had to be ironed out during the early years of the Conference. The Illinois Synod, for example, requested that the term "entscheidender Gewalt," as used in the constitution, be defined, and the Conference made it clear that it exercised no "decisive power in matters of doctrine and conscience."⁸ This question seems to have been in the wind, for the Synodical Conference took great pains to make it clear that it had no intention of infringing on the rights of its member synods.

Missouri and Wisconsin plunged right into the task of removing the troubles still extant in various parts of Wisconsin. Joint pastoral conferences were thought to be one of the best means of bettering the feeling between members of both synods. Already in 1873 the Wisconsin Synod resolved that a committee speak with Missouri and Norwegian men at the next meeting of the Synodical Conference and make definite plans

⁶Verhandlungen der Ev.-Luth. Synodal-Conferenz von Nord-Amerika (St. Louis), 1872, p. 13. Hereafter cited as Syn. Conf. Report.

⁷Syn. Conf. Report, 1912, p. 5.

⁸Syn. Conf. Report, 1872, p. 73.

so that these joint conferences could be started.⁹ The following year Synod was positively brusque about saying that "in den einzelnen Distrikt-Conferenzen theils eine, theils zwei solcher gemeinschaftlichen Conferenzen mit den Gliedern der Missouri und der norwegischen Synode festgestellt worden sind," and ordering that "die zu besuchen alle in solchem Distrikt wohnende Pastoren verpflichtet sind."¹⁰

In 1869, even before the Synodical Conference had been organized, Hoenecke had written to Walther (for Bading) in regard to the congregational difficulties that would have to be settled.¹¹ At its convention that same year the Missouri Synod decided that full investigations should be conducted only where there were real personal injuries or questionable instances of excommunication, and that all other squabbles should simply be buried.¹² This wasn't exactly what Wisconsin had in mind; nevertheless, the executive report of 1870 stated that "the dealings with the Venerable Missouri Synod concerning the regulation of our mutual relation . . . have come to a satisfactory conclusion."¹³ At the 1874 convention of the Synodical Conference twelve basic principles for the evaluation of opposition congregations were set up. The general tone of these principles was one of caution and pointed to an evangelical approach to the problem. Neighboring congregations were exhorted to

⁹Wis. Report, 1873, p. 19.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 11.

¹¹Joh. Ph. Koehler, "The History of the Wisconsin Synod," Faith-Life (revised and translated), Vol. XIV, No. 3, 6.

¹²Mo. Report, 1869, p. 90.

¹³Koehler, op. cit., Vol. XIII, No. 8, 7.

look upon each other as sister congregations. Where there had been particular animosity, no attempts at merging should be made. Sleeping dogs should be let lie, except in cases such as that of an unjust excommunication, where an investigation must be conducted.¹⁴

The synods were also to exercise a mutual Lehr-Wache. Each should have access to the others' conventions in order that doctrinal unity might be preserved. This was held to be necessary especially because what one synod would say would in a way be subscribed to by the others.¹⁵

With the establishment of peace between Missouri and Wisconsin some of the areas which had for years been hotbeds of strife now became centers of close association between members of these two synods. This was the case notably in Watertown and Oshkosh and in Dodge, Washington and Sheboygan Counties.¹⁶ During these years pastors and whole congregations occasionally transferred from one synod to another. Shortly after the agreement of 1868 there was at least one instance of a Missouri pastor installing a Wisconsin Synod man.¹⁷

In 1869 the first steps were taken toward achieving cooperation between Wisconsin and Missouri in their respective educational systems. A plan whereby Wisconsin Synod students would make use of the seminary at St. Louis, and Missouri students would attend Northwestern at

¹⁴Syn. Conf. Report, 1874, pp. 36-39.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 54.

¹⁶Koehler, op. cit., Vol. XIV, No. 7, 9.

¹⁷Wis. Report, 1880, p. 12.

Watertown, met with general approval at the Wisconsin Synod convention of that year.¹⁸ Northwestern's board of control (Bading, president; G. Thiele, secretary) also gave a favorable opinion:

So weit wir diese Angelegenheit erwogen haben, glauben wir ueberzeugt zu sein, dass die besagte Vereinigung ein Mittel sein werde, wodurch dies Werk unsrer Haende unter Gottes Gnade und Segen wesentlich gefoerdert werden koennte, und dass es eine besondere Freundlichkeit unsres Gottes waere, wann er die Verwirklichung des gedachten Planes uns gelingen liesze.¹⁹

Committees from both synods were busy working out a detailed plan of how this cooperation was to be carried out. The Missouri Synod was to send students and a professor to Northwestern. The professor was to be chosen by Missouri, but Wisconsin would have the right of approval. The Wisconsin Synod would then use Concordia Seminary in the same way. Each synod was to run its own institution, and guest students were to be handled according to the rules of the institution. Other rules were also formulated in regard to such matters as suspensions. As a sign of real mutuality, each synod was to help support the other's school with Liebesgaben.²⁰

There was some objection to this proposal at the Missouri convention. The principle complaint was that if it were carried out Northwestern would compete with the Missouri Synod's school at Fort Wayne. The backers of the plan answered that this competition would strengthen the school at Fort Wayne and that this school had never

¹⁸Ibid., 1869, pp. 22-23.

¹⁹Wis. Report, 1869, p. 27.

²⁰Mo. Report, 1869, pp. 90-91.

been intended to play the role of an institution like Northwestern.²¹

The obvious advantages of such an arrangement were indicated in the Missouri Report:

. . . was koenne erprieszlicher sein, also dasz, nach einigen Jahren unsere beiderseitigen Prediger, welche aus diesen Anstalten hervorgingen, zuletzt noch auf einer und derselben Anstalt ihre theologische Ausbildung erhielten und nun auch wirklich ganz in einem Geiste ihr Werk Treiben.²²

With this goal in mind, Missouri readily agreed to cooperate with Wisconsin in an educational program.

The Missouri Synod immediately sent Professor Stellingma and a number of students to Northwestern. Wisconsin's response was not so prompt. Six students attended Concordia Seminary in 1870, but the required professor was not yet supplied.²³ This deficiency did not appear to make much difference at first.²⁴ Walther wrote Bading a letter welcoming the Wisconsin Synod seminarians to St. Louis, and in his president's report to the convention of 1871, Bading observed that these students were in good hands and that they had not lost their loyalty to Wisconsin in the process of being educated at Missouri's institution.²⁵ The Wisconsin Synod thanked Missouri heartily for its services.²⁶

Hoenecke, whom the Wisconsin Synod had requested to teach at

²¹Ibid., pp. 91-92.

²²Ibid., p. 90.

²³Wis. Report, 1870, p. 25.

²⁴Koehler, op. cit., Vol. XIV, No. 3, 8.

²⁵Wis. Report, 1871, p. 7.

²⁶Ibid., p. 34.

Concordia, was still at Watertown. His reluctance to accept the call to St. Louis is a very important commentary on the actions of Wisconsin over against Missouri during the following ten years. He did in fact accept the call, but his letter of acceptance to Bading (April 7, 1870) shows his hesitance:

I would not like to expose myself to the charge sometime, when the structure of our institutions happens to collapse (of which I haven't the least doubt any more) that I especially contributed to that event by not going to St. Louis. It is a fact, however, that never in my life have I had to make such a distasteful decision as yielding in this matter.²⁷

Unfortunately there was now no money to pay him, so Hoenecke was given a reprieve and advised to take a call as a pastor.²⁸

When in 1871 the money was available, Hoenecke wasn't. Bading reported to the synod:

Herr Pastor Hoenecke erklart, dass er nicht wisse, wie er die Synode zum Abstehen von seiner Berufung bewegen solle, dass er aber offen gestehen muesse, es werde mit dieser Berufung eine schwere drueckende Last wiederum auf ihn gelegt.²⁹

It is difficult to determine just what it was that made Hoenecke so reluctant to go to St. Louis. Several years later, at the Missouri convention of 1874, Bading remarked that even Walther had admitted that Hoenecke's reasons were in part well founded.³⁰ It has sometimes been assumed that he was simply afraid of being overshadowed by Walther if he were to go to St. Louis. This is probably not true. Hoenecke's

²⁷Kochler, op. cit., Vol. XIII, No. 9, 6.

²⁸Wis. Report, 1870, p. 31.

²⁹Ibid., 1871, p. 35.

³⁰Mo. Report, 1874, pp. 53-54.

letter to Bading of April 7, 1870, gives a hint as to the real reason for his hesitance: he feared lest certain of Missouri's theories of education gain the upper hand also in the Wisconsin Synod and ultimately cause the collapse of the educational structure of the entire Synodical Conference. The fact is that several members of Northwestern's faculty and board were quite strongly pro-Missouri, such men as Adelberg, Ernst, Strosen and, later, Brohm. These men, it was feared, would give up those very educational (and other) features in which Wisconsin was superior to Missouri and could contribute something to its improvement. In their eagerness to unite with the Missouri Synod they would overlook certain of its real weaknesses.³¹ That Ernst was suspected of such inclinations is shown by a letter which he wrote to Bading, dated March 19, 1870:

In the inner affairs of the institution there has been a change for the better. The relationship between myself and Prof. Meumann has cleared up since our last talk and now become cordial. I must also confess that Prof. Roenecke has acted very friendly toward me since then, and I feel myself under great obligations to him for that reason. I am convinced that our differences of opinion will easily be ironed out if we on both sides speak our mind simply and clearly, but frankly. We both surely are working for the welfare of the institutions to whose service God has called us. And be assured, dear Præses, that I too am striving for the prosperity and the growth and certainly not the absorption of your Synod by another body. I still cling to my original plan and my erstwhile conviction that it is just the Wisconsin Synod that in the field of education can render the Lutheran church in America a special service that the Missouri Synod can not render; and all my appreciation of the latter notwithstanding, a merger of the two synods, to my mind, for that very reason would be a misfortune if the Missouri Synod were dominant in it.³²

Thus Ernst tried to show Bading that he was by no means guilty of the

³¹Kochler, op. cit., Vol. XIII, No. 9, 6.

³²Ibid., Vol. XIV, No. 3, 6.

haste of which Hoenecke suspected him and others.

From the above it is clear that some of the stronger men in the Wisconsin Synod, although they were thankful that agreement had been reached with Missouri in matters of doctrine, hesitated to accept blindly all the methods and goals of the sister synod. In 1878 Hoenecke remarked to Joh. Ph. Koehler, who was then his vicar, that "there is something sectarian about them (the Missourians)."³³ He was aware of some decided shortcomings in the Missouri Synod and was at pains to insure that these things would not now be carried over into the Wisconsin Synod. Meunam, Hoenecke and, after he had made himself clear, Ernst, all saw pronounced deficiencies in the Missouri Synod's educational system.³⁴

While the Northwestern faculty was having compunctions, Concordia Seminary was waiting for the man who had never been sent. At the 1874 convention it was reported that the college board had decided to let Krohn take Hoenecke's place. Meanwhile, however, Missouri had requested that Krohn be sent to Springfield. The latter refused to comply, allegedly for reasons of conscience.³⁵ Since it was apparent that it could in no way supply the required teacher to Missouri, the Wisconsin Synod now decided that there would have to be a thorough discussion of the whole situation with the Missouri Synod; Pastors Bading and Adelberg and Professor Ernst were appointed a committee and instructed to handle

³³Ibid., pp. 8-9.

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵Wis. Report, 1874, pp. 45-46.

the problem to the best interests of Synod.³⁶ In passing it might be noted that Professor Ernst submitted a brief which showed that the Wisconsin Synod actually contributed more to the arrangement than Missouri did.³⁷

The committee appointed by the Wisconsin Synod soon reached a satisfactory agreement with Missouri. This was already formulated by the time the Missouri Synod convention was held in 1874. Bading was there, and although Wisconsin was given the right to charge Missouri students tuition, he assured the Missouri Synod that this would not be done unless it were absolutely necessary.³⁸ There were no major changes in the arrangement except that the professorial exchange, mutual financial support, and some of the more powerful rights of one synod over the administration of the other's school were discontinued.³⁹ Little harm was done by this settlement. It did hurt Northwestern to lose Stelhorn, but the loss of the forty students who left with him was overcome in a year or two.⁴⁰

The hesitation of Dr. Hoenecke and the apparent reasons for this hesitation presaged the further disappointment that was to come. From the very beginning of the Synodical Conference, the intention had been manifested to unite all the synods into one large organization with

³⁶Ibid., pp. 47-48.

³⁷Koehler, op. cit., Vol. XIII, No. 9, 7.

³⁸Mo. Report, 1874, pp. 54-56.

³⁹Ibid., pp. 56-57.

⁴⁰Wis. Report, 1875, pp. 45-46 (Anhang).

smaller territorial divisions. This idea was to be found already in the form for union summarized near the beginning of the chapter.⁴¹ It has sometimes been said that Professor A. Schmidt of the Norwegian Synod was the driving force behind this move. This is probably not correct. The evidence rather points to Dr. Walther as the man who, more than any one else, engineered this attempt. He had a tremendous desire to establish one large American Lutheran Church.⁴²

The Wisconsin Synod, at its convention in 1871, appeared to be in favor of such a body. It answered the second proposal of the form for union in this way:

Die Synode erkennt in diesen Einigungswerke einen Weg des Herrn, unserer lutherischen Kirche zu kraeftigerer Entfaltung der in sie gelegten Gaben und Kraefte zu verhelfen, welche, so lange die Synode vereinzelt stehen, nicht in dem wuensenswerthen Masse zur Ausuebung kommen koennen.⁴³

Despite this statement, the Wisconsin Synod had no intention of plunging into such major alterations suddenly. While agreeing that the geographical delimitation of synods was workable, Synod argued that it was not at present feasible to inaugurate a system of parishes based on geographic boundaries.⁴⁴

At the convention of the Synodical Conference in 1874 it became apparent that there were two schools of thought regarding territorially

⁴¹J. L. Neve and Willard D. Allbeck, History of the Lutheran Church in America (Third revised edition; Burlington, Iowa: The Lutheran Literary Board, 1934), p. 231.

⁴²Koehler, op. cit., Vol. XIV, No. 7, 9.

⁴³Wis. Report, 1871, p. 28.

⁴⁴Ibid.

divided parishes:

Schon im vorigen Jahre traten bei der Besprechung dieser Theses zwei verschiedene Meinungen zu Tage. Auf der einen Seite wurde behauptet, dass territoriale Abgrenzung das einzig Richtige und Normale sei, alles andere sei an sich Unordnung. Solche sei zwar, wo sie sich durch geschichtliche Verhaeltnisse gewissermassen noethwendig geworden, zeitweilig zu dulden; aber doch habe man stets im Auge zu behalten, dass es anders werden sollte.

Auf der andern Seite gab man zu, dass territoriale Abgrenzung wohl die beste und schoenste Ordnung sei, und sei darum allerdings anzustreben. Man verwahrte sich aber dagegen, dass nur eine territoriale Abgrenzung eine wirkliche Ordnung, alles Andere aber Unordnung sein solle. Es gebe auch ausser jener noch andere Abgrenzungsweisen, die vielleicht nicht so gut, wie jene, aber eben doch auch Ordnungen seien.⁴⁵

The lively discussion that followed brought out the differences even more clearly. The one side maintained that the apostles used a territorial division of parishes; since they were enlightened by the Holy Spirit theirs was the only right way. Furthermore, it was said, for two churches which are in agreement to compete with each other is against love and tends to give offense. On the other hand it was argued that experience had shown that a different type of division also works. One must also guard lest external ordinances loom too large in one's thinking; order and peace come about through the Word of God, not by means of external ordinances.⁴⁶ The men who held the latter position were assured that this would not be a legalistic thing. If, for example, a member of one congregation were to move into the territory of another, he could retain his old membership if he chose. This would

⁴⁵Syn. Conf. Report, 1874, p. 15.

⁴⁶Ibid., pp. 15-16.

of course not be encouraged.⁴⁷

The following year a committee was appointed for the purpose of "Anstrengung einer Abgrenzung nach territorialer Grenze."⁴⁸ Note that nothing is said here about the "Abgrenzung der Gemeinden nach territorialer Grenze." It had evidently been decided that this were better left alone for the time being, until the state-synod plan had been completed. The Wisconsin Synod was making it clear that it would go into such ventures only with caution.

In 1876 the committee that had been appointed (A. Lange, H. Winder and A. Mikkelsen) brought in their recommendation:

1. dass die sämtlichen deutschen Synoden innerhalb der Synodal-conferenz sich zu einer kirchlichen Körperschaft vereinigen, etwa unter dem Namen der deutschen evangelisch-lutherischen Synode von Nord-Amerika;
2. dass diese Synode in Distriktssynoden getheilt werde, deren geographische Grenzen die Staatsgrenzen bilden;
3. dass die allgemeine Synode durch die sie representirenden, von den Distriktssynoden gewählten Delegaten alles das verwaltet, was fuer alle einzelnen Distriktssynoden als Gesamtkörper zu verwalten ist;
4. dass diese deutsche allgemeine Synode die Verbindung mit den Synoden anderer Sprachen innerhalb der Synodalconferenz festhaelt.⁴⁹

The ensuing discussion brought out great differences of opinion among members of the Synodical Conference. The proposal to create one large German Ev.-Luth. Synod of North America bore the brunt of the criticisms, which ranged from warnings about the dangers and the cost which such a project involves, to basic opposition to the very

⁴⁷Ibid., pp. 19, 30.

⁴⁸Ibid., 1875, p. 35.

⁴⁹Ibid., 1876, p. 45.

desirability of a union of this type. Many felt that the Synodical Conference as it then existed was the type of structure that was required; there was, it was thought, no need for "einen imposanten ausserlichen Gesamtkoerper mit kirchenregimentlicher Jurisdiction."

A note of caution was also voiced in connection with the formation of the state synods themselves. That Article III of the constitution pointed the way to such a synodical structure could not be denied; it was also admitted that this was the way to get rid of the Erdbebel in some of the congregations. Nevertheless some men warned against trying to "railroad" such a plan against the desires of member congregations and synods. The goal could not be achieved in all states at once, it was maintained; nor could territorial boundary lines be set up immediately. Finally, it should be remembered that the members of the Synodical Conference are united for the Kingdom of God.⁵⁰ These objections and warnings were taken into consideration when the final formulation of the plan was prepared. It was conceded that this should not immediately be carried out all over, but only in those places where it could be done without imposing undue hardship upon the people; it was nevertheless to be implemented "mit allem Ernst und Eifer."⁵¹

The proposed integration of synodical educational facilities was also considered at the 1876 convention of the Synodical Conference. This was of course closely connected with the state-synod plan. The Conference set up six points on which this cooperation was to be based:

⁵⁰Ibid., pp. 45-47.

⁵¹Ibid.

1. Die Synodalconferenz gibt ihren gegenwaertigen Synoden den Rath, die in ihren Territorien befindlichen Anstalten zur Erziehung von Predigern aufzuloesen, ein Gesamtseminar zu errichten und dieses unter die Controle der Synodalconferenz zu stellen.
2. Das schon bestehende Schullehrseminar unter dieselbe Controle zu stellen.
3. Bis die Aufloesung der grosseren Synodalkoerper geschehen ist, den betreffenden Staatssynoden es zu ueberlassen, ob sie an irgend eine und an welche der bestehenden allgemeinen Synoden sie sich anschliessen wollen.
4. Die Pflege des Gymnasial-Unterrichts den Staaten-Synoden zu ueberlassen.
5. Mit dem deutschen Gesamt-Predigerseminar ein solches fuer die Englischredenden zu verbinden.
6. Die norwegische Synode einzuladen, ihr Seminar mit den genannten Seminarrien certlich zu verbinden, resp. dieselben nach Beduerfnisz zu benutzen.⁵²

A resolution was added to the previous six to the effect that even if the state-synod plan could not be effected immediately, the joint seminary should be established as soon as possible.⁵³

Walther was again the man behind this joint seminary program. In a letter from Lochner he is quoted as saying: "No time to be lost! I consider this a chance of the utmost importance, that will pave the way to a university which will be so named not in the American fashion. For there are prospects that the Norwegians, too, will furnish a competent professor."⁵⁴

The 1876 meeting of the Synodical Conference had shown that not all of its members were ready to rush headlong into the state-synod plan. The opposition, if it could be called that at the moment, came largely from the Wisconsin Synod; actually, Wisconsin was as yet not opposed to

⁵²Ibid., pp. 48-53.

⁵³Ibid., p. 53.

⁵⁴Kochler, op. cit., Vol. XIV, No. 1, 5.

the plan, but simply believed that it must be carried out slowly and carefully. On the other hand, Missouri's conviction that a state-synod polity was the only way was not shared by many men in the Wisconsin Synod. The advisability of changing the synodical structure was still an open question for these people. In the May 1, 1877 issue of the Gemeindeblatt, a Pastor Kuhn published a very conservative and sensible plea that the Wisconsin Synod go along with Missouri in forming a state synod with the Missouri Synod members in Wisconsin. He noted that the need for such an outward structure was being realized by more and more congregations and that this plan would obviate many present inter-synodical difficulties. On the other hand, he stated positively that the projected state synods would have to be independent and that they should not be brought under the political control of general synods.⁵⁵

An unsigned article designed to counteract Kuhn's thesis appeared in the May 15 issue of the same magazine. This may have been written by Professor Ernst. The author stated:

That state synods in themselves are desirable, is generally admitted, although some attach more, some less importance to such an arrangement. Do not, however, put too much stock in such constitutional projects. All true blessing, surely, must derive from the word of God, and unity in this is and ever will be sufficient for the unity of the church according to the Augsburg Confession, Art. 7.

The author went on to explain that there were actual differences between Missouri and Wisconsin; this was not just a matter of terminology. He also warned of the possible absorption of smaller synods by the larger ones, and concluded:

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 4.

Hence, every one should try to gain a clear vision of what will benefit most our congregations, for whose sake, indeed, our synods originally were founded, and the church as a whole, so we steer clear of church political machinations that probably have not taken a foothold as yet in our congregations and for that reason, instead of the blessings looked for, would only entail disturbance and division.⁵⁶

These two articles elucidate the factors which would soon cause hard feeling between Missouri and Wisconsin. There was a fear of absorption on the part of Wisconsin, but more important was the real difference in attitude toward outward merger. This was to be even more evident in the 1877 convention of the Wisconsin Synod.

When the Wisconsin Synod met in 1877, the state-synod and joint seminary proposals were the main items on the program. The delegate to the Synodical conference called attention to the fact that only one Wisconsin representative was present when the state-synod plan of 1876 was drawn up.⁵⁷ The first two days of discussion threw Synod into a turmoil, so that one delegate exclaimed: "Welche Aufregung hat nicht schon in diesen zwei Tagen in unsrer Synodalversammlung geherrscht, wie schon seit langer Zeit nicht geschehen."⁵⁸

The objections which were now raised and the answer given by Missouri's Strasen, who was present, clarify the basic difference in attitude between Missouri and Wisconsin. One delegate spoke at length, making the point that doctrinal unity already existed and that the current trend toward building imposing church bodies was contrary to the

⁵⁶Ibid., p. 5.

⁵⁷Wis. Report, 1877, p. 16.

⁵⁸Ibid., p. 22.

Gospel. As to the practical difficulty, congregational friction, this also was to be healed with the Word of God, not by external union.⁵⁹

After such discussion had gone on for some time, Praeses Strasen asked for the floor, and gave his opinion:

Wenn zwei Kirchenkoerper innerlich einig sind, so folgt daraus mit Nothwendigkeit, dass auch das Verlangen, aeußerlich sich zu vereinigen, sich kundgeben muss. Wie koestlich waer es, wenn die ueber den Kreis der Erde zerstreute lutherische Kirche sich zu einer Synode vereinigen koennte; jeder rechtschaffene Lutheraner wuerde sich freuen, darin zu sein. Wenn ich nun den Gang dieser Verhandlungen ins Auge fasse, so ist mir entgegen getreten, dass man eine Furcht hat vor Verschmelzung mit Missouri. Es ist das Verhaeltnisz von Wisconsin zu Missouri unter einem Bilde dargestellt worden, aus welchem gefolgert werden muss, dass die Synode von Wisconsin zur Synode von Missouri keine Liebe habe. Es ist geredet worden von der Gefahr, die Wisconsin drohe, mit Missouri verschmolzen zu werden. Es mag in der Ordnung sein, dass Wisconsin nicht Districtsynode von Missouri werden will, aber der Ausdruck "Gefahr" ist anstoeszig. Man sieht in solcher Vereinigung ein Unglueck und Uebel, welchem man entgehen moechte. Das scheint mir mit der innerlichen Einigkeit in der Lehre im Widerspruch zu stehen.⁶⁰

This rather emotional and unrealistic utterance of Strasen's brought Hoenecke to his feet. Hoenecke was certain that the real issue in which the two synods differed had now been laid bare:

In dem ersten von Praeses Strasen angefuehrten Punkte schlaegt gerade das durch, was einem von da und dort zufliezt und was mich allezeit mit Missbehagen gegen die Plaene erfuehlt hat, naemlich dieser Gedanke: Wenn die Wisconsinssynode in That und Wahrheit ihrem Bekenntnisz gemaez steht und von ganzen Herzen zu reiner Lehre und Praxis sich bekennt, dann ist es natuerlich, dass sie begehren muss, sich mit der Missourissynode zu verschmelzen. Dagegen muss es doch mit der Kimmethigkeit in der Lehre nicht recht stehen, wenn die Lust zu solcher Vereinigung fehlt. Man hat mir gesagt, dass nicht so guertheilt werde; nun aber ist ein derartiges Urtheil hier effentlich ausgesprochen worden. Durch das von mir gebrauchte Gleichnisz sollte nur gesagt werden: Es koenen zwei Koerperschaften in Lehre und Praxis uebereinstimmen, ohne dass

⁵⁹Ibid., pp. 17-18.

⁶⁰Ibid., pp. 26-27.

sie doch begehren, in eine Koerperschaft vereinigt zu werden, und das ist ebenso wenig noethwendig, als wenn zwei christliche Personen, die sich lieb haben als Christen, sich heiraten mueszten. Wir haben uns als zwei kirchliche Koerperschaften lieb, aber doch ist es nicht noethig uns organisch zu verschmelzen. Ich fuerchte mich nicht vor irgend einer Gefahr. Meine Ehre und Anerkennung als Lutheraner habe ich bei Gott und lasse sie nicht abhaenig sein von Menschen, und wenn mein Bruder mir diese Anerkennung versagte, mueszte ich es als Kreuz tragen; aber ich stehe bei Schrift und Symbolen mit Aufrichtigkeit des Herzens.⁶¹

Bading finally closed the long debate with a speech in which he sided with Hoenecke. He pointed out once more that Wisconsin's attitude stemmed neither from fear nor from divisiveness, but solely from her wish to remain independent.⁶²

The resolutions finally adopted by the Wisconsin Synod at this meeting were consistent with the opinions voiced during the course of the convention. The Synod did not reject the plan under consideration; it did, however, insist that two precautionary measures be accepted: The Wisconsin Synod was not to disband until all the existing general synods would do so; she would also not join with any of the existing general synods, inasmuch as this was neither necessary nor good for her congregations.⁶³

In the discussion of the proposals which were made by Wisconsin, it was stated frankly that she had no desire to become a district of Missouri. One delegate summed it up like this:

The point is sometimes made, that we could then say, "We no longer have a Missouri Synod and a Wisconsin Synod. We are then no longer bound to a large general synod, but to one large, Lutheran

⁶¹Ibid., p. 27.

⁶²Ibid., p. 29.

⁶³Ibid., p. 17.

Church." It would be correct to say, "We no longer have a Wisconsin Synod, but we still have a Missouri Synod."⁶⁴

In this same connection Wisconsin decided not to join in establishing a joint seminary. The reason given was that a small school, where close supervision and Erziehung are possible, is preferable to a large school, where these things are lacking. Furthermore, not too much emphasis should be placed on Gelchrtheit. It was also remarked that a seminary is to a synod what a school is to a congregation: it should establish one thought and opinion.⁶⁵ Of the ninety-eight who voted, sixty-four were against taking part in the joint seminary.⁶⁶ Steps were immediately taken to provide a separate seminary for the Wisconsin Synod. The plans were presented at the next convention and accepted.⁶⁷

Later in the summer, when the Synodical Conference convention was held, the reactions of the member synods to the state-synod plan and the joint seminary were reported. Missouri had not met as yet, but would obviously be in favor of the controverted proposals. The Minnesota Synod had definite compunctions about state-synods without proper safeguards. However, they did not state their objections quite so definitely as did Wisconsin, and they were willing to go along with the joint seminary, although they could not as yet help materially.⁶⁸

⁶⁴Ibid., pp. 19-20.

⁶⁵Ibid., pp. 23-26.

⁶⁶Ibid., p. 26.

⁶⁷Ibid., p. 30.

⁶⁸Ibid., pp. 30-31.

The Wisconsin Synod stated its conclusions as they had been formulated at its convention that summer. The Synod had resolved:

1. Dass sie den ursprünglichen Plan der Vereinigung aller recht-gläubigen Lutheraner der Synodal-Conferenz zu selbstständigen, unabhängigen Staatsynoden von Herzen gutheisst und billigt.
2. Dass sie auch zu solcher Vereinigung zu einer Staatsynode von Wisconsin bereit ist, sobald die Möglichkeit abgeschnitten ist, dass diese Staatsynode sich wieder an eine der bestehenden allgemeinen Synoden anschliesse und damit ihre Selbstständigkeit und Unabhängigkeit verliere.
3. Dass sie über den Anschluss an eine der zur Zeit noch bestehenden allgemeinen Synoden weder als in Gottes Wort geboten, noch auch zur wahren Einigkeit als wesentlich noethig, noch auch als fuer unsere Synode und Gemeinden heilsam und erprieszlich erkennen kann.

In regard to the joint seminary the Wisconsin Synod resolved:

Dass wir die Errichtung eines grossen, allgemeinen Prediger-Seminar fuer uns nicht fuer gut und erprieszlich erkennen und uns darum nicht daran betheiligen koennen.⁶⁹

Along with this statement Wisconsin assured the other synods that basically they were still in agreement and cautioned that no one should act as though there were a difference in spirit. It was advised that in the future such undertakings should be explained more carefully to the individual synods and that Christian love should prevent the forcing of such projects on any synod.⁷⁰

In view of the course which events had taken, the Synodical Conference now decided to drop the matter and to leave its further development to the individual synods. The time, it was felt, was obviously not ripe; perhaps by proceeding cautiously and by making beginnings on a small scale the synods might still achieve their goal.

⁶⁹ Syn. Conf. Report, 1877, pp. 41-42.

⁷⁰ Ibid., pp. 43-44.

A committee was also named, composed of all of the Wisconsin Synod's delegates to the Synodical Conference and one-fifth of the delegates of the other synods, which was to talk over some of the points of disagreement while the Conference was still in session. One of the main purposes of this committee was to clarify the phrase, "Anstrengung nach territorialischer Grenze," which some took to indicate that the state-synods would be entirely independent, while others had in mind a general synod which would stand midway between the state-synods and the Synodical Conference.⁷¹

The Missouri Synod did not accept Wisconsin's refusal so gracefully. At its convention in 1878 the statement was made that

Unsere Synode konnte aber dem ebengenannten Beschluss der Wisconsinssynode [Cf. above] keineswegs zustimmen, sondern glaubte in der in demselben liegenden Forderung eine Gefährdung der christlichen Freiheit und einen, wenn auch unbeabsichtigten, Versuch, gewissenmassen der Regierung Gottes vorgreifen zu wollen, erkennen zu müssen.⁷²

Stronger statements than this were heard at the Missouri convention that year. Walther spoke of a "widergoettlich" trespass against Christian liberty. Pastor Brauer of St. Louis referred to Wisconsin's "ingratitude toward the Missouri Synod which, as a matter of fact, has pulled it out of the unionistic morass." Bading retorted that Brauer was attacking a straw man that he had made, and Walther also disavowed the latter's statement. The Wisconsin men left soon after this, and no satisfactory settlement was reached at this time.⁷³

⁷¹Ibid., pp. 42-43.

⁷²Mo. Report, 1878, p. 33.

⁷³Koehler, op. cit., Vol. XIV, No. 2, 6.

Missouri now determined to go along with the state-synod proposal, provided the possibility of joining one of the existing general synods was not denied; she also agreed to cooperate in the proposed joint seminary.⁷⁴ This was to be carried out even if one synod would abstain. The fear was that if the thing were not taken in hand now, it would never be accomplished.⁷⁵ In the discussion preceding this decision, several accusations, probably coming from the Wisconsin Synod, were answered, among them the intimation that Missouri was afraid of competition.⁷⁶ In regard to Wisconsin's reasons for preferring a small seminary, Missouri defended a large institution on the grounds that it would aid the preservation of doctrinal purity to have professors from different synods checking up on each other; a large seminary would also prepare men to work with the English language more efficiently than would a small one.⁷⁷ It was emphasized that the new seminary would not necessarily be in St. Louis.⁷⁸ By the conclusion of this meeting, it appeared that Missouri and Ohio were in agreement as to procedure, while Wisconsin was out of the picture.⁷⁹

The months following this convention saw Brauer aggressively anti-Wisconsin and Walther in the role of peace-maker. There was not

⁷⁴Mo. Report, 1878, pp. 33-34.

⁷⁵Ibid., p. 34.

⁷⁶Ibid., p. 34.

⁷⁷Ibid., pp. 34-37.

⁷⁸Ibid., p. 37.

⁷⁹Ibid., pp. 40-41.

discussion among the pastors of both synods in Milwaukee. Bading, although testy at first, finally agreed to this statement of Walther's, which marked the close of the open skirmishing:

May our last encounter be and remain in fact the last, and God grant that our synod may carry on the work of the Lord shoulder to shoulder with yours in one spirit and faith for the edification and abundant comfort of His church in these latter troubled days.⁸⁰

The 1879 meeting of the Synodical Conference was marked by a sense of urgency. It was feared that unless the state-synod plan were now carried out mit vollem Ernst, the thing would never be achieved.⁸¹ For this reason it was resolved, "Dasz die deutschen Synoden innerhalb der Synodalconferenz sofort zu beschliessen und sobald als inner moeglich zu bewerkstelligen."⁸² The Conference also decided that in order to carry out the work with success and vigor there had to be larger alliances. However, the state synods were to retain the same independence in the administration of their private affairs as formerly the districts had; the new state synods would stand in the same relationship to the future general synods as the district synods now stood to the present general synods (i.e., of Missouri and Ohio).⁸⁴

It is important that two or three general synods were to be established. The Synodical Conference stated explicitly that this was a concession to the Wisconsin and Minnesota Synods, so that they might

⁸⁰Koehler, op. cit., Vol. XIV, No. 2, 7.

⁸¹Syn. Conf. Report, 1879, p. 28.

⁸²Ibid., pp. 27-28.

⁸³Ibid., p. 29.

⁸⁴Ibid.

form their own general synod, and not have to enter one of the older alliances.⁸⁵ The "older alliance" that they feared was naturally the Missouri Synod.

The Synodical Conference also resolved that there should be a common seminary, which would be controlled by all two or three general synods.⁸⁶

This was clearly to be the final attempt. The whole newly-formulated state-synod plan was now to be placed before the respective synods. To reject one part of it was to reject it all. If one synod would refuse to participate, the others would go ahead anyway.⁸⁷ This was the first proposal, except for one made by the Eastern District of the Missouri Synod in 1880, in which it was suggested that the three larger general synods should form a new body, to be called the General Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Wisconsin. This would take the place of the Synodical Conference.⁸⁸

Unfortunately, something else intervened just when the problems seemed to have been solved. The predestinarian controversy broke into the open in 1881. The Wisconsin Synod, at its 1881 convention, decided that the plan would have to be postponed, inasmuch as the situation had changed in such a way as to make its completion impossible.⁸⁹ The

⁸⁵Ibid.

⁸⁶Ibid., pp. 27-28.

⁸⁷Ibid., p. 30.

⁸⁸Suelflow, op. cit., p. 67.

⁸⁹Wis. Report, 1881, p. 56.

presidential address of Missouri's Schwan betrayed disappointment and bitterness. He spoke of those who, although seemingly close to Missouri in the work of the past years, at the last minute declared themselves unready, and in their synodical organs actually took up a position of opposition to Missouri. At the same time, Wisconsin moved closer to Missouri, so that Schwan was able to remark that those who in a few externals seemed to disagree with Missouri, "doch in der Lehrfrage mit so entschiedner Bezeugung der Wahrheit fuer uns eintrat."⁹⁰

Thus the attempt to unite the member synods of the Synodical Conference into one large body, composed of state synods, failed. In retrospect, it seems on the one hand fortunate that it failed in its early stages, but on the other hand unfortunate that it did not succeed later, when the issues had been clarified. It may well have been that the Wisconsin Synod would have agreed to the plan as it was formulated by the Synodical Conference in 1879, had the predestinarian controversy not intervened.

The general practice of second-guessers has been to condemn the Wisconsin Synod out of hand for being stubborn and for being afraid of Missouri's shadow.⁹¹ This is hardly a fair analysis of the situation. Walther, at the first convention of the Synodical Conference, said that "there is great danger that each of these church bodies will first of all think of its own expansion, and that (such a church body) will miss the blessing of union because it wants to gain members, individual

⁹⁰Mo. Report, 1881, p. 18.

⁹¹Suelflow, op. cit., p. 55.

prestige, and influence through such a union."⁹² That such an attitude, which can be categorized as nothing other than sin, was to be found in individuals of both synods may well have been the case. But to blame one and not the other is questionable historiography. The fact is that Missouri had a reputation for being prone to override others with its own ambition, and whether this was true or false, it was only natural that Wisconsin should have been conditioned by this general attitude toward Missouri. Furthermore, the original wording of the state-synod plan indicated that the Missouri and Ohio Synods were to remain intact until all states had achieved state synods; each state synod, as it organized, could affiliate with one of the remaining larger synods, and Missouri or Ohio would have been the only choice. It was obvious to the Wisconsin Synod that as soon as a state synod of Wisconsin would have been formed, the ex-Missourians in that Synod would very properly have wished to affiliate with Missouri. Thus the Wisconsin Synod was being asked "to die a graceful death in favor of Missouri."⁹³ The fact that Wisconsin's objections always pointed to this, and that the final formulation of the Synodical Conference recognized the validity of this objection by removing the offending stipulation, seems to be ample evidence that Wisconsin's hesitation was justifiable. If Christian love is to be spoken of, then Christian love would require that an arrangement of this kind be equitable, as the final proposal was.

One other point should be remembered. The question of church polity

⁹²Ibid., p. 56.

⁹³Ibid., p. 65.

was discussed in great detail at the Synodical Conference conventions of 1873-1878. There was a basic difference between Missouri's and Wisconsin's view of the church, as from the account of the 1877 convention of the Wisconsin Synod. This difference had to be aired before any major alteration of synodical structure, such as the one proposed, could be attempted. It seems, however, as though the differences had been satisfactorily cleared up, and the Missouri and Wisconsin Synods were on the verge of a state-synod political structure, when the predestinarian controversy intervened.

CHAPTER IV

THE PREDESTINARIAN CONTROVERSY

The controversy which broke the Synodical Conference wide open and ruined the state-synod plan was also of importance in that it further cemented the relationship between the Missouri and Wisconsin Synods.

Although this controversy broke out suddenly, it had been in the making for a number of years. Already between the years 1872 and 1874 Professor Stellhorn, who was still at Watertown, had caused a stir. At a Missouri Synod pastoral conference in Watertown, he presented a paper in which he made some striking statements about the doctrine of conversion. The pastors who were present suspected that what he had said was not quite correct, but they could not put their finger on the trouble. Professor Ernst invited Hoenecke, who happened to be in town, to attend the sessions the following day. There Ernst first tried to refute Stellhorn on philosophical grounds, but failed. Hoenecke then took over the debate and literally pinned Stellhorn's back to the wall. The latter sat down and admitted defeat.¹

F. A. Schmidt, professor at the Norwegian seminary at Madison, Wisconsin, was the one who really instigated the controversy. He took exception to statements of Walther's which had been made already at a meeting of the Wisconsin District of the Missouri Synod in

¹Joh. Ph. Koehler, "The History of the Wisconsin Synod" Faith-Life (revised and translated), Vol. XIV, No. 5, 6.

1868.² From then on the disagreement was aired in various periodicals, particularly in Lehre und Wehre and in Brobst's Monatshefte.³ At the meeting of the Synodical Conference at Columbus, Ohio, in 1879, Walther and Schmidt met privately and agreed to meet again the following year. Meanwhile Schmidt was to remain silent.⁴

It is difficult to determine who spoke first now. It appears that Walther, at a meeting of the Western District in 1879, publicly attacked "certain people" of Synod who did not agree with him. It soon became apparent that he meant Schmidt and Allwardt, who had sided with Schmidt.⁵ Thereupon the latter began publishing a monthly, Altes und Neues, for the express purpose of opposing Walther's teaching.⁶

The core of the argument was that Schmidt and his followers accused Walther of crypto-Calvinism, and Walther accused Schmidt of synergism. An example of the type of statement to which the latter objected is this, which was made at the meeting of the Western District in 1877: "Yes, God has from eternity already elected a number of persons to salvation; He has determined that these shall and must be saved; and as certainly as God is God, so certainly they will be saved,

²J. L. Neve and Willard D. Allbeck, History of the Lutheran Church in America (Third revised edition; Burlington, Iowa: The Lutheran Literary Board, 1934), pp. 207-10.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Ibid.

and besides them none other."⁷

Schmidt, on the other hand, had formulated theses such as this one, which he sent to a faculty member of Concordia Seminary in May of 1879:

"Der Besonder Gnadenwille Gottes, als naechster Grund und Norm der Erwählung im engsten Sinne, hat allerdings das verschiedene Verhalten der Menschen gegen die allgemeine Gnade zur Voraussetzung."⁸ Schmidt was not at all careful in the language he used in Altes und Neues. In the January, 1880 issue he wrote: ". . . Wohlan, so sei es denn in Gottes Namen Kampf, offener und entschiedener Kampf gegen diesen neuen Krypto-Calvinismus." And even more indignantly he exclaimed, "Das ist das End von Lied bei dieser neumissourischen Schwärzerei. Wie alle Geisterei verläuft sie zuletzt in ekelhafte geistliche Hoffart und Geistprahlerei."⁹

Until 1881 the developing controversy had remained by and large within the confines of the Missouri Synod. Schmidt was a Norwegian, but the Norwegians as such were not involved. Then, in 1881, Ohio really became involved, both by admitting into membership people who had left Missouri¹⁰ and also by joining in the accusations. That Missouri now looked upon the entire Ohio Synod as its opponent is

⁷Ibid., p. 212.

⁸Verhandlungen der Ev.-Luth. Synodal-Conferenz von Nord-Amerika (St. Louis), 1882, p. 14. Hereafter cited as Syn. Conf. Report.

⁹Ibid., p. 21.

¹⁰Roy Arthur Suelflow, The History of the Missouri Synod During the Second Twenty-Five Years of its Existence, unpublished doctoral dissertation, Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, 1946, p. 178.

evident from its 1861 conference proceedings.¹¹ It was therefore resolved, in preparation for the next meeting of the Synodical Conference, that:

1. Ihr sitzt mit keiner Person in kirchlicher Berathung zusammen, die uns öffentlich des Calvinismus beschuldigt hat.
2. Ihr erkennt keine Synode als Glied der Synodalconferenz an, die, als solche, gegen uns die Beschuldigung des Calvinismus erhebt.¹²

It remained to be seen what position the Wisconsin Synod would now take over against Missouri. Professor Hoenecke came to the defense of Walther, and supported him with articles in the Gemeindeblatt.¹³ That the controversy affected Wisconsin deeply is indicated by the fact that the Lehrverhandlung at its 1862 convention in La Crosse had "Conversion" for its topic.¹⁴ The decision to side with Missouri did not come automatically. At the Wisconsin Synod's pastoral conference of 1879 the delegates to the Synodical Conference were instructed to ask Missouri to correct certain of its statements which might be misunderstood. This seems to have been done at a special conference of Missouri pastors at Chicago in 1880.¹⁵ The problem had been further clarified at a meeting involving delegates of Missouri, Ohio, Wisconsin and the Norwegians, held in 1861 (January), at the Wisconsin Synod's seminary

¹¹Synodal-Bericht der Allg. deutschen ev.-luth. Synode von Missouri, Ohio, u. a. St. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House), 1861, pp. 17-45, passim. Hereafter cited as Mo. Report.

¹²Verhandlungen der Deutschen Ev.-luth. Synode von Wisconsin, u. a. St. (Milwaukee), 1861, p. 45. Hereafter cited as Wis. Report.

¹³Kochler, op. cit., Vol. XIV, No. 5, 7.

¹⁴Wis. Report, 1862, p. 13.

¹⁵Kochler, op. cit., Vol. XIV, No. 5, 7.

in Wauwatosa. Here such leaders as Walther, Franz Pieper, Wyzehen, Schwan, A. Hoenecke and Hading were present. This meeting lasted five days, so it would appear that the differences were discussed thoroughly.¹⁶

Even now that sides had been taken, Hoenecke did not indulge in harsh language as did some of the Missourians. Heve says of his part in the dispute: "During the controversy, Dr. Hoenecke by gentle and conciliatory speech took the sting out of Missouri's offensive phraseology, and accomplished much in the interest of peace in the church."¹⁷

Nevertheless, Wisconsin had taken her place beside Missouri. There was, in fact, a change in attitude on the part of the Wisconsin Synod even between 1881 and 1882. In 1881, before the main lines of the dispute were clarified, the Wisconsin Delegates to the next meeting of the Synodical Conference were instructed that in case the doctrinal controversy should become an issue either during the organization of the conference or in the meeting itself, they should consider their mandate suspended. This was not to mean that in such an instance Wisconsin should be looked upon as having left the Synodical Conference.¹⁸ Perhaps fortuitously, the 1881 meeting of the Conference never occurred; by 1882 the Wauwatosa Conference had been held and Wisconsin had come to more definite conclusions as to her position in the dispute.

When Schmidt was named a delegate at the 1882 convention of the Synodical Conference, Missouri, Wisconsin and Minnesota protested.¹⁹

¹⁶Suelflow, op. cit., p. 156; Koehler, op. cit., Vol. XIV, No. 5, 8.

¹⁷Heve-Allbeck, op. cit., p. 231.

¹⁸Wis. Report, 1881, p. 56.

¹⁹Syn. Conf. Report, 1882, p. 4, footnote.

There was a lengthy argument about the possibility of barring Schmidt from the convention, with several men from the Norwegian Synod protesting such an action. The formal reason given for prohibiting Schmidt from the convention was not his false doctrine but the fact that for some time he had been proceeding against certain synods as against enemies of the truth and hardened heretics and had refused to engage in further colloquies; he had also sought to break up the Synodical Conference and had tried to infiltrate into congregations and tear them away from the church.²⁰

After a spirited debate marred by much hard feeling, in which Rasmussen and Muus of the Norwegian Synod attempted to get Schmidt into the convention as a delegate, it was finally resolved not to recognize him as a brother or as a delegate.²¹ Even after this resolution had been made, the Norwegians persisted in their arguments and became quite incensed.²² But this was to no avail, and the final answer given by the Synodical Conference to Schmidt was that in order to be reinstated he would have to admit to these accusations in the affirmative, without any further hearing: (1) That he had, without taking proper steps, openly attacked Synodical Conference doctrine as Calvinistic and dealt with his opponents before the world as crypto-Calvinists; (2) That he had done wrong in disrupting Missouri congregations; (3) That he was willing to beg forgiveness contritely.²³ Schmidt answered that he was

²⁰Ibid., pp. 26-27.

²¹Ibid., p. 36.

²²Ibid., p. 39.

²³Ibid., p. 50.

willing to retract where he had gone too far, but that he wanted to be shown his error from Scripture.²⁴ It should be remembered that not Schmidt's doctrine, but his actions, were condemned without further hearing.

This has of course been a very brief summary. The point to be made is that the Wisconsin Synod, while not immediately jumping into the controversy on the side of Missouri, came to the conclusion, after having considered both sides carefully, that Missouri was in the right. The history of Wisconsin's part in the dispute was resumed by a Wisconsin spokesman at the 1882 Synodical Conference convention. He remarked that Wisconsin had not written against Schmidt prior to 1882, because they thought that he would perhaps deal with them a little more readily since he did not mistrust them as he did other synods. But as soon as they stated their opinion on Election he called them Calvinists and crypto-Calvinists just like the Missourians. He broke into their congregations and accused them of being hypocrites. The Wisconsin Synod thereupon handled the situation in the proper way: it complained about Schmidt to his own synod. Since the Norwegians have not met in the meantime, the Wisconsin spokesman averred, the Synodical Conference must do what they certainly would have done--place before him his sin and tell him that he must repent.²⁵ Thus Wisconsin, when it saw that it could not play the role of mediator, took the side of Missouri.

The agreement between Wisconsin and Missouri was further

²⁴Ibid., p. 52.

²⁵Ibid., pp. 42-43.

established when each synod recognized the other's official position on election. Thus the entire Synodical Conference recognized both the statements of Wisconsin and Minnesota as recorded in their synodical report of 1882,²⁶ and also Missouri's Thirteen Theses, which had been accepted by that synod at its convention of 1880.²⁷ The only one who refused to accept both documents was Pastor Maus of the Norwegian Synod.

The issue had been clearly defined. There were still a few odds and ends to be taken care of, but substantially the controversy was over. A little later in the year, a colloquy would be held between all the theological professors and all general and district presidents and Schmidt's party.²⁸ Several people were also still in doubt about one expression used in the Wisconsin Synod's definition of election, but this was clarified at Wisconsin's convention in 1883.²⁹

The Ohio Synod left the Synodical Conference because it believed, like Schmidt, that the Missouri Synod's doctrine of election was Calvinistic.³⁰ Aside from this loss the Synodical Conference stood firm, perhaps more so than ever before. The bond between Missouri and Wisconsin could not help but be strengthened by such an ordeal. It had now become clear to Missouri that even though Wisconsin was not quick to jump on the bandwagon, still by her actions in a really difficult

²⁶Ibid., p. 64.

²⁷Ibid., p. 79.

²⁸Ibid., pp. 80-81.

²⁹Wis. Report, 1883, pp. 59-60.

³⁰Syn. Conf. Report, 1882, pp. 83-84.

situation she had shown herself to be the synod which was really one with Missouri.

The state-synod plan was dead. Ohio had been one of the prime movers and, although Missouri had been very eager to see this plan succeed, the predestinarian controversy had instilled in her a new caution. President Schwan betrayed this in his Synodalrede at the Missouri convention of 1887, when he spoke of carrying on the work even more zealously and more cautiously than before.³¹ After the synod-shaking events of the past eight years, there would have to be a time for regrouping forces before any major endeavor with another synod would be attempted. Wisconsin, for her part, was in no hurry. She had shown at the very height of enthusiasm for the state-synod program that she had no great desire to carry this out with a crash program, but that such a change must come about slowly and by the preaching of the Word of God. The attempt to unify Missouri and Wisconsin would lie practically dormant for nearly twenty years.

³¹Mo. Report, 1887, p. 18.

CHAPTER V

THE PERIOD OF CONSOLIDATION

The years immediately following the predistinarian controversy were relatively quiet ones. Missouri felt that she had been deceived, and Wisconsin had never been in a hurry to make radical changes. During the coming years, until shortly after the close of the century, both synods would concentrate on consolidating their position and expanding their boundaries. The relationship between them had improved immeasurably because of the events of the past five years. They had been engaged in joint endeavors before this time, but it was not until now that cooperation developed which brought the two synods really close together.

The minutes of the Wisconsin Synod conventions in particular give evidence of the close communication and good feeling that existed between Missouri and Wisconsin. When the Missouri Synod celebrated its fiftieth anniversary, a committee from the Wisconsin Synod was there to extend the congratulations of its synod.¹ Three years later, at Wisconsin's fiftieth anniversary, Missouri synod congregations in Milwaukee took an active part in the celebrations. Wisconsin District Praeses Strasen, who had formerly looked with a jaundiced eye at certain aspects of the Wisconsin Synod, Franz Pieper, William Dallmann, and the faculties of St. Louis and Springfield Seminaries were on hand to

¹Verhandlungen der Deutschen Ev.-Luth. Synode von Wisconsin u. a. St. (Milwaukee), 1897, p. 115. Hereafter cited as Wis. Report.

speak or to convey congratulations.²

It also became the custom for both synods to exchange greetings at their conventions. During these years men took calls from one synod into the other with increasing frequency. A cursory examination of the records of such exchanges indicates that the Wisconsin Synod gained more men from Missouri than she gave up to that synod. The readiness to cross synodical lines was such that in one instance, when a small group of people approached the Wisconsin Synod with the request for a minister, the Synod advised them to join a nearby Missouri congregation.³

Nevertheless there quite naturally remained instances of disagreement and hard feelings, some of which harked back to the early days when the respective synods were still at loggerheads. In addition to these cases, new disputes arose for the very reason that there were no geographic boundaries to delimit parishes. Quite often at meetings of the Synodical Conference or of other smaller groups within the Conference, these problems were aired and steps taken to avert further difficulties.

The mixed pastoral conference of Manitowoc and Sheboygan Counties requested the Synodical Conference to set up rules regarding unattached congregations; the suggestion was made that congregations or preaching stations that were unattached and that had been founded or served by one synod should not, in event of a vacancy or other such emergency,

²Ibid., 1900, pp. 11-12.

³Ibid., 1897, p. 93.

be accepted by another synod unless the first synod had requested this or stated that it could not supply the congregation.⁴ A committee appointed by the Conference brought the following recommendation, which was accepted: (1) If a pastor is called across synodical lines, he should help the calling congregation to find a man, advise them that the synods are in agreement, and urge them to seek the advice of the synod to which they belong. This should also be done in the case of a call from a "free" congregation formerly served by the other synod.

[Evidently it was assumed that in these situations a pastor who would accept such a call would remain with his own synod.] (2) When a cross-synod change has already taken place, the synod which has lost the congregation should let the other have it rather than disturb the people.⁵

Four years later it became necessary to define the right of a congregation to leave a synod. The Synodical Conference resolved that: (1) This is to be a general decision for a general question. (2) A congregation has the inalienable right and freedom to leave a synod. (3) A congregation must determine how to use this right, and must be careful not to sin against love. (4) Particular application of the decision is up to the ones concerned. (5) When such a change is to be made within the bounds of orthodox synods, the congregation should remember its close bond with its old synod, and be careful that the

⁴Verhandlungen der Ev.-Luth. Synodal-Conferenz von Nord-Amerika (St. Louis), 1833, pp. 50-51. Hereafter cited as Syn. Conf. Report.

⁵Ibid.

law of love is not broken and that everything is done in good order.⁶

In 1897 the president of the Wisconsin Synod requested that a standing committee be named, which would operate in case of disagreements between Missouri and Wisconsin. It was suggested that all the district visitors should form this committee; in case of a dispute the visitors in that area should have the full authority of the entire committee. In extraordinary cases faculty members could also be called in. The final resolution was that the president should name a committee for each incident.⁷ When the Missouri Synod considered a similar recommendation at its convention in 1899, it thought best to allow the president of Synod to name a special committee for each incident; since the president already had this power, no resolution was necessary.⁸

That there was intersynodical friction is borne out by President Pieper's report to the Missouri Convention in 1905, in which he took note of the danger to intersynodical relations incurred when a member of one synod joins or is served by another synod before receiving a peaceful release from the congregation of the first synod. Pieper commented that if a person feels that he has been denied his release unjustly, he should complain to the refusing congregation and its synod. Thus a wrong will be corrected and peace will be maintained between the synods.⁹

⁶Ibid., 1892, pp. 51-52.

⁷Wis. Report, 1897, p. 114.

⁸Synodal-Bericht der Allg. deutschen ev.-luth. Synode von Missouri, Ohio, u. a. St. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House), 1899, pp. 133-34. Hereafter cited as Mo. Report.

⁹Ibid., 1905, p. 21.

Three years after this, at a meeting of the Synodical Conference, Franz Pieper read a paper on the preciousness of the unity of believers. In the discussion that followed Koehler mentioned that church politics sometimes endanger this precious unity. He was requested to expand on this in the afternoon and did, showing the troubles that arise from politics and the party spirit. In the ensuing debate, C. C. Smith called Koehler's remarks a judging of hearts. The discussion was not recorded in the minutes because the secretary had not taken any notes on it. Chairman Bading backed him up by ruling that the matter had been closed as of that morning and should not be recorded.¹⁰ Although the hard feelings in evidence at the close of the session really stemmed from a clash within the Wisconsin Synod ranks, the main thought of the discussion also evidences intersynodical conflict.

One of the major rulings of the Synodical Conference, in regard to mission work, the resolution of 1912, should also be given here:

1. Auf solchen Missionsfeldern, wo bereits eine rechtgläubige Synode in Arbeit steht, sollte eine Schwestersynode nicht auch ihrerseits ohne zwingende gute Gründe die Missionsarbeit aufnehmen, "damit die nicht auf fremden Grund baue."
2. Bei Besetzung bereits bestehender vakanter Missionsgemeinden, resp. Predigtplätzte, sollte jederzeit gewissenhaft so gehandelt werden, wie die Synodalkonferenz im Jahre 1888 folgendermassen dargelegt hat:¹¹
3. Es sollte mit allen Ernst und allerseits dahin gewirkt werden, dass nahegelegene kleine Missionsgemeinden verschiedener Synoden, wo möglich, zu einer Parochie vereinigt werden, und dass Missionsposten, die örtlicher Verhältnisse wegen besser und erfolgreicher von einer Schwestersynode bedient werden

¹⁰Joh. Ph. Koehler, "The History of the Wisconsin Synod," Faith-Life (revised and translated), Vol. XV, No. 11, 15.

¹¹The contents of the source referred to here have been given above, in connection with the request of the pastoral conference of Manitowoc and Sheboygan Counties.

koennten, dieser auch zugewiesen werden.

4. Schliesslich moechten wir der Ehrw. Synodalkonferenz anheingeben, ob es nicht in solchen Staaten, in denen verschiedene Synoden nebeneinander in der Missionsarbeit stehen, ratsam waere, gemeinsame Missionsbehoerden zu schaffen, die solche Missionsangelengeheiten in gottgefaelliger Weise zu ordnen die Aufgabe haetten.¹²

These rules and regulations were of course not established in a vacuum. They were formulated to meet specific, pressing problems, some of which ought briefly to be discussed.

At Mayville, Wisconsin Synod pastor F. J. Oehlert had acted in a manner which his synod characterized as dishonorable, and in the process his congregation had left the synod. The Missouri Synod, however, had accepted Oehlert into membership. Wisconsin's president protested this action, but met with little success; in 1888 that synod deemed it necessary to sustain its protest until Oehlert had shown himself to be repentant.¹³ In 1889 Synod was again forced to repeat its complaint, since Missouri had not as yet given a satisfactory explanation for its action.¹⁴ This case seems never to have been settled; it is not mentioned again in the Wisconsin Reports.

Similar difficulties arose in Crete, Illinois, Poynette, Wisconsin, and Yakima, Washington, all of which, after considerable dealing, came to a fairly satisfactory conclusion.

The major intersynodical fight of this period occurred as the result of bickering in a Missouri Synod congregation in Cincinnati, Ohio.

¹²Syn. Conf. Report, 1912, pp. 59-60.

¹³Wis. Report, 1888, p. 77.

¹⁴Ibid., 1889, p. 63.

The real significance of this dispute is that it led both the Wisconsin and the Missouri Synods to formulate their respective doctrines of the church in a much clearer form. The incident began when a Mr. Schlueter of Trinity congregation in Cincinnati took his son out of the parochial school with the intention of sending him to the public school until he had caught up in English. After that, he promised, he would return the boy to the church's school, and have him confirmed at fifteen. When the congregation refused to consent to this, he took the boy out anyway. The reaction in the congregation was violent; after considerable debate Schlueter was classed as one who had excommunicated himself. This action was not approved by the faculty at St. Louis. Soon two other local Missouri congregations were involved; these were composed of people who had previously broken from Trinity. Finally, Trinity and the pastors A. and E. von Schlichten were suspended by the officials of the Central District. The Wisconsin Synod became involved when the congregation and its pastors applied for membership in it. This was refused because the affair had not yet been properly settled with Missouri. When the congregation tried again in 1905, Praeses von Rohr appointed a committee to look into the situation. Their report, given in June of 1908 and based on opinions of Dr. Hoenecke, was not favorable to the Missouri Synod.¹⁵ The point was that Missouri could not very well defend the action of its own Central District, since it believed that a synod is not really a church and therefore that it does not have the right of excommunication. The entire relationship was very

¹⁵Koehler, op. cit., Vol. XVI, No. 5, 6-7.

involved at this point. Missouri, while theoretically not believing that the congregation should have been suspended, in the sense of excommunicated, yet found itself appearing as the enemy of the congregation, because it felt that the congregation had not handled the Schluster case properly; the Wisconsin Synod, while holding that a synod does have the right to excommunicate, nevertheless was quite friendly with the suspended congregation. Actually, neither synod was particularly clear on its own position at the moment. The Cincinnati matter was more or less settled in 1911, when Schluster apologized (Praeses Pfotenbauer pointed out that this did not mean that the excommunication had ever been right) and was received back into the congregation. The congregation had previously rejoined the Missouri Synod, except for a few adherents of Von Schlichten.¹⁶

The Wisconsin Synod was reasonably satisfied with the outcome of the Cincinnati affair, as is shown by the remarks of its president in 1911:

Wir stehen in bruederlicher Gemeinschaft nicht nur mit den Synoden, die mit uns die Allg. Synode bilden, sondern auch mit der ehrw. Synode von Missouri. Der zwischen uns und ihr schwebende Handel kann wohl als erledigt angesehen werden. Aentlich wird mir mitgetheilt: "Was Cincinnati anbetrifft, so erklarte sich unsere Synode mit ihrem Komitee zufrieden und sieht den Handel mit der ehrw. Wisconsin Synode als erledigt an." Und: "dass gegruendete Hoffnungen vorhanden sind, dass der Cincinnati-Fall zu einem befriedigenden Abschluss kommen wird."

Es hat leider nicht an Vorkommnissen gefehlt, die darnach angetan sind, die bruederliche Gemeinschaft, in der wir mit der ehrw. Synode von Missouri stehen, zu stoeren. Wir wollen nicht nur alles aengstlich meiden, was irgendwie das Band, das uns verbindet, lockern koemnte sondern auch, so viel an uns ist, alles tun, dieses Band zu festigen.¹⁷

¹⁶ibid.

¹⁷wis. Report, 1911, pp. 17-18.

But the real issues that had been raised were not yet settled; during the next years there would be many discussions and frequent articles, particularly in the Wisconsin Synod's Quartalschrift, on the question of whether a synod is a church in the full sense of the term.

In the Quartalschrift of 1912, such titles as these appeared: Die Stimme unserer Kirche in der Frage von Kirche und Amt, by Aug. Pieper; Von der Entlassung aus einer Ortsgemeinde, by J. Schaller; Die Lehre von der Kirche und ihren Kennzeichen in Anwendung auf die Synode, by Aug. Pieper; Die Lehre von heiligen Predigant, by Ed. R[ein?]; Zur Verstaendigung in der gegenwertigen Diskussion ueber Kirche und Amt, by Aug. Pieper.¹⁸ In the last-named article, Pieper stated the theses on which Missouri's doctrine of the church is based: "Nur die Kirche kann bannen; Kirche ist nur die Ortsgemeinde; Ortsgemeinde ist nur der Haufe von Glaebigen, so zu einem Pfarrer gehoeren; Also kann nur ein Haufe von Glaebigen, so zu einem Pfarrer gehoeren, bannen."¹⁹ The opinion of the members of the Wisconsin Synod on these points was divided. The faculty of Wauwatosa held that a synod is also "church" in the full sense of the term and that suspension is tantamount to, and must be respected as, excommunication. This opinion had been developed gradually, with Pieper at first establishing the significance of suspension without actually coming to the point of saying that "synod" is "church." But, to some extent through the influence of

¹⁸Theologische Quartalschrift, herausgegeben von der Allg. Ev.-Luth. Synode von Wis. u. a. St., redigiert von der Fakultaat des Ev.-Luth. Seminars zu Wauwatosa, Wis. (1912), table of contents. Hereafter this will be called QS.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 183.

Koehler, this had been clarified by 1912. Some members of Synod had at first objected to such a formulation, notably Ernst and the Manitowoc Conference, but the faculty ultimately prevailed.²⁰ In his Quartalschrift article "Zur Verständigung," Pieper had shown where Wisconsin differed from Missouri. Wisconsin could not accept the opinion that the concept "church" is limited only to Ortsgemeinde. They insisted that the synod too, as a congregation of believers, is a church.²¹

In 1914 a series of discussions between representatives of both synods began. At the convention of the Synodical Conference that year, Dr. Franz Pieper acted as spokesman for Missouri in private discussions with Wisconsin men. He had previously indicated his disagreement with the Wauwatosa doctrine in a private conversation with his brother August at Wauwatosa.²² Now, in 1914, there was again no agreement either in the formulation of the doctrine or in the method of obtaining it from Scripture.²³

In 1915, a formal protest from St. Louis was lodged against the formulations of the three senior professors at Wauwatosa.²⁴ (Hermann Meyer had since joined the faculty.) Now all four of them set up individual statements, but were not able to agree on one set of theses. The outcome of this protest has not been recorded.²⁵

²⁰Koehler, op. cit., Vol. XVI, No. 6, 9-11.

²¹Ibid., 1912, p. 183.

²²Koehler, op. cit., Vol. XVI, No. 6, 11.

²³Ibid., p. 11f.

²⁴Ibid., p. 12.

²⁵Ibid.

There were two more meetings between Missouri and Wisconsin for the purpose of coming to an agreement; one was held in Chicago, and another in Milwaukee in the twenties. The difference between the approaches of the two groups to the problem has been defined by one of the participants; granted that he may have been biased, his own words will nevertheless serve to clarify the attitudes of the two parties:

The real issue was the definition of the term "institution" as applied to the church and the office of the ministry in their concrete form. That afforded a striking illustration of the difference in the method of interpretation; on the one side, the linguistic-historical research to establish the meaning of the Scriptures and formulate that dogmatically; on the other side, the interpretation of the terms according to the preconceived dogmatic notions--the same difference as before in connection with the "analogy of faith." The disagreement was not such that the opponents accused each other of false doctrine; still some of the things said by individuals on both sides was not according to Hoyle.²⁶

The dispute was finally settled after a fashion at a meeting between the St. Louis and Thiensville faculties and the presidents of the Synods, held at Thiensville in 1932. The Thiensville Theses themselves demonstrate that only a compromise was arrived at, and that the issue was never really settled:

1. It is God's will COMMAND? OR PLEASURE? and order ORDINANCE? OR ARRANGEMENT?, as we learn from the Scriptures, that Christians who live together also enter into outward association, to perform jointly the duties of their spiritual priesthood.
2. Again, it is God's will and order, as we learn from the Scriptures, that such Christian local-congregations have shepherds and teachers to discharge the common task of the office of the Word in their midst.
3. It is also God's will and order, as we learn from the Scriptures, that Christian local-congregations manifest their fellowship of faith with other congregations and jointly with them perform the work of the Kingdom outside of their own circle too, as that is

²⁶Ibid.

done among us in the optional form of the synod.

4. Inasmuch as every Christian has title to the keys of the kingdom of heaven, judgment rendered in accordance with the Word of God by an individual Christian, or several too, in whatever grouping, is honored in heaven. However, as we learn from the Scriptures, God's will and order is that proceedings against an erring brother are not to be considered conclusive until his local-congregation has taken action. The discipline of a local-congregation and the discipline of a synod cannot properly come into conflict with each other because the local-congregation expels from the local-congregation, not from the synod, and the synod from the synod, not from the local-congregation.--Note: The expulsion performed by the local congregation is what we, according to ecclesiastical usage, call excommunication.²⁷

Although the synods were not always in perfect agreement, their coexistence was generally a peaceful one. Missouri's President Schwan had set the tone in his report of 1887 when he admonished his synod that even though difficulties do arise, no one should suspect that Missouri and Wisconsin are not in the same spirit.²⁸ Nine years later, speaking of minor disturbances, he reminded Missouri that she hadn't joined with Wisconsin.

Weil wir uns gegenseitig fuer unfehlbar oder fuer die lebenswuerdigsten Leute in der Welt gehalten haetten; sondern lediglich darum, weil wir mit einander denselben Einen, heiligen, christlichen Glauben in Lehre und Praxis bekennen und weil wir uns darin gegenseitig dienen und foerdern wollen.²⁹

Within the bounds of this rather cautious mutuality, Missouri and Wisconsin were able to accomplish a respectable amount of work in collaboration, particularly in connection with the Synodical Conference. Even institutions run by one synod were often aided by members of the

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸Mo. Report, 1887, p. 26.

²⁹Ibid., 1896, p. 25.

other; in 1899 the Wisconsin Synod reported that Missouri people had contributed \$170.55 to its old folks' home in Belle Plaine, Minnesota.³⁰

But there were many joint ventures, and these should be noted.

The Bohemian Mission: Particular mention is made of this in the 1892 report of the Synodical Conference. For some time the Wisconsin Synod and the Minnesota and Montana Districts of the Missouri Synod cooperated in doing mission work among the Bohemian settlers in Minnesota and in certain western states. The responsible men from both synods requested the Synodical Conference to take over the administration of this mission, but were advised to keep on running it themselves. This was in keeping with the usual policy of the Synodical Conference.³¹

The Lithuanian Mission: This was a joint endeavor of the Wisconsin Synod and the Missouri's Eastern District. Contrary to precedent, the Synodical Conference in 1904 acceded to the wishes of both parties and agreed to assume responsibility for the mission pending approval by the Eastern District of Missouri. A commission was also appointed to assume control.³²

The Kinderfreundgesellschaft: Members of both synods had joined forces at Milwaukee for the purpose of erecting a home for mentally retarded children. This intention was first mentioned to the Synodical Conference in 1902.³³ Two years later the home had been founded in

³⁰Wis. Report, 1899, p. 18.

³¹Syn. Conf. Report, 1892, p. 52.

³²Ibid., 1904, p. 70.

³³Ibid., 1902, pp. 86-87.

Watertown.³⁴ This was to grow into the large institution today called "Bethesda."

The Denver Sanatorium: This had also been projected by 1904. That year Pastor Her from Denver spoke to the Wisconsin Synod convention regarding the plans for a hospital for the tubercular and requested the support of the Synod; he suggested that the members of the synod either take up a collection or join the society. The synod greeted the work with joy and wished it God's blessing.³⁵ Subsequently members of both synods supported this independent project.

The Milwaukee city mission: Since 1902, Synodical Conference churches had cooperated in the city mission, doing work particularly in the county institutions. In 1910 they proposed to the Wisconsin Synod that the work be expanded to include the state institutions. Synod advised them to leave this up to the pastors living in the neighborhood of such institutions, and added the amendment that the City Mission Society look into the situation and report on it.³⁶

Foreign Missions: In 1884 the Synodical Conference discussed the possibility of beginning foreign missions. This was a time for probing and problematics rather than for positive decisions. It was remarked that the Conference could not fairly be accused of indifference to missions; it was in fact engaged in several such endeavors. The question of whether Synodical Conference Lutherans should support

³⁴Wis. Report, 1904, p. 110.

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶Ibid., 1910, pp. 96-97.

missionaries belonging to other organizations not in fellowship with them was given a good deal of attention, but no clear-cut decision was reached. It was conceded that in one sense such people should not be supported by the Conference; on the other hand, they do work which the Conference would do if it were on the scene. There was a note of caution throughout, motivated by fear lest member congregations be disappointed after giving money to such missions, and by the knowledge that where the proper spirit is lacking the end result may also be bad.³⁷ Evidently this giving for the mission activities of others was a rather common thing at the time.

At the convention of 1892 a committee of the Wisconsin Synod urged that the Synodical Conference begin mission work to the heathen itself. Wisconsin very likely had the American Indians in mind. The reply of the Synodical Conference committee was disappointing. They agreed that it was indeed time that something be done, but maintained that it is better for the individual synod to undertake such work, since this makes for ease of administration. It was furthermore said that it is easier to get congregations to support work done strictly by their own synod. The committee therefore recommended that the Wisconsin Synod begin work among the Indians immediately and that the other synods lend their support. They also stipulated that this should not curtail the work of the Negro mission. Ultimately the only thing decided was that each synod should think the matter over and report at the next

³⁷Syn. Conf. Report, 1884, pp. 90-92.

convention.³⁸ The Wisconsin Synod subsequently developed the Indian mission on its own.

The question of the administration of foreign missions by the Synodical Conference was not brought up again until 1916. Previous to this a Lutheran Mission Society had been organized whose principle endeavor was the China Mission. The society had, however, experienced some difficulty in getting men to serve over there; they therefore requested the Synodical Conference to take over the mission. A committee, whose members included Wm. Dallmann, Joh. Ph. Koehler and John Behnken, proposed that: (1) The Conference take over the China Mission. (2) It should be administered by the society until the next meeting of the Conference. (3) The officers of the Conference should take the necessary legal measures. (4) The Missionstaube and the Pioneer, issued by the society, should also contain financial reports and the reports of the officers. The last point was accepted; the other three were held over until the next convention to give synods and districts opportunity to discuss them.³⁹ The project was defeated when the Wisconsin Synod decided "dasz wir um gewisser Unstaende willen gegenwaertig nicht die Freudigkeit gewinnen koennen, solche Zustimmung zu geben."⁴⁰ The Missouri Synod eventually took over the China Mission.

The last such attempt occurred in 1924, when Pastor Gausewitz reported that the Minnesota District of the Wisconsin Synod had advised

³⁸Syn. Conf. Report, 1892, p. 48.

³⁹Ibid., 1916, pp. 106-08.

⁴⁰Wis. Report, 1916, p. 67.

the Synodical Conference to take over Wisconsin's Poland Mission and eventually all foreign missions. It was remarked that this had been brought up in 1892, when it was thought best to let individual synods handle their own mission activities. The trustees were asked to consider the request and to report at the next convention.⁴¹ The attempt, of course, never materialized.

The one major mission venture conducted by the Synodical Conference was the Negro Mission. From 1874, when it was resolved, "dasz es der Synode des Westlichen Districts an das Herz gelegt werde, sich dieser elenden Leute anzunehmen und einstweilen den Anfang mit dieser Mission zu machen,"⁴² until into the twenties, the Synodical Conference Reports were full of news and reports concerning this mission. The cooperation between Missouri and Wisconsin in this one endeavor alone is a story in itself. The beginnings were, as noted, made by a district of the Missouri Synod; but from a very early date the work was carried out jointly, and Wisconsin men were generally members of the commission.

Politically also, there was cooperation between Missouri and Wisconsin during these years. In 1889 the Bennett Law was passed in Wisconsin; it was feared that this law was directed against parochial schools, inasmuch as it contained stipulations which not all of these schools were able to live up to. That part of the law which concerned the Synodical Conference churches in Wisconsin specified a certain amount of study in the English language, and also gave the state the

⁴¹Syn. Conf. Report, 1924, p. 68.

⁴²Ibid., 1874, p. 74.

right to stipulate the time when school should be held. The Wisconsin Synod declared that this law was tyrannical and unjust insofar as it affected the parochial schools

- a. weil es den Bestand und die Wirksamkeit unserer loyalen Gemeindeschulen bedroht und damit zugleich unsere lutherische Kirche selbst, deren organische Bestandtheile diese Schulen sind, zu schädigen droht;
- b. weil wir unter Unstaenden durch dieses Gesetz gezwungen wurden, unsere Kinder, anstatt in unsere Gemeindeschulen, in die oeffentlichen Schulen zu schicken, was haeufig ohne Gewissensverletzung nicht geschehen koennte;
- c. weil dieses Gesetz sich ungerechtfertigte Eingriffe in die Rechte der Eltern und in das Familienleben erlaubt;
- d. weil dieses Gesetz mit dem Geist unseren freien Institutionen in Widerspruch steht.⁴³

It is amazing with what almost worldly efficiency the Wisconsin Synod acted now that her schools were threatened. A committee was appointed to find out what was being done in other states; they were also to provide publicity in the press and to take any other lawful steps in order to achieve the goal of Synod.⁴⁴ These instructions were carried out posthaste. The committee, under the leadership of Professor Ernst, joined with Missouri's committee. All opponents of the new law were invited to a meeting held December 26, 1889, in the school of St. John's church (Wisconsin Synod), at Milwaukee.⁴⁵ The common cause produced strange bedfellows, as Roman Catholics joined the Lutherans in the fight.

⁴³Wis. Report, 1889, p. 62.

⁴⁴Ibid.

⁴⁵Centennial Committee of the Joint Synod of Wisconsin s. o. St., M. Lehniger, Chairman, Continuing in His Word (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, c. 1951), pp. 31-2

At the convention of the Synodical Conference the next year, the Wisconsin Synod and the Wisconsin District of the Missouri Synod requested a statement from the Conference in regard to the school law; they also asked the Conference whether it intended to name a special committee. The latter was not deemed necessary, but this statement was forthcoming:

Resolved:

1. That we indorse the resolutions on the school question adopted by the Joint Synod of Missouri, etc.;
2. That we likewise indorse the resolutions adopted by the Synod of Wisconsin, etc.;
3. That we are in hearty sympathy with the brethren in Illinois and Wisconsin, who are at present compelled to do battle for their schools, and pledge ourselves to support them to the best of our abilities.⁴⁶

The strenuous effort paid off, and in 1891 the Wisconsin Synod's committee was able to report that the battle had been won in Wisconsin. Since the situation in Illinois was still not very favorable, Professor Ernst and Dr. W. Holz were still to function as a committee.⁴⁷

Almost thirty years later, when the parochial schools again seemed to be threatened, the Wisconsin Synod selected several men to join with an already appointed central committee of the Missouri Synod, and agreed to pay one-fifth of the cost of the proceedings necessary to defend its schools.⁴⁸ Two Missouri men, Steffens and Wenschel, formed the Washington committee which operated under a commission made up of men from both

⁴⁶Syn. Conf. Report, 1890, pp. 35-36.

⁴⁷Wis. Report, 1891, p. 62.

⁴⁸Ibid., 1919, p. 11.

synods.⁴⁹

It will have become apparent that the period from 1880-1900 was relatively free from further attempts at union either between Missouri and Wisconsin or between these two synods and other groups. Three major union movements beginning with the year 1903 will be grouped together in the sixth chapter. There was, however, one other attempt, which, while not of direct concern to either synod, did nevertheless affect them both. This was the union movement of the Norwegians, called Opgjøer after the union document itself. The union was to be between the Norwegians who had left the Synodical Conference at the time of the predestinarian controversy and the U. E. L. C. Essentially, Opgjøer allowed election to be defined either as covering the entire salvation of the elect from the calling to the glorification or as specifically the decree of final glorification. The concept of intuitu fidei was brought in under the latter definition.⁵⁰ This was clearly a compromise document, and, as such, one against which the Synodical Conference felt the need to warn its brethren. August Pieper, writing in the Quartalschrift, analyzed the situation:

Wir sind fern davon, unsere norwegischen Brüder um deswillen, weil sie sich dieser Darstellungsweise bedienen, zu verärgern, wir sind vielmehr fest überzeugt, dass sie trotzdem die rechte Lehre festhalten wollen und wirklich noch festhalten. Aber die Darstellungsweise ist sachlich verkehrt und führt, wenn konsequent verfolgt, notwendig zu synergistischen Gedanken. Darum möchten wir warnen. Und den bisherigen Gegnern gegenüber muss man doch absolut unmissverständlich reden.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Ibid., pp. 160-61.

⁵⁰ Syn. Conf. Report, 1912, pp. 14-24, passim.

⁵¹ Qs, 1909, pp. 33-34.

This attempt on the part of the Norwegians called forth new definitions of the doctrine of election from the leaders of both Missouri and Wisconsin. It was, in a sense, a revival of the old controversy which had rocked the Synodical Conference twenty years before. The Quartalschrift carried extensive treatments of the problem. In 1910, at the request of the Wisconsin Synod, the three members of the Wauwatosa faculty prepared a joint statement which was also presented in the Quartalschrift.⁵² In 1914 August Pieper published Ein lutherisches "Opgjoer," in which he defined the doctrine of election as found in the Formula of Concord.⁵³

The Synodical Conference together took action at its convention of 1912. In his opening sermon Dr. Franz Pieper delivered a stinging anti-unionism plea based on Romans 16:17-18.⁵⁴ During the course of the proceedings it was decided to send a letter to the Norwegians still in fellowship with the Conference, asking them to get rid of the statements in Opgjoer which leave room for synergism and also the statement that election pertains only to the decree of final glorification. Professors W. H. T. Dau and Franz Pieper, together with Director J. Schaller, were delegated to talk to the Norwegians directly.⁵⁵

Two years later the committee was forced to report that it had failed in its attempt. This was through no fault of their own. Their

⁵²Ibid., 1910, pp. 75-79.

⁵³Ibid., 1914, pp. 59-60.

⁵⁴Syn. Conf. Report, 1912, pp. 7-14.

⁵⁵Ibid., pp. 23-24.

detailed account shows how hard they tried to arrange a meeting with the Norwegians;⁵⁶ the latter employed several delaying tactics, from which it was evident that they simply did not want to talk to the men from the Synodical Conference. Their first excuses were valid, involving sickness and finally the death of at least one key man. The entire course of events, however, makes it impossible to excuse them. Their minds were made up, and they had no intention of letting anyone stand in their way.

The committee tried to arrange a meeting soon after the 1912 convention, but without success. There is some slight indication that John Schaller, the Wisconsin representative, was left out of the dealings, but there was probably a valid reason for this.⁵⁷

In 1916 the committee was again forced to report that it had been unable to meet with the Norwegians. (Schaller had by this time been replaced by Schlusten.) Meanwhile, the Norwegians had decided to join with the United Church although this decision was opposed by a strong minority. The Synodical Conference committee was empowered to make another attempt at meeting with them.⁵⁸

But by 1920 the situation had not changed. Dr. Stub of the Norwegians had again continued his delaying action. He finally became a little more straight-forward and admitted that he did not wish to

⁵⁶Ibid., 1914, pp. 33-34.

⁵⁷Ibid. The reason given was that the manipulations of the Norwegians forced the Missouri committeemen to act as individuals. The slight impression still remains that they might have had a reason for leaving Schaller out of the picture.

⁵⁸Ibid., 1916, pp. 62-79.

meet with the Synodical Conference committee until the union had been completely consummated. Stub was incensed because the account of the minority report had been included in the Synodical Conference Report of 1916.⁵⁹ The minority, meanwhile, had asked the Synodical Conference committee to meet with them at St. Paul while the Norwegians were in session there. The committee complied, and was of some help. The minority subsequently formed an opposition synod, which was in confessional agreement with the Synodical Conference. The committee had left before this was done, in order to avoid suspicion. Since Dr. Stub had also informed the committee that the newly organized union did not want to meet with them in the near future, the committeemen were relieved of their duty at their own request.⁶⁰

At this same convention, the Synodical Conference welcomed the Norwegian opposition synod into its membership, and announced that the Norwegian Ev.-Luth. Church of America had severed its bond of faith and church-fellowship with the Conference.⁶¹

The period following the predestinarian controversy demonstrated that the Missouri and Wisconsin Synods were indeed one in faith. The earlier dreams of organic union were allowed to rest for the time being, while both synods recuperated from the turmoil of controversy and established a situation of peaceful coexistence in the best sense of the term. Missouri seemed to recognize that Wisconsin had a background

⁵⁹Ibid., 1920, pp. 16-18.

⁶⁰Ibid., pp. 18-21.

⁶¹Ibid., pp. 22-23.

of her own, and could not be expected to give up this tradition in favor of Missouri. As a result, each synod was able to recognize the other for what it was: a group of strongly confessional Lutherans, whose ideas were not in every instance in complete agreement with those of the sister synod.

Beginning with the year 1903, the period of quiescence ended. The minor difficulties which in part remained from earlier days had been settled, and there were signs of renewed activity in the direction of union. Part of this activity has already been dealt with. It should be mentioned, however, that from 1903-1906 a series of meetings was held between the Synodical Conference synods and the Ohio Synod. This will be treated in the next chapter, in order to bring it into line with several other union movements. It has been necessary to deal with certain aspects of the relationship between the Missouri and Wisconsin Synods which go beyond the time limits of this chapter, because they have to do with that cooperation without union which is the general subject of the chapter.

It is evident that not everything in this relationship was perfect. There were a great many disputes, some of which did not reach a satisfactory settlement. Yet, both Missouri and Wisconsin had come to appreciate each other, and, in many areas of church activity, to work together in unity. When, in May of 1911, Professor Schaller of the Wisconsin Synod spoke at the Walther-Feier in the St. Louis Coliseum, he expressed the feeling of closeness to the Missouri Synod which had come to be one of the qualities of the Wisconsin Synod:

Kein Pastor aber ist in unsern Kreisen, der nicht irdentwie von dem, was Gott durch Walther ausgerichtet, grossen Gewinn fuer

seine Person und seine Amtstätigkeit gehabt hätte. Einen besonderen Grund habe ich noch von der Fakultät unsers Predigerseminars auszurichten; es trifft sich, dass die drei Mitglieder dieser Fakultät ihre ganze theologische Seminareusbildung unter der Leitung Walthers und unter seinem ueberwiegenden Einflusse empfangen haben. Wie sollten wir darum nicht gerne unsere Beteiligung an Ihrer Festfreude kundgeben? . . . Wir bezeugen unsere volle Glaubenseinigkeit mit der Synode, die D. Walther als ihren groessten Lehrer in gesegneten Andenken behielt, und sprechen die Hoffnung aus, dass wir allezeit auf der gemeinschaftlichen Grundlage bleiben, auf der wir jetzt stehen.⁶²

⁶²Mo. Report, 1911, p. 209.

CHAPTER VI

THREE FINAL FAILURES

During the first twenty-five years of the twentieth century, three new attempts were made to achieve a further union of Lutherans in America. The first two were short-lived; the third continued on into the second quarter of the century and did not really end until recently.

Although the failure of these three attempts is due to a number of causes, it is impossible to escape the impression that the change in attitude on the part of Missouri was a major factor. The Wisconsin Synod, while not denying the desirability of a united church, had never been overly eager to strive for new alignments. Wisconsin's professed attitude was one of waiting until, when and if he chose to do so, God would lead the churches into an external unity. This attitude stemmed from the great emphasis that the Wisconsin Synod put on the invisible nature of the church.

Of greater significance was the fact that the Missouri Synod had undergone a change. This was very likely brought about by the predestinarian controversy, which was a far greater shock to Missouri than is usually realized. Wisconsin may also have been partially responsible for Missouri's new cautiousness. The result was that the synod which, under the leadership of Walther, had felt itself driven to work toward the establishment of a Lutheran Church of America, now displayed a coolness toward other Lutheran bodies. In fact, during the first of the three movements to be discussed the Wisconsin Synod at

times displayed a greater readiness to unite than did Missouri. The mood of both synods had been set at the Synodical Conference Convention of 1889, when, in ^{answer} answer to a reminder by the Minnesota Synod that there had once been a desire to form state synods, the Conference answered in a noncommittal fashion that there were still some differences to be resolved as to what exactly a state synod should be, or for that matter whether there should be state synods, and that the whole matter should be left to the future and commended to God.¹ All agreed that they stood in complete unity of faith, and that formal union could be consummated only when all the synods and their parts thought that the time had come.² It would be easy to criticize these people, but it should be borne in mind that they had been disillusioned by a trusted partner, the Ohio Synod, just when success seemed to be within reach.

It is therefore not surprising that when a series of discussions was held between men of Missouri and Wisconsin and representatives of the Iowa and Ohio Synods shortly after the turn of the century, Missouri displayed a certain reticence and distrust. At the first meeting, which was held at Watertown early in 1903, the principals for Ohio were Allwardt of Lebanon and Doermann of Chicago; Franz Pieper came up from St. Louis, while August Pieper, Joh. Ph. Koehler and the Watertown professors represented the Wisconsin Synod. Not much was accomplished at this meeting. Without a prepared program the men could do little more than engage in haphazard discussion. The main topic developed was

¹Verhandlungen der Ev.-luth. Synodal-Conferenz von Nord-Amerika (St. Louis), 1889, p. 53. Hereafter cited as Syn. Conf. Report.

²Ibid., p. 52.

that the Lutheran doctrine of Scripture must conform to the doctrine of justification by faith; Professor Pieper talked at some length about this. The same subject was to open the next discussion.³ There were two more such meetings in 1903. The first one, held in Milwaukee, was not very important because the key men of the Ohio Synod were not present. Most of the time was devoted to Dr. Hoeneck's discussion of correct dogmatic procedure.⁴ Later in the year, at Chicago, Fritschel and Reu were on hand to represent Iowa. Discussion of the doctrines of election, the Anti-Christ, chiliasm and eschatology in general proved fruitless.

The third meeting is of interest particularly because of the comment it provoked from Wisconsin's Dr. Hoenecke. He reviewed the meeting in an article in the Quartalschrift, commenting on its general method and goal. Hoenecke was evidently not in full agreement with Missouri's dogmatic approach, even though he granted that it was capable of exact distinctions. This reminds one of his earlier hesitance to side fully with Missouri. In a concluding remark, he made a distinction between truth and the mode of expressing it which was quite foreign to Missouri's way of thinking at that time:

Doch halten wir fest, dass es auf dogmatische Formel, aus die Weise, das Dogma, die goettliche Wahrheit, auszudruecken, nicht ankommt, sondern auf die Wahrheit selbst, aber auf die volle. Wer in einem Glaubensartikel dasselbe mit mir lehrt, mit dem

³Joh. Ph. Koehler, "The History of the Wisconsin Synod," Faith-Life (revised and translated), Vol. XVI, No. 8, 6-7.

⁴Ibid., p. 8.

⁵Ibid.

bin ich in diesen Artikel geisteseinig, mag er auch die Wahrheit anders ausdruecken, als ich.⁶

Hoenecke's less strenuous attitude toward the other side is also shown by his reportage of the fifth meeting in the Quartalschrift, where he consistently refers to the errors of the opponents as "inconsistencies."⁷

The meetings were discontinued after the sixth one, which was held at Fort Wayne in October of 1906. When agreement was still not reached, the Missouri Synod declared that it was no longer willing to continue the colloquys, and Koehler agreed to see to it that the Quartalschrift would withdraw from further discussion.⁸

The series was doomed to failure. Missouri went into it only half-heartedly; some of its members admitted that they attended, "um den Schein zu meiden, als ob wir einem Frieden auf dem Grunde der Wahrheit nicht von Herzen geneigt sind."⁹ The other synods, for their part, operated with the "analogy of faith," which Missouri thought would rob Scripture of its authority. Someone with the initials "F. B." presented several articles in Lehre und Wehre, in which he explained Missouri's reasons for dropping out. One of the main reasons given was that several periodicals published by the opponents had abused

⁶Theologische Quartalschrift, herausgegeben von der Allg. Ev.-luth. Synode von Wis. u. a. St., redigiert von der Fakultät des Ev. luth. Seminars zu Wauwatosa, Wis. (1904), pp. 91-93. Hereafter this will be called QS.

⁷Ibid., 1905, p. 65.

⁸Koehler, op. cit., Vol. XVI, No. 10, 9-11.

⁹Synodal-Bericht der Allg. deutschen ev.-luth Synode von Missouri, Ohio, u. a. St. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House), 1905, pp. 21-22. Hereafter cited as Mo. Report.

individuals in the Synodical Conference; another was the lack of success at the conferences.¹⁰

Franz Pieper, in his presidential report to the Missouri Synod in 1905, noted that the conferences "haben wiederum gezeigt, dass die Synodalconferenz in Glauben und Bekenntnis einig ist." The members stand, he said, "den Irrthum gegenueber Schulter an Schulter."¹¹ These words may have been overly optimistic in view of Hoenecke's reactions to the conferences.

If the theologians of the Synodical Conference were willing to let partly united synods remain that way, the laymen were not. In 1913 the second of the three union movements of this quarter century, the Laienbewegung, was initiated by laymen in Racine and Milwaukee, under the leadership of August C. Frank of Racine. The first meeting was held in January, at the Wisconsin Conservatory of Music in Milwaukee. A committee of twelve was appointed to implement the merger of the Missouri and Wisconsin Synods in Milwaukee. More than two hundred laymen were present at the second meeting, for which a larger hall in the Milwaukee auditorium had to be rented. It was now decided to have the committee's written proposal printed and sent to all the congregations of each synod. Every congregation was to send one or two delegates to the next meeting, which would take place at St. John's

¹⁰Lehre und Wehre, theologisches und kirchlichzeitgeschichtliches Monatsblatt, herausgegeben von der Deutschen Ev.-luth. Synode von Missouri, Ohio, u. s. St., redigiert vom Lehrkollegium des Seminars zu St. Louis (1906), p. 529. Also 1907, pp. 18ff.; 77ff. Hereafter cited as Lehre und Wehre.

¹¹Mo. Report, 1905, p. 20.

church, Milwaukee, on March 9.

Professor August Pieper appeared at this meeting as a delegate of Jerusalem congregation, and promptly denounced the union proposal drawn up by Professor F. Meyer of Lutheran High School as containing false doctrine. The "false doctrine" consisted in this, that a certain selection of passages had been referred to as "Biblical grounds"; this was little more than an unwise selection of terms. Chairman Frank asked Joh. Ph. Koehler for an opinion. (The latter had been asked to serve on the committee when he had answered some questions put by the laymen at the previous meeting.) Koehler defended the laymen, reminding Pieper that it is necessary to interpret speech and terminology properly. Pieper left the meeting after giving a brief answer, and the phrases in question were removed.

President Bergemann next protested against the methods used by the movement, maintaining that such a matter should have been handled through the proper channels, namely the synodical officials.

These objections do not seem to have bothered the laymen. There were between four and five hundred people at the meeting at St. John's. Sixty congregations were represented, of which half were from Milwaukee. Forty to fifty pastors had written to the committee, only a few of them with disapproval. The movement had been discussed at pastoral and mixed conferences, and the reactions had usually been favorable. When the laymen met at Appleton a few months later, a committee consisting mainly of laymen was appointed to negotiate with Missouri for merger. Schaller, Koehler and August Pieper were in attendance at Appleton. Schaller opposed the movement, while Koehler defended it. Pieper did

not say much; he had already called the whole thing "Bauernkrieg."¹²

By this time the Laienbewegung had considerable influence behind it. The appointed committee prevailed upon Synod to select a regular synodical committee, which was to contact the Missouri Synod and particularly its Wisconsin District.¹³ These men were to deal not only with the Missouri Synod but also with Minnesota, Michigan, and the smaller western districts which were at this time just in the process of forming, together with Wisconsin, the Joint Synod of Wisconsin a. o. St. Since 1892 all these groups had worked in close connection with each other as a general synod, but now they were striving for organic union. This was to prove a great difficulty for the Wisconsin Synod members who now wished to join with Missouri. For this reason, the committee which Wisconsin had appointed to negotiate a merger with the Wisconsin District of Missouri, now felt it necessary to request that the larger group, the General Synod of Wisconsin a. o. St., appoint another committee to deal with them.¹⁴

The following year there was little to report. The committee for union with Missouri had thus far talked only informally with representatives of the other members of the General Synod. Since that time Minnesota and Michigan had named committees, and it was hoped that more

¹²Kochler, op. cit., Vol. XVI, No. 7, 9ff.

¹³Verhandlungen der Deutschen Ev.-Luth. Synode von Wisconsin u. a. St. (Milwaukee), 1913, pp. 117-18. Hereafter cited as Wis. Report.

¹⁴Ibid., General Synod Report following Wis. Report, p. 73.

could now be accomplished.¹⁵

In the meantime, the General Synod had accepted the proposal that a Joint Synod be formed, and had produced a detailed program for the complete merger. This needed only be ratified by the individual synods and districts.¹⁶ Wisconsin ratified the plan.¹⁷

The Wisconsin District of Missouri had also been busy. Its committee suggested that Missouri now plan to unite with Wisconsin on a state-synod basis. Missouri agreed, and appointed a committee to work toward this goal.¹⁸

The committees of the two synods each set up proposals, and in three sessions were able to come to an agreement. The synthesis of the two sets of proposals, as presented to both synods, is given in its entirety:

Wir empfehlen unsern Synoden, dass die jetzt in der Synodalkonferenz verbundenen Synoden in eine engere und festere Verbindung treten durch Bildung eines einheitlichen grossen Koerpers.

1. Alle zur Synodalkonferenz gehoerenden Synoden loesen sich auf.
2. Der zu bildende neue, einheitliche Koerper soll den Namen fuehren: "Ev-Luth. Synodalkonferenz von Nord-Amerika."
3. Der so reorganisierten Synodalkonferenz werden alle allgemeine Missionen zur Betreibung und Verwaltung ueberwiesen.
4. Die Synodalkonferenz uebernimmt auch die Verwaltung und Erhaltung der Verlagshauser.
5. Die Synodalkonferenz uebernimmt auch die Verwaltung und Erhaltung der Predigerseminare.
6. Der allgemeine Koerper uebertraegt einem oder mehreren

¹⁵Wis. Report, 1914, pp. 106-07. The "General Synod" mentioned here is the union of all those groups who in 1917 would form the Joint Synod of Wisconsin a. o. St., and is not related to the General Synod in the east.

¹⁶Ibid., pp. 19-21.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 79.

¹⁸Mo. Report, 1914, p. 175.

Distrikten, in deren Mitte oder Nahe ein Gymnasium liegt, die Erhaltung und Verwaltung desselben wenn dieser oder diese Distrikte dies wuenschen un begehren.

7. Dem zu bildenden allgemeinen Koerper wird das Eigentum der bisherigen Synoden uebertragen.
8. Der allgemeine Koerper teilt sich nach uebereinkommen in Staaten--oder Distriktesynoden.¹⁹

The following year the outlook was favorable. Wisconsin resolved:

- a. Dass die Synode die gemachten Empfehlungen anhoere, und seine Freude darunter ausspricht, dass die Komiteen sich auf gewisse Saetze geeinigt haben.
- b. Dass die Konferenzen im Laufe des Jahres sich eingehend mit diesen Punkten beschaeftigen, und dass dieselben naechstes Jahr von der Synode in Beratung genommen werden.²⁰

But by 1916 the situation had changed. The Wisconsin Synod now ratified the constitution accepted by the General Synod,²¹ and the negotiations for merger with Missouri were abruptly cut short:

Da unsere Synode bereits in Distrikte eingeteilt und die Vereinigung in unserer Allgemeinen Synode zu einem Koerper bereits soweit gediehen ist, so sollte, um einen allgemeinen Wirrwarr vorzubeugen, der Plan einer Vereinigung aller Synoden innerhalb der Synodalkonferenz von uns abgewiesen werden.²²

Missouri gracefully declared herself ready to unite whenever Wisconsin was ready, and its president was empowered to appoint a committee to deal with the brethren whenever they gave the word.²³

Thus another attempt to realize the state-synod dream of Walther had failed. One gets the impression that in 1915, when the Wisconsin Synod reacted favorably, she was only biding her time to see whether the

¹⁹Wis. Report, 1915, p. 116.

²⁰Ibid., p. 20.

²¹Ibid., 1916, p. 88.

²²Ibid., p. 114.

²³Mo. Report, 1917, p. 153.

plan to form the Joint Synod would be brought to completion. When it was successfully carried out, all thought of further negotiations with Missouri was abruptly cut off. The Wisconsin Synod was building its own empire, and Missouri would have to wait until this had been consolidated.

Before the outcome of the Laienbewegung had even been decided, a new movement was under way. In 1913, the Iowa Synod had offered to engage in a series of free general conferences with all synods, especially with Missouri and Wisconsin.²⁴ This offer was not followed up at the moment, but two years later Pastor H. Boettcher suggested to the Sibley County (Minnesota) Conference that it meet with the neighboring Ohio Synod pastors to discuss the doctrinal differences between the Synodical Conference and its former brethren.²⁵ This was to be strictly for pastors; theological professors were to be excluded because it was feared that they would be too concerned with technicalities. The Bible was to be the source, and the confessions the norm, of the discussions.²⁶ The exclusion of the professors was taken by some to be a slight, but this was not intended. The pastors simply did not want the conversation to be monopolized by the theological professors.²⁷ Just as the laymen had attempted to unite Missouri and Wisconsin quite independently of the

²⁴J. L. Neve and Willard D. Allbeck, History of the Lutheran Church in America (Third revised edition; Burlington, Iowa: The Lutheran Literary Board, 1934), p. 211.

²⁵Ibid., pp. 240-41.

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷Koehler, op. cit., Vol. XIV, No. 12, 8-9.

clergy, so now the pastors sought to regain the Ohio Synod for the Synodical Conference, independently of the professors.

The first meeting was held at Gaylord, Minnesota, on July 28, 1915. Unfortunately, only one Ohio Synod minister was present; the group quickly reached agreement in rebus et phrasibus on the doctrine of election.²⁸ The following fall a substantial group of Ohio Synod pastors took part in a meeting with the Synodical Conference men of the St. Paul area. The doctrine of predestination was the main topic, and there was agreement as to which statements in regard to the old controversy were correct and which were misleading and ambiguous.²⁹

The movement slowly gathered momentum, and in January of 1916 two hundred and fifty pastors from the Missouri, Wisconsin, Iowa and Ohio Synods met in St. Paul. By May, Leitsaetze had been prepared by a committee made up of members of all four synods there "St. Paul Theses" were accepted by a mixed pastoral conference held at Trinity church in St. Paul on May 3 and 4. These theses were signed by many pastors of the four synods. By 1917 the list of signatures contained 545 names, divided according to synods as follows (Minnesota, Michigan and Nebraska were for all practical purposes already part of the Joint Synod of Wisconsin a. o. St.): Iowa, 170; Missouri, 161; Minnesota, 81; Ohio, 66; Wisconsin, 47; Michigan, 16; Nebraska, 3; Ev. Synod in Minnesota, 1.³⁰

²⁸Have-Allbeck, op. cit., pp. 240-41.

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰Koehler, op. cit., Vol. XVI, No. 12, 9.

By this time, the St. Paul Conference was ready to call in the synods. The Wisconsin Synod agreed to appoint Director Schaller and Professor Herman Meyer as a committee to meet with similar committees of the other synods.³¹ In his opening address to the Missouri Synod in 1917, President Franz Pieper gave a detailed analysis of the tentative theses propounded in the pastoral conferences. He closed with the admission that every Christian confesses equal guilt before God (this was a point in question because of the background of inter-synodical controversy), and then added that "Zur Einigung der lutherischen Christen in der Lehre von der Bekehrung ist nur noetig, dass sie das auch mit dem Munde bekennen, was sie in ihren Herzen vor Gott glauben."³² Missouri then also appointed a committee to work with those of the other synods.³³

During the years 1918 through 1920, the representatives of Missouri, Wisconsin, Iowa and Ohio met six times, each time for a three-day session.³⁴ At the main meeting, held in 1919, Professor Metzger of St. Louis submitted the theses on which the discussion was to be based. The result of the ensuing debate was a set of theses accepted by the representatives of all the synods. The theses are here reproduced in full:

1. Die Bekehrung des Menschen ist allein das Werk der göttlichen Gnade. Diese ist allgemein, ernstgemeint, genügend und kräftig.

³¹Wis. Report, 1917, p. 17; Koehler, op. cit., Vol. XVI, No. 12, 9.

³²Lehre und Wehre, 1917, pp. 1-6.

³³Mo. Report, 1917, pp. 153-54.

³⁴Ibid., 1920, p. 239.

2. Gott wirkt in seiner Gnade die Bekehrung durch die Predigt und Gehör seines Worts und bricht unsere Herzen und zeucht den Menschen, dass er durch die Predigt des Gesetzes seine Sünde und Gottes Zorn recht erkennt, und wahrhaftiges Schrecken, Reu und Leid im Herzen empfindet, und durch die Predigt und Betrachtung des hl. Evangelii von der gadenreichen Vergebung der Sünden in Christo ein Finklein des Glaubens in ihm ange-sündet wird, die Vergabung der Sünde um Christi willen annimmt, und sich mit der Verheissung des Evangelii tröstet.
3. Diesem Wirken Gottes gegenüber verhält sich der natürliche Mensch feindselig und widerstrebend, auch wissentlich und willentlich, ehe er durch den heiligen Geist wiedergeboren wird.
4. Die jedoch allezeit dem hl. Geist widerstreben, dass sie entweder Gottes Wort gar nicht hören, sondern mutwillig ver-achten, die Ohren und ihr Herz verstocken und also dem hl. Geist den ordentlichen Weg verstellen, dass er sein Werk in ihnen nicht haben kann, oder da sie es gehört haben, wiederum in den Wind schlagen und nicht achten, oder sich für und für der erkannten Wahrheit widersetzen: die werden nicht bekehrt. Und dies ist ihre Schuld ganz allein.
5. Kommt es bei einem Menschen nicht zu dem die Bekehrung ver-hindernden Verhalten, so ist dies in keiner Weise eine Leistung oder ein Verdienst des Menschen.
6. Bei der Darstellung der Lehre von der Bekehrung muss man sich möglichst hüten vor jeder Redeweise, die sich deuten lässt:
 - a. als ob der Mensch aus seinen eigenen natürlichen Kräften oder aus geschenkten Gnadekräften irgend etwas zu seiner Bekehrung mitwirken oder beitragen könnte;
 - b. oder als ob die bekehrende Gnade in irgend einem Sinn unwiderstehlich sei;
 - c. oder als ob nach einem geheimen Gnadenvillen denen, die bekehrt werden, eine besondere Gnade mitgeteilt werde, die den Nichtbekehrten worenthalten wäre.³⁵

That the meetings were successful is shown by the letter from Professor Hermann Meyer which accompanied the theses as they were presented to the Wisconsin Synod.

Zweierlei möchte Ihr Komitee in Bericht über diese Verhandlungen besonders betonen: erstens, dass sie alle in freundlichen Geiste und gegenseitiger Achtung geführt wurden (es ist noch nicht ein gehässiges Wort gefallen), und zum andern, dass sie, soweit Menschen urteilen können, auch von unionistischen Interesse völlig frei sind. Man sucht die Differenzen nicht zu verdecken, sondern zu beseitigen. So enthielt man sich in Columbus einer beantragten

³⁵Wis. Report, 1919, pp. 157-58.

Abstimmung, weil ein Glied des Ohio-Komitees die Befürchtung aus sprach, dass die Worte nicht von allen gleich verstanden würden.³⁶

Professor Meyer then concluded by recommending that the meetings continue. The next one had been scheduled for November, and would take place either at Bloomington, Illinois or at St. Louis.³⁷

There was no further news about the discussions until 1920. Meanwhile much had been accomplished, for in that year Missouri's committee announced that ten theses on the doctrine of conversion had been agreed upon, and that they were both "conformable to the Scriptures and the confessions of the Lutheran Church," and a concise and suitable basis for agreement. These theses were to be distributed to all conferences by the district presidents. Inasmuch as there was not yet complete agreement on the doctrine of election, Synod resolved to continue the discussions.³⁸

Up until this time everything seemed to be proceeding in good order, and one would have expected that complete agreement would soon be achieved so that the four synods could finally unite. The goal seemed to be within reach even as late as 1923. The committees of both Missouri and Wisconsin were satisfied that they were in agreement with the other synods in regard to the doctrines of conversion and also now of election. The theses that had thus far been agreed upon were now

³⁶Ibid., pp. 158-59.

³⁷Mo. Report, 1920, pp. 83-84.

³⁸Ibid., 1923, pp. 227-29; Wis. Report, 1923, p. 101.

to be discussed further by smaller groups in the various synods.³⁹

But despite the fact that the outlook was so promising at this point, the goal was not to be achieved. What had appeared to be a movement of real consequence was soon reduced to the status of a probe. In 1926 the Missouri Synod demonstrated that it was by no means ready to carry out a merger with Ohio and Iowa without a period of extended discussions on various levels. At its convention that year, Missouri expressed joy that the theses thus far agreed to, gave expression in part to the true Lutheran teaching, yet maintained that they were not enough. The net result was a resolution to keep up the discussions, with a view to producing more exact formulations, especially in the area of Christian fellowship. And everyone was to pray for a God-pleasing union.⁴⁰ The Wisconsin Synod, as it had learned to do, followed in the path of Missouri.

Thus three attempts in a quarter of a century all ended in failure. The last one remained in a process of fermentation for at least twenty more years, until it ended in a stalemate when the American Lutheran Church was formed. Perhaps if Walther had been present during these years, events would have taken a far different turn. The Missouri Synod, after its disillusionment in the 1860's, never regained the fervent desire to build a Lutheran Church of America that motivated Walther; and the Wisconsin Synod had never known that desire.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Mo. Report, 1926, pp. 140-41.

CHAPTER VII

SOME CONCLUSIONS

The history of the relationship between the Wisconsin and Missouri Synods is a story of fine cooperation on many fronts. Yet the failure to achieve organic union despite frequent and often sustained effort, indicates that the two synods were not entirely in agreement. Wisconsin is often looked upon as a pendant of the Missouri Synod. This is not true. The Wisconsin Synod has a history of its own, and a tradition of its own, which are quite at variance with Missouri's history and tradition.

Dr. Hoenecke's casual remark to Joh. Ph. Koehler that there was something "sectarian" about the Missouri Synod, provides an important clue to the Wisconsin Synod's reluctance to be absorbed by Missouri. The separation of the Saxons from the mother church left its mark upon them. In the opinion of men like Hoenecke, a university-trained theologian, the Missouri Synod was to be dealt with very carefully lest with its tremendous drive it swallow up the very people who could assist it best by remaining independent.

The Saxons' departure from Germany had given them both a parochial viewpoint and a tremendous esprit de corps. It led them to provide the motive force for the early attempts at a state-synod political structure, and at the same time gave their hard-headed conviction that since they were theologically correct the other churches should capitulate to them. The latter was a major factor in the failure to realize a Lutheran

Church in America. Let Wisconsin be accused of jealousy and pride. The real reason for her obstinate refusal to take a chance with Missouri in the early years was legitimate; she feared that she would be swept into the Missouri Synod in a way which would not have been equitable, no matter how much talk is made about self-sacrifice for love. The Wisconsin Synod did not want to lose her identity because she did not like everything about Missouri's identity, and felt that she could contribute more to Missouri's growth by remaining independent.

Nevertheless, not all the blame is Missouri's. Even when it became apparent that the troublesome parts of the state-synod plan were going to be changed, Wisconsin does not appear to have exerted a great deal of effort to complete the realignment. It is apparent that the Missouri Synod provided almost all the initiative, and Wisconsin was being carried by the former's stream. By the time the predestinarian controversy broke out, the Wisconsin Synod was in a position where it could hardly back down, particularly since a state-synod organization had been projected already in the Synodical Conference Constitution. It will probably never be known whether the state-synod plan would actually have been brought to completion had it not been for the predestinarian struggle; the objections had been answered, yet one suspects that if the Wisconsin Synod had now carried out the proposal, it would have done so only because there was no way out.

The point is that while Missouri felt that a state-synod type of church structure was necessary, Wisconsin did not; this is the crux of the matter. There was never a real desire on the part of the Wisconsin Synod to change its political form. In its opinion, such matters were

adiaphora. If they seemed feasible, and there were no major objections from any quarter, then they might be carried out; but Wisconsin never felt a sense of urgency in regard to the formation of state synods, simply because she did not believe that this reorganization was necessary.

It was not until after the turn of the century that apathy took hold of the Missouri Synod. As late as 1893, Frases Schwab could still exhort his synod:

Wahrlich, wahrlich, wir muessen vorwaerts, und zwar mit Gewalt, sonst reizt uns der Strom rueckwaerts! Im Reiche Gottes gibt's keinen Stillstand. Also vorsichtiglich, aber vorwaerts! Das sei unsere Loesung. Vorwaerts auf der ganzen Linie, vorwaerts Mann fuer Mann in allen Gemeinden, in allen Districten! Vorwaerts in Namen des Herrn und in der Macht seiner Staerke!¹

Missouri did indeed continue to push forward in its own growth, but in its relationship to other churches there was now more emphasis on the "vorsichtiglich" than on the "vorwaerts." Wisconsin had no great desire to fill the gap.

The close connection between Missouri and Wisconsin was bound to affect both synods to some extent. The stubborn refusal on many Wisconsin Synod leaders to adopt certain principles of the Missouri Synod has already been noted. This continued approximately until the influence of Dr. Hoeneck waned, toward the close of the first quarter of this century. From that time on, the Wisconsin Synod began more and more to take on the aspect of the Old Missouri. At roughly the same time, the seeds of change were sown in the Missouri Synod, which were

¹Synodal-Bericht der Allg. deutschen ev.-luth. Synode von Missouri, Ohio, u. e. St. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House), 1893, p. 19.

to carry it in new directions. One might say that the lines of development of the two synods crossed in the 1920's. This is of course an over-simplification. The Wisconsin Synod has never become quite like Old Missouri. Yet in the main, the year 1925 saw the Missouri Synod tending toward the position of an earlier Wisconsin, and the Wisconsin Synod taking its place.

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