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The Origin of the Synodical Conferences

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THE ORIGIN OF

THE SYNODICAL CONFERENCE

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by

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CHAPTER I

THE SYNODICAL CONFERENCE IN AMERICAN LUTHERAN HISTORY

Like Caesar's Gaul the Lutheran Church in America has been divided into three major parts. Of these the Synodical Conference has been in existence the greatest number of years, although it has not had the oldest American synod as a member. Since 1872 the Synodical Conference has personified the right wing of confessional Lutheranism. Almost a century has elapsed since the six founding synods of the Synodical Conference asserted their insistence upon confessional Lutheranism as the proper exposition of biblical theology.

The course of history in the Synodical Conference has not flowed smoothly. Storms of theological controversy have swirled around it during much of its existence, engulfing it at times so that the constituent membership of the Conference has not remained unchanged. Less than a decade after its organization the Conference was rocked by dissension and dispute over the doctrine of predestination with the result that its membership was decreased by half and wounds were opened among brethren that were extremely slow in healing. The experience of 1880 shattered the foundations of the Conference but led eventually to a stability that resulted in only minor changes in membership and theological attitudes for the subsequent three-fourths of a century.

During the period of time from the Predestinarian Controversy until about 1960 the image of the Synodical Conference that has persisted has been that of a core composed of the Missouri and Wisconsin Synods with the Norwegian Lutheran and the Slovak Synods as more recent accretions. The gulf between these synods, which included the Minnesota and Illinois Synods that later became integral parts of the Wisconsin and Missouri Synods, and the Ohio and Norwegian Synods, which severed their connection with the Synodical Conference at the time of the Predestinarian Controversy, has been so great and traditional that there is minimal recollection of the fact that all these groups were at one time staunchly united in protest against the assaults of lax confessionalism and American Lutheranism. The two groups that were once brethren have been so widely separated that no one has been sufficiently interested in the history of the Conference to chronicle in detail the trends, movements, and events that led to the formation of a body once so closely knit together. The most extensive reports of the establishment of the Synodical Conference that exist today are at best skimpy and incomplete, usually one-sided and sometimes inaccurate.[1]

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[1]See John Theodore Mueller, A Brief History of the Origin, Development, and Work of the Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America, Prepared for Its Diamond Jubilee, 1872-1947 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1948); Walter A. Baepler, A Century of Grace: A History of the Missouri Synod, 1847-1947 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1947), pp. 155-165; A. W. Meyer, "The

The years in which events occurred that culminated in the establishment of the Synodical Conference were some of the most significant years in the history of Lutheranism in America. Mighty forces were at work in those days, forces that affected all Lutheran synods in this country, forces that led to warm synodical friendships and bitter synodical hostilities. In this study some of these forces are examined as they affected the six synods that formed the Synodical Conference and also certain synods that did not align themselves with the Conference. The background and general emphasis of each of these groups are examined briefly in a general way and then the interplay of forces, trends, and synods as they were operative until the establishment of the Synodical Conference in 1872 are recounted and examined.

Organization of the Synodical Conference," Ebenezer: Reviews of the Work of the Missouri Synod during Three Quarters of a Century, edited by W. H. T. Dau (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1922), pp. 321-332; Fred W. Meuser, The Formation of the American Lutheran Church (Columbus, Ohio: The Wartburg Press, 1958), pp. 50-54.

CHAPTER II

SYNODICAL BACKGROUNDS

On September 14, 1818, ten Lutheran pastors and eight laymen met at the church in Somerset, Ohio, to establish the first Lutheran synod which lay west of the Appalachian Mountains and later became a charter member of the Synodical Conference. While the mother synod of Pennsylvania did not give its hearty approval to the establishment of the synod, it did recognize problems created by distance. As the tide of immigration flowed steadily westward, the Lutheran pioneers required spiritual care. Obtaining pastors for them and ordaining men whose field of labor was at a great distance from the center of synodical activity were matters of concern for both the mother synod and the pastors on the frontier.[1] As the movement of people toward the west continued, the fledgling Ohio Synod increased in size. Faithful men like John Stauch, William Foerster, and Paul Henkel selflessly gave of themselves to serve the scattered Lutherans in the rugged frontier territory.[2]

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[1]P. A. Peter and William Schmidt, Geschichte der Allgemeinen Evangelisch-Lutherischen Synode von Ohio und anderen Staaten (Columbus, Ohio: Lutheran Book Concern, 1900), pp. 16-18.

[2]C. V. Sheatsley, History of the Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Ohio and Other States: From the Earliest Beginnings to 1919 (Columbus, Ohio: Lutheran Book Concern, 1919), pp. 9-51.

The synod grew as men were recruited for the Lord's work in this country or came from Germany to gather the Lutherans who were in danger of straying away from the faith.

The growth of the Ohio Synod was not without problems. On several occasions numbers of pastors severed their connections with the Ohio Synod to align themselves with other synodical groups. In 1836 the English Synod of Ohio was formed with the approval of the mother synod. At this time dissatisfaction with the confessional statement of the new constitution as well as with the connection with the parent Ohio Synod caused a sizeable group of men to separate and establish a third synod, the East Ohio Synod.[3] Again in 1855 a group of men defected from the Ohio Synod as the English Synod seceded, the increasingly firm stand of the Ohio Synod in regard to lodges being a major factor in their decision.[4] A second English District Synod was thereupon formed, but the problem of lodgery again came to the fore in the 1860's and was one of the chief reasons for the split of 1869. Another defection had occurred earlier in 1845 when Wilhelm Sihler led a group of men out of the Ohio Synod as a result of a dispute over the language used in instruction at the Seminary in Columbus and the wording of the distribution formula in Holy Communion.[5] These men contacted

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[3]Ibid., pp. 112-114.

[4]Ibid., pp. 116, 117.

[5]Peter and Schmidt, pp. 91-96.

C. F. W. Walther in St. Louis, soon thereafter joining in the creation of the Missouri Synod in 1847.[6] The theological atmosphere in the Ohio Synod remained agitated in the period after 1856 with lodgery gaining as a companion discussion of the doctrines of the church and the ministry, an echo of the bitter dispute that involved J. A. Grabau of the Buffalo Synod and C. F. W. Walther but did not have a schismatic effect in Ohio.[7] The concern that men in the Ohio Synod demonstrated for faithfulness to Scripture and the Confessions made their lot in the first half century of its existence a period of problems and disputes.[8]

The accelerated immigration of the nineteenth century brought to this country people who were motivated by idealistic, political, social, religious, and other reasons. One group that came for confessional reasons was the Saxon Lutherans that settled in Missouri in 1839 under the leadership of Martin Stephan and five fellow pastors and that later became a nucleus of the Missouri Synod and an impelling force in the establishment of the Synodical Conference. Their arrival was for them the start of a period of turmoil and

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[6]H. Kowert, "The Organization of the Missouri Synod in 1847," Ebenezer: Reviews of the Work of the Missouri Synod during Three Quarters of a Century, edited by W. H. T. Dau (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1922), pp. 94-105.

[7]Ohio Synod, Proceedings, 1859, pp. 21-24.

[8]Fred W. Meuser, The Formation of the American Lutheran Church (Columbus, Ohio: The Wartburg Press, 1958), pp. 8-10.

tribulation which began with the revelation of the unfaithfulness of their leader and continued with two years of sickness, hunger, and doubts regarding the clergy and the existence of the colony as a true Christian congregation. The debate in Altenburg, Missouri in 1841 brought peace and harmony to the group, signalling also the appearance of C. F. W. Walther as a forceful leader and an alert theologian who was firmly oriented in Scripture and the Confessions.[9] Recognition of the stand of Walther and his colleagues became widespread soon after the publication of the first issue of Der Lutheraner in 1844, a clear voice that heralded the confessional stand to Germans in the new world and the old.[10]

From 1841 to his death in 1887 the personality of C. F. W. Walther dominated the Saxon colony and the Missouri Synod. Already in Germany Walther took a stand as a proponent of scriptural confessionalism which continued as a prominent theme in his many utterances throughout his life. Possessing an acute intellect and productive diligence, Walther became a leader among Lutherans, especially of the

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[9]J. F. Koestering, Auswanderung der saechsischen Lutheraner im Jahre 1838, ihre Niederlassung in Perry-Co., Mo., und damit zusammenhaengende interessante Nachrichten, nebst einem wahrheitsgetreuen Bericht von dem in den Gemeinden zu Altenburg und Frohna vorgefallenen sog. Chiliastenstreit in den Jahren 1856 und 1857.(St. Louis: Druck und Verlag von A. Wiebusch u. Sohn, 1866), pp. 19-62.

[10]Walter A. Baepler, A History of the Missouri Synod, 1847 to 1947 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1947), pp. 84-87.

conservative persuasion.[11] In his autobiography Walther's counterpart in the Ohio Synod and colleague for a time in the Synodical Conference, M. Loy, wrote an assessment of Walther's abilities some years after the rupture of the Conference and the end of fraternal relations between their respective synods:

> The Missouri Synod dominated the Conference. It was numerically the strongest of the synods united in it and it was the strongest in intellectual power and theological learning. Aside from the one master mind which dominated the Missouri Synod, this would not have been the case. Other synods had men of ability that rendered them the equals of the Missourians, with the exception of Dr. Walther, who towered above them all. As he was a man sincerely devoted to the Lord and to the Evangelical Lutheran Church, I was glad that we had him among us, and was thankful that God had given us so powerful an advocate of a cause so dear to my heart.[12]

Loy's characterization continued with a description of the more mundane and less commendable side of Walther's personality and, in the mind of many of Walther's opponents, his outstanding characteristic:

> I do not think that he was of an arrogant and domineering disposition, but his experience was such that his demeanor not unseldom assumed that appearance. He was accustomed to have his doctrinal statements accepted as indisputably correct and his judgment assented to as decisive and final.[13]

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[11]Julius A. Friedrich, "Dr. C. F. W. Walther," Ebenezer: Reviews of the Work of the Missouri Synod during Three Quarters of a Century, edited by W. H. T. Dau (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1922), pp. 35-39.

[12]M. Loy, Story of My Life (Columbus, Ohio: Lutheran Book Concern, 1905), pp. 354, 355.

[13]Ibid., pp. 355, 356.

It is not surprising that with Walther's personality he was surrounded by devoted disciples and opposed by hostile antagonists.

Among the closest synodical friends and colleagues of Walther and the Missouri Synod were members of the Norwegian Synod, close colleagues long before their fellowship in the initial years of the Synodical Conference.[14] The immigration that had begun with a small group of hardy Norwegians in 1825 increased so that there was a growing concern for the spiritual welfare of the Norwegian immigrants but only a trickle of pastors available to care for their needs. The religious life of these settlers reflected the complexity of theological currents pervading the church of Norway in the first quarter of the nineteenth century. The state church had a position of superiority in Norway since it had the support of government, university, and the aristocracy, and placed a strong emphasis upon the institution of the church and its forms. Among the several movements that affected the church in Norway was Grundtvigianism, the influence of Nicolai Grundtvig of Denmark whose opposition to the rationalism of the time led him to a strong emphasis on living Christianity in conjunction with the Word and Sacraments, especially Baptism and the Word used in connection with it,

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[14]Gerhard L. Belgum, "The Old Norwegian Synod in America, 1853-1890," unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, Yale University, 1957, pp. 216, 217.

the Apostles Creed. Also prominent in Grundtvigianism were nationalism and culture in their relation to the church. On a different level was Haugeanism which, in opposition to the institutional and aristocratic emphasis of the state church, offered concepts that were readily accepted by large numbers of the common people. Hans Nielsen Hauge experienced a spiritual conversion that led him as a lay preacher to espouse an aggressive Christian life in the face of those forces in society that hindered for their own ends true Christianity and its principles of justice and right. Hauge's lengthy imprisonment at the hands of the entrenched authorities and his zealous sincerity gained for him a strong following in Norway which led to widespread activity in the lay preaching movement. Not to be overlooked was rationalism that was common in Europe and strongly influenced the Church of Norway, with its counterpart in the resurgent orthodoxy whose leaders were Gisle Johnson and C. P. Caspari, men who cast a strong shadow in the return to biblical theology and confessional Lutheranism.[15]

The conflicting currents of Norwegian Christianity were

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[15]Iver Iverson, "The Land Whence They Came," Norsemen Found a Church, edited by J. C. K. Preus (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1953), pp. 225-259. See also E. Clifford Nelson and Eugene L. Fevold, The Lutheran Church among Norwegian-Americans: A History of the Evangelical Lutheran Church (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1960), I, 13-45; Gerhard L. Belgum, "The Old Norwegian Synod in America, 1853-1890" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University, 1957), pp. 23-95.

all evident among the Lutherans in America. The Hauge influence was strong in the activity of Elling Eielsen who had come to this country in 1839 and worked energetically as a lay preacher with the Fox River settlements near LaSalle, Illinois, as his base.[16] Grundtvigian influence was evident in the theology of C. L. Clausen who came to this country as a teacher but was ordained here and served many years in Wisconsin and Iowa.[17] The first constitution of the Norwegian Synod, adopted in 1851, also showed definite traces of the ideas hailing from Grundtvig, although a thorough revision adopted in 1853 under the sound guidance of H. A. Preus marked the end of Grundtvigian ideas in the newly founded church body. With H. A. Preus at the helm and able men like J. A. Ottesen and Ulrik V. Koren as colleagues the orthodox positions of Gisle Johnson and Caspari became the dominant tone in the Norwegian Synod.[18] When a decision was made in 1857 as to which seminary should be utilized for the training of the Norwegian theological students, St. Louis was chosen without question and a warm theological and personal friendship developed between Walther and the Norwegians

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[16]T. F. Gullixson, "The Crucible--Muskego," Norsemen Found a Church, edited by J. C. K. Preus (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1953), pp. 4-7.

[17]Ibid., pp. 8, 9.

[18]Carl S. Meyer, Pioneers Find Friends (Decorah, Iowa: Luther College Press, 1963), pp. 48-53.

in the Synod.[19] The Haugean group continued its course without touching directly the Synodical Conference but remained a disturbing element in its relationship with fellow Norwegians, as did certain other groups.

Very near to the Norwegians and at the same time that the Norwegian Synod was being established, but apparently without contact because of language differences, the Wisconsin Synod came into being. On May 26, 1850, Salem Church in Granville, Wisconsin, was the site of the formation of the Wisconsin Synod, long a key member of the Synodical Conference. Leading figures in the establishment of the synod were John Muehlhaeuser and his companions John Weinman and Candidate Wrede.[20] All three had been sent to this country by the Langenberger Mission Society, one of the very lively missionary groups of Europe. The influence of the Gospel has perhaps never been extended farther in one century than in the nineteenth, with the private mission societies of Europe carrying on after the tradition of the Pietists in serving Christ by obedience to the Great Commission. Basel, Berlin, Barmen, Elberfeld, Langenberg were a few of the active mission centers, the last three combining in 1841 to form the

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[19]Carl S. Meyer, "Early Growth of the Missouri Synod," Moving Frontiers: Readings in the History of the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod, edited by Carl S. Meyer (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1964), pp. 217, 218.

[20]John Philip Koehler, Geschichte der Allgemeinen Evangelisch-Lutherischen Synode von Wisconsin und anderen Staaten (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1925), pp. 183-195.

Langenberger Verein.[21] Often comparatively little emphasis was placed on scriptural doctrine, the nuances of doctrine being considered an unnecessary and even harmful impediment in the consecrated work of bringing souls to the Savior. When the Reformed and Lutheran Churches of Prussia were combined in the Union of 1817 the trend toward syncretism was accelerated, influencing other parts of Germany and also Switzerland.

Such was the atmosphere that was dominant in the Langenberg Society, which sent the founders of the Wisconsin Synod to this country, and the Berlin Society that later gave financial support to the Synod. Because of the joint Lutheran and Reformed membership of the societies their missionaries were expected to serve individuals from both communions with no emphasis on distinctive doctrines, especially in regard to the Lord's Supper.[22] While in many places gross unionism was carried on between Lutherans and Reformed, Muehlhaeuser, the first president of the Wisconsin Synod, and his companions were not guilty of flagrant unionistic practices, although they worked for a long time in harmony with the practices expected of them by these societies. Of conditions in the Synod in the early years M. Lehninger

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[21]M. Lehninger, editor, Continuing In His Word: 1850-1950, The History of the Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1951), pp. 11, 12; for a thorough discussion see Koehler.

[22]Lehninger, p. 23.

wrote in the centennial history of the Wisconsin Synod:

> For a number of years the unionistic Mission Societies of Germany continued to supply the young and weak Wisconsin Synod with workers for its vast field. These men, although they were personally Lutheran and had received their training with a stress on Lutheranism, yet came to us from unionistic mission societies. The Synod, although Lutheran in confession, accepted men and monies from the unionistic societies, and was under obligation to them. It felt genuinely thankful toward them for the help which they had so generously provided.
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> This fact put our Synod very definitely under a cloud. Our fathers were suspected of unionism and were branded as unionists. Things did not change very much even when John Bading (1853) and other men with strong Lutheran convictions arrived, not even when Bading was elected president in 1860, to succeed Pastor Muehlhaeuser, at least not at once.[23]

At the same time financial support in considerable quantity came from the Pennsylvania Ministerium and its Home Mission Society.[24] Clearly, practices existed in the Wisconsin Synod that would raise criticism among stricter, more confessional Lutherans.

Across the Mississippi River to the west similar conditions prevailed among the German Lutherans. The pioneer missionary in the Minnesota area was Carl Ferdinand Heyer, member of the Pennsylvania Ministerium and a long-time missionary for it in the West and in India. After W. A. Passavant's exploratory journey in the Mississippi Valley in 1850, interest in mission work in this area was aroused and Heyer was induced to serve in Minnesota. His indefatigable work and urgent appeals for additional workers resulted in a

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[23] Ibid., pp. 68, 69.

[24] Ibid., p. 22.

growing number of pastors in the area so that in 1860 he felt the need for a synodical organization and took the lead in establishing the Minnesota Synod.[25] The Synod, a minor member of the Synodical Conference, was supplied with pastors from two sources, the Pennsylvania Ministerium and the mission society of St. Chrischona in Basel, Switzerland. Especially among the latter was the same lax confessional practice in evidence as was found in Wisconsin. An early change in conditions was noted, especially after J. H. Sieker transferred from Wisconsin and became a leading spirit in the Minnesota Synod and its president while G. Fachtmann, an outspoken unionist and controversial character, resigned his position in St. Paul. Some laxity as far as the lodge problem was to be found so that the early years of the Synod were not always peaceful.[26]

One other synod later became a member of the Synodical Conference. The Illinois Synod was established in 1846 as a member of the General Synod. During the sixth decade of the nineteenth century the Synod was composed of almost equal numbers of Germans and Scandinavians who separated in 1860 to form the Scandinavian Augustana Synod. A further division took place in 1866 when a minority of the Synod remained in the General Synod while the majority continued as the

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[25] [A. Kuhn,] Geschichte der Minnesota Synode und ihrer einzelnen Gemeinden (St. Louis: Louis Lange Publishing Co., [1910]), pp. 4, 5.

[26] Ibid., pp. 6-8.

Illinois Synod until it was absorbed fourteen years later as a district of the Missouri Synod.[27]

An active participant on the scene where the Synodical Conference was later established, though never a member of it, was the Iowa Synod. The name of Wilhelm Loehe of Neuendettelsau, Germany, stood out prominently in the establishment of the Iowa Synod. The mission society and foundation headed by Loehe was different from the majority of such institutions in Germany for it had a strong confessional basis. Loehe's missionary activity in this country had been stimulated by F. Wyneken's Nothruf of 1841, calling for help for the Germans in America who lacked spiritual care in their frontier homes.[28] Loehe's support of the Lord's work in America was unusual because of its diversity. While Loehe did recruit ordained pastors when possible, the bulk of the men sent over by him were teachers or partially trained men who completed their theological education at the practical Seminary of the Missouri Synod in Ft. Wayne. A special interest of Loehe was Indian missions, for which purpose he sent a colony to Michigan with Frankenmuth as its headquarters. His interest in Christian education led to the first steps in establishing a school for the training of

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[27]Erwin L. Lueker, editor in chief, Lutheran Cyclopedia (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1954), p. 496.

[28]Theo. Graebner, "Die Gruendungen Wilhelm Loehes," Denkstein: zum fuenfundsiebzigjaehrigen Jubilaeum der Missourisynode, edited by G. Metzger (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1922), pp. 22, 23.

Lutheran teachers. George Grossmann arrived as an emissary of Loehe in 1852 to establish this school at Saginaw.[29] While Loehe was strictly confessional in his theology, his cooperation with Walther and the Missouri Synod grew tepid as it became apparent that their ideas about the church and the ministry differed. Loehe held views more similar to those of J. Grabau of Buffalo who emphasized greater authority of the clergy in contrast to Walther. The matter came to a crisis in Grossmann at Saginaw so that Loehe and Walther parted company after a decade of cooperation. Grossmann and John Deindorfer, pastor at Frankenhilf, led a group of twenty members to Dubuque and St. Sebald, Iowa, where the Iowa Synod was formed in 1854. The confessional statement adopted by the Synod read in part:

> The Synod subscribes to all the symbolical books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church because it recognizes all the symbolical decisions on controverted questions before or during the time of the Reformation as corresponding to the divine Word. But because within the Lutheran Church there are different tendencies the Synod espouses that one which strives for greater completeness by means of the Confessions and on the basis of the Word of God.[30]

This position led to criticism and to sharp polemical attacks that charged Iowa's doctrinal position with being vague and indecisive.

Less a participant and more an influence on the history

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[29]Meuser, pp. 23-25.

[30]Iowa Synod, Proceedings, 1854, p. 3; quoted in Meuser, pp. 40, 41.

of Midwestern Lutheranism was the General Synod. Since its inception in 1820 varied winds of doctrine had blown in this large intersynodical body. At times there were tendencies toward a moderately firm confessional stand. At other times the spirit of American Lutheranism was rampant with the Pennsylvania Ministerium its strongest opponent either in or near the General Synod. Strong proponents of a less rigid confessional stand were S. S. Schmucker of Gettysburg Seminary and Benjamin Kurtz, whose Lutheran Observer was a strong voice in favor of liberal Lutheranism.[31] A point of crisis was reached in the confessional struggle with the publication in 1855 of Schmucker's Definite Platform which made a frontal assault on the confessional Lutheran position with its suggestions for the revision of the primary Lutheran symbol, the Augsburg Confession.[32] While the rupture of the General Synod did not eventualize until a decade later, the sky was lowering as storm clouds hung heavy on the confessional front.

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[31]Abdel Ross Wentz, A Basic History of Lutheranism in America (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1955), p. 112.

[32]Ibid., pp. 142, 143.

CHAPTER III

EARLY INTERSYNODICAL ATTITUDES AND NEGOTIATIONS

Few events shook the Lutheran theological world in America as much as the publication of the Definite Platform of 1855. Reaction was instantaneous to this American Recension of the Augsburg Confession. The nineteenth century had witnessed a growing battle among Lutherans over confessional positions since the establishment of the General Synod in 1820. The polarity between the two factions grew steadily with occasional, critical clashes as the tide rose in favor of greater confessional fidelity. When the advocates of "American Lutheranism" made their last stand in 1855, the reaction was overwhelmingly critical of the Definite Platform. It was rejected almost unanimously by the various synodical bodies.[1]

One of the men who sounded the tocsin immediately was C. F. W. Walther. He wrote in Lehre und Wehre:

> When in September of the previous year the Wittenberg Synod of Ohio brought forth its Definite Platform for a so-called American Lutheran Church, together with her official repudiation of the constitution, the Magna Charta of our Church, the Unaltered Augsburg Confession, and exhorted all who shared their opinions to quit traditional Lutheranism, then it seemed as though a destructive storm was gathering and threatening to strike the Luthern Church of our New Fatherland.[2]

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[1]Abdel Ross Wentz, A Basic History of Lutheranism in America (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1955), pp. 137-143.

[2]C. F. W. Walther, Lehre und Wehre, II, 3; quoted in

The attack upon the bastions of Lutheranism demanded forthright action. Walther's suggestion was a series of free Lutheran Conferences to be held at intervals by individuals who subscribed to the Unaltered Augsburg Confession of 1580. The meetings would be gatherings of individuals who would not come as representatives of their synods but would speak for themselves. It was Walther's view that personal confrontation was more desirable than expressions in the periodicals which often hindered rather than advanced unity and the "preservation of the precious gem of doctrinal purity and unity". A larger goal than mere doctrinal unity was in the mind of Walther who said: "Would not the meetings . . . promote and advance the efforts toward the final establishment of one single Evangelical Lutheran Church of America?"[3] Thus the hope for an organically united body of Lutheranism was expressed by Walther already in 1856.

The proposal for a series of free conferences called forth various reactions.[4] Proponents of the Definite Platform, like Kurtz, were hostile towards Walther's suggestion.[5] The Lutheran Standard of the Ohio Synod was wholeheartedly

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E. L. Lueker, "Walther and the Free Lutheran Conferences of 1856-1859," Concordia Theological Monthly, XV (August 1944), 532.

[3]Walther, Lehre und Wehre, II, 3-6; quoted in Lueker, "Walther," p. 534.

[4]Lueker, "Walther," pp. 536-542.

[5]Ibid., p. 539.

in favor of the proposed discussions.[6] Statements dealing with the implementation of Walther's suggestion and the selection of a time and place for the meeting appeared in the columns of Der Lutheraner and the Lutheran Standard. The printed tally of those who expressed a site preference showed the majority favored Columbus, Ohio.[7]

At the First Free Conference, October 1-7, 1856, at Columbus, Ohio, there were fifty-four pastors and nineteen laymen present. Sixteen pastors were from the Missouri Synod while the majority of the remainder came from the Ohio Synod. Several came from New York and Pennsylvania. The first two sessions resulted in a resolution of and plea for unity, after which the doctrines of the Augsburg Confession were discussed.[8] The Second Free Conference met in Pittsburgh in the fall of 1857. The majority in attendance came from the Missouri Synod, a lesser group from Ohio, and scattered representatives from the New York, Pittsburgh, Tennessee, and Norwegian Synods.[9] At the Third Free Conference in August 1858, at Cleveland three representatives from New York and one from Tennessee were present with men from the Ohio Synod and the Missouri Synod in the majority.[10] At the Fourth

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[6]Ibid., p. 536.

[7]Ibid., p. 542.

[8]Ibid., pp. 543-550.

[9]Ibid., p. 553.

[10]Ibid., pp. 556, 557.

Free Conference in 1859 at Ft. Wayne, Walther was absent as were the Ohio theologians, M. Loy and W. Lehmann, who had presided at the three previous meetings.[11] Although a fifth meeting was scheduled for Cleveland in 1860, it was not held. Strained relations between Missouri and Ohio over the transfer of a pastor as well as Walther's illness were factors in the decision to abandon the Conferences.[12]

The diminishing size of the space given in Der Lutheraner to the Free Conferences tells graphically their declining success. Initially there were high hopes and obvious enthusiasm for the Conferences on the part of Walther as is clear from the lengthy report of the meeting in Columbus.[13] In succeeding years the reports diminished in size until the fourth of the series of meetings did not rate a single sentence of summary. The small representation of clergy from synods outside the Missouri and Ohio Synods indicated interest in the Free Conferences was largely limited to these two groups. The reaction to the Definite Platform did not lead immediately to the formation of a confessional intersynodical body, but rather to a hopeful start that soon after its birth was shown to be not viable.

The confessional conflict continued for some years but abated a bit during the early years of the Civil War. There

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[11] Ibid., p. 559.

[12] Ibid., pp. 562, 563.

[13] "Die allgemeine Conferenz," Der Lutheraner, XIII October 21, 1856), 33, 34.

was then no peace for the nation as the slavery issue erupted in bloodshed, while at the same time feelings concerning slavery stirred strongly among Lutherans. The most vocal group was the Francke Synod which was established in 1837 when the Hartwick Synod in New York declined to condemn slavery aggressively.[14] The outbreak of war resulted in the establishment of the General Synod of the Lutheran Church in the Confederate States in America.[15] In the northern states the Union cause was generally supported among Lutherans but with varying degrees of fervor. The laity among the Germans and Scandinavians in the Midwest were often ardent in their condemnation of slavery. Among the Swedes T. N. Hasselquist sounded an abolitionist note in Hemlandet which he published after 1855.[16] C. L. Clausen among the Norwegians spoke out clearly against slavery, although the bulk of Norwegian pastors were less fervent in their support of abolition and favored the gradual elimination of slavery.[17] The feeling among the Norwegian laity was strong in the condemnation of slavery. When the report spread that Walther, head of the college and seminary where the Norwegian students were being

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[14]Charles W. Heathcote, The Lutheran Church and the Civil War (Burlington, Iowa: Lutheran Literary Board), pp. 54-55.

[15]Ibid., pp. 91-96.

[16]Wentz, p. 171.

[17]Gerhard L. Belgum, "The Old Norwegian Synod in America, 1853-1890" (unpubished Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University, 1957), pp. 357-359.

taught, refused to condemn slavery and did not support the Northern cause, laymen among the Norwegians took steps to establish Luther College in Decorah, Iowa, although theological training continued for some years in St. Louis.[18] Walther's position that slavery itself was not wrong received considerable criticism especially among the Norwegians during the war years, his failure to take a positive stand and express his views forthrightly in his periodicals perhaps lending credence in the popular eye to the charge that he was a sympathizer of the South.[19] While 1865 brought an end to the active military controversy in regard to slavery, it did not eliminate all suspicion and rancor towards Walther and other pastors whose stand towards slavery agreed generally with his.

Although the Norwegian laymen were largely critical of Walther's views about slavery, some of his strongest supporters were the leaders of the Norwegian Synod.[20] Fellowship and cooperation between the Missouri and Norwegian Synods preceded any other among the midwestern synods. One of the general problems among the pioneer synods was the training of pastors. This was a matter of special concern to the leaders of the Norwegian Synod since their experience with Haugean lay preachers impressed on them the urgency of

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[18]Theodore C. Blegen, Norwegian Migration to America: The American Transition (Northfield, Minnesota: The Norwegian-American Historical Association, 1940), pp. 425, 426.

[19]Ibid., p. 422.

[20]Belgum, pp. 216, 217.

obtaining qualified spiritual shepherds for their people. An invitation in 1856 from the Ohio Synod to use the Columbus seminary for the training of their pastors stimulated the Norwegians to action.[21] J. A. Ottesen and N. Brandt were appointed members of a committee to visit the seminaries of the Buffalo, Ohio, and Missouri Synods with a view towards suggesting the preferred place for training Norwegian theological students. In its report the committee described briefly the synodical history of each group, the theological climate, and the instructional conditions at each seminary. The Missouri Synod seminary was enthusiastically recommended as the preferred school.[22] For the succeeding twenty years Concordia Seminary was used by the Norwegian Synod with Lauritz Larsen its first professor there.[23]

The warm relationship that sprung into existence at the visit of the examining committee in 1857 grew rapidly so that close personal ties existed between the leaders of Missouri and the Norwegians, in some cases even after the withdrawal from the Synodical Conference in 1883.[24] In the year 1863

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[21] Ibid., pp. 182, 183.

[22] "Indberetning fra Pastorene Otteson og Brandt om deres Reise til St. Louis, Missouri: Columbus, Ohio; og Buffalo, New York," Kirkelig Maanedstidende, II (October 1857; reprint of 1900). An English translation is in Carl S. Meyer, Pioneers Find Friends (Decorah, Iowa: Luther College Press, 1963), pp. 65-79.

[23] Blegen, p. 248.

[24] Belgum, pp. 411, 412.

an unusually large delegation of Norwegian pastors attended the meeting of the Missouri Synod in Ft. Wayne. Among the sixteen representatives were the two professors from Decorah and St. Louis, the officers of the Synod, and even J. A. Ottesen who was returning from Norway.[25] According to their spokesman, U. V. Koren, the reason for their presence, as reported by the secretary of the Missouri Synod, was: "They were commissioned by their Synod to testify here openly how great the blessing was that had accrued to them through our Synod." That they did this well is evident from the secretary's summary of Koren's words:

> It is said they are a daughter synod of the Missouri Synod. That is true for they truly harbor a filial attitude toward it. They have been chided as an annex or appendage of the Missouri Synod papal throne. The words, as they are meant, are not correctly chosen, although, rightly understood, are not bad. They indeed recognize the Missouri papal throne, namely that one at the right hand of God, where the Son of God as the only Ruler and Governor of the Church sits, who for our sakes became the Servus Servorum Dei, the Servant of all Servants of God.[26]

While the occasion for this testimonial of loyalty was not indicated, the date, 1863, the tenth anniversary of their Synod, would suggest that the numerous attacks upon Walther's slavery stand might have been the reason.

The cooperation between the Missouri and Norwegian Synods did not mark the inception of a general movement towards intersynodical fraternization. Six years passed by before

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[25]Missouri Synod, Proceedings, 1863, p. 4.

[26]Ibid., pp. 58, 59.

closer synodical relations were noticeable in the Midwest. The source of activity was the newly established Minnesota Synod which sent J. C. F. Heyer to the convention of the Wisconsin Synod in Milwaukee in 1863. The Minnesota delegate reported on the growth of population in his state and the status and needs of the new synod there, ending his words with a plea for a closer relationship between the Minnesota and Wisconsin Synods. That fraternal relations would be desirable with the Ohio and Michigan Synods also was mentioned in the ensuing discussion that resulted in a resolution authorizing the synodical officals to contact the presidents of the Minnesota, Michigan, and Ohio Synods, and also send them a copy of the Wisconsin Synod constitution.[27]

The overtures of the Minnesota Synod were welcomed by the Wisconsin Synod. E. Mohldenke was a delegate to the Minnesota convention of 1864 and reported back to his own convention. Immediately thereafter on the floor of the convention G. Fachtmann, who had been working in Minnesota for some time as a member of the Wisconsin Synod from which he had just been given a release, addressed the group as the delegate from Minnesota. He relayed the requests of the Minnesota Synod which included a plea for pastors and indicated a desire to participate in the Seminary at Watertown.[28] For their part they offered to send President Heyer on a trip in

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[27]Wisconsin Synod, Proceedings, 1863, p. 32.

[28]Wisconsin Synod, Proceedings, 1864, p. 11.

the east to raise funds for the seminary if the students from the Minnesota Synod could be trained for the ministry in Watertown in the future. The offer was accepted.[29]

Again in 1865 Professor E. Mohldenke of Watertown visited the Minnesota Synod convention, rendering a lengthy and favorable report to his synod at the convention in the following year. The attitudes in evidence in the Minnesota Synod as well as its progress were commended, although a gilt verse behind the pulpit on the wall of the church in Redwing was disturbing because of its lodge implications:

> "Komm, Jude, Christ, Mohamedaner,
> Komm, Katholik und Protestant,
> Reicht liebend euch die Bruderhand;
> D'rum weg Verfolgung, Wahn, und Spott,
> Wir glauben all' an einen Gott."[30]

Interest in the Wisconsin Synod church paper was reported as was also interest in and promises of material support for the seminary.[31] Actually some financial support was already flowing to Watertown through the activity of the Minnesota Synod. A problem arose regarding the division of funds raised jointly in Germany by the two synods. Minnesota's suggestion for a solution was that a full scholarship be established for one of its students at Watertown. The suggestion was adopted by the Wisconsin Synod convention.[32] Greater events on the

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[29] Ibid., p. 14.

[30] Wisconsin Synod, Proceedings, 1866, p. 30.

[31] Ibid., p. 29.

[32] Ibid., p. 33.

Lutheran church scene in America in 1866 and 1867 eclipsed for a few years direct negotiations between the Wisconsin and Minnesota Synods.

The decision of the Wisconsin Synod in 1863 to seek to improve relations also with the Ohio and the Michigan Synods showed less results than the negotiations with the Minnesota Synod. The Western District of the Ohio Synod in session in Middletown, Ohio, in 1864 responded to the overtures of the Wisconsin Synod with some enthusiasm. It referred them to the general body of the Ohio Synod "which would certainly not fail to act upon them with fitting conditions and on a proper basis."[33]

When the matter of relations with the Ohio Synod was discussed in the 1864 convention of the Wisconsin Synod E. Dammann of Milwaukee reported that the two synods were in agreement in doctrine and practice. Further discussion brought the suggestion from the floor that, in view of the probable split of the General Synod which may come any time, it might be better to hold the matter of union on a confessional basis in abeyance for the time being. Should such a split come and a meeting of confessional synods be held, it was decided, the Wisconsin Synod would participate by sending delegates.[34]

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[33]P. A. Peter and William Schmidt, Geschichte der Allgemeinen Evangelisch-Lutherischen Synode von Ohio und anderen Staaten (Columbus, Ohio: Lutheran Book Concern, 1900), pp. 169, 170.

[34]Wisconsin Synod, Proceedings, 1864, p. 11.

When intersynodical matters were discussed in 1866 this decision was repeated. Confessionally, it was also decided, the Synod would be satisfied with the Augsburg Confession and, if possible, the Small Catechism as a doctrinal basis, since the Scandinavians accepted only the Augsburg Confession.[35] Interest in the Wisconsin Synod in fraternal relations with other bodies was sustained, but there were no immediate results. The motion to send delegates to the Ohio Synod convention, would not, it was reported in 1865, be implemented because the secretary's letter evoked neither reply or inquiry from the Ohio Synod.[36] Presumably the same was true in regard to the Michigan Synod, although there is no specific reference to it in the record.

Omitted from the list of those with whom the Wisconsin Synod desired fellowship was Missouri. Wisconsin did not seek fraternal relations and the Missouri Synod reciprocated the sentiment. There was no evidence of friendliness towards or trust in the Wisconsin Synod by Missouri before 1868. At the beginning of the twenty-second volume of Der Lutheraner the editor reviewed the situation in various of the Lutheran synods. The Wisconsin Synod must be watched carefully, he warned, because of its bold aggressiveness and its daring raids on congregations.[37] The assessment of E. A. Brauer in

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[35]Wisconsin Synod, Proceedings, 1866, p. 33.

[36]Wisconsin Synod, Proceedings, 1865, p. 6.

[37]"Vorwort zum 22. Jahrgang des 'Lutheraners,'" Der Lutheraner, XXII (September 1, 1865), 1.

the Lehre und Wehre at the beginning of the same year was no less hostile. The chief complaint was unionism and that the confessional claims of Wisconsin's leaders were hypocrisy since they recruited their preachers from Basel and Prussia where the men served in unionistic conditions to which they usually returned again.[38]

While mutual coldness was evident between Missouri and Wisconsin, relations between Missouri and Ohio were merely cool. There was recognition on the part of Missouri that the Ohio Synod was trying to solve her problems but that progress was elusive. In the survey of Lutheranism by the editor of Der Lutheraner referred to above, the Ohio Synod was pictured as not getting anywhere on the problem of church and ministry because she still followed the practice of denying in the interest of peace the evidence of the one eternally true Confession. That resulted in aggressiveness, hostility, and factiousness.[39] In his presidential address of 1866 M. Loy admitted that the Ohio Synod had been working for a long time on the doctrine of the church and ministry and he hoped concentration on these doctrines at the current convention would lead to the tangible results of unity.[40] The proximity of the Buffalo Synod to the Ohio Synod had

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[38]E. A. Brauer, "Vorwort," Lehre und Wehre, XI (January 1865), 3.

[39]"Vorwort," Der Lutheraner, XXII (September 1, 1865), 1.

[40]Ohio Synod, Proceedings, 1866, pp. 7, 8.

made the Missouri--Buffalo controversy an active issue in the Ohio Synod as early as 1856. In that year the Lutheran ecclesiastical court, an intersynodical Lutheran judicial body with binding authority proposed by the Buffalo Synod and approved by the Northern District of the Ohio Synod, was rejected by the general body which substituted regulations for a synodical church court that never actually materialized.[41] In 1859 the general issue of church and ministry was discussed at the convention. That this was considered of importance was indicated by the fact that several sets of theses on these doctrines were presented to the synod.[42] In the initial stages of the controversy there was considerable sentiment for Buffalo, but "the two capital 'L's'" did not agree with this tendency and the whole Ohio Synod soon realized that Missouri was essentially right.[43] It was on a new and, hopefully, decisive set of theses, written by Lehmann, Loy, and others and presented in 1866, that Loy was pinning his hopes for an end to the controversy.

The appearance of the new set of theses seemed to soften the antagonism of Walther to the Ohio Synod, although his first reaction was that there was some intentional ambiguity, evidence that the Ohio Synod seemingly wanted peace rather

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[41]Ohio Synod, Proceedings, 1856, pp. 9-11; Peter and Schmidt, pp. 145-147.

[42]Ohio Synod, Proceedings, 1859, pp. 21-24.

[43]Peter and Schmidt, p. 145.

than unity.[44] A sharp reply to a statement by Lehmann also indicated tension between the members of the Missouri and Ohio Synods in early 1866. Lehmann had asserted that he would not be rushed into a decision on the church and ministry and would consider them an open question until his synod reached a decision. E. Brauer of the Missouri Synod responded with an insinuation that Lehmann was unwilling to face the issue and raised the question whether it would remain an open question in Lehmann's opinion if the synod did not reach a decision.[45] In addition, a statement by Loy and Lehmann on lodges was criticized by K. Eirich because lodges are not condemned as sinful but only as improper and undesirable, indicating that Missouri's suspicion about lodges in the Ohio Synod had not been completely allayed.[46]

Several months later the atmosphere was noticeably different as guarded hopefulness was the tone of Der Lutheraner's assessment of the situation in Lutheranism in the opening article of volume XXIII in September 1866. Three portents of better things in Lutheranism were the departure from the General Synod of the Pennsylvania Ministerium with plans to form a new, soundly confessional intersynodical body, the

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[44]Der Lutheraner, XXII (August 15, 1866), 189, 190.

[45]/E. A./ B/rauer/, "Dr. Lehmann von der Ohio-Synode," Lehre und Wehre, XII (April 1866), 118.

[46]K. Eirich, "Das Zeugnisz gegen die geheimen Gesellschaften auf dem Krebsgang innerhalb der Ohio-Synode," Der Lutheraner, XXIII (July 1, 1867), 162, 163.

settlement of differences between the Missouri and Buffalo Synods, and Ohio's continual insistence that it believed, taught, and acted according to the Lutheran Confessions. "These prospects of peace bring," said the editor, "only joy with trepidation rather than a hearty joy."[47] Some months later Walther's joy was considerably more outspoken for he had read the report of the Ohio Synod's convention where the wording of the ambiguous first thesis on the church had been altered radically. Three days of discussion at the convention had resulted in unanimous agreement on the doctrine of the church and, Walther hoped, the next convention would experience as great a victory for Scripture and the Confessions when the doctrine of the ministry would be discussed. He would be no more happy if this had happened in his own church.[48] Quite possibly Walther was also aware of the spate of articles with a confessional emphasis appearing at this time in the columns of the Lutheran Standard, heartening evidence of abandonment of the previously ambiguous position.[49]

Any signs of improvement in intersynodical relations

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[47]"Vorwort zum 23. Jahrgang des 'Lutheraners,'" Der Lutheraner, XXIII (September 1, 1866), 1.

[48]Der Lutheraner, XXIII (November 15, 1866), 46.

[49]"Dr. Sprecher's Two Methods," Lutheran Standard, XXVII (February 1, 1867), 20, 21; (February 1/5/, 1867), 28. B., "Why I am a Lutheran," Lutheran Standard, XXVII (February 1, 1867), 17, 18; (February 1/5/, 1867), 25, 26; (March 1, 1867), 33; (March 15, 1867), 49; (April 1, 1867), 57. C. P. Krauth, "The Augsburg Confession not Romanizing," Lutheran Standard, XXVII (April 15, 1867), 66, 67.

that might have been evident between the Missouri and Ohio Synods were not paralleled between the Iowa and Missouri Synods.[50] In the eyes of Missouri Iowa was seriously in error in regard to the Confessions, chiliasm, open questions and several other doctrines. Direct, open hostility was not evident to a great extent, to judge by the periodicals of this period, the middle third of the 1860's. More could be expected--and did come--later, for, in the words of Der Lutheraner, "the Iowa Synod with its mixture of hierarchialism, chiliasm, and some truth was becoming bolder in setting forth its so-called historical, but in reality most unhistorical, interpretation of the Confessions."[51] The movement towards fraternalism among the Midwestern synods was, indeed, only in its early, formative stages with efforts being made towards fellowship that were tentative and partial.

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[50]See also Geo. J. Fritschel, Quellen und Dokumente zur Geschichte und Lehrstellung der ev.--luth. Synode von Iowa u. a. Staaten (Chicago: Wartburg Publ. House, n.d.), pp. 207-269; Gerhard Sugmund Ottersberg, "The Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Iowa and other States, 1854-1890" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Nebraska, 1949).

[51]"Vorwort," Der Lutheraner, XXII (September 1, 1865), 1.

CHAPTER IV

1866-1867, POINT OF DECISION

The steps toward closer cooperation among the Lutheran synods that originated in the upper Mississippi Valley were a noble effort that indicated a growing interest in positive fraternal relations between the synods of the Midwest. The whole body of Lutheranism was, however, to be shattered by the events of 1866 and 1867 before the Lutheran synodical picture took shape again in a vastly different form from that which existed prior to 1866.

Chronologically, there were two events that occurred in these years that may as well be mentioned at this time although they were not among the major steps toward intersynodical cooperation. The earlier of these was the agreement between the Buffalo and Missouri Synods which brought to an end the controversy that had raged between them for more than two decades. The bone of contention was the doctrines of the church and the ministry with J. A. Grabau, leader of the Buffalo Synod, holding to a decidedly more hierarchical view of the church than Walther.[1] When Grabau's influence waned

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[1]Johann A. Grabau, "Johann Andreas August Grabau," translated by E. M. Biegener, Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly, XXIII (April 1950), 10-18; (July 1950), 66-74; (January 1951), 176-181; XXIV (April 1951), 35-39; (July 1951), 74-79; (October 1951), 124-132; XXV (July 1952), 49-71.

and he disassociated himself from the Buffalo Synod in 1866, steps were immediately taken by the Synod to meet with the Missouri Synod in a colloquy as its leaders had repeatedly offered to do, only to have Grabau avoid such a meeting.[2] From November 20, 1866 to December 6, 1866, the colloquy was held in Buffalo, New York with virtually unanimous agreement being reached by the two groups, only a small segment of the Buffalo Synod indicating disagreement with its parent body.[3] Thus peace was brought to end what had been one of the most vehement controversies in Lutheranism in America.

Peace with the majority of the Buffalo Synod did not introduce halcyon days to Missouri for the Buffalo Synod's place in the field of controversy was soon taken by the Iowa Synod. Although relations between the two synods had been strained since the establishment of the Iowa Synod by Loehe's disciples in 1854, a request came to Walther from the Iowa Synod in 1867 for a meeting of the two groups.[4] A meeting was arranged for November of the same year in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. That there was skepticism in the minds of some Missouri men is evident from an article in Lehre und Wehre in which Franz K. Schmitt held little hope for success from the

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[2] [C. F. W.] W[alther], "Das Buffaloer Colloquium," Der Lutheraner, XXIII (December 15, 1866), 57, 58.

[3] Protokoll ueber die Verhandlungen des Colloquiums gehalten in Buffalo, N. Y., vom 20. November bis 5. Dezember 1866 (n.p., n.d.).

[4] Missouri Synod, Proceedings, 1869, p. 26.

meeting. Unity could come, he held, from doctrinal harmony only and failure on the part of the Iowa Synod to retract in periodicals its well-known position would indicate that no unity existed. Furthermore recent "bitter remarks" about Walther by leaders of the Iowa Synod seemed to indicate the absence of a disposition on their part towards obtaining an amicable agreement, so that Schmitt felt justified in his pessimism.[5] The reference may have been to a reply to Walther's remarks in January, 1867, in which he questioned the right of G. Fritschel of the Iowa Synod to imply that it was to be numbered among those synods that had taken a strong confessional position from the beginning.[6] A series of five articles in Der Lutheraner between June 15 and September 1, 1867, beginning with a quotation of Job 13:7, "Will ye speak wickedly for God? and talk deceitfully for him?" hardly seemed to portend a successful colloquy.[7]

After the colloquy was held in Milwaukee Walther reported his cautious hopes that, though agreement had not been reached between the Iowa and Missouri colloquents, a certain understanding had been reached and efforts would not be given

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[5]Franz W. Schmitt, "Einige Worte in Betreff des in Aussicht stehenden Colloquiums zwischen der Iowa- und Missouri-Synode," Lehre und Wehre, XIII (September 1867), 272-275.

[6]Der Lutheraner, XXIII (January 15, 1867), 77, 78.

[7]/C. F. W./ W/alther/, "Die neueste Vertheidigung der Iowa-Synode durch einen ihrer Professoren," Der Lutheraner, XXIII (June 15, 1867), 152-158; (July 15, 1867), 169-172; (August 1, 1867), 177-181; (August 15, 1867), 185-189; XXIV (September 1, 1867), 1-8.

up.[8] Disagreement had occurred in regard to the Lutheran Confessions, open questions, chiliasm, the anti-Christ, while lack of time prevented a discussion of the Office of the Keys.[9]

Any hopes for agreement were soon rudely dashed to the ground when heated controversy broke out between the Missouri and Iowa Synods. The accuracy of the report of the colloquy which the Iowa Synod had published deserved considerable comment, according to Walther, whereas the fact that it was sent to all pastors of the Missouri Synod by the opponents seemed to indicate a fear that the Missouri organs would not disseminate a factual report.[10] The emphasis on doctrinal articles in Der Lutheraner seemed to be on those doctrines about which there was disagreement with the Iowa Synod. A series of ten articles on chiliasm soon came to a close.[11] Already a series on the anti-Christ had begun.[12] More dangerous, it was felt, was the attitude of the Iowa Synod

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[8] [C. F. W.] W[alther], "Das Colloquium," Der Lutheraner, XXIV (December 1, 1867), 56.

[9] [O.] F[uerbringer], "Wie stehen wir zur Iowa-Synode?" Der Lutheraner, XXIV (April 15, 1867), 121, 122.

[10] [C. F. W.] W[alther], "Das Colloquium, " Der Lutheraner, XXIV (February 15, 1868), 92.

[11] Hermann Fick, "Der Chiliasmus ist falsch, weil er mit dem Texte von Offenbarung Capitel 19. und 20. durchaus im Widerspruch steht," Der Lutheraner, XXIV (March 15, 1867), 105-107.

[12] F. Brunn, "Ist der Pabst der Antichrist?" Der Lutheraner, XXIV (February 1, 1868), 81, 82.

toward "open questions" with its ambiguous stand on the interpretation of certain doctrines as was pointed out by Der Lutheraner quite incisively in repeated articles and comments.[13] When the Missouri Synod was accused of having "an aura of infallibility" and "fishing in troubled waters, conjuring up heretical accusations against Iowa and then warning against them,"[14] the likelihood of a peaceful settlement was remote and it would have been strange if the two bodies would have joined in cooperative activity in the fairly immediate future. By 1869 the bridge, which the colloquy of 1867 might have been, had become a gaping chasm between the two synods that would be unbridgeable for some time.

The issue of October 11, 1866, of the Lutheran and Missionary carried an announcement that was to dwarf for the time being all other Lutheran intersynodical news and activity, and would lead to events that would change the course of Lutheran history in America. It was the call, decided upon by the Pennsylvania Ministerium at its recent convention, inviting synods holding to the Unaltered Augsburg Confession to meet for the establishment of an intersynodical church

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[13]"Offene Fragen," Der Lutheraner, XXV (November 15, 1868), 40, 41; (December 1, 1868), 51, 52; H., "Die Stellung des Herrn Prof. Fritschel und seiner Anhaenger zur heiligen Schrift," Der Lutheraner, XXV (May 15, 1869), 137-140.

[14]E. Riedel, "Bericht ueber die diesjaehrige Versammlung der Synode von Iowa," Der Lutheraner, XXV (January 15, 1869), 73-75.

body. The only existing general synod, it said, was such in name only and did not include all Lutheran synods among its constituting members. Any hope that it would be a real General Synod had become dimmer and dimmer until now no possibility of it existed since it had admitted members contrary to its constitutional position. The new organization would be founded on the principles of integrity in doctrine and practice.[15]

The call that emanated from the Pennsylvania Ministerium was not unexpected. In 1823 the Pennsylvania Ministerium had severed its connection with the General Synod but had rejoined it in 1853. The thirteen years since that time had not been without friction. When the Pennsylvania Ministerium joined the General Synod in 1853 it stipulated its right to protest and withdraw from the meeting should the General Synod violate its constitution by acting contrary to the long-established faith of the Lutheran Church.[16] Any suspicions of laxity in the General Synod were not long in being fortified by the publication of the Definite Platform of 1855. The admission despite the opposition of the Pennsylvania Ministerium of the Melanchthon Synod into the General Synod

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[15] Lutheran and Missionary, October 11, 1866; quoted in "Die bruederliche Ansprache der Pennsylvania-Synode an die lutherischen Synoden dieses Landes zum Zweck der Vereinigung," Lehre und Wehre, XII (November and December, 1866), 335, 336.

[16] Abdel Ross Wentz, A Basic History of Lutheranism in America (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1955), p. 149.

in 1859 aggravated the situation. The departure of the Scandinavians from the Illinois Synod in 1860 and the cleft caused by the Civil War added turmoil to the General Synod. Feelings rose over the selection of a successor to S. S. Schmucker at Gettysburg Seminary in 1864 and were intensified in a dispute over the admission of the Francke Synod, causing the Pennsylvania Ministerium delegation to leave the General Synod convention at York in 1864. A parliamentary dispute in view of the Pennsylvania Ministerium's action at York brought a complete rupture at the Ft. Wayne convention of the General Synod in 1866 and resulted in the complete severance of relations between the two bodies.[17] Almost immediately thereafter the call for a new general synod was issued.

The constitutional meeting of the General Council was held two months after the call issued by the Pennsylvania Ministerium. Thirteen synods were represented at the meeting in Reading, Pennsylvania, from December 11 to 14, 1866. The strongly confessional tone of the meeting was set by Pres. Loy of the Ohio Synod. His sermon dealt with the conditions necessary for a Christian union: a common faith, a common confession of faith, a common understanding of this confession. Dr. C. P. Krauth presented a discussion on fundamental principles of faith and church government. A constitution was drafted and received the approval of the delegates of all synods except the Norwegian Synod,

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[17] Ibid., pp. 146-152.

represented by F. Schmidt, and the Missouri Synod, whose representative was J. A. F. W. Mueller of Pittsburgh. C. F. W. Walther and W. Sihler were unable to attend as representatives of the Missouri Synod because of the colloquy with the Buffalo Synod. The position voiced by the two protesting representatives was that the time was not ripe for a formal organization since doctrinal unity did not exist. A proper step, they held, would be the calling of a free conference to discuss doctrine. An invitation was extended by the constituting majority to these two synods to be present with full advisory privileges at the next meeting of the General Council.[18]

Reactions on the part of the participants to the Reading Convention were almost unanimous in their praise. Among the representatives from the East there was no dissent. Pres. Loy of the Ohio Synod was quite favorably impressed with the meeting. In his autobiography he recalled:

> The days of Reading are among the delightful memories of my life. I had the joy of meeting there some of the ablest men in the Lutheran Church and hearing them express a love for the Church as it burned in my own soul and uttering it in words of eloquence which I could not command. . . . The impression which I received was such that it would have seemed strange, if I had found it in my heart to say that I could not join these men in their strenuous efforts to secure a fitting place in our favored land for the glorious Church of the Reformation.[19]

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[18]"Convention ev.-lutherischer Synoden zu Reading, Pa., vom 11. bis 13. December 1866," Lehre und Wehre, XIII (January 1867), 15-20.

[19]M. Loy, Story of My Life (Columbus, Ohio: Lutheran Book Concern, 1905), pp. 332, 333.

The days were made more interesting for Loy by the fact that he was broached regarding becoming the successor at St. Mark's Church in Philadelphia and at the Seminary there to Dr. G. Krotel, one of the leaders of the Pennsylvania Ministerium.[20] In Wisconsin words of high praise flowed from the lips of Pres. W. Streiszguth who had been elected German Secretary at Reading and who said all at the meeting felt the presence of the Lord, had seen a great act of God occur, and expected blessed results from this event for the Lutheran Church.[21] Pres. S. Harkey of the Illinois Synod reported that the General Council was established with a sure firm basis on the Unaltered Confession of the Lutheran Church.[22]

The chief source of dissonance in regard to the General Council was the Missouri Synod. Already before the call for the initial meeting had been issued by the Pennsylvania Ministerium an article by W. Sihler appeared in Lehre und Wehre in which he questioned the advisability of haste in the establishment of a new general synod. Two reasons cited by him were a lack of doctrinal unity among the nominally Lutheran synods and a consequent lack of practice in agreement with the Confessions in all synods except the Missouri and Norwegian Synods.[23] After the Reading meeting Lehre und Wehre gave

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[20]Ibid., pp. 334, 335.

[21]Wisconsin Synod, Proceedings, 1867, pp. 4, 5.

[22]Illinois Synod, Proceedings, 1868, p. 6.

[23]Wm. Sihler, "Sollte die alsbaldige von der

considerable space to F. Schmidt's article in the Lutheran Watchman in which he defended his position which coincided with that of the Missouri Synod, that free doctrinal conferences should precede the establishment of a new intersynodical body. Schmidt took a realistic view of the conditions in the synods of the new body when he indicated that there was obviously an eager and pious desire for Scriptural and confessional truth. The difficult problem of the Council was quite apparent, he indicated. Despite the desire for unity there would be the temptation to gloss over difficult problems. The goal of unity would never be reached if the doctrinal problems were evaded. If doctrinal unity would be reached all confessional synods would cooperate.[24] Walther was skeptical of the success of the General Council. He was, however, not entirely averse to it and did prefer the stand of the General Council to that of the General Synod.[25] The Lutheran Standard apparently did not feel Missouri's position was completely intransigeant as it noted the difference of opinion expressed by the delegate from the Missouri Synod but recognized also Missouri's approval of the

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Pennsylvanischen Synode beabsichtigte Bildung einer neuen rechtglaeubigen lutherischen Generalsynode wohl rathsam und heilsam sein?" Lehre und Wehre, XII (September 1866), 263-272.

[24]C., "Der 'Lutheran Watchman' ueber die Convention in Reading," Lehre und Wehre, XIII (February 1867), 54-57.

[25]/C. F. W./ W/alther/, "Der 'Lutheran Observer,'" Lehre und Wehre, XIII (May 1867), 151, 152.

basic principles adopted by the General Council.[26] While there were clouds on the confessional horizon at the end of 1866, it was generally felt that these were not too threatening and the goal of Lutheran unity had come considerably closer as a result of the meeting at Reading.

At approximately the same time that events in the General Synod were coming to a climax to lead quite directly to the formation of a intersynodical body in the east, a train of events was set in motion in a decision that was temporarily ignored but led, nevertheless, eventually to the formation of the third intersynodical group.

At the convention of the Northern District of the Ohio Synod in 1865 there was dissatisfaction with one of the congregations of Ohio that had accepted an ambitious young pastor from another synod, dismissing its pastor without just cause after having been encouraged in this action by pastors of the other synod.[27] At the same time the Northern District complained that the Eastern District had accepted a pastor who had been excommunicated by the Buffalo Synod. Pres. G. Cronenwett conferred with the Eastern District which defended its action with the position that the excommunication of the

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[26] "The General Convention," Lutheran Standard, XXVII (January 1, 1867), 4, 5.

[27] P. A. Peter and William Schmidt, Geschichte der Allgemeinen Evangelisch-Lutherischen Synode von Ohio und anderen Staaten (Columbus, Ohio: Lutheran Book Concern, 1900), p. 176.

pastor in question, L. F. E. Krause, was not valid.[28] When the matter was discussed at the Northern District convention in 1866 it was decided to protest to the parent body of the Ohio Synod.[29] The Ohio Synod did not act upon the matter of transfer of pastors from the Buffalo Synod because of insufficient documentation and also the fact that the Buffalo Synod was in a period of transition.[30] Because of repeated instances of friction with other synodical bodies it decided, however, to appoint a committee to meet with representatives of the Buffalo Synod and the Missouri Synod to work towards the removal of these various difficulties and the creation of friendly relations between the two synods.[31] No mention was made in the records of the specific problems with the Missouri Synod. Despite the active debate and the unanimous resolution of 1866 no action was taken by the officials in carrying it out until a repetition of the resolution in 1867 again brought it to the attention of the officials.[32] The ensuing action was a major step forward towards the establishment of the Synodical Conference.

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[28] Ibid.

[29] Ohio Synod, Northern District, Proceedings, 1866, pp. 9, 10.

[30] Ohio Synod, Proceedings, 1866, p. 24.

[31] Ohio Synod, Proceedings, 1866, p. 26.

[32] Ohio Synod, Proceedings, 1868, p. 10.

CHAPTER V

WITHDRAWALS FROM THE GENERAL COUNCIL

When the constitutional convention of the General Council adjourned in December 1866, there was a feeling of joyful exhilaration in the midstream of Lutheranism in America. In the Pennsylvania Synod feelings had been tense since it left the 1864 convention of the General Synod in protest. The situation had become intolerable in 1866 so that the complete withdrawal had been felt necessary, but at Reading the golden rays of a brilliant new dawn burst forth as the confessional Lutheran synods took a courageous step forward in establishing a truly Lutheran general body. Among the other synods there was a happy and hopeful attitude with a conviction that Lutheranism was progressing properly. Except for the parent body of the General Synod, which had lost one-half its membership by the action of 1866, the lone clouds at the sunrise of confessional Lutheranism were the Missouri and Norwegian Synods whose feelings were hopeful and fearful, desirous of the triumph of confessional Lutheranism but apprehensive that the unity in doctrine necessary for it did not really exist and that jubilation was premature. Less than a year was needed to show that these were not idle fears as the Midwestern synods reassessed the situation and major cracks appeared in the walls of the edifice while the General Council was still under construction. At the fifth anniversary of the

General Synod several of the Midwestern synods were no longer present as members to celebrate what had been hailed as the victory of confessionalism.

Of the synods that were in attendance at the Reading convention, only the Missouri and Norwegian Synods failed to send representatives to the first convention of the General Council at Ft. Wayne in November 1867, their wishes for a free conference being recognized in Pres. G. Bassler's address to the convention.[1] Although the Ohio Synod was represented by delegates, complete satisfaction with the new body did not exist as had become evident in the special session of the Ohio Synod held in Hamilton, Ohio, June 13-19, 1867.

The delegates at the Reading convention, Pres. M. Loy and Prof. W. Lehmann, reported at Hamilton their satisfaction with the General Council. The proceedings were very satisfying as far as they went, the doctrinal basis as accepted was pure and good, and the spirit that prevailed in the proceedings was praiseworthy and churchly.[2] The opening address of Pres. Loy indicated that the key of the whole situation lay in the words "as far as they went." While he found nothing to criticize in the decisions of Reading, there was a lack evident to him which gave rise to apprehensiveness towards the General Council. The grace of God was without

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[1]General Council, Proceedings, 1867, p. 7.

[2]Ohio Synod, Proceedings, 1867, p. 12.

question the impelling power for the progress made this far. That it was the Lord's will there should be unity could not be denied by anyone. To act as an obstacle in its way was not a pleasant experience and to fail to do all possible to reach the goal would not be consistent with love, but it must be emphasized, he stated, that without doctrinal unity no true unity could be possible. A thorough examination of doctrine in the General Council should be made and hasty affiliation should be avoided.[3] After lengthy debate the suggestions of the president were adopted. Delegates were to be sent to the convention of the General Council, but the decision regarding membership was reserved for the general body of the Ohio Synod, especially in view of the fact that the expected copy of the proposed constitution had not arrived in time for examination at the convention in Hamilton. Its demands for Lutheran doctrine and practice were emphasized by the Ohio Synod in instructions that the delegates investigate carefully regarding chiliasm, altar fellowship, pulpit fellowship, and secret societies.[4]

When the General Council met in Ft. Wayne its president, G. Bassler, recognized the presence of the Ohio Synod delegates and expressed the conviction that sooner or later, even though not at the present time, they would be welcomed into full membership since they are "one with us in faith,

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[3]Ibid., pp. 7-9.

[4]Ibid., pp. 10, 11.

standing upon an unequivocal acceptance of the Unaltered Augsburg Confession."[5] The formal request of the Ohio Synod for information on the stand of the General Council regarding the four specified points of doctrine did not receive a direct answer from the convention. As soon as official evidence of un-Lutheran doctrines and practices would be presented to the General Council in a manner prescribed by the Constitution, the convention responded, it would investigate the matter. In the meantime the Ohio Synod should examine the reply made to the proposal of the Iowa Synod for a constitutional amendment dealing with these matters.[6] The questions of the Ohio Synod were out of order since it was not a member of the organization. Upon joining, it would have the full privileges of the floor so that its matter could be discussed. A virtual answer to its questions would, however, be supplied since the Iowa Synod had signed the constitution and raised the identical four questions. When the proposed amendments of the Iowa Synod, clear statements on the four points of chiliasm, altar fellowship, pulpit fellowship, and secret organizations, were brought to the floor of the convention, the committee of one representative from each of the constituent synods recommended that the matter be discussed by the district synods of the General Council since it was not prepared to make a definite statement

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[5]General Council, Proceedings, 1867, p. 7.

[6]Ibid., pp. 16, 17.

at this time. This was the action decided upon by the convention.[7]

That the decision of the General Council in this whole matter would not make the Ohio Synod happy was to be expected. The reaction of the Ohio Synod was not long in forthcoming. In Prof. Lehmann's response in the Kirchenzeitung to the report of the November convention as given in the Lutheran and Missionary, his disillusionment and disappointment was scarcely camouflaged. The statement of the Lutheran and Missionary can almost, he stated, be considered a declaration of war on all those who take adherence to the Lutheran Confessions as a serious matter. Failure on the part of the General Council to act immediately and decisively could be excused were it not for the tone of the commentator, a semi-official voice of the body, who seemed fundamentally opposed to the thorough application of the Confessions in regard to the questions posed by Ohio. The best they could hope for was a free conference. Pessimism was evident in his final remarks: "Our fine hope in this matter will, unfortunately, meet its end, and little remains for us except sorrow and pain."[8] The Lutheran Standard repeated the suggestion for a free conference, but was apparently not too hopeful of

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[7]Ibid., 1867, p. 19.

[8]/Wm./ L/ehmann/, "Ist das die Antwort?" Lutherische Kirchenzeitung, VIII (December 15, 1867), 389.

resolving the difficulties with the General Council.[9] The official action of the Ohio Synod, like the remarks of Pres. Loy pertaining to the General Council, was rather brief. Under the present circumstances union with the General Council was impossible, unity of spirit being preferable to a mere external unity.[10] The Ohio Synod decided to go its own way separate from the General Council.

Two issues that were undoubtedly contributing factors in the decision of the Ohio Synod in 1868 were the problems in connection with the English District of the Ohio Synod and the negotiations carried on recently with the Missouri Synod.

Because of the lodge problem in its English District one of the four points on which the Ohio Synod desired the General Council to make a definite statement of position was secret organizations. For years there had been friction in the Ohio Synod over lodges, the break in 1854, which led to the formation of the English Synod of Ohio, being caused by it but not bringing about the end of the lodge dispute in the Ohio Synod.[11] The publication of a statement favorable to the lodges by A. Henkel began a dispute in 1858 between the English District and the general body that lasted a full

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[9]"The Projected Lutheran Conference," Lutheran Standard, XXVI (April 1, 1868), 52.

[10]Ohio Synod, Proceedings, 1868, p. 28.

[11]Supra, p. 5.

decade.[12] Matters reached a critical stage when the English District disregarded the action of the parent body and joined the General Council as a regular member in 1867.[13] The Ohio Synod declared such independent action by a district synod intolerable and urged those members of the English District who did not approve the action of their convention to proceed with forthright action. It was suggested they call a meeting of the English District to rectify the matter or, if necessary, to reorganize as a new district unless they individually would join the other districts of the Ohio Synod.[14]

The break in the Ohio Synod finally became complete in 1869 at the meeting of the English District where Pres. Loy was present with the intention, as he indicated later in his autobiography, of becoming a member of the English District.[15] The meeting was a heated affair with the president of the district excoriating Pres. Loy and the parent body. The refusal to grant Pres. Loy the privileges of the floor led to the action of the minority under G. Baughman of separating itself from the English District.[16] The welcome given by Pres. D. Worley of the English District to W. Passavant of the

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[12]P. A. Peter and William Schmidt, Geschichte der Allgemeinen Evangelisch-Lutherischen Synode von Ohio und anderen Staaten (Columbus, Ohio: Lutheran Book Concern, 1900), p. 158.

[13]General Council, Proceedings, 1867, pp. 14, 15.

[14]Ohio Synod, Proceedings, 1868, pp. 29, 30.

[15]M. Loy, Story of My Life (Columbus, Ohio: Lutheran Book Concern, 1905), p. 347.

[16]Ibid., pp. 348-350.

General Council, in contrast to the denial to Loy of the right to speak although he was synodical president, did nothing to mollify the feelings of Pres. Loy and his supporters.[17] Loy's unhappiness with the English District over the years was so great that he suggested the abolition of the system of member synods to avoid a recurrence of the conflict between parent and member synods. Only the general body should be permitted to exist.[18] The bitter feeling that was in evidence leads to the surmise that the Ohio Synod might not have been quite so hostile to the General Council and inclined towards the Missouri Synod if there had not been such antagonism between the parent body and the apparently self-willed and truculent English District which flaunted its sympathetic colleague, the General Council.

The Iowa Synod took a stand on the "four points" in the General Council meeting of 1867 at the side of the Ohio Synod. Whereas the Ohio Synod asked questions in regard to the position of the General Council, the Iowa Synod came with amendments to the constitution that would clearly state its position on these points.[19] After the refusal of the General Council to take a definite position and the referral of the matter to the district synods for discussion, the Iowa Synod presented a statement to the convention. It indicated that

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[17] Ibid., p. 351.

[18] Ohio Synod, Proceedings, 1868, pp. 11, 12.

[19] General Council, Proceedings, 1867, pp. 17, 18.

agreement in faith and confession alone are not enough for an official ecclesiastical connection, but agreement in practice is also a prerequisite. Since such agreement in practice evidently did not exist, as was evident by the action of the General Council in refusing to make a definite statement on the "four points," the Iowa Synod could not enter into complete membership in the General Council but would participate for the present only as an advisory rather than as a voting member.[20] The matter of the "four points" came up on the floor of the General Council in the convention of the succeeding year. After a lengthy discussion of the various points a committee reported a statement which, among other things, condemned altar fellowship with "heretics and fundamental errorists."[21] Members of the committee, Presidents J. Bading, R. Adelberg, and S. Klingman of the Wisconsin, New York, and Michigan Synods respectively, presented a minority report which was withdrawn in favor of a less critical report in which they proposed a more forthright statement on the "four points," although the majority report as discussed on the floor, was better than they had expected.[22] It was not until two decades later that the Iowa Synod ended its advisory membership in the General Council.

Like firecrackers on a string the "four points" triggered

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[20]Ibid., pp. 33, 34.

[21]General Council, Proceedings, 1868, pp. 22-25.

[22]Ibid., p. 25.

a succession of explosions in the General Council. The immediate reactions of the Ohio and the Iowa Synod were followed by the delayed explosion in the Wisconsin Synod. At its convention in 1867 the constitution of the General Council was accepted after the optimistic report of President W. Streiszguth and the discussion on the floor of the convention.[23] Twelve months later suspicions were arising in the Wisconsin Synod about the General Council. In his presidential report in 1868 Pres. Bading referred to the situation in the General Council in which he found much commendable. The problem raised by the Ohio and Iowa Synods required a decision at Ft. Wayne on the part of the Wisconsin Synod delegates. They had felt compelled to take their position beside Iowa and had stated to the convention that a final decision on their stand in regard to the "four points" would be made by the full Wisconsin Synod.[24]

At the convention of 1868 considerable time was devoted in several sessions of the Wisconsin Synod to a discussion of the "four points." A minority favored a less rigid position, two pastors presenting their resignation immediately with A. Martin, professor at the Seminary and former member of the Pennsylvania Ministerium, stating that if the Wisconsin Synod would withdraw from the General Council he would at the same

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[23]Wisconsin Synod, Proceedings, 1867, pp. 4, 5, 20.

[24]Wisconsin Synod, Proceedings, 1868, p. 8.

time sever his connection with the Synod.[25] The decision finally adopted by the Wisconsin Synod was that the Synod would not consider itself a member of the General Council any further if its answer in regard to the "four points" would not be satisfactory.[26]

Withdrawal from the General Council by the Wisconsin Synod was a matter of compulsion rather than desire. The Gemeindeblatt carried several articles dealing with the decision to be made regarding membership in the General Council, pointing out a weakness in the statement of the Council and denying at the same time any hostility towards the Council. The author seemed unhappy that conditions were as they were and would like to stay in fellowship with it.[27] When the Wisconsin Synod met in 1869 it declared the General Council's statement inadequate and ended its membership in the organization.[28] The length of the discussion in the General Council's convention of 1869 of the Wisconsin Synod's withdrawal seemed to indicate a growing concern over defections from the body. While it defended its position and actions in regard to the "four points," it lamented the withdrawal of the Wisconsin Synod and characterized it as hasty and

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[25]Ibid., p. 27.

[26]Wisconsin Synod, Proceedings, 1868, p. 19.

[27]"Die Beschluesse der allgemeinen Kirchen-Versammlung ueber die vier Punkte," Evangelisch-Lutherisches Gemeinde-Blatt, IV (February 1, 1869), 1; (February 15, 1869), 3.

[28]Wisconsin Synod, Proceedings, 1869, p. 24.

uncharitable.[29]

The end was not yet. Illinois followed the same path from satisfaction at the creation of the General Council to separation from it. The "four points" could not be silenced without a forthright decision more direct than the General Council was apparently willing to give.

The 1868 convention of the Illinois Synod was important. It was the second meeting of the body which had been constituted the previous year by the group that refused to continue in the General Synod. That Pres. S. Harkey of the Illinois Synod expressed clear satisfaction with the General Council in his opening address in 1868 was not surprising.[30] However, the actions of the convention gave unmistakable evidence that even though the General Council might straddle certain disputed issues, the Illinois Synod had no intention of doing likewise. A large majority of the convention passed a direct, concise statement accepting the principle of close communion. All were not in agreement with this for the next session brought forth a lengthy statement of fifteen points protesting the synodical decision. Pres. S. Harkey was among those whose signature was affixed to the protest.[31] In the matter of lodges, all secret organizations were condemned as

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[29]General Council, Proceedings, 1869, pp. 32-34.

[30]Illinois Synod, Proceedings, 1868, p. 6.

[31]Ibid., pp. 9-12.

contrary to God's Word.[32] At the same convention the need for pastors was discussed, the convention calling for a committee to contact the seminaries of the Iowa, Wisconsin, and Augustana Synods to investigate the possibility of using one of them for the training of Illinois Synod theological students.[33] Apparently the use of the seminary of the Missouri Synod in St. Louis was not even considered. The problem of which seminary to use in the training of its pastors was easily resolved in 1869 with the decision being for the Iowa Synod seminary in St. Sebald, Iowa, distance and language eliminating Watertown, Wisconsin, and the Augustana Seminary at Paxton, Illinois.[34]

A significant motion at the convention of 1869 was the decision of the Illinois Synod to seek closer relations with the Missouri Synod. A stimulus towards this and at the same time towards separation from the General Council was the situation in the congregation at Shelbyville, Illinois. A difficult situation had arisen there in regard to lodges so that the congregation was quite disturbed. Also, it was without a pastor for some time. The congregation requested the help of Pres. R. Knoll who took steps to have the congregation supplied by students from Concordia Seminary. Permission was

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[32] Ibid., p. 17.

[33] Ibid., pp. 15, 16.

[34] Illinois Synod, Proceedings, 1869, pp. 11, 12.

granted by Pres. Walther.[35] At this time the Illinois Synod was still a member of the General Council and was not in formal fellowship with the Missouri Synod although negotiations were in progress.

When the congregation of Shelbyville called Candidate Kothe, one of the Concordia Seminary students that had been serving it, the issue of membership in the General Council by the Illinois Synod had to be faced. Walther stated that he could give his permission for the candidate to accept the call and be transferred to the Illinois Synod in accord with the recently agreed but not yet ratified plan only if the Illinois Synod would sever all connection with the General Council. Walther held that statements in the Lutheran and Missionary, the official General Council periodical, clearly showed its actual position to be opposite to the statement on the "four points" set forth by the Council in 1868.[36] Not desiring to be accused by the General Council of hasty action in withdrawing as the Wisconsin Synod had been, the Illinois Synod asked in 1870 for a definite statement on the "four points." It indicated that a major reason for this was the failure of the General Council in its session of 1869 to utter a word of criticism of flagrant unionism in its midst. The Illinois Synod promised to refrain for a year from making

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[35]Illinois Synod, Proceedings, 1870, p. 9.

[36]Ibid., pp. 20, 21.

a final decision regarding severance.[37] In the following year the Illinois Synod held the answer of the General Council to the Illinois Synod to be unsatisfactory so that fraternal relations between the two groups ended. In addition, the convention vehemently protested the treatment of the General Council in delaying discussion of the matter until the last hour of the convention. Also reprehensible, according to the convention, was the handling of this matter in the columns of the Lutheran and Missionary, so that it was decided a report, which the convention drew up and discussed sentence by sentence, should be printed in Der Lutheraner and the Kirchenzeitung.[38]

While the influence of Missouri was evident in the withdrawal of the Illinois Synod from the General Council, it was probably the influence of the Wisconsin Synod that was a factor in the similar action of the Minnesota Synod. There had been a pause in negotiations between the Minnesota and Wisconsin Synods since 1864 to 1866 when C. F. Heyer had been the president of the Minnesota Synod and guiding spirit.[39] The reins of the Minnesota District had now fallen to J. H. Sieker, a graduate of the Watertown seminary and former member of the Wisconsin Synod. The dual friendship with the General Council, whose Pennsylvania Ministerium was still

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[37] Ibid., pp. 21, 22.

[38] Illinois Synod, Proceedings, 1871, pp. 11-13.

[39] Supra, pp. 27-29.

giving financial support as it had since the time it first sent Heyer into the territory, and with the Wisconsin Synod, which was now in early 1869 on the verge of fellowship with the Missouri Synod, made the Minnesota Synod reluctant to leave the General Council and desirous that it would take a more confessional stance. Therefore the Minnesota Synod instructed its delegates "to work in the General Council that its [the General Council's] relationship to the Confessions may always become clearer and more unmistakable."[40]

Pursuant to the motion of his synod, Pres. Sieker raised several questions at the 1869 General Council convention at Lancaster, Ohio. The 1868 statement of the Council forbade altar and prayer fellowship with "heretics and fundamental errorists."[41] The confessional press made much of these ambiguous terms which did not answer the question whether one could practice fellowship with members of other Protestant denominations. In his desire for clarity Sieker presented two statements and asked whether they represented the position of the body. The matter was up before the body several times. Sieker withdrew and resubmitted the questions after rewriting them. He was asked whether he had been instructed to ask those specific questions. Finally the matter was tabled until the next convention.[42]

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[40]Minnesota Synod, Proceedings, 1869; quoted in General Council, Proceedings, 1870, p. 36.

[41]General Council, Proceedings, 1867, p. 23.

[42]General Council, Proceedings, 1869, pp. 20, 28, 39, 40.

Pres. Sieker reported to the Minnesota Synod convention in 1870 that there had been considerable objection by General Council members to his questions, since he as delegate had not had specific instructions to ask those questions, although the General Council had finally consented to discuss them as personal inquiries. The Minnesota Synod reassured Pres. Sieker he had acted in accordance with its wishes and as a convention made the questions its own. Furthermore, it stated, it would continue its membership in the General Council only so long as the Council protested un-Lutheran actions in its own midst. It also deplored the use of parliamentary tactics against Pres. Sieker.[43]

The definition of "fundamental errorists" as given by the General Council in its 1870 convention was "those who stray from the Christian faith intentionally, maliciously, and steadfastly." In a discussion on what fundamental doctrines are it was admitted that there are some areas where "the conscientious judgment of faithful pastors and congregations must prevail."[44]

That these answers would be satisfactory to the Minnesota Synod was hardly to be expected, especially in view of the manner the questions were handled and the concurrent acceleration of fellowship among the Midwestern confessional synods. While the answers to the questions might be merely ambiguous,

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[43]Minnesota Synod, Proceedings, 1870, p. 43.

[44]General Council, Proceedings, 1870, pp. 36, 37.

Pres. Sieker stated at the Minnesota Convention of 1871, there was no ambiguity in the position of the General Council as expressed by its papers and officials. His former optimism towards the General Council had turned to complete disillusionment.[45] The formal resignation of the Minnesota Synod was immediately forthcoming. In contrast to the lengthy statement on the earlier withdrawal of the Wisconsin Synod, a short factual report by the president to the General Council, indicating dissatisfactions with the answer to the "four points" as the reason for the withdrawal of the Illinois and Minnesota Synods, was all the notice that the convention took of these events, no criticism or expression of regret being voiced upon the floor of the General Council convention.[46] By this time the direction of the confessional tide in the Midwest was patent to all, so that there was little purpose in the General Council becoming disturbed over it.

The only other synod with which the General Council had unfriendly relations in this period was the Missouri Synod which had never accepted membership in the General Council. The position of the Missouri Synod remained the same throughout this period as enunciated from the beginning: it was willing to meet in free conferences for the establishment of unity and union among the Lutherans. The response of the

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[45]Minnesota Synod, Proceedings, 1871, p. 11.

[46]General Council, Proceedings, 1871, p. 6.

General Council was a friendly offer to set aside time in connection with its convention to engage in a free conference.[47] The answer of the Missouri Synod indicated clearly that such an arrangement would not be satisfactory. The suggestion for free conferences, Walther replied, had not been made to the General Council but had been made before it existed. Besides, such an incidental treatment of the matter could not hope to treat the matter adequately. Truly free conferences separate from any synodical convention with the persons present as individuals and not as representatives of their synods would be the only way the Missouri Synod would participate.[48] A lengthy report with a long historical review of previous actions indicated the interest in the matter at the General Council convention of 1869. In view of the Missouri Synod's definite position the General Council stated its willingness to entertain suggestions in regard to this matter from the Missouri Synod or from anyone else "in accord with our Basis."[49]

The General Council convention of 1869 opened a period of belligerence in the Lutheran press. The statement of the General Council was interpreted, presumably correctly, as meaning that suggestions regarding union would be welcome only "in accord with our Basis," the constitution, membership

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[47]General Council, Proceedings, 1868, p. 26.

[48]Missouri Synod, Proceedings, 1869, p. 103.

[49]General Council, Proceedings, 1869, pp. 28-32.

in the General Council being a prerequisite for bringing matters to the attention of the assembly. Thus, the Missouri Synod could make a suggestion only after joining the General Council. Such action on the part of the General Council was held to be arbitrary and evidence of stubbornness.[50] Der Lutheraner quoted the Lutheran Standard as saying that properly there was no basis for the decision of the General Council, but it was clear evidence of unwillingness to discuss doctrine in free conferences as it should.[51] The periodicals of the Ohio and Missouri Synods called attention to statements by S. K. Brobst of Allentown, Pennsylvania, a member of the General Council, in which he favored the idea of free conferences, siding with the Missouri Synod in holding that the matter could not be handled adequately at a General Council convention.[52] The writer in the Lutheran Standard was skeptical of success since "the leading minds of the General Council show no inclination to meet and confer with Western 'Symbolists.'"[53]

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[50]N. W., "Why does the General Council refuse to entertain the Proposal of a Free Conference," Lutheran Standard, XXVII (December 1, 1869), 182.

[51]J. G. W., "Warum weigert sich das General Council, den Vorschlag einer Freien Conferenz anzunehmen?" Der Lutheraner, XXVI (December 1, 1869), 59, 60.

[52]C., "Eine Stimme im 'Lutheran and Missionary' ueber freie Conferenzen," Lehre und Wehre, XXV (March 1869), 88; "Free Conference Again," Lutheran Standard, XXVII (August 1, 1869), 118; "Die freie Conferenz," Der Lutheraner, XXVI (February 15, 1870), 93.

[53]"Free Conference Again," Lutheran Standard, XXVII (August 1, 1869), 118.

Further forthright criticism of the General Council concerned itself with the answer that had been given in regard to the "four points" as well as to the questions asked by Sieker and the Minnesota Synod. In addition to pointing out the ambiguity of the definition of "fundamental errorists," general statements that bordered at times on the uncharitable were made about the inconsistency and non-confessional stand of the General Council in contrast to its constitutional position. By the end of 1870 the various bodies outside the General Synod had taken their stands among the two opposing forces in the current confessional battle although the coalescing of common opponents of the General Council had not as yet occurred.

CHAPTER VI

GROWING FELLOWSHIP

The establishment of the General Council in 1867 served as an interlude in the convergence of the Lutheran synods of the Midwest. In the last years before the emergence of the General Council definite steps had been taken to establish closer relations between several of the synods, the Minnesota and Wisconsin Synods being the initiators of these actions. Interest in these projects had waned with the hopeful appearance of a larger intersynodical body, but the vision of total union had proved soon to be only a mirage. The confessional issue was too great to permit complete fellowship even among the more confessional synods, although the desire for fraternization among synods remained. It soon directed itself toward a renewal of negotiations between individual bodies with little overt expression of plans for a larger fellowship. Whereas before 1867 there had been only a few tentative gestures, after disillusionment with the General Council became more pronounced intersynodical relations became a major item of business for all the Midwestern confessional synods, in some cases bringing reversals of attitude that were surprising.

Almost to the day that the first convention of the General Council met, the movement among the Midwestern synods began in a totally unrelated action with a suggestion of

overtures from the Ohio Synod to the Missouri Synod.[1] The theological climate in the Ohio Synod was such that the move was not surprising, for the Ohio Synod had been engaged in a definite swing towards a more confessional position. This had been evident for some time in the struggle with the lodge question, in which the majority in the synod took a strong stand against secret organizations. The controversy, in which it was engaged at this time, would soon lead to a defection from the synodical ranks.[2]

Another matter that had occupied the attention of the Ohio Synod for some time and showed its leaning toward the Missouri Synod was consideration of the doctrines of the church and the ministry. The conflict of the Missouri Synod with J. Grabau of the Buffalo Synod and W. Loehe of Germany had foisted these doctrines into a position of prominence in the Lutheran Church. The Ohio Synod had had the matter up for discussion for some time, especially in the Northern District which was contiguous to the headquarters of the Buffalo Synod and had received members from it by transfer. The continuation in the 1864 convention of the Ohio Synod of a discussion in 1862 of the doctrine of the church resulted in Prof. W. Lehmann being given the commission to present a series of theses on the parallel doctrine of the ministry to

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[1]Missouri Synod, Proceedings, 1869, p. 26.

[2]Supra, pp. 53-55.

the 1866 convention.[3] By this time the doctrines had been discussed in every convention for over a decade. The stand of the synod on these doctrines was being clarified and was clearly beginning to harmonize quite closely with the position prominently held by Walther.

The impetus for the approach of the Ohio Synod to the Missouri Synod had come originally in 1866 as a byproduct of a protest lodged in connection with the reception of pastors from the Buffalo Synod. It was decided that a committee, the presidium of the Ohio Synod, should approach the Missouri Synod, as well as the Buffalo Synod, in an effort to reach an amicable settlement of the problems related to opposition congregations.[4] When no action was taken by synodical officials the matter was brought to the attention of the general body again, this time the matter of a joint edition of a new hymnal being urged as an additional reason why the two synods should reach agreement.[5] Synodical officials now acted so that when the letter from Loy reached Walther in early November, 1867, he contacted his vice presidents and arranged a meeting which was held May 4-6, 1868, at Columbus, Ohio.

A congenial meeting in Columbus resulted in the following statement:

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[3]Ohio Synod, Proceedings, 1864, p. 9.

[4]Ohio Synod, Proceedings, 1866, p. 26.

[5]Missouri Synod, Proceedings, 1869, pp. 26-28.

Points of Union between the Evangelical Synods of Missouri and Ohio.

The undersigned hereby declare that on the 4., 5. and 6. of March, A. D. 1868, in Columbus, Ohio, the following points were discussed and united upon:

1. The Joint Synod of Ohio and adjacent States and the Synod of Missouri, Ohio and adjacent States, reciprocally acknowledge each other as orthodox.

2. We acknowledge all as Synodical Congregations which enjoy the right of representation in Synod.

3. When a Congregation belonging to one calls a Pastor from the other Synod, we consider it proper that he should unite with that Synod, or if this is not desirable, to decline the call.

4. In receiving ministers, Congregations and individuals into synodical connection, both sides shall require an honorable dismissal and in general respect the discipline exercised by the other. But should difficulties arise, the respective Presidents shall endeavor to reconcile matters without disturbing the peace.

5. Where Congregations of both Synods have already assumed an attitude of opposition, both Synods bind themselves to do all that Christian love requires, in order that a fraternal and harmonious relation between such Congregations and their pastors be effected.

6. When, in the organization of new congregations in the vicinity of parishes already established, the Pastors and Congregations engaged cannot agree upon the parochial boundries to be drawn, they are required to submit the matter for decision to a Committee, appointed from both Synods. As a matter of course no blame is attributed to him, who organizes a new congregation within the parochial boundaries acknowledged by both Synods, as though he had trespassed upon a foreign territory and erected an opposition altar.

7. Should the organ of either of these Synods publish anything containing error, the party perceiving it shall, if possible, privately and in a friendly way make it known to the erring, and do everything in order that no dissension in doctrine or practice may disturb the brotherly relations. We will apply the same rule in all similar cases.

8. Both Synods declare that if individual members

advocate a doctrine which, according to God's word and the Confessions of our Church, is erroneous, the mutual agreement of the Synods does not involve the acknowledgement of such an error, but is adopted rather with the presupposition that each do what it can, by the grace of God, to secure a perfect unity in doctrine among themselves.

9. Both Synods regard it as self-evident that the brotherly relation should be faithfully cherished by visiting Pastoral Conferences and Synodical Conventions of the respective bodies.

Columbus, Ohio, March 6., A. D. 1868
Attested:

C. F. W. Walther,
Pres. Missouri Synod.
H. Schwan,
Pres. of the Middle District,
Missouri Synod.
F. Lochner,
Vice Pres. Northern District
of the Missouri Synod.
M. Loy,
Pres. of the Joint Synod of
Ohio.
F. A. Herzberger,
Pres. of the Eastern District
of the Ohio Synod.
W. F. Lehmann,
Representative of E. Schmid,
Pres. of West. Dist., Ohio
Synod.[6]

Details of the negotiations leading to this document do not seem to be a matter of current record. One question that is presently unanswered is the proportionate amount of time spent on doctrine and on practical matters of church polity. Obviously, in a three day session there could not have been a discussion of the full range of Christian doctrine. Very

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[6]"Minutes of the Seventeenth Meeting of the Joint Ev. Luth. Synod of Ohio and Adj. States, held in East Birmingham, Allegheny Co., Pa., from Sept. 30th to Oct. 7th, 1868," Lutheran Standard, XXVI (December 1, 1868), 179.

likely, since Walther had sat with Loy and Lehmann at the Free Conferences a decade earlier and was also quite aware of their positions in general from their articles in the Kirchenzeitung and the Lutheran Standard, he did not feel it necessary to discuss in detail doctrines that were not in controversy.[7] One would surmise that only doctrines like the church and the ministry, the "four points," the Confessions, "open questions," and lodges were discussed more at length. Even then, to judge by the relative thoroughness of the statements about practical matters, it would seem unlikely that they spent, at most, one day on doctrinal matters. The first statement of the agreement probably gives a fairly accurate picture of the situation: both sides were probably interested in not much more than a reciprocal acknowledgement of orthodoxy. Of greater urgency between the two synods was an understanding in regard to fraternal relations as they applied to parish and synod, the matter with which the final statement chiefly concerned itself.

When the Ohio Synod met on September 30, 1868, Pres. Loy was quite optimistic concerning relations with the Missouri Synod, pleasant news for him to report to counteract the unfulfilled hopes in regard to the General Council and the disappointments in the English District matter. In his report

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[7]On the Free Conferences see Moving Frontiers: Readings in the History of the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod, edited by Carl S. Meyer (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1964), pp. 247-253.

Pres. Loy urgently recommended that the Synod ratify the agreement reached with the representatives of the Missouri Synod, assuring the convention that there was no question the Missouri Synod would do the same since its districts had already ratified the document.[8] Two major points were discussed in connection with the lengthy, thorough discussion of the agreement. One of these was the fact that F. Schiedt had independently presented an overture urging complete merger with the Missouri Synod. The president's statement that such an action was premature was accepted in the decision of the Synod.[9]

A more delicate problem requiring considerable discussion also was the implications of the acknowledgement of orthodoxy as stated in the first paragraph of the agreement. The Missouri Synod's position on most doctrines was well known and unquestioned. The position of the Missouri Synod on the church and the ministry was quite clear because of the Buffalo Synod controversy. The Ohio Synod was in the midst of studying these doctrines in its synodical assemblies. Since the Ohio Synod had not taken a final position in this matter it was felt by some that recognition of the Missouri Synod as orthodox would be acceptance of its position on the church and the ministry, an act precluding further study of them by the Ohio Synod. The condition was expressly attached to paragraph

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[8]Ohio Synod, Proceedings, 1868, p. 10.

[9]Ibid., p. 33.

one by the convention that further discussion of the doctrine of the ministry was not precluded since the Synod had not reached a definite decision although many had done so personally. With this explanatory statement the agreement with the Missouri Synod was approved unanimously.[10]

Pres. Loy's original optimism was not shared by all members of the Missouri Synod as one conditional statement was followed by another. When Pres. Walther reported to the Missouri Synod at its convention in 1869 he referred to the fact that all districts of the Missouri Synod had indeed ratified the agreement. There had been, however, a conditional ratification on the part of the Eastern District of the Missouri Synod. This was that the Ohio Synod make an unconditional statement on its doctrinal position at its next convention.[11] A clue to the reason for this condition which the Eastern District set forth is found in a remark made in the debate on the floor of the convention. It was pointed out that a considerable number of Buffalo Synod pastors had transferred to the Northern District of the Ohio Synod.[12] The fear was apparently present among some Missouri men that these men could still hold a position consonant with that of Grabau and yet be members of the Ohio Synod since it had not explicitly condemned his stand.

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[10] Ibid., pp. 33, 34.

[11] Missouri Synod, Proceedings, 1869, p. 28.

[12] Ibid., p. 94.

The effort of Loy to mollify the fears in the minds of the Missouri Synod were not entirely successful. As the leader of the delegation of Ohio Synod guests he stressed the fact that there was virtual agreement with the position of the Missouri Synod and little doubt that definite statements would be forthcoming to the satisfaction of the Missouri Synod. The adoption by the Ohio Synod of the first three theses as presented by Lehmann should clearly indicate the position of the Ohio Synod since these theses presented the salient points of the doctrine of the ministry. That undoubtedly was true, but, in the opinion of the majority of the Missouri Synod, it still was an ambiguous position that the Ohio Synod had taken. To the explanation of Loy, that it had been taken only as an act of love to brethren who were somewhat weak, the answer was given that love towards the Missouri Synod required a forthright statement to calm its fears. Proper action for the Ohio Synod would have been, it was stated, to take a clear position on the doctrine and then continue to discuss the matter with the minority to convince it. It was impossible, the Missouri Synod decided, to enter into full fellowship on the basis of such an ambiguous statement. As soon as the Ohio Synod removed the condition expressed in regard to the doctrinal recognition of the Missouri Synod fellowship would be in effect.[13]

The action of the Missouri Synod delayed fellowship with

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[13] Ibid., pp. 92-95.

the Ohio Synod for one year. In 1870 Pres. Loy explained at length to his convention why the agreement had not been ratified by the Missouri Synod in the previous year.[14] After the completion and acceptance of the theses of Lehmann on the ministry the Ohio Synod declared itself in full agreement with the Missouri Synod in doctrine. The report in the Lutheran Standard stated regarding the adoption of the theses: "With a unanimity which the most sanguine had scarcely expected, the theses were adopted."[15] The adoption of the theses and the declaration of agreement were followed by a significant resolution to contact other like-minded synods. The Missouri Synod immediately recognized the statement of the Ohio Synod and entered into relations without further convention action as Walther reported in 1872 to the Synod which ratified the action.[16] Groundbreaking had taken place for the establishment of the Synodical Conference.

Practically concurrent with the Ohio--Missouri Synod negotiations and with a less favorable prognosis but a more favorable outcome were the equally significant negotiations between the Wisconsin and Missouri Synods.

The attitude of the Missouri Synod to the Wisconsin Synod had been unfriendly as Walther publicly admitted.[17]

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[14]Ohio Synod, Proceedings, 1870, pp. 10, 11.

[15]"Meeting of the Joint Synod," Lutheran Standard, XXVIII (October 15, 1870), 156.

[16]Missouri Synod, Proceedings, 1872, p. 95

[17]/C. F. W./W/alther/, "Wieder eine Friedensbotschaft!"

The reason for this was largely the support that had come to the Wisconsin Synod from the German mission societies and from the Pennsylvania Ministerium.[18] To accept financial help from the mixed Lutheran and Reformed German mission societies especially was considered by Missouri to be acquiescence to their lax unionistic practices and was culpable. The situation had improved but slightly by the beginning of 1868. In reply to a critical statement in the minutes of the Northern District of the Missouri Synod, in which it was recognized that there was some improvement in the Wisconsin Synod but that it was still guilty of syncretism, the Gemeindeblatt took exception to the patronizing attitude in the Missouri Synod. "Though the Missouri Synod does not use the words of Cain, Am I my brothers keeper? there is a Cainitic ring to their words."[19] Der Lutheraner's reaction was an article running in two issues in which F. Lochner of Milwaukee responded. Although an editorial note expressed regret at being obliged to print another polemical article in its own defense, the author briefly replied in not overly charitable words to references to Cain and then launched out into an extensive discourse on parochial problems between several congregations of the two synods in Milwaukee, giving also a

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Der Lutheraner, XXV (November 1, 1868), 37.

[18]Supra, pp. 12-14.

[19]"Eine Jubilaeumsgabe," Evangelisch-Lutherisches Gemeinde-Blatt, III (November 15, 1867), 2-3.

critical analysis of the relations of the Wisconsin with the Iowa Synod.[20] A rejoinder signed by the officers of St. Peter's Church, Milwaukee, one of the Wisconsin Synod congregations involved, appeared in the columns of the Gemeindeblatt.[21]

Another heated literary exchange took place also in the early months of 1868. The secretary of the Wisconsin Synod, G. Vorberg, had issued an appeal to the German Evangelical Church for pastors and theological students to supply the needs in America since many of the Germans were Evangelical. Lehre und Wehre commented critically on the fact that the appeal was directed to the Evangelical Church with no reference to Lutheran and that these Evangelicals were called "comrades of the faith."[22] In the following issue Lehre und Wehre took note in a paragraph entitled "Hercules at the Crossroads" of a dilemma of the Wisconsin Synod. Twenty-six thousand dollars was available in Berlin to the Wisconsin Synod if it could prove it permitted Evangelicals and Reformed to attend its communion. In view of its statement to the General Council that it had the same position as the

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[20]F. Lochner, "Einiges zur Wuerdigung der Synode von Wisconsin. Zugleich als Antwort auf das 'Gemeindeblatt' vom 15. Nov. d. J.," Der Lutheraner, XXIV (January 15, 1868), 75-78, 82-84.

[21]"Eine Oppositions-Gemeinde und ein Oppositions-Prediger," Evangelisch-Lutherisches Gemeinde-Blatt, III (April 1, 1868), 3.

[22]"Wisconsin-Synode," Lehre und Wehre, XIV (February 1868), 56.

Ohio and Iowa Synods in regard to altar fellowship it was in a predicament. "$26,000 is a nice handful of money," concluded the article, perhaps facetiously.[23]

To say that relations between the Missouri and Wisconsin Synods were not good at this time would seem to be the understatement of the year in view of such public exchanges in the periodicals. But at the same time there were slight breaks in the dark intersynodical sky. In the next issue of Lehre und Wehre after the above-mentioned "Hercules at the Crossroads," the Southern District of the Wisconsin Synod received ungrudging praise for having condemned one of its members who had published a chiliastic pamphlet.[24] Again, when the Wisconsin Synod rejected the $26,000 available in Berlin and was condemned in the German periodicals for its action, Lehre und Wehre approvingly stated, "The reproach that she must now bear is her highest honor," excusing in the same article its reference in the "Hercules at the Crossroads" article by stating it had picked it up in the German press.[25]

That the Wisconsin Synod also was not hopelessly embittered became evident in the resolution passed at its convention in June 1868, practically in the midst of the journalistic recriminations catalogued in part above. A floor committee

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[23]"Herkules am Scheidewege," Lehre und Wehre, XIV (March 1868), 93.

[24]"Wisconsin-Synode," Lehre und Wehre, XIV (April 1868), 122, 123.

[25]"Wisconsin-Synode," Lehre und Wehre, XIV (June 1868), 195.

had been appointed to consider the matter of relations with the Missouri and Buffalo Synods. It reported that since no specific overtures had been submitted, its report must concern itself with general attitudes. There were, it stated, as far as it knew no specific doctrinal differences between the Missouri and Wisconsin Synods. The controversies between them were related to practical questions, charges by individual members of both synods, and periodical articles that had more a spirit of hatred and disdain than the sincere regret they should have. The committee recommended that the president be empowered to take steps towards mutual recognition as Lutheran synods and fraternal relations in the spirit of truth on the basis of pure doctrine. When the matter was up for further discussion the question was raised about the reaction of the Missouri Synod to such a suggestion in view of the membership of the Wisconsin Synod in the General Council. It was decided to proceed as planned in approaching the Missouri Synod since there was a question of membership of the Wisconsin Synod in the General Council in view of its request for an unequivocal stand on the "four points."[26] The overriding sentiment of the convention favored such action with the chief opposition coming from Prof. A. Martin whose friendship towards and former membership in the Pennsylvania Ministerium were known. The action of the convention indicated that the Wisconsin Synod was in

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[26]Wisconsin Synod, Proceedings, 1868, p. 28.

earnest now when it stated its stand on the disputed "four points" was similar to Ohio and Iowa, for it was willing to face the Missouri Synod over the conference table and seek a common understanding.

The earnestness of Pres. J. Bading was evident in the fact that he immediately took steps to arrange a meeting between the Wisconsin and Missouri Synods. Walther's zeal seems to have been somewhat less, for he stated to his brother-in-law, F. Lochner of Milwaukee, that he was getting tired of the many journeys and colloquies of that year since there were so many other individuals that do nothing for the general welfare of Synod although they could serve in these matters better than he.[27] The meeting between the Missouri and Wisconsin Synod representatives was held on October 21 and 22, 1868, in Milwaukee. If Walther showed a lack of interest before the meeting, his attitude was changed by it, for he wrote in his report in Der Lutheraner: "We must admit that all our suspicions against the dear Wisconsin Synod have not merely disappeared but were also made ashamed. God be thanked for His unspeakable gift!"[28]

The document signed by the representatives of the two

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[27] C. F. W. Walther to Fr. Lochner, Milwaukee, Wis., September 10, 1868, Briefe von C. F. W. Walther, edited by L. Fuerbringer (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1916), II, 134, 135.

[28] [C. F. W.] W[alther], "Wieder eine Friedensbotschaft!" pp. 37, 38.

synods at Milwaukee was in its essentials identical with the agreement reached between the Missouri and Ohio Synods seven months previously. Beginning with a happy, mutual recognition as orthodox Lutheran church bodies, the document dealt primarily with practical matters like opposition congregations, transfer of pastors and members, mutual recognition of authority and disciplinary actions, and the establishment of new congregations. The only significant addition was that "between both synods altar and pulpit fellowship takes place."[29]

The negotiations of the two day session were delineated in the introductory paragraph of the document. After the representatives of the Wisconsin Synod explained their relationship to the Union, namely, the Prussian Church and the German mission societies, the recent theses on "open questions" in Lehre und Wehre were discussed, complete unity becoming evident. Then doctrines in current dispute in the Lutheran Church were the center of discussion. The church and the ministry, ordination, inspiration, obligation to the Confessions, chiliasm, the anti-Christ, and others.[30] How much of the sessions were spent on doctrine is not clear, but undoubtedly a good share of the time was spent on practical questions since the bulk of the document concerned itself with them and since early in the year Walther had opened the

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[29]Wisconsin Synod, Proceedings, 1869, 15-17.

[30]Ibid., pp. 15, 16.

columns of the Lutheraner to the most prominent dispute between congregations of the two synods, that involving his brother-in-law in Milwaukee, F. Lochner.[31]

Although the agreement was ready, it could not be ratified by the respective synods until the conventions of the two bodies in 1869. There was, however, another meeting held with representatives of the Missouri and Wisconsin Synods in attendance. This concerned itself with the educational institutions of the two synods. The chief source of supply of pastors for the Wisconsin Synod was the German mission societies, a supply that was about to end and must end if the agreement with the Missouri Synod was to go into effect. The institution of the Wisconsin Synod at Watertown consisted of an English academy, a college, and a German gymnasium, a preparatory school. Lacking was an adequate seminary for the theological training of pastors. In view of the impending change in relations of the Wisconsin Synod that was an imperative need. To establish a seminary at Watertown, it was recognized, would impose quite a burden upon the Synod and the existing institution which had progressed to the present satisfactory status only with considerable financial help from Germany. Being now deprived of that and with the required expansion into more extensive theological training, the existing institution would invariably suffer.

At the meeting called by Pres. Bading and held in May 1869,

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[31]Lochner, pp. 82-84.

in Milwaukee, a plan of cooperative use of existing institutions of the two synods evolved. The suggested plan recommended that Missouri Synod students could use the Watertown facilities, although the Fort Wayne preparatory school of the Missouri Synod would continue to exist. Theological students of the Wisconsin Synod would be trained in St. Louis, an arrangement parallel to the utilization of the St. Louis facilities by the Norwegian Synod. Professors would be exchanged so that each synod would support one instructor at the school of the other synod. Stipulations concerning the calling of the professors as well as the authority of the respective synods were set forth in the proposed agreement.[32]

Within two weeks after the informal meeting at which the plan for cooperation of institutions was worked out the Wisconsin Synod met in one of its most significant conventions. Basic to any proposed action involving the Missouri Synod was a clear understanding regarding relations with the churches of Germany. The first business of the convention was a discussion of this problem which resulted in a decision to refrain from accepting the monies that had been collected in Prussia for the Watertown institution, thus effectively severing relations with the churches of Germany.[33] Similarly, the separation from the General Council by the Wisconsin Synod

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[32]Missouri Synod, Proceedings, 1869, pp. 90, 91.

[33]Wisconsin Synod, Proceedings, 1869, pp. 13, 14.

was declared complete since the General Council had not taken an unambiguous position in regard to the "four points."[34] The proposed agreement between the Missouri and Wisconsin Synods was discussed extensively by the convention and ratified.[35] The most heated discussion seems to have developed in regard to the plan involving the reciprocal use of educational institutions and exchange of professors. One member of the convention committee unsuccessfully submitted a minority report which urged a delay of one year before putting into effect the suggested plan, the convention voting to accept the suggestions developed by the intersynodical committee.[36] A whole new direction was given to the activity of the Wisconsin Synod by these decisions of 1869.

If Pres. Walther had not been overly anxious when meetings between the Wisconsin and Missouri Synod were suggested in 1868, that attitude had changed completely by the following year. In a letter to O. Fuerbringer, President of the Northern District of the Missouri Synod, Walther urged that the convention of the Missouri Synod be advanced a month to the beginning of September. In addition to certain incidental benefits it would permit the exchange of professors with the Wisconsin Synod to be put into effect already in the coming school year. Walther's attitude towards the Wisconsin

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[34] Ibid., p. 24.

[35] Ibid., p. 17.

[36] Ibid., pp. 21-23.

Synod was indicated in the same letter by the words, "The dear Wisconsiners behaved themselves so splendidly at their last meeting that we did not even give thanks after God had spoken to us through them."[37] The antagonism that had existed towards the Wisconsin Synod when it received help from non-confessional groups had apparently completely evaporated.

The approval of the Missouri Synod to the agreement with the Wisconsin Synod was forthcoming in the 1869 convention after a thorough examination of the document. The most vigorous part of the discussion was consideration of the section of the agreement regarding cooperation of the educational institutions and exchange of professors. After it was set forth clearly that the Ft. Wayne institution would not be harmed by the arrangement, the Watertown school would be strengthened, and that participation in the plan would not give unfavorable impressions, the convention decided to participate in the plan. When the brethren from Wisconsin urged all haste in implementing the plan, the convention voted to waive the regular procedure of calling a professor and elected F. W. Stellhorn during the sessions.[38]

Prof. Stellhorn immediately assumed his duties at the college at Watertown. Thus was taken a big step forward in

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[37]C. F. W. Walther to O. Fuerbringer, Frankenmuth, Mich., June 30, 1869, Briefe von C. F. W. Walther, II, 162, 163.

[38]Missouri Synod, Proceedings, 1869, pp. 90-92.

relations between the Missouri and the Wisconsin Synod, active cooperation that, Walther hoped, would lead to the complete amalgamation of the two synods.[39] The first step, however, was not followed by successive steps, for the Wisconsin Synod did not find itself financially able to carry out its part of the bargain and place an instructor in St. Louis. At its convention in 1871 there was a determination to act. After the matter was discussed and regret at the delay expressed, pledges amounting to $571 were received by personal action of the delegates at the convention, $107 in cash. With these funds and others becoming available the Wisconsin Synod decided to act and called Prof. A. Hoenecke of Watertown to be its representative on the St. Louis faculty. The officers of the Synod were authorized to contact his congregation regarding his release.[40] Difficulties persisted in filling the position so that in 1874 the Wisconsin Synod requested that the agreement with the Missouri Synod in regard to the schools and exchange of professors be abrogated.[41] While some of the effects of the decisions of 1869 between the two synods were only temporary, the important

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[39]C. F. W. Walther to H. C. Schwan, Cleveland, Ohio, June 30, 1867; original in Concordia Historical Institute, St. Louis, Mo.; quoted in Roy Arthur Suelflow, "The History of the Missouri Synod During the Second Twenty-Five Years of its Existence, 1872-1897" (unpublished Th.D. dissertation, St. Louis: Concordia Seminary, 1946), p. 18.

[40]Wisconsin Synod, Proceedings, 1871, p. 35.

[41]Missouri Synod, Proceedings, 1874, pp. 53-55.

matter of fellowship began a long period of synodical fraternization.

A third suitor appeared for the hand of the Missouri Synod when the Illinois Synod approached with the request that representatives of the Missouri Synod meet with it for the purpose of mutual understanding and recognition.[42] The tragic fact of disunity among the Lutherans, even among those who take a confessional stand, had been caused, the Illinois Synod resolution said, more by failure to know each other personally than by actual doctrinal differences.[43] The first step to be taken was to approach the Missouri Synod, despite the fact that it would seem this would have been one of the least likely prospects with which an agreement could be reached. The stand of the Missouri Synod toward the General Council was common knowledge, whereas the Illinois Synod had not deviated yet in its support of the General Council. Just twelve months previously in its search for a seminary to train its pastors no thought had been given to St. Louis, and even in this session of 1869 when the selection fell to the Iowa Synod seminary, no one apparently called attention to the fact that St. Louis was much closer.[44] Nevertheless, the Illinois Synod in its resolution was confident the Missouri Synod would welcome the approach of the

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[42]Missouri Synod, Proceedings, 1869, p. 29.

[43]Illinois Synod, Proceedings, 1869, pp. 19, 20.

[44]Ibid., pp. 11, 12.

Illinois Synod with prospects for success being good.

The Illinois Synod was correct in feeling that its action would be welcome, for Pres. Walther acted immediately to arrange a meeting of representatives of the two synods. At St. Louis on August 4 and 5, 1869, the meeting was held, a meeting quite similar to those held with the Ohio and Wisconsin Synods. The topics discussed were also similar: "open questions" on the basis of the Lehre und Wehre article, the "four points," chiliasm, and then a lengthy discussion on the General Council and practical matters like transfers and church discipline. The final document echoed the previous agreements with the same mutual recognition of orthodoxy and detailed procedure in practical problems, several of the paragraphs being verbatim reproductions of parts of the agreement with Wisconsin.[45]

Formulating the agreement with the Illinois Synod was no more difficult than with the Wisconsin Synod at Milwaukee. Gaining the approval of the Missouri Synod was a different matter. Sharp opposition developed on the floor of the convention in Fort Wayne in 1869 as men who had closer contact with individuals of the Illinois Synod expressed unconcealed misgivings regarding fellowship, stating that the transfer of pastors from the Illinois Synod would be introducing false leaven into the Missouri Synod. Also prominent in the discussions were the relations with the General Council and the

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[45]Illinois Synod, Proceedings, 1870, pp. 16, 17.

Iowa Synods, which, it was unconditionally stated, must be ended. Further free and official conferences as well as exchange of visits to the conventions were set forth finally as the road to proper relations and mutual confidence.[46] The barrier blocking the road was at the present time quite high, probably seeming insurmountable to many.

Pres. R. Knoll of the Illinois Synod was discouraged by the rebuff received in Fort Wayne, but was assured that the opposition was based upon the experience of individual members of the Missouri Synod with their Illinois Synod neighbors and felt that if conscientious efforts were made all would not be lost.[47] The first of these steps was taken in the 1870 convention of the Illinois Synod when it considered at length the matter of the General Council and resolved to request an unambiguous statement from it. Failure to receive such a statement resulted in the withdrawal from the General Council in 1871.[48] At the same convention in 1871 Prof. A. Craemer and G. Schaller were delegates of the Missouri Synod and participants in a lengthy discussion of "open questions" and the agreement reached during the previous year between the two synods. After several sessions had been devoted to these matters, the convention officially ratified the agreement of fellowship with the Missouri Synod.

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[46] Missouri Synod, Proceedings, 1869, pp. 95, 96.

[47] Illinois Synod, Proceedings, 1870, p. 7.

[48] Supra, pp. 61, 62.

It was urged that the Missouri Synod discuss the matter in the conventions of the individual districts and then, as was hopefully stated by the members of the Illinois Synod, there would be no question of passage by the general body of the Missouri Synod in 1872.[49]

The forecast was correct. Committee meetings and discussions in the district conventions did allay the fears of the members of the Missouri Synod. In his presidential report in 1872 at St. Louis Walther reported that the Western District, whose members had the unfortunate contacts with the Illinois Synod, declared itself at its convention in 1870 as being fully satisfied and in favor of fellowship with the Illinois Synod, the brethren who dissented in 1869 joining in this resolution.[50] When the matter was before the general convention in 1872 only one voice was heard in opposition, stating that there had been no improvement since 1869. Among others, the committee that had met with the Illinois Synod in 1871 challenged the assertion, the convention being readily satisfied and voting ratification of the agreement and fellowship with the Illinois Synod.[51] The report of Pres. Fr. Erdmann to the Illinois Synod of this action was quite joyous and included a happy recognition of the friendly reception Illinois Synod students were receiving in the seminary in

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[49]Illinois Synod, Proceedings, 1870, pp. 14-18.

[50]Missouri Synod, Proceedings, 1872, pp. 26, 27.

[51]Ibid., pp. 95, 96.

St. Louis.[52]

When the conflict in the General Synod and the establishment of the General Council had led to a hiatus in the fraternization of the Midwestern synods, the most active intersynodical relations had been carried on by the Minnesota and Wisconsin Synods. This had gone so far as to include a joint effort to raise funds for the school at Watertown. Although for a few years the focus of fellowship had been in the General Council, the two synods at the headwaters of the Mississippi continued to exchange delegates at synodical conventions. At the convention of the Minnesota Synod in 1869 Pres. Bading and Prof. A. Hoenecke were the delegates of the Wisconsin Synod, setting in motion at this time the wheels which were to lead to fellowship between the two synods. Their suggestion that the two synods cooperate more closely led to the request that they present definite proposals in writing to the Minnesota convention. The resultant proposals were: that they unite as one body; that each synod have its own administration and property; that they have joint synodical conventions; that the pastors in the respective areas should join the respective synods; and that further discussions, especially doctrinal, be held between representatives of both groups.[53] Essentially the plan was the creation of

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[52]Illinois Synod, Proceedings, 1872, pp. 11, 12.

[53]/A. Kuhn,/ Geschichte der Minnesota Synode und ihrer einzelnen Gemeinden (St. Louis: Louis Lange Publ. Co., /1910/), pp. 13, 14.

one synod with two districts.

In line with the final suggestion made by Pres. Bading and Prof. Hoenecke a meeting of representatives of both synods was held in La Crosse, Wisconsin, on September 25, 1869. Harmony in doctrinal matters was readily recognized on both sides. More delicate was the matter of affiliation with the General Council. Because of the activity of C. F. Heyer, and others, the Minnesota Synod owed its whole existence to the Pennsylvania Ministerium and was reluctant at this time to sever connections with the General Council. The Wisconsin Synod, on the other hand, had voted withdrawal from the General Council which would accept it in about six weeks with critical words.[54]

The Minnesota Synod's relationship to the General Council proved an obstacle at the Wisconsin Synod convention in 1870. The convention committee recommended against unification as suggested at the Minnesota Synod convention in the previous year, favoring a fraternal relationship as existed with the Missouri Synod, since there was doctrinal unity between the Wisconsin and Minnesota Synods, and urging that the Watertown facilities be offered for the training of the Minnesota Synod pastors. The minutes of the convention reported a lack of time to assess adequately the questions of relations with the Minnesota Synod, the consequences of a decision of fellowship, and the will of the majority of the congregations of the

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[54]Supra, pp. 57-59.

Synod.[55] The report of the convention in the Gemeindeblatt as quoted in Der Lutheraner, with its statement that more time was spent in discussing the Minnesota Synod issue than any other except that of educational institutions, implies that sufficient time was devoted to discussion but a hopeless difference of opinion existed regarding fellowship with the Minnesota Synod while it was still in affiliation with the General Council.[56]

The prospect of fellowship between the Minnesota and Wisconsin Synods seemed rather remote in 1870 but came into being in the following year. The demand of Pres. Sieker of the Minnesota Synod for a definite statement on the "four points" from the General Council and that body's unsatisfactory answer in 1871 brought about the withdrawal of the Minnesota Synod from the General Council in that year. At its convention in 1871 the Wisconsin Synod heard a favorable report from its delegate of the previous year to the Minnesota convention and voted recognition of the Minnesota Synod as orthodox.[57] In the name of the Synod Pres. Bading offered the facilities of the Watertown college to the Minnesota Synod students provided that the Synod would pay five hundred dollars for the support of a professor. Also reactivated was a suggestion of several years previously concerning joint

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[55]Wisconsin Synod, Proceedings, 1870, pp. 33, 34.

[56]"Synode von Wisconsin," Der Lutheraner, XXVI (August 15, 1870), 190.

[57]Wisconsin Synod, Proceedings, 1871, pp. 27, 28.

publication of the Gemeindeblatt. The Minnesota Synod would be permitted to use this periodical jointly as its synodical organ provided that it would join in financial support and provide joint editorship. All these actions were concurred in with thanks by the Minnesota Synod with J. Sieker being appointed co-editor of the Gemeindeblatt.[58] With the final approval of the Wisconsin Synod in 1872 the first step towards eventual organic union between the two synods was taken.

The action of the Wisconsin Synod in 1870 was not only a stimulus to fellowship between it and the Minnesota Synod but also between the Minnesota and the Missouri Synods. The first effort to bring about friendly relations between the Synods of Missouri and Minnesota had ended unfortunately. In 1869 Pres. Walther had made a trip to St. Paul with high hopes of effecting some progress towards fraternization between the two synods. The optimistic reports of the likelihood of reaching an agreement proved to be unfounded as Walther was given to feel quite clearly by Pres. Sieker that a different spirit governed their actions.[59] The words of Walther in the letter to Sieker indicated deep disillusionment, but the reason for them was not indicated, although a good surmise might be the unreadiness of the Minnesota Synod

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[58]Minnesota Synod, Proceedings, 1871, pp. 40, 41.

[59]C. F. W. Walther to J. H. Sieker, St. Paul, Minn., May 23, 1871, Briefe von C. F. W. Walther, II, 215-217.

to break off relations with the General Council.

The Wisconsin Synod's refusal to cooperate heartily with the Minnesota Synod was sufficient stimulus to induce it to demand a clear stand from the General Council and then to end its membership in the organization. The Minnesota Synod was not satisfied to have joined hands in fellowship with the Wisconsin Synod but wanted similar relations with the Missouri Synod. Pres. Sieker wrote to Walther with that in mind in March 1871.[60] Meetings were held in St. Paul for the clergy of that area in the Minnesota and Missouri Synods. In January 1871, a two-day meeting was held in Sieker's school in St. Paul in which the topic was the proper relationship in their ministry of preachers who consider each other orthodox. In March a similar meeting was held in the Missouri Synod church there with the Office of the Keys being the topic under discussion. A third meeting was scheduled for July.[61] Later in the year Sieker attended the Fort Wayne meeting where he indicated the intentions of the Minnesota Synod in joining the Synodical Conference.[62] Such activity indicated that the Minnesota Synod had more than passive interest in fellowship with the Missouri Synod.

At the 1872 convention of the Missouri Synod in St. Louis

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[60] Ibid.

[61] E. R., "'Gemeinschaftliche' Conferenzen," Der Lutheraner, XXVIII (May 15, 1872), 126, 127.

[62] Missouri Synod, Proceedings, 1872, p. 94.

Pres. Sieker represented his synod and participated actively in the discussion. After detailing the historical origins of the Minnesota Synod and stating its present relationship to the General Council he urged that members of the Missouri Synod from Minnesota testify to the doctrinal position of his synod. Attendants at the two free conferences held in St. Paul reported complete doctrinal harmony in evidence at the meetings. The subscription of the Minnesota Synod, the convention was assured, was a quia subscription, the Lutheran Confessions being accepted as in total agreement with Scripture. The convention seemed satisfied with the Minnesota Synod but indicated that it was custom to have a formal meeting between representatives of the two synods before entering formal fellowship agreements.[63]

Representatives of the Missouri Synod were H. Fick and E. A. Brauer with two laymen from Minnesota, Brandhorst and Helmke. Fick and Brauer spent some time during the journey up the river from St. Louis reading the reports of the Minnesota Synod conventions of 1870 and 1871 as well as the free conference of January 1871, in St. Paul as it was reported in the Gemeindeblatt. The reference in the committee report to "the pleasant, comfortable journey of several days on the river steamer" conjures up mental pictures of the two theologians sitting comfortably on a deck chair on the river boat on a clear June day smoking their pipes while reading

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[63] Ibid., pp. 94, 95.

and discussing the various theological articles. At any rate, the reading of these articles and their personal experience with the Minnesota Synod convinced Fick and Brauer there was no great need for further discussion of doctrinal matters. The time of the meeting was spent in discussing the practical theses dealing with a subject which is one of those involved sentences that defies translation but means, roughly, the relationship of pastors of synods that consider each other orthodox.[64] The bulk of the report of Fick and Brauer consisted of excerpts from the recent reports mentioned above that showed the position of the Minnesota Synod on various controverted doctrines.[65] The representatives of the Missouri Synod publicly declared themselves satisfied and happy with the things they had observed and heard, indicating thereby that fellowship was in force as far as the Missouri Synod was concerned.[66]

Charter member in the circle of confessional Lutherans of the Midwest was the Norwegian Synod. Although it had been in fellowship with the Missouri Synod for over a decade, it did not participate in the round of negotiations in the late eighteen sixties. While it was interested in the growing

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[64]"Was ist das in Gottes Wort den Predigern der sich gegenseitig als rechtglaeubig anerkennenden Synoden gebotene gegenseitige Verhalten auf dem Gebiete ihres amtlichen 'Wirkens'?"

[65]H. Fick and E. A. Brauer, "Bericht ueber das mit der ehrwuerdigen Synode von Minnesota abgehaltene Colloquium," Der Lutheraner, XXVIII (July 1, 1872), 149, 150.

[66]Minnesota Synod, Proceedings, 1872, p. 26.

fraternization of these groups and carried frequent reports on intersynodical activities in its periodical, Kirkelige Maanedstidende, it did not meet with any of the German synods for the purpose of establishing fellowship, continuing, however, in close cooperation with the Missouri Synod. Language may have been partly the reason for the failure of the Norwegian Synod to participate in a movement with which it concurred heartily as far as its theology was concerned, although the Norwegian pastors were able to use the German language. More likely is the fact that at this time a controversy was raging among the Scandinavians regarding the doctrine of justification, with the Norwegian Synod one of the most active participants.[67] When the Synodical Conference was established in 1872 the doctrinal essay concerned itself with justification, a selection made primarily with the situation among the Norwegians in mind.[68]

Not all was peace and light among the German Synods in the Midwest at this time, although the majority of them were becoming more friendly with one another. The greatest friction was between the Missouri and the Iowa Synods. Polemics between these two groups reached their climax about 1870 with a growing crescendo in the activity and articles critical of each other. In 1871, to cite one example, the dialog

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[67]J. Magnus Rhone, Norwegian American Lutheranism up to 1872 (New York: Macmillan, 1926), p. 233.

[68]Synodical Conference, Proceedings, 1872, p. 20.

was still in progress as S. Fritschel wrote in Brobst's Theologische Monatshefte that the Missouri Synod had left the true position on the Lutheran Confessions, whereas the Iowa Synod had kept it. Walther could not let this go unchallenged and replied promptly with a denial.[69] Sometimes it seems there was an unusual readiness to insert notes in the periodicals that reflected on the opposing body. In the columns of Der Lutheraner was a note to the effect the Lutheran Observer had picked up a report of a planned meeting between Iowa and Ohio Synod preachers in Marshall, Wisconsin, a clever plan, it was suggested, to use the Ohio Synod as a means of bringing the Iowa and Missouri Synods closer. The correspondent, evidently a member of the Ohio Synod since Der Lutheraner picked up the article from the Kirchenzeitung, commented in picturesque, colloquial German that someone was apparently playing a joke on the Observer or else had dreamed a dream.[70] Actually the meeting was held in Marshall, Michigan, and was, as Walther reported a month later, between the Iowa, Michigan, and Canada Synods. Walther also noted that the meeting condemned prayer and altar fellowship, which was surprising on the part of the Canada Synod, and declared chiliasm harmless, a stand on the part of the Iowa Synod that

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[69] [C. F. W.] W[alther], "Professor Sigmund Fritschel," Der Lutheraner, XXVIII (November 15, 1871), 29, 30.

[70] E. S., "Auch eine Neuigkeit fuer die Ohio-Synode," Der Lutheraner, XXVII (July 1, 1871), 165.

was not surprising to him.[71] At times the polemics of the era took on the appearance of comic tragedy.

Competition seems to have played a part in the ecclesiastical drama of this period. At most of the conventions of the Ohio, Wisconsin, and Minnesota Synods of the period between 1866 and 1870 representatives of the Iowa Synod were in attendance, most frequently S. Fritschel who was often given the floor, sometimes for considerable time. This practice was already recognized in 1866 by E. A. Brauer who commented critically in Lehre und Wehre, "Iowa errs if she thinks she can get unity through friendly visits that say nothing."[72] The number of these visits with bodies that were drawing closer in position to the Missouri Synod's strong confessional stand gives the impression that the Iowa Synod hoped to gain support for its position while drawing these bodies farther from the Missouri Synod.

If the Iowa Synod wooed the others while fighting the Missouri Synod, its courtship was a failure that never led to the fraternal altar. The trend was definitely towards the Missouri Synod, with the various synods eventually showing their colors as they took sides with the Missouri Synod but did not imitate the critical attitude of Walther and his fellows towards the Iowa Synod. At the Ohio Synod convention

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[71] [C. F. W.] W[alther], "Ohio und Iowa," Der Lutheraner, XXVII (August 1, 1871), 181, 182.

[72] E. Brauer, "Vorwort," Lehre und Wehre, XII (January 1866), 9.

of 1868, when the agreement was ratified which it was thought would bring immediate fellowship with the Missouri Synod, the Iowa Synod presented a set of theses to the convention. The theses were received with thanks and the assurance to Iowa it had the same earnestness of faith and brotherliness that these theses gave evidence of.[73] There was apparently no lengthy discussion of the theses which were not printed in the report. The tide had swung towards the Missouri Synod.

Time in its conventions was freely granted the Iowa Synod representatives by the Wisconsin Synod. In 1867 a delegation of Inspector G. Groszmann, Profs. S. and G. Fritschel, and seven pastors was in attendance when a whole morning session was devoted to a discussion of "open questions."[74] S. Fritschel led a lengthy discussion again at the convention in 1869 after which it was decided to drop the matter because there was no official relationship between the two synods.[75] Again the Missouri Synod had won as fellowship was approved at this convention.

Sincere regret was the tone of the report of relations between the Minnesota and Iowa Synod as discussed on the floor of the Minnesota Synod convention of 1871. Notice had been taken at the convention of the previous year of doctrinal aberrations by the Iowa Synod. Rather than begin a

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[73]Ohio Synod, Proceedings, 1868, p. 28.

[74]Wisconsin Synod, Proceedings, 1867, pp. 13-15.

[75]Wisconsin Synod, Proceedings, 1869, p. 24.

controversy in the press it was decided to invite a member of the Iowa Synod to present its case at the convention. S. Fritschel appeared and was given considerable time but was unable to convince the convention that the charge of doctrinal error was incorrect. The Minnesota Synod stated in its resolution that it did not want to do the Iowa Synod an injustice and if it became apparent it had done so it would make public printed amends.[76] The report followed immediately the section in the convention report telling of the decision to join the Synodical Conference.

The friendly relations between the Illinois Synod and the Iowa Synod took a sudden turn and ended on an opposite note of bitterness. In 1869 the Illinois Synod had decided to send its theological students to the Iowa Synod seminary for training, instructing a committee to visit the Iowa Synod convention and work out an agreement. In 1870 the committee reported that it had not done so because it felt the synodical decision was hasty and should be reconsidered. The convention held the Iowa Synod's doctrinal position to be erroneous, adding that its negotiations with the Illinois Synod about the use of the seminary had not been sincere.[77] Again growing friendliness with the Missouri Synod was a factor in further isolating the Iowa Synod from the other Midwestern Lutheran bodies.

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[76]Minnesota Synod, Proceedings, 1871, p. 45.

[77]Illinois Synod, Proceedings, 1870, p. 13.

Still raging was the battle between the synods of the East and Midwest. The immediate trauma of the General Synod at the loss of the Pennsylvania Ministerium and its colleagues, as well as the initial enthusiasm and subsequent disappointment of its own losses in the General Council, apparently wore off with the result that more frequent and sometimes bitterly critical remarks appeared in their periodicals. The Missouri Synod's "pompous arrogance" was the target more than once. Perhaps because it was involved in controversy with the Iowa Synod, the Missouri Synod papers engaged somewhat less in critical repartee with the General Synod and General Council periodicals although occasionally General Council ambiguity was set forth in the columns of Der Lutheraner and Lehre und Wehre. Sometimes it seems the exchanges between the Lutheran Standard and the Kirchenzeitung of the Ohio Synod with the Lutheran Observer and the Lutheran and Missionary were as forthright as any. The religious press of 1870 clearly reflected with regretful acrimony the synodical realignment that had taken place in the previous half decade.

CHAPTER VII

ESTABLISHMENT OF THE SYNODICAL CONFERENCE

By the beginning of 1870 there was definitely a spirit of fellowship in evidence among some of the confessional Lutheran bodies of the Midwest. Prior to 1866 practically the only intersynodical ties of any degree of closeness in this group of synods was with the Pennsylvania Ministerium which was either parent or godparent to several of the synods, either having been responsible directly for their origin or given them financial support as they were slowly growing and approaching a still distant self-sufficient adulthood. In this group of synods little more had existed than tentative friendship between the Wisconsin and the Minnesota Synods, half-brothers if not siblings in the family of the Pennsylvania Ministerium.

The greatest change in intersynodical relationships had taken place around the Missouri Synod. The negotiations between the Wisconsin and Minnesota Synods had not ripened into full fellowship as yet, although the Missouri Synod, which still practiced cooperative fellowship with the Norwegian Synod, had signed a fraternal pact with the Wisconsin Synod. The Missouri Synod was carrying on conversations with two synods, the Ohio and the Illinois, while a complete but temporary rupture had taken place between the Missouri and Minnesota Synods. The Ohio Synod was definitely estranged

from its neighbor to the east and on the verge of fraternal relations with the Missouri Synod which had balked at the one conditional statement added to the negotiated agreement of 1869. The winds of fellowship were blowing warm in the Ohio Synod so that there was an undercurrent of desire to remove to a greater extent, if possible, without a violation of conscience the barrier of isolation that had surrounded it for so long but had almost been breached the previous year.

Strong evidence of the desire for fellowship was given at the meeting of the Eastern District of the Ohio Synod held at Youngstown, Ohio, in June 1870. Here the Eastern District declared itself in full doctrinal agreement with the Missouri Synod and urged the general body of the Ohio Synod to concur in this action. That mere formal fellowship was not its goal was clearly indicated by the resolution, for it recommended sending official delegates to the convention of the Missouri Synod and also embarking on intersynodical cooperation where possible. Specifically it suggested that a cooperative arrangement be developed in regard to the educational institutions.[1]

The action of the Eastern District was augmented at the convention of the Ohio Synod by Pres. M. Loy. His presidential report indicated clearly his attitude regarding the major issue of fellowship. Disappointment was his feeling in regard to relations with the General Council and a

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[1]Ohio Synod, Eastern District, Proceedings, 1870, p. 22.

conviction, which he had not felt two years previously, that there was no hope of repairing the breach between the two bodies. Similarly, his feeling toward the Missouri Synod's action in rejecting fellowship with his synod because of the condition attached to the agreement of 1868 was one of disappointment. There was, however, a significant difference: hope. At considerable length he explained the decision of the Missouri Synod, reluctantly admitting there was justification for its actions in view of the Ohio Synod's balking to accept the agreement completely. The remedy for the impasse was the simple action of removing the condition that had been attached to the agreement. The agenda of the convention called for a thorough discussion of the doctrine of the ministry so that Loy felt there would be no question in anyone's mind regarding it and no need for such a qualifying statement.[2]

The recommendation of the Eastern District did not fall on deaf ears in regard to cooperation in educational institutions, for Pres. Loy made a positive suggestion towards carrying out the wishes of the District.

> I would recommend that steps be taken towards effecting a proper understanding between the Synods of Missouri, of Wisconsin, of Illinois and our own Synod, which all occupy substantially the same position, and arranging a plan of cooperation in the work of the Lord. Probably this could be done by appointing a committee for this purpose and requesting the Synods named to appoint similar committees to confer with ours, and then reporting the results of their deliberations to the respective Synods for action. In the work of education

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[2]Ohio Synod, Proceedings, 1870, pp. 10, 11.

especially such co-operation is greatly to be wished.[3]

While fellowship with the Missouri Synod was desirable, it was only the first step towards a greater goal, union of all synods that were truly likeminded. Such an arrangement was not only desirable but possible. It would, however, never come to pass unless someone take the initiative. That, Loy felt, should be the lot of the Ohio Synod, and such was his recommendation. The circle of those discussing fellowship should be enlarged to include the Wisconsin and Illinois Synods. With both of these the Missouri Synod was in agreement or on the verge of fellowship and Loy could see no reason why the four could not agree. The three of them would soon undoubtedly have met the requirements of the Missouri Synod for fellowship. These were more than adequate as far as the others were concerned for none of them had been inclined to be so demanding in their relationships with other synods although they did have standards which they required to be met, evidence of this being the Ohio Synod--General Council relations and the slowdown between the Minnesota and Wisconsin Synods. They were not inclined towards such formal, precise agreements between synods and, furthermore, the intersynodical negotiations would take precedence over bilateral negotiations, as was evident from the fact that Loy was ready to meet immediately in a body with the other synods named.

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[3]Ibid., p. 12.

The Ohio Synod convention expressed its regret over the misunderstanding that had taken place in the negotiations with the Missouri Synod and hoped that with the conclusion of discussions on the ministry and the revocation of the objectionable condition added to the agreement full fellowship would be effected with the Missouri Synod. The synodical response to Loy's suggestion for negotiations with other confessional bodies was to select a committee to act, giving it power to call a special meeting of the Ohio Synod if necessary.[4] The green light was on for intersynodical activity on a larger scale than had been anticipated generally.

Little emphasis was put at the convention of 1870 on a general justification for fellowship, either in regard to the Missouri Synod or in regard to a larger group. The reasons were obvious. Loy referred the hearers to his address to the convention three years previously where he had discussed the matter at length.[5] That there was doctrinal unity was known by all and needed no emphasis. The Eastern District had pointed out in its resolution the desire for cooperation and mentioned specifically the area of educational institutions. That was the area that was apparently uppermost in the mind of Loy since on it and it alone he spent considerable time as he gave reasons for an intersynodical group of confessional Lutheran bodies.

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[4] Ibid., pp. 24, 25.

[5] Ibid., pp. 11, 12.

The well-being of the college and seminary at Columbus had been a matter of deep concern for Pres. Loy ever since he was elected to the office of president of the Ohio Synod in 1860. In practically all of the Midwestern synods at this time one of the greatest needs was for pastors to supply the growing frontier so that the synods and their officials put forth serious efforts to solve these problems, efforts that because of the size and youth of the synods can at best be called halting. The first presidential report of Loy indicated only briefly his concern for the institutions, but by the succeeding synodical convention in 1864 the problem was obviously of greater magnitude. Two problems, neither of them new, were called to the attention of the convention by Loy with words of urgency. There was the matter of a second theological professor for the seminary at Columbus since Prof. W. Lehmann had been carrying the load alone for some time. The Board of the Seminary had sought a person with fitting qualifications but had been unsuccessful. The best help that the Synod could give would be to recommend to the Board a suitable candidate for the position. The other problem, which had also been before the Synod before and had been entrusted to the Board although it had not as yet acted, was the matter of a seminary for the training of teachers for the parochial schools in the Synod. Again the words stressed the urgency of the need with finding suitable teachers the greatest difficulty.[6] The convention committee was not averse

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[6]Ohio Synod, Proceedings, 1864, pp. 7, 8.

to the president's suggestion that the convention nominate a candidate for the position of second theological teacher and complied with his wishes by recommending him for the position.[7]

With Pres. Loy now a member of the faculty at Columbus, serving as the second theological professor in the seminary and housefather in the college, the report of J. A. Schulze, Secretary of the Board of Directors of Capitol University and the Seminary, focussed the attention of the convention on the problem of institutions at the convention in 1866. Among the problems presented to the convention was the matter of relocation of the institution at Columbus. A subject of discussion for some time, both by the Board and with members of the Synod, had been whether it was feasable to move the institutions away from Columbus, the consensus being that such a move was desirable. The Board would welcome the opinion of the convention.[8] The estimate of the attitude in the Synod towards removal of the institution as expressed in the Board report was apparently accurate. The convention gave the Board of the institution permission to sell the property if it received a favorable offer and instructed it to make subsequent recommendation to Synod regarding a new location, the final determination of place to be decided by the Synod in

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[7]Ibid., p. 11.

[8]Ohio Synod, Proceedings, 1866, p. 19.

regular or special convention.[9] The absence of any report of conflict would seem to indicate that at this point synodical sympathy was against the continuation of the Columbus campus.

More mundane institutional matters occupied the convention of the Ohio Synod in 1867. The housefather, Loy, was concerned with the discipline of the institutions and raised the question whether it might be desirable to separate the college and the seminary, since at present young men of different age levels, different academic levels, and different vocational goals were together in one scholastic community. With some hesitation Pres. Loy also called the attention of the Synod to the inadequacy of faculty salaries, requiring some members to supplement their salary by secondary employment.[10] The convention responded by declaring the separation of the college and seminary not feasable, advising also great care in the admission of consecrated young men into the college.[11] Further, it was decided the golden anniversary collection of the Ohio Synod, which hopefully would average three dollars per communicant, be designated for the support of the two institutions and divided between them.[12]

Although problems of salary and discipline were again

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[9] Ibid., pp. 17, 18.

[10] Ohio Synod, Proceedings, 1867, p. 9.

[11] Ibid., p. 13.

[12] Ibid., pp. 16, 17.

before the convention in 1868, the matter of relocation of the institutions apparently drew more interest. In view of the interest in relocation expressed at the two previous conventions the Board had been actively engaged in seeking an agreeable solution. Negotiations had been carried on in various places in regard to relocation and it was stated that perhaps before the end of the convention a definite report on the progress of these could be made.[13] This did not materialize.

At the same convention, 1868, the Ohio Synod had before it the matter of fellowship with the Missouri Synod. The fellowship agreement was approved with the later contested condition. The report of 1868 did not indicate any conscious connection between fellowship and institutions, but in two years the picture changed. When Pres. Loy suggested action toward an intersynodical body of confessional synods he had definite ideas as to how this might affect the picture of the educational institutions of these synods. While he did not name any institutions, he did suggest the possibility of the group supporting one German and one English college as well as one German and one English seminary. Although the Ohio Synod was not, Loy stated, too poor to support its current institutions, the job could be done more effectively by intersynodical cooperation.[14]

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[13]Ohio Synod, Proceedings, 1868, p. 37.

[14]Ohio Synod, Proceedings, 1870, pp. 12, 13.

The idea of intersynodical cooperation in the matter of the educational problem was not unique with Loy. A year before Loy's suggestion was made to the Ohio Synod, Pres. J. Bading of the Wisconsin Synod had presented the possible solution of its pastoral shortage by having one seminary jointly supported by the Missouri, Wisconsin, and Norwegian Synods, thus relieving Watertown of obligations for theological training and enabling it to flourish as a college.[15] That obvious solution to common problems in education would be joint educational institutions was recognized by many, including Loy, who suggested it to the Ohio Synod where there was a definite feeling that action should be taken about its schools at Columbus.

That the matter of joint support of educational institutions was one of the chief reasons for Loy's support of the idea of intersynodical cooperation on a scale greater than with the Missouri Synod alone was noted by Walther in his report to his synodical convention in 1872. The purpose of the committee of the Ohio Synod was, Walther quoted from its letter to him,

> to confer with similar committees of other synods, who hold with us the same confession in doctrine and practice, about the feasability of cooperation in the support of necessary educational institutions and, if an understanding can be reached, to submit together with their representatives a plan for the consideration of the various synods, to set such cooperation into action.[16]

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[15]Wisconsin Synod, Proceedings, 1869, p. 8.

[16]Missouri Synod, Proceedings, 1872, p. 25.

Pursuant to the decision of the Ohio Synod, Pres. Loy extended an invitation to the Missouri, Wisconsin, Illinois, and Norwegian Synods to meet together, Chicago being selected as the site for the meeting which was held from January 11 to 13, 1871. The meeting was attended by representatives of all five synods.[17] Pres. R. Knoll of the Illinois Synod attended but did not participate officially in the deliberations since his Synod had not yet severed its connection with the General Council. He was, however, quite enthusiastic in his support of the proposed organization and emphatically urged the Illinois Synod to support it and join.[18] Similarly Walther was quite jubilant about the organization which he considered a vindication of the stand of the Missouri Synod as it for twenty-five years had stood alone for the pure doctrine.[19]

It was an elated group that met on January 11, 1871, in Chicago to spend three days in active and serious deliberation of matters that it felt were of considerable signifiance for confessional Lutheranism and the Kingdom of God. There was no definite plan of action for the group but just a desire for cooperation that spurred them on in this practical expression of Christian unity. While the group had no definite agenda for its meeting, it had a goal and a feeling that

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[17]Ohio Synod, Proceedings, 1872, p. 7.

[18]Illinois Synod, Proceedings, 1871, p. 5.

[19]Missouri Synod, Proceedings, 1872, p. 26.

the chief prerequisite for meeting that goal was creating a constitution under which it could cooperate. Doctrinal discussions were not planned and did not materialize to any extent. Loy's report in the Lutheran Standard stated:

> One thing was especially noteworthy, that the general aim of working together in more intimate external relations with each other was, from the outset, unanimously approved, and not even a question was raised whether this should be brought about.[20]

The Missouri Synod had formal agreements with the Ohio, Wisconsin, and Norwegian Synods, which was sufficient for all concerned, while Knoll, the president of the Illinois Synod, with whom the Missouri Synod had no agreement as yet, did not formally join in the discussions.

Little time was wasted in getting down to the practical question of a constitution. On the afternoon of the first day a committee, composed of one member of each synod, presented salient points to be set forth in the constitution. The suggestions were so well received that the committee was instructed to bring before the assembly a proposed constitution. This was done in record time, the proposals receiving before the time of adjournment two days later the hearty approval of the assembly and recommendation to the various synodical bodies.[21]

One other item of major business was handled by the

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[20]"The Chicago Conference," Lutheran Standard, XXIX (February 1, 1871), 20.

[21]Ibid.

assembly. This was the matter of educational institutions. A specific proposal was made and passed by the assembly although it did not have legal existence yet. The resolution read:

> This Convention, in all its members is convinced that it would, in a high degree, promote the interests of the Lutheran Church in America if the Ohio Synod would resolve to unite its Seminary with that of the Missouri Synod, by transferring it to St. Louis and, on account of an existing special want, appointing a Theological Professor of its own to deliver lectures in the English language, its relation to that Institution being regulated in a manner similar to that of the Wisconsin Synod. Secondly, the Convention takes the liberty to propose to the Ohio Synod the removal of its College to Pittsburg, where it would be in the midst of large congregations of its own and of the Missouri Synod, and the granting to the latter Synod of the same privileges of its College, coupled with the same duties, as the Missouri accords to the Ohio Synod in the Seminary at St. Louis.[22]

The article, in which Loy was reporting the Chicago meeting, gave hearty approval to this plan.

Because it would be a year and a half before the Ohio and the Missouri Synods would meet to adopt the constitution it was decided to hold a second preparatory meeting in Fort Wayne, Indiana, in November of 1871. This was to be a free conference where anyone from the interested synods could participate. The constitution was to be discussed further and an essay was to be presented by one of the members of the committee. The essay was to present fully the reasons for establishing the Synodical Conference.[23]

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[22] Ibid., pp. 19, 20.

[23] [F. Schmidt,] "Vorwort," Denkschrift, enthaltend eine

At the meeting held on November 14 to 16, 1871, in E. G. Sihler's church in Fort Wayne, members of the four synods that were officially creating the Synodical Conference were present. Also in attendance as guests, although they both had officially taken steps to leave the General Council and join the Synodical Conference, were members of the Illinois and the Minnesota Synods. The presence of these two delegations led to a discussion of the General Council and their relations with it, the result being a recommendation to the constituting synods that the Illinois and Minnesota Synod be permitted to participate fully. The reception of the proposed constitution by the various synods was discussed with the general approval of all concerned being expressed.[24]

The greater part of the time at Fort Wayne was spent in hearing the essay authorized by the Chicago meeting. F. Schmidt, professor of the Norwegian Synod on the faculty of Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, presented his paper, "Memorial Containing a Thorough Exposition of the Reasons Why the Lutheran Synods Forming the Synodical Conference Cannot Unite with Any of the Associations of Synods Existing in this Country." Confessionalism was the theme of the paper.

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eingehende Darlegung der Gruende, weshalb die zur Synodal-Conferenz der evangel.-Luther. Kirche von Nord-Amerika zusammentretenden Synoden sich nicht an eine der hierzulande schon bestehenden lutherisch benannten Verbindungen von Synoden haben anschliessen koennen (Columbus, Ohio: Schulze und Gassmann, 1871), pp. 3, 4.

[24]Ibid.

Because of dangers in other church bodies as well as tendencies in the intellectual and social life of society the Church must always be on guard as it carries out the Lord's will and work. As an aid in attaining this goal the Lutheran Church has stated its stand in the Confessions to which it must be faithful. The bulk of Schmidt's paper discussed the three extant intersynodical Lutheran bodies and their confessional stands. The General Synod has, he asserted, completely deserted the Lutheran position. The General Synod of the South was pictured as being somewhat better. Holding satisfactory confessional position but denying it by its deeds was the General Council. Its position on the "four points" of altar and pulpit fellowship, lodges, and chiliasm as well as its toleration of the lax position of the Iowa Synod were given as specific examples of practices that were not in harmony with the Confessions. The wish was expressed by Schmidt that the General Council would return to Scripture, the Confessions, and true Christian unity.[25]

The intervening ten months between the two preliminary meetings had given the various synods time for study of the proposed constitution of the Synodical Conference While there was some discussion which resulted in several changes, the final draft of the constitution did not differ greatly from that adopted in Chicago. It read:

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[25] [Schmidt,] Denkschrift, pp. 8-34.

CONSTITUTION OF THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN SYNODICAL CONFERENCE OF NORTH AMERICA.

I. Name. The Ev. Lutheran Synodical Conference.

II. Confession. The Synodical Conference receives the canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testament as the Word of God, and adopts the Confessions of the Ev. Lutheran Church as contained in the Concordia of 1580 as her own.

III. Object and Aim. The external manifestation of the unity of the spirit in the respective Synods; Mutual strengthening in faith and confession; Promotion of harmony in doctrine and practice, and removal of discords which arise or threaten to arise; Activity in common for common ends; Endeavors to fix the boundaries of Synods according to territorial limits, except where the language separates; Union of all Lutheran Synods in America in one orthodox American Lutheran Church.

IV. Power. The Synodical Conference is merely an advisory body in all matters, respecting which all the Synods constituting it have not conferred upon it the authority to decide. Only the totality of the Synods represented in it shall decide upon the reception of ecclesiastical bodies into the Synodical Conference, so that such reception can take place only by resolution of all the Synods united in it. It shall, through the respective District Presidents, provide for the organization and holding of regular mixed pastoral conferences. Without the consent of all the Synods represented in the Synodical Conference none of the Synods forming it shall enter into organic relations with other bodies.

V. Subjects of Activity. Church doctrine and practice; Relations of the ministers and congregations of one Synod in the Conference to those of another; Relations of the whole body and its several parts to ecclesiastical organizations not connected with it; Affairs of Home and Foreign as well as of Emigrant Missions; Hospital and Orphan House Matters; Lutheran Literature in general, and Tracts in particular; Education of Ministers and School Teachers, and similar matters.

VI. Organization. 1. The body is composed of members entitled to vote and advisory members. The former are the pastors and lay-delegates chosen by the respective Synods as their representatives. The latter are those present who are either regular members of the respective Synods, or who were lay-delegates at the synodical

meeting next preceding. For the present each of the Synods in the Conference having eighty members entitled to vote, or less, shall be entitled to four delegates; every forty additional voting members, and also every fraction of forty, shall entitle to two additional representatives, provided, however, that an equal number of ministers and laymen shall be chosen.--2. The officers shall be a President chosen from the ministry, a Secretary, and a Treasurer, with an alternate for each, to be elected for one year.--3. The time of meeting shall be in July annually.--4. The duration of the convention shall be at most six days.

VII. Constitution. This Constitution shall take effect as soon as it is confirmed by resolution of all the respective Synods. Only by such approval of all Synods can amendments be made in the Constitution. The Synodical Conference shall have power to make such by-laws as shall not conflict with the Constitutions of the respective Synods nor assume control over matters belonging in their jurisdiction.[26]

Three specific points are especially noteworthy in the constitution of the Synodical Conference in the light of the complex and delicate relations between synods as manifested in the decade before its organization. First, the foundation of the Synodical Conference was to be unqualified subscription to Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions. Second, the authority of the individual synods was jealously guarded in the constitution. This was not to be violated by any action of the Conference, nor could it be jeopardized by the relations of members synods with synods or organizations that were outside the group. Unanimous consent of synods was required for admission of other synods as well as membership

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[26] Ibid., pp. 5-7; translated in Lutheran Standard, XXX (May 5, 1872), 73, 74.

in other ecclesiastical organizations by individual synods.

A third interesting point is the goals and activity of the Conference. Essentially peace and harmony, both doctrinal and practical, were the goals of the organization. However, real, tangible goals were evident in two areas that were more than vague hopes, as the past discussion had shown and the future discussion of the next five years would demonstrate further. These were the matter of educational institutions as proposed in the Chicago Resolution of January 1871, and the matter of territorial districts. The foundation was set here for the arrangement that the Synodical Conference should be divided into districts or territorial synods according to state boundries, making essentially one organic synod subdivided geographically with the only non-geographical membership being the Norwegian elements of the synod.[27] The hopes and ideals of the Synodical Conference at its founding were indeed high.

The first regular convention of the Synodical Conference was held in Milwaukee from July 10 to 16, 1872. In view of the fact that they had made formal application for membership, the Illinois and Minnesota Synods were received as members with the original four Synods of Missouri, Ohio, Wisconsin and the Norwegian Synods. In the election of the first permanent officers of the Synodical Conference C. F. W. Walther became president, W. F. Lehmann vice president, A. Schmidt

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[27] "The Chicago Conference," Lutheran Standard, XXIX (February 1, 1871), 19, 20.

secretary, while J. Schmidt was elected treasurer.[28]

The major business at the first Synodical Conference convention was the study of doctrinal papers. The opening sermon was preached by Walther on the basis of I Timothy 4, 16. After the business of organization, during which the Norwegian Synod was granted its request to hold membership on the basis of the Augsburg Confession and the Small Catechism since the Scandinavian churches had never subscribed to the complete Book of Concord, M. Loy presented a paper on "What is our Obligation towards the English people of our Country?" The second major essay was read by F. A. Schmidt on "Justification," which was recognized by the convention as an important contribution because of the topic itself, but also because of the current doctrinal dispute between the Norwegian Synod and the Augustana Synod.[29] The obligation of mission work was felt by the convention so that it had a committee present a rather thorough report on inner or home missions. Besides the interpretation of several phrases of the constitution little business was conducted. There was, nevertheless, joy at the conclusion of the meeting that the birth of the organization was completed and that a major step toward more God-pleasing relations among the Lutherans in America had been successfully consummated.

The span from the zenith to the nadir of the Synodical

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[28]Synodical Conference, Proceedings, 1872, p. 75.

[29]Ibid., p. 20.

Conference was about a decade. In ten years the joyous, idealistic, confessional harmony was shattered in a rupture that fractured a synodical partnership of a quarter of a century and dashed in pieces hopes of a sound, substantial, mutually helpful arrangement in doing the Lord's work.

While there were no signs of an impending break at the time of the establishment of the Synodical Conference, there were already indications that one of the major goals of the Conference might not be achieved. An undercurrent of unrest in regard to the plan for close cooperation in regard to educational institutions was beginning to manifest itself. Although there was hearty agreement among the leaders of the various synods that the suggested move of the Columbus seminary to St. Louis and Capital University to Pittsburgh would aid the Ohio Synod in solving a problem of considerable concern for several years and be a step in the best interests of all concerned, opposition and resentment had already begun to develop in the Ohio Synod. Already in 1872 Pres. Loy recognized the feeling in his synod against the moves proposed at the constitutional convention of 1871, indicating, nevertheless, his continued favor of the plan.[30] In his autobiography Loy admitted that he felt unpopular among some of his brethren because he favored a common seminary and state synods.[31]

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[30]Ohio Synod, Proceedings, 1872, p. 8.

[31]M. Loy, Story of My Life (Columbus, Ohio: Lutheran Book Concern, 1905), pp. 358, 359.

That the Ohio Synod as a whole did not share Loy's feelings about the move of the schools to St. Louis and Pittsburgh as the solution of their problems was clearly indicated in the synodical action in 1872 and 1873. At the earlier convention the floor committee recommended against haste in carrying out the suggestion and received the assent of the convention to this in its vote. The convention also decided to improve the school with additional teachers and improved buildings.[32] In the following year at a special convention the Ohio Synod reverted to its idea of moving the school as it considered thirteen offers, finally deciding on a site in East Columbus.[33] Although the actual move to the new site in East Columbus was still to take place, the sentiment of the majority in the Ohio Synod was against the idea of a combined seminary at St. Louis, and it would only grow stronger in time. For all practical purposes the question of a joint seminary for all synods of the Synodical Conference was settled by this action, the extended discussion of the of the problem in 1876 being almost academic.

The feeling that synodical authority would be lost in an arrangement where autonomy in its seminary was given up could only be aggravated by the suggestion that the historical synodical arrangement be abandoned in favor of a single

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[32]Ohio Synod, Proceedings, 1872, p. 15

[33]/C. F. W./ W/alther/, "Die Allgemeine Ev.-Luth. Synode von Ohio und anderen Staaten," Der Lutheraner, XXIX (March 15, 1873), 93.

church with state synods except where this was not feasable because of language. 1876 was the year when this also received its greatest attention on the floor of the Synodical Conference.[34] The enthusiasm for it also was not sufficient to carry the proposition to victory and action at this time. The growing suspicion of the Missouri Synod's desire to dominate--as indicated in and together with the two plans that would alter the historic structure of the synods in polity and education--began to undermine the unity in the Synodical Conference so that it may have been true, as Meuser wrote,

> It is unfruitful to speculate on historical possibilities, but there were enough undoctrinal frictions between Ohio and Missouri to have caused Ohio to investigate intersynodical friendship elsewhere even if the doctrinal controversy had not disrupted the Conference.[35]

The seeds of trouble had already been sown when the Synodical Conference was founded.

The tragic eruption of hostilities in 1880 in the Predestinarian Controversy with its bitter charges of synergism and Calvinism is a lengthy account beyond the scope of this paper. Suffice it to say that the bitterness engendered in 1880 among these confessional men who had happily joined in a confederation in 1872 surpassed the acrimony that was evident among most Lutheran bodies in America in the critical

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[34]Synodical Conference, Proceedings, 1876, pp. 44-48.

[35]Fred W. Meuser, The Formation of the American Lutheran Church (Columbus, Ohio: The Wartburg Press, 1958), p. 54.

years after 1864. The face of the Synodical Conference was changed by the withdrawal of the Norwegian and Ohio Synods from membership, a serious blow from which the Synodical Conference never completely recovered.

CHAPTER VIII

SHORT-LIVED HOPES

The decade prior to the establishment of the Synodical Conference was a period of energetic activity on the Lutheran synodical scene. Synodical movement, breaking of long-standing fellowships, realignment of synods, appearance of new and stronger synodical bodies, and a general ferment around doctrine and the Lutheran Confessions were part of a change in Lutheranism in America between 1863 and 1872 that was never equalled except possibly in the period between 1915 and 1925.

At the beginning of the period confessional polarity was evident in Lutheranism with the small but forthright and adament Missouri Synod courageously carrying the banners of a conservative confessionalism while the older, larger General Synod held uncertain ramparts with a large portion espousing a more modern American Lutheranism that was viewed with increasing confessional suspicion by almost half of its constituency.

The leader of the disenchanted group in the General Synod was the Philadelphia Ministerium which found adherents of a more confessional tenor in many of the existing synods but especially among those who had come into being as a result of its energetic missionary activity. Lively conventions of the General Synod in 1864 and 1866 led to the

establishment of a center group, the General Council, which gave hope of being the answer to the confessional problem among the Lutheran Synods.

While the General Council was hailed with joy by the moderate confessional groups, it was evidently still a bit too liberal for some synods. Soon dissatisfaction arose in the ranks of the young intersynodical group as a kindred spirit appeared among several of the synods that were somewhat right of center in the confessional spectrum.

Of these synods the largest was the Ohio Synod which for several years had been tending towards a more confessional doctrinal position, especially as several defections eliminated members of a more liberal stand. It also was the most desirous of joining with the moderately conservative synods, having apparently a greater sense of isolation since it felt it could not join with its eastern neighbor, the Philadelphia Ministerium, from which it had originally sprung and with which it had had moderately close ties.

In an effort to eliminate some of the causes of intersynodical friction the resolution of the Northern District of the Ohio Synod of 1866 became the stimulus towards closer affiliation among the more confessional synods despite the fact that it did not have as its goal an intersynodical body. This action started a trend toward fraternization and affiliation with the Missouri Synod in a series of bilateral agreements. These eventually included the Ohio, Wisconsin, Illinois, and Minnesota Synods, the Norwegian Synod having

been affiliated with the Missouri Synod for over a decade. The course of these agreements did not run uniformly smoothly. Only the Missouri-Wisconsin negotiations resulted in immediate agreement, the agreements between the Missouri Synod and the Ohio, Illinois, and Minnesota Synods encountering obstacles that delayed fellowship for several years.

A second stimulus towards affiliation among the more confessional synods came from the Ohio Synod also in 1870 and provided sufficient impetus to bring about the creation of a intersynodical body, the Synodical Conference. All of the synods that were disenchanted with the General Council were united or on the verge of union with the Missouri Synod, except the Iowa Synod which was being met by a cooling trend from these synods. The leading spirit in the union movement was Pres. M. Loy of the Ohio Synod who saw in the affiliation of these synods the answer to the education problems of his synod. Pres. C. F. W. Walther emerged as the focal point in the incipient organization although he had not been prominent in intersynodical circles since the conferences of 1856 to 1859 and had been almost in eclipse during the Civil War.

Final negotiations in 1871 led to the establishment of the Synodical Conference in May of 1872 with charter members being the Ohio, Missouri, Wisconsin, Norwegian, Illinois, and Minnesota Synods. The negotiations were more practical in emphasis than doctrinal, except for controversial issues involving the Iowa Synod and the General Council, the Confessions and the "four points" respectively.

High hopes were engendered by the establishment of the Synodical Conference, but these proved to be ephemeral. Already in 1872 the interest of the Ohio Synod in a joint seminary for the training of pastors for all member synods of the Synodical Conference was dwindling, although the project was discussed for some time. Also the hope of geographical districts or synods in the Conference flickered uncertainly for several years and then died. The eruption of 1880 in the Predestinarian Controversy shook the foundations of the young body, effectively crippling it as the Ohio and Norwegian Synods withdrew, leaving the Wisconsin and Missouri as the major synods in the Synodical Conference for the next three-quarters of a century.

The synods that formed the Synodical Conference in 1872 and their leaders must be credited with courage and consecration for their work. Uncompromising devotion to the Word of God and staunch loyalty to the Lutheran Confessions impelled them to avoid or withdraw from alliances that they believed to be compromises of the truth and stimulated them to establish a union where they felt the banner of God's Word would fly prominently as a testimony to their uncompromising Christianity and Lutheranism. That their high hopes were short-lived and dissension and disappointment replaced the courageous optimism of 1872 does not minimize the effort or detract from the idealism of these men who made a significant contribution for the cause of the Kingdom of God.

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