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LUTHERAN FREE CONFERENCES IN AMERICA
FROM 1856 TO 1866

A Thesis Presented to the Faculty
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,
Department of Church History
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Bachelor of Divinity

by

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CHAPTER I

AN INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to shed some light on the confessional experiences within the bodies which finally took part in the Lutheran Free Conferences in America in the decade beginning in 1856. The study has been carried on with the intent of determining to what extent doctrines formulated the climate of friendliness between confessional bodies.

The study has revealed that factors in friendliness between even the confessional bodies are the personalities within the membership of the different synods. But the writer has been further convinced that, although personalities are a factor, they are not the sole cause of either good or poor inter-synodical relationships. A common interest in pure doctrines and a desire to work together with people of like faith have also caused breeches to be healed. Another impetus driving them together is an attack on their common doctrines.

It has been impossible to determine to what extent the mid-nineteenth century Free Conferences have contribu-

ted to the life of the Lutheran Church in America. But it has become quite evident that the conferences have helped to establish a consciousness of the Lutheran Symbols.

There are also indications that these Free Conferences set a new pattern for synods and inter-synodical meetings before fellowships are formed and unions are consummated.

This study has been limited to the materials available at Concordia Historical Institute and Pritzlaff Memorial Library of St. Louis in 1953 and early 1954. An effort was made to secure additional materials, especially issues of the Lutheran Standard. The writer contacted Capital University of Columbus, Ohio, but was informed that the only copies in their possession were reference copies. The librarian directed the writer to Wartburg Seminary of Dubuque, Iowa. Inquiries by the writer and his adviser were never acknowledged by the Wartburg librarian or seminary officials. The Library of Congress also did not have the desired issues in its possession.

The writer takes note of a study of the Free Conferences by E. L. Lueker published in the Concordia

Theological Monthly, volume XV. Lueker, however, limits his study to the minutes of the conference, Walther's doctrinal convictions, and his reaction to the conferences. The article contains no other historical or confessional study of men or synods, nor does it take note of their reaction to the Free Conferences.

CHAPTER II

EVENTS LEADING TO THE FIRST CONFERENCE

General Historical References

The participating bodies in the Lutheran Free Conferences of the period 1856 to 1866 were mostly synods which had their beginning before the aforementioned period. The writer, therefore, feels that it is important that we also take a backward glance into the confessional history of some of the synods. The purpose shall be to note trends in American Lutheran theology and the individual synod's reaction to these trends.

Lutheran activity began quite early in the American colonies, the first Lutheran pastor arriving with an expedition on April 17, 1640. Reorus Torkillus worked among the Swedes until his death in 1643.¹ After the Dutch conquered the Swedes, all Lutheran pastors, with the exception of Lars Lock returned to Europe. The Lutheran Consistory in Amsterdam sent Ernest Gutwasser to America in 1657, but he was deported in 1659² and had

¹J. L. Neve and Willard D. Allbeck, History of the Lutheran Church in America (Burlington, Iowa: The Lutheran Literary Board, 1934), p. 25.

²Ibid., p. 22.

little opportunity to work the field.

For the next 80 years the Lutherans in America became an easy prey for any ecclesiastical propagandist.³ However, Pastor Henry Melchior Muhlenberg's arrival in Philadelphia marked a change to the effect that they became organized and more able to operate as a denomination.⁴

As a result of Pastor Muhlenberg's work the Lutheran church in America began to increase in numbers and strength, but the time of the really large increase came when they gained new recruits of the same faith from Germany.⁵ This, naturally, coincided with the increased German immigration. The height of such immigration was reached in the three year period, 1852-1854, when over 500,000 Germans arrived.⁶ However, some of the groups had the opportunity to set their policies and develop their character before the great influx.⁷

The Pennsylvania Ministerium, the first synod we shall

³Virgilius Fern, The Crisis in American Lutheran Theology (New York: The Century Co., 1927), p. 4.

⁴Ibid., p. 4.

⁵Ibid., p. 117.

⁶Ibid., p. 118.

⁷Ibid., p. 117.

review briefly, is the Mother Synod of the Lutheran Church in America. It had its origin as a body in 1748 and was formed under the leadership of Henry Melchior Muhlenberg.⁸ At the time of its organization, it was known as "United Pastors."⁹ Since the first constitution for the organization was not drawn up until 1781,¹⁰ and its confessional statement is of a later date, we turn to a report which Pastor Muhlenberg sent to Halle after the dedication of Saint Michael's Church in Philadelphia, on August 14, 1748.¹¹ The report indicates the confessional consciousness of the participants, especially that of Pastor Henry Melchior Muhlenberg. He writes: "Thereupon one of us made a short address, calling to mind that the foundation-stones of this church had been laid . . . that . . . all the Symbolical books should be taught."¹²

⁸ Ibid., pp. 4 f.

⁹ Ibid., p. 5.

¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 15 f.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 8.

¹² Ibid., p. 9.

The confessional stand of the Ministerium remained strong under Muhlenberg's leadership¹³ and the constitution of 1781 required that, "Every minister professes that he holds the Word of God and our Symbolical Books in doctrine and life."¹⁴

But with the passing of Doctor Henry Melchior Muhlenberg, a definite change took place and is typified by the example of Doctor C. Emmanuel Schultze, a son-in-law of Doctor Muhlenberg. In 1797 Schultze wrote that there is no great difference in point of doctrine in all of the Protestant churches. And "with the Church of England, however, the Lutherans have and ever had a closer connection than with others, owing to a more perfect similarity . . . even in some particulars in doctrine."¹⁵

After the beginning had been made to turn from the traditional stand and confessions of the Lutheran Church, the Pennsylvania Ministerium joined in close fellowship with the Reformed or German Calvinistic church. Kinship in language became more important than identity of

¹³Neve and Allbeck, op. cit., p. 60.

¹⁴Ferm, op. cit., p. 16.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 21.

doctrine.¹⁶ In 1821 the Ministerium noted that their delegates to the Reformed church had been received as advisory members of that body. Pennsylvania promised to do the same for the Reformed church.¹⁷

Even the withdrawal of the Pennsylvania Ministerium from the General Synod in 1823 is attributed to the close association of the lay people with the Reformed. Their association had developed into fellowship with the German Reformed and the ties became sacred to them because of church union, intermarriage and common language.¹⁸ This separation from Lutheran fellowship, although not primarily caused by theologians and accepted by them as a temporary thing, lasted for thirty years.¹⁹

In 1850 a doctrinal discussion broke out on the floor of the Pennsylvania convention. Now there was evidence that a trend of confessionalism had started within Synod.²⁰ One of the prominent leaders of the confessional awakening which followed this convention was Doctor W. J. Mann, whose leadership we shall discuss later.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 63.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 43.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 43.

¹⁹Neve and Allbeck, op. cit., p. 74.

²⁰Ferm. op. cit., p. 144.

The New York Ministerium was the second Lutheran organization of ministers and congregations to form on the American shores. Although there might have been a meeting in 1785, the first successful meeting of which we have records, took place in 1786.²¹ This meeting was held at Albany at the instance of Doctor John Christopher Kunze, another son-in-law of Doctor Henry Melchior Muhlenberg. The meeting was held at the dedication of a church. However, six years passed before the group met again.²² As long as Doctor Kunze remained, the spirit of Muhlenberg lived through him,²³ although he saw nothing wrong in coming into close relationship with the Episcopal Church. In 1797 the Ministerium, under Doctor Kunze, resolved not to recognize newly erected Lutheran Churches in an area where the people could be served by the Episcopal Church.²⁴

After the death of Kunze, the New York Ministerium was controlled for twenty years²⁵ by the gifted, but

²¹Neve and Allbeck, op. cit., p. 64.

²²Loc. cit.

²³Ibid., p. 64.

²⁴Ferm, op. cit., p. 24.

²⁵Neve and Allbeck, op. cit., p. 64.

rationalistic Doctor F. H. Quitman.²⁶ He published his own catechism in 1814, with the "consent and approbation of the Synod."²⁷ This catechism had no relationship with the historic catechism of Luther either in form or doctrinal content, but was entirely based on rationality.²⁸

The New York Ministerium members of this period have been accused of being Socinians, denying the Trinity.²⁹ And Doctor Quitman, the president, permitted only pastors of that nature and rationalists to fill his pulpit.³⁰ It is easy, therefore, to understand that the constitution of 1816 required no confessional statement from its ministers.³¹ In Chapter V, Section 10, we note that a minister having been ordained by any Bishop, Convention, Presbytery, Association or Council could join the New York Ministerium without being re-ordained, provided he could

²⁶Ibid., p. 65.

²⁷Ferm, op. cit., p. 25.

²⁸Loc. cit.

²⁹Neve and Allbeck, op. cit., p. 85.

³⁰Ibid., p. 86.

³¹Ferm, op. cit., p. 41.

satisfy a committee that he had the proper piety, language abilities, and "unexceptional character."³²

It was out of special consideration for the New York and Pennsylvania Ministeriums that the General Synod refrained from incorporating any doctrinal declarations, even of the Augsburg Confession.³³ Both Ministeriums withdrew from the General Synod, New York in 1820 and Pennsylvania in 1823. The New York group was received back into the General Synod in 1836³⁴ even though it expressly stated its refusal to accept the recommended constitution for district synods and its declaration, but to remain faithful to its own constitution, "which contained no reference to allegiance on its part to any of the Lutheran Confessions."³⁵

But New York also found its way back to confession-
alism. The strong wave of German immigration threw the
weight of its influence to the second oldest of the
Lutheran bodies in America. "The process was slower than

³²Ibid., p. 40.

³³Neve and Allbeck, op. cit., p. 90.

³⁴Ferm, op. cit., p. 99.

³⁵Ibid., p. 100.

that in Pennsylvania, yet it was felt."³⁶ And so one of the most liberal bodies, which had denied almost everything which marked it as Lutheran, was on its way back to the confessions in the second half of the nineteenth century.

The third of the synods which concerns us primarily is the Ohio Synod. It was formed at Somerset, Ohio, in September 1818,³⁷ although it had been meeting as a special conference of the Pennsylvania Ministerium since 1912.³⁸

The practices of the new synod were not always consistent with its own confessions. In 1833 the Joint Synod of Ohio passed a resolution in which they declared their willingness to enter into a union with the German Reformed Churches "provided terms of union can be found which are based on truth and righteousness."³⁹ And some of the pastors undertook to teach both Lutheran and Reformed children their respective doctrines "taking the Lutheran

³⁶Ibid., p. 149.

³⁷C. V. Sheatsley, History of the Joint Synod of Ohio (Columbus, Ohio: Lutheran Book Concern, 1919), p. 67.

³⁸Loc. cit.

³⁹Ibid., p. 104.

Catechism in one hand and the Heidelberg in the other."⁴⁰
 The synod also resolved to invite the German Reformed Church to send its young men to the Ohio Synod's seminary if they were "desirous of studying Theology at our seminary."⁴¹

Other members of the synod had a much firmer footing in their teaching and induced their body to take an officially strong stand in 1836. They resolved: "That this Synod shall strictly adhere to the Augsburg Confession and admit no one to membership in its Body who shall deny any part thereof."⁴²

Other strong American influences came to the attention of the synod in this free country. One of those influences, which had its origin in denominations which did not practice indoctrination of their members, was the spirit of revivalism. This spirit had taken hold of some of the other synods, but it was soundly condemned by the Joint Synod of Ohio in 1832, because "we believe that our Church will thereby be polluted with sectarian forms and principles. Furthermore they feared that revivals would

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 105.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 105.

⁴²Ibid., p. 103.

"beget and nourish fanaticism and disorder, which do more to promote the spirit of unbelief and skepticism than the writings of Voltaire and Paine have done."⁴³ They protested against the new ways and measures which accommodate themselves to the fanatical spirit of the times and "heretby publicly declare our intention to remain immutably pure Evangelical Lutheran in faith, form and discipline according to the Bible and the Symbolical books."⁴⁴

In 1836 the English Synod of Ohio was formed out of the Joint Synod. This new synod stayed in fellowship with the Joint Synod, also known as the German Synod.⁴⁵ "But it was not long until there was some dissatisfaction expressed with reference to the confessional basis and relation to the Joint Synod."⁴⁶ In 1840 in Zanesville, the new English-speaking synod resolved to expurge the articles laying their confessional basis, and that the synod "Should be free and independent of all others."⁴⁷ This resolution was opposed by "but one loud dissenting

⁴³Ibid., p. 107.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 108.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 112.

⁴⁶Loc. cit.

⁴⁷Loc. cit.

voice."⁴⁸ This Body became known as the East Ohio Synod and united with the General Synod. However, Pastors Charles Henkel, James Manning, E. Greenwald, Joseph A. Roof, and A. Barthelomew reorganized and remained with the Joint Synod of Ohio.⁴⁹

The Tennessee Synod was formed during a decade when only 6,761 German immigrants came to America.⁵⁰ Its formation was a result of an open rupture in the North Carolina Synod due to differences in doctrine and practice. The new group, having left the convention of the North Carolina Synod in Lincolnton, met in Solomon's Church, Cove Creek, Green County, Tennessee on July 17, 1820 "to organize a conference or synod in accordance with the teachings, doctrines, and policy of the Word of God, as set forth in the Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church."⁵¹ To carry out their purpose they included the requirement in their constitution that "all

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 113.

⁴⁹Loc. cit.

⁵⁰Ferm, op. cit., p. 117.

⁵¹Henkel, Socrates, History of the Evangelical Lutheran Tennessee Synod (New Market, Virginia: Henkel and Co., Printers and Publishers, 1890), p. 24.

teachers will promise to teach according to the Word of God, the Augsburg Confession, and the doctrines of our Church."⁵²

The sincerity of the doctrinal position of the men organizing the church is illustrated by their stand when attempts were made to heal the breach with North Carolina. When George Goodman of North Carolina asked them to give a majority opinion, they replied, in the October convention of 1822, that as the Bible is the only rule and standard of doctrine and church discipline, and as the Augsburg Confession is clear and correct, therefore the majority have no right to make decisions which are contrary to the aforementioned standard.⁵³

Shortly after the break, the Reverend David Moser of North Carolina tried to interest the Tennessee Synod in healing the breach with North Carolina. In 1824 three separate petitions were presented to the Tennessee Synod requesting that they state publicly the differences in doctrine between them and North Carolina. These petitions came from Philadelphia congregations, Lincoln County, North Carolina; Pastor Moser's congregation and Saint

⁵²Ibid., p. 32

⁵³Ibid., pp. 51 f.

John's Church of Lincoln County, North Carolina.⁵⁴

Tennessee appointed a committee to collect the writings of the two parties and place the conflicting doctrines opposite to each other.⁵⁵ Furthermore, that if those who have "deviated from the doctrines contained in the Augsburg Confession and Lutheran teachings shall publicly renounce, in print, such deviations, further steps for a re-union may be instituted."⁵⁶

Again in 1825 nine persons had presented a memorial to the effect that if it were possible to effect a re-union with North Carolina without compromising doctrine, such steps should be taken.⁵⁷ In answer to that request, the synod proposed to repeat the offer which had been made the previous year and if it were complied with, they should take all necessary steps to effect peace and harmony, but if the responses were not satisfactory, the Tennessee Synod would be willing to furnish speakers who would discuss the disputed doctrines with the representatives of the North Carolina Synod. This would be done in such a manner

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 63.

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 64.

⁵⁶Ibid., p. 64.

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 66.

that "The audience that may assemble at the time and place, may form their views relative to the differences, and that the arguments on both sides may afterward be published."⁵⁸

The synod made several attempts to meet with the North Carolina ministers in 1825 and 1826, but all attempts failed. Then a committee was appointed. They selected a meeting place, Organ Church, Rowan County, North Carolina on November 4, 1826,⁵⁹ but none of the North Carolina ministers attended, it was reported in 1828.⁶⁰

These first attempts to re-unite with North Carolina seemed to set the pattern of all union efforts of the Tennessee Synod for the period under consideration.⁶¹ When she saw that the Pennsylvania Ministerium had left the General Synod in 1823, the Tennessee convention resolved to send an inquiry about the doctrine of Pennsylvania.⁶² The doctrinal inquiry was repeated in 1825, and a committee was appointed to follow through on the matter.⁶³ Finally

⁵⁸ Loc. cit.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 70.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 72.

⁶¹ Neve and Allbeck, op. cit., p. 66.

⁶² Henkel, op. cit., pp. 59 f.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 66.

someone asked them for their opinion on all major denominations uniting. In answer the convention of 1841 resolved to state that it was necessary for churches to be in harmony on doctrine before they could unite. And since such harmony among all the major denominations was an impossibility, a union was entirely impractical, and it would prove "detrimental to the true interests of the Redeemer's Kingdom, and endanger the civil and religious liberties of our happy country."⁶⁴

The 1848 convention advised the Synod of Western Virginia that although Tennessee would be most happy to have all the synods which call themselves Lutheran unite, it would be possible for them to do so only "upon the assurance of a strict adherence to the doctrines and usages of the Church, as set forth in its Symbols."⁶⁵ And in 1853, Tennessee sent its thanks to the Pennsylvania Synod for inviting her to join the General Synod, but informed her that no union was possible since the General body did not stand entirely by the Unaltered Augsburg Confession, nor did it require its members to do so.⁶⁶

⁶⁴Ibid., pp. 101 f.

⁶⁵Ibid., p. 119.

⁶⁶Neve and Allbeck, op cit., p. 66.

But noting in September 1848 that there was a German Evangelical Lutheran Synod in Missouri, "which is devoted to the promulgation and defense of the primitive doctrines and usage of the Lutheran Church," Tennessee rejoiced and hailed the appearance of Der Lutheraner.⁶⁷

Like the Ohio Synod, the Tennessee Synod also disapproved of revivals and the revival tendencies, called the "new measures" in the General Synod. In September 1841, the synod branded these measures as "contrary to the Word of God, the doctrine of the Augsburg Confession and her (the Lutheran Church's) usage in her purest and best ages," and these measures are "calculated to sow the seed of discord among its members."⁶⁸

Tennessee made the contribution of authorizing an English translation of the Book of Concord. It was to be printed by Doctor S. G. Henkel. This permission was given in 1845. In 1851 Doctor Henkel reported that the book was completed and ready for delivery.⁶⁹ The committee had not made a thorough study of the translation, but the committee members expressed their confidence that, in keeping with

⁶⁷Henkel, op. cit., pp. 114 f.

⁶⁸Ibid., p. 161.

⁶⁹Ibid., p. 126.

the quality of the work previously supervised by the Henkels, they could be certain of its excellency throughout⁷⁰. The synod, therefore, highly recommended it to all "who call themselves Lutheran ministers throughout the Lutheran Church, and the community in general."⁷¹ Thus the Tennessee Synod was instrumental in bringing the complete Lutheran Symbols into the language of the land and into the hands of those who were not able to use either the German or Latin.

The Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Church in America was officially organized at the convention held at Luther Valley Church, Rock Prairie Settlement, Wisconsin on October 3-7, 1853. This successful attempt followed five preliminary meetings between 1849 and the aforementioned date.⁷² It accepted the same doctrinal⁷³ and liturgical

⁷⁰Ibid., p. 126.

⁷¹Ibid., p. 127.

⁷²G. C. Ylvisaker, chief editor, Grace for Grace (Mankato, Minnesota: Lutheran Synod Book Company, 1943), pp. 32-44.

⁷³The Scandinavian Churches adhere only to the Augustana because they had no part in the 1580 doctrinal controversies in Germany.

basis and adopted the same customs as the mother church in Norway.⁷⁴ The new synod was quite hesitant about joining with other groups and went to the trouble of having Reverends J. A. Ottesen and N. Brandt visit different institutions of learning to find one which would be satisfactory for the training of their pastors. The two strongly recommended Concordia Seminary of St. Louis,⁷⁵ thus beginning a rather close association with the Missouri Synod.

A number of the pastors west of the Allegheny Mountains in Pennsylvania organized the Pittsburgh Synod in 1845.⁷⁶ These men, who came from several different synods took their action of organization with the intention of insuring harmonious cooperation.⁷⁷ The guiding spirit in the organization and operation of this synod of

⁷⁴Ylvisaker, op. cit., p. 47.

⁷⁵Ibid., p. 69.

⁷⁶The writer has no definite information regarding the confessional position of the members of the Pittsburgh Synod, but he is aware that W. A. Passavant twice publicly opposed Walther's insistence on confessionalism as a prerequisite for membership in the Free Conferences. Passavant did so in the pages of The Missionary of May 1, 1856, Page 54 and November 12, 1857, page 166.

⁷⁷Henry Eyster Jacobs, A History of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the United States (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1899), p. 386.

young men was W. A. Passavant, editor of The Missionary.⁷⁸

This young synod became active in works of charity and also set the pace for the Lutheran Church in reaching out through an aggressive mission program which extended from Pennsylvania to the Mississippi Valley and from Canada to Texas.⁷⁹

The final synod which we shall discuss is the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod.⁸⁰ This one, too, had come into being only shortly before the first meeting of the Free Conferences. The Missouri Synod was organized in 1847⁸¹ largely through the efforts of the Saxons who had immigrated to Missouri under the leadership of Martin Stephan in 1839.

The confessional stand of the synod was well known in America because of the strong stand taken by Professor

⁷⁸Neve and Allbeck, op. cit., p. 77.

⁷⁹Jacobs, op. cit., p. 386.

⁸⁰This synod was organized as "Die deutsche Ev. Luth. Synode von Missouri, Ohio u. a. Staaten." It is hereinafter called the Missouri Synod.

⁸¹Neve and Allbeck, op. cit., p. 91.

C. F. W. Walther in the pages of Der Lutheraner. He used the publication to criticize the un-Lutheran character of the General Synod and to laud the rising party of conservative Lutherans.⁸²

Some Inter-Synodical Relations

In 1851 a letter was presented to the Tennessee Synod convention through the Ohio Synod delegate to the aforementioned synod. This letter, written by Professor Reynolds, "expressed a desire to see a closer and more efficient union between the Tennessee and Ohio Synods, which have the same doctrinal basis."⁸³ The Tennessee Synod acted favorably on the suggestion by resolving to propose any plan further than sending delegates to each other. The synod further repeated her recommendation to her own clergy to make use of the Ohio Synod publications, the Lutheran Standard and the Evangelical Review.⁸⁴ Again in the 1855 Tennessee Synod Convention the Reverend C. Spielmann, president of Capital University, Columbus, Ohio, was introduced to Synod and invited to a seat and vote.⁸⁵ And

⁸²Loc. cit.

⁸³Henkel, op. cit., pp. 125 f.

⁸⁴Ibid., p. 126.

⁸⁵Ibid., p. 142.

the Reverend J. P. Cline, of the Virginia Synod, was invited to a seat as an advisory member.⁸⁶

The Missouri Synod had also appointed delegates, Pastors Theodore Brohm and A. Hoyer, to the 1853 convention of the Tennessee Synod. But the two pastors wrote a letter to Tennessee voicing their regrets that they were unable to attend the meeting.⁸⁷ In this letter, they also requested the Tennessee Synod to send as many delegates as she would desire to the Missouri Synod convention to be held in St. Louis in 1854. They promised such delegates a friendly and hospitable reception.⁸⁸ Pastors Brohm and Hoyer also expressed the hope that the next Tennessee Synod convention would be held at a place more easily accessible to the Missouri Synod representatives.⁸⁹ The Reverend A. Biewend of Missouri also sent a notice to the Tennessee Synod in 1853, stating that he had been appointed to serve as delegate, but would be unable to attend, whereupon the Tennessee Convention resolved to express their appreciation to the Missouri Synod and to appoint

⁸⁶Loc. cit.

⁸⁷Ibid., p. 140.

⁸⁸Ibid., pp. 140 f.

⁸⁹Ibid., p. 140.

J. R. Moser as delegate to the next session of the Missouri Synod.⁹⁰

The Missouri Synod was disappointed that Pastor J. R. Moser could not attend the 1854 convention of Missouri and resolved to send Pastor T. J. Brohm of New York to the next convention of Tennessee.⁹¹ The Reverend Brohm did attend the Tennessee convention in 1854 and Tennessee appointed two return delegates "to cultivate a more intimate acquaintance and a closer union."⁹²

The delegates which the Tennessee Synod appointed to the other synods were more than good will ambassadors. They also came to ask questions and to become better acquainted with their hosts. In 1856 Pastor J. R. Moser asked the Missouri Synod to explain their method of

⁹⁰Ibid., p. 137.

⁹¹Synodal-Bericht der deutschen Ev. Luth. Synode von Missouri, Ohio, u. a. Staaten vom Jahre 1854, second Edition. (St. Louis: Druckerei der Synode von Missouri, Ohio u. a. Staaten, (1876)), p. 291.

⁹²Henkel, op. cit., p. 141.

celebrating the Lord's Supper.⁹³

Tennessee sent her delegates to numerous synods. In 1857 they appoint Pastor H. Goodman to the Eastern District Synod of Ohio; Pastor J. K. Hancher to the Western District Synod of Ohio; Pastor J. Stirewalt to the Joint Synod of Ohio; Pastor A. J. Brown to the Pennsylvania Synod; and the Reverend J. R. Moser to the Missouri Synod.⁹⁴

Similar appointments were made in 1858 with the exception that there was a delegate sent to the Western District of the Missouri Synod, since the body met in districts that year.⁹⁵

Ohio Synod, in exchanging delegates with the other synods we have mentioned was also making a bid for church

⁹³"Kirchlich-Zeitgeschichtliches," Lehre und Wehre, III (1856), 126.

It appears to have been the policy to mark all articles sent in or contributed to Lehre und Wehre. It was done with a notation immediately following the title of the article, hence the writer will assume, in the body of the thesis, that unmarked articles were written or edited by Walther until his resignation in February, 1859.

⁹⁴Henkel, op. cit., p. 149.

⁹⁵Ibid., p. 156.

union, however she insisted on "one confession. This confession . . . most unequivocally expressed in her symbolical books."⁹⁶

The Ohio Synod was interested also in promoting good relations between the other synods. She noted with regret the difficulties between Missouri and Buffalo. In the Ohio convention of September 1856, she pleaded that more brotherly relations might be sought by both parties with all their might.⁹⁷ She felt that unity between the churches was much more important than winning a fight. However, she also knew that brotherhood could be established only through agreement on doctrine. She reminded Buffalo that as long as she condemned, slandered, and perverted the Lutheran doctrine, there was no possibility of union.⁹⁸

The Definite Platform Appears

The influx of the German immigrants was felt also in the General Synod by an increased demand for confessionalism. Those who were not in sympathy with the confessions,

⁹⁶Sheatsley, op. cit., p. 160.

⁹⁷"Vermischte kirchliche Nachrichten," Lehre und Wehre, II (1856), 379.

⁹⁸Ibid., p. 380.

noted that they would have to take some action to stem the tide within their general body. The Reverend S. W. Harkey, Professor H. L. Baugher, and Doctor Benjamin Kurtz made an attempt in 1844, as a committee, when they gave a report that they regarded the Symbolical Books as "good and useful exhibitions of truth, but . . . not . . . binding on the conscience, except as far as they agree with the word [sic] of God."⁹⁹

These committee members were concerned about the change which was taking place confessionally within their body. They had become used to confessional laxity like that exhibited by F. H. Quitman. Doctor Quitman stated in his catechism that doctrines are set forth on the basis of their rationality, and he used Scripture passages "only as they can be made to conform to this test."¹⁰⁰

The first meeting of the mother synod of the South was held jointly with the Episcopalians. Their first constitution made no reference to, nor did it in any way imply adherence to, the Augsburg Confession.¹⁰¹

⁹⁹Ferm, op. cit., p. 165.

¹⁰⁰Ibid., p. 25.

¹⁰¹Ibid., p. 30.

The General Synod was formed by some of the nominal Lutheran bodies in an attempt to save the American Lutheran churches from complete disruption and amalgamation with the Reformed.¹⁰² So it served in a way to bring more confessional consciousness¹⁰³ to the rationalistic and unionistic groups. However, it was not a confessional organization, and, as we have noted before, the constitution made no mention of the Lutheran Symbolical Books.¹⁰⁴ But a new trend was beginning.

Two synods with a very liberal background, New York and Pennsylvania, authorized work on a common liturgy with Ohio, a much more conservative synod, taking this action in 1842.¹⁰⁵ By 1851 the German Pennsylvania Ministerium recommended the Lutheran Standard to its friends.¹⁰⁶ And when the Pennsylvania Ministerium rejoined the General Synod in 1853 it did so entertaining the

¹⁰²Neve and Allbeck, op. cit., p. 85.

¹⁰³Ferm, op. cit., pp. 34 f.

¹⁰⁴Ibid., p. 39.

¹⁰⁵Ibid., p. 144.

¹⁰⁶Ibid., p. 145.

views of the fundamental doctrines of the gospel as these are expressed in the Confessional writings of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, and especially in the Unaltered Augsburg Confession.¹⁰⁷

The Ministerium furthermore reserved the right to have its delegates withdraw should the General Synod at any time require their synod or any other synod to accept anything which is contrary to the old and accepted faith of the Evangelical Lutheran Church.¹⁰⁸

With many of the synods moving towards confession-
alism, each at a somewhat different rate, the more liberal
men saw themselves losing ground. From the middle forties,
men like S. S. Schmucker were waging a losing battle.¹⁰⁹
But they were determined to make a final desperate try to
turn the trend.

Early in September, 1853, many of the leading minis-
ters connected with the General Synod received a forty-two

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., pp. 146 f.

¹⁰⁸ Adolph D. Spaeth, D. Wilhelm Julius Mann, ein deutsch-amerikanischer Theologe (Reading, Penn.: Pilger-Buchhandlung, 1895), p. 172.

¹⁰⁹ Luther A. Weigle, in a "Foreword" to Vergilius Ferm's The Crisis in American Lutheran Theology (New York: The Century Co., 1927), p. ix.

page booklet, published by Miller and Burlock of Philadelphia. It contained neither the names of the writers nor who had authorized its distribution. It was entitled, Definite Platform, doctrinal and disciplinarian, for Evangelical Lutheran District Synods, constructed in accordance with the principles of the General Synod.¹¹⁰ There was no explanation except that the recipient should look at the pamphlet and if he desired to keep the copy, send twenty-five cents to the printer. If he did not want it, he was directed to return the pamphlet.¹¹¹

The Definite Platform was chiefly a revision of the Augsburg Confession. The primary changes were the omission of five teachings, which the authors considered errors. The following are the five, as noted by John G. Morris:

The only errors contained in the Confessions (which are all omitted in this Recension) are--

1. The approval of the ceremonies of the mass.
2. Private confession and absolution.
3. Denial of the divine obligation of the Christian Sabbath.
4. Baptismal Regeneration.
5. The real presence of the Body and Blood of the Saviour in the Eucharist.

¹¹⁰John G. Morris, Fifty Years in the Lutheran Ministry (Baltimore: Printed for the Author by James Young, 1878), p. 337.

¹¹¹Loc. cit.

With these few exceptions we retain the entire Augsburg Confession, with all the great doctrines of the Reformation.¹¹²

This document immediately caused much excitement.

The fact that it was sent out anonymously did not help it to be accepted, although many were quite certain of the authorship at the time it was sent out. Schmucker acknowledged having prepared it with Benjamin Kurtz.¹¹³ This admission appeared in the Observer of December 7, 1855.¹¹⁴ The third party implicated in the venture was Samuel Sprecher,¹¹⁵ professor at Wittenberg Seminary of Springfield, Ohio, and a brother-in-law to Schmucker.¹¹⁶

Sprecher freely admitted, in 1853, that they had departed from the doctrines and customs of the Lutheran Church. He expressed the feeling that the American Lutheran Church should do as the churches of the Augsburg Confession "did in 1580, exercise their right to declare what they regarded as the doctrines of the sacred [sic] Scriptures in regard to all points in dispute in the church."¹¹⁷

¹¹²Ibid., p. 338.

¹¹³Ferm, op. cit., p. 308.

¹¹⁴Ibid., pp. 269 f.

¹¹⁵Neve and Allbeck, op. cit., p. 95.

¹¹⁶Ferm, op. cit., p. 187.

¹¹⁷Ibid., p. 188.

The other authors also stated that they rejected all the other Symbolical books except the Augsburg Confession.¹¹⁸

Schmucker contended that all five of the doctrines of the Augsburg Confession which they considered incorrect were non-fundamental.¹¹⁹ The following was his definition of a fundamental doctrine:

A fundamental doctrine of Scripture is one that is regarded by the great body of evangelical Christians as essential to salvation, or essential to the system of Christianity; so that he who rejects it cannot be saved, neither be regarded as a believer in the system of Christian doctrine.¹²⁰

With this interpretation, Schmucker did not feel that he had gone too far afield, despite his acknowledgment that he had departed from the views of Luther and the early Lutheran divines on such doctrines as the Lord's Supper and baptism.¹²¹

Not nearly so mild mannered as S. S. Schmucker was his co-liberal, Benjamin Kurts. He had shown his theological thinking freely through the pages of the Observer, which he edited.¹²² He exhibited his color especially in his pamphlet, "Why Are You a Lutheran?" in which he

¹¹⁸Ibid., p. 192.

¹¹⁹Ibid., p. 301.

¹²⁰Loc. cit.

¹²¹Ibid., p. 307.

¹²²Weve and Allbeck, op. cit., p. 76.

maintained that it was a Lutheran principle "not to exact uniformity in minor points."¹²³ In this work, he also denied the real presence in the Lord's Supper by stating, "the bread and wine remain unchanged."¹²⁴

Kurtz loved controversy and readily detected weak points in the argument of opponents.¹²⁵ In 1857 Doctor Walther noted that Kurtz, in his ignorance of the confessions, was trying to direct the hatred of others against the conservatives.¹²⁶ When he was unsuccessful at persuading even his own synod to adopt the Definite Platform, he took the lead, in 1857, in forming a new one, the Melancthon Synod.¹²⁷ He finally resigned the editorship of the Observer in 1858.¹²⁸ The immediate reason for his resignation has not been determined by the writer.

¹²³Fern, op. cit., p. 159.

¹²⁴Ibid., p. 160.

¹²⁵Morris, op. cit., p. 137.

¹²⁶"Kirchlich-Zeitgeschichtliches," Lehre und Wehre, III (1857), 190.

¹²⁷Fern., op. cit., p. 336.

¹²⁸"Kirchlich-Zeitgeschichtliches," Lehre und Wehre, IV (1858), 64.

Reactions to the Definite Platform

One of the colleagues of Schmucker at Gettysberg Seminary, Charles Philip Krauth, wrote a letter to his son, Charles Porterfield Krauth, in which he deplored the fact that the Definite Platform appeared. He stated that he was sorry that Kurtz was defending it so vehemently in the Observer. There "ought to be an antidote to the Observer somewhere," he wrote.¹²⁹

Charles Porterfield Krauth led the Pittsburgh Synod, of which he was a member, in rejecting the Platform at the convention in May 1856.¹³⁰ But his action did not mean that he was completely convinced of the necessity of confessionalism in theology. In 1859 he prepared the resolution admitting the unionistic Melancthon Synod, under the leadership of Kurtz, into the General Synod.¹³¹ By 1866, however, he completely endorsed the stand of requiring exactness in doctrine.¹³²

The first pamphlet which was written in opposition to the Definite Platform came from the pen of the Reverend

¹²⁹Ferm, op. cit., p. 270.

¹³⁰Ibid., p. 312.

¹³¹F. Bente, American Lutheranism, II (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1919), p. 184.

¹³²Loc. cit.

N. J. Hoffman. It appeared in January 1856 and was entitled, The Broken Platform; or, A Brief Defense of Our Symbolical Books Against Recent Charges of Alleged Errors.¹³³ The pamphlet was generally considered poorly written and it failed to impress either side of the controversy.¹³⁴

The really substantial opposition to the Definite Platform from within the General Synod came from W. J. Mann, a man who had come to America from Germany and, in 1845, had begun his ministry in the Reformed church.¹³⁵ In 1850 he was called as assistant pastor to Doctor C. R. Denme at Saint Michael's and Zion Lutheran Church in Philadelphia,¹³⁶ since he had indicated that he was no longer satisfied by serving in the Reformed church.¹³⁷

Even Doctor Schmucker had to admit that the forty-six page pamphlet published by Pastor Mann against the Definite Platform was a truly Christian and gentlemanly

¹³³Ferm, op. cit., p. 280.

¹³⁴Loc. cit.

¹³⁵Spaeth, op. cit., p. 32.

¹³⁶Ibid., p. 127.

¹³⁷Ibid., p. 46.

work.¹³⁸ Mann called his work, A Plea for the Augsburg Confession, In Answer to the Objections of the Definite Platform: An Address to All Ministers and Laymen of the Evangelical (Lutheran) Church of the United States.¹³⁹

In it he charged the writers of the Platform with trying to remove the historically doctrinal basis of the Lutheran Church and force the members of the church to accept the new basis, suggesting that the writers would "unlutheranize everyone who would not accept their views."¹⁴⁰

Mann took each of the points of the Augsburg Confession which the authors of the Definite Platform had rejected, and showed the correctness of the confession and the folly of the Platform authors. He said that the Augustana does not "show approval of the ceremonies of the mass."¹⁴¹ As concern the private confession, Mann asked, why a minister should be permitted to hear the general confession of his entire flock, but not the individual confessions.¹⁴²

In his argumentation on the Christian Sabbath, he

¹³⁸Ferm., op. cit., p. 287.

¹³⁹Ibid., p. 286.

¹⁴⁰Ibid., p. 288.

¹⁴¹Ibid., p. 290.

¹⁴²Loc. cit.

contended that if the command were rightly understood, it is a divine obligation, but Sunday is not the divinely appointed day because the examples¹⁴³ of the apostles were not inspired.¹⁴⁴ To this Schmucker answered:

The apostles "when engaged in the specific and appropriate duties of that office, for which they were inspired . . . were as much under the guidance of the Spirit in their actions, as their words." Thus their "inspired [*sic*] example" in observing the day of the Lord's resurrection as a day of special religious convocation "is obligatory on Christians of all ages."¹⁴⁵

Mann explained that the difference between the Augsburg Confession and the Definite Platform was not so great on the Sabbath as it appeared at first, because both carried the idea that it was a sin to impede the holiness of the Lord's day.¹⁴⁶

However, on the Sacraments the Augsburg Confession and the Definite Platform had very marked differences. The Platform denied the Words of Scripture and the writers maintained that doctrines surrounding the Sacraments are of a non-fundamental nature. "Here, surely, is an issue,"

¹⁴³Italics those of Mann.

¹⁴⁴Ferm, op. cit., p. 290.

¹⁴⁵Ibid., pp. 306 f.

¹⁴⁶Ibid., p. 292.

Mann said.¹⁴⁷ The Augustana is, and ever shall be correct¹⁴⁸ because Jesus' words mean exactly what they say. When Jesus says to His disciples, "This is my blood," then, "this is my blood." [sic] ¹⁴⁹ Mann felt that it was strange, indeed, that the authors of the Platform felt so strongly about the Christian Sabbath, yet were so shallow on the Sacraments.¹⁵⁰

In 1857 Pastor Mann wrote an essay entitled, "Lutheranism in America,"¹⁵¹ in which he described the church as having two wings and a center. The left wing was made up of those in sympathy with Doctors Kurtz and Schmucker, whom he calls "Know-nothings." The right wing is the confessional group of Lutherans in America exemplified by Missouri and Buffalo.¹⁵³ And despite the fact that Mann belonged to a synod which he called the center group because they

¹⁴⁷Ibid., p. 293.

¹⁴⁸Loc. cit.

¹⁴⁹Loc. cit.

¹⁵⁰Ibid., p. 294.

¹⁵¹W. J. Mann, "Lutheranism in America", Lehre und Wehre, III, (1857), 123.

¹⁵²Loc. cit.

¹⁵³Loc. cit.

wanted to tread between the two extremes, his sympathies were with the Missouri Synod.¹⁵⁴ And later in life, Doctor Mann became a very strong defender of the Confessional writings.¹⁵⁵

Although the Definite Platform had caused a great stir within the church bodies, the authors had composed it for a different purpose. They wanted it adopted by the various district synods of the General Synod. The following is a compilation of the action taken by those synods. Some of the synods are also included which were not in membership with the general body.

In September 1856 the Pennsylvania Synod unanimously resolved to ask their representatives to vote against it.¹⁵⁶ Also in 1856 the Alleghany Synod adopted the doctrine, but rejected the Platform.¹⁵⁷ The East Pennsylvania Synod rejected the Platform already in September, 1855.¹⁵⁸ Maryland had a resolution on the floor to oppose the Platform but the secretary failed to record whether this synod, to which Kurtz belonged at the time, passed

¹⁵⁴Ibid., p. 124.

¹⁵⁵Spaeth, op. cit., p. 98.

¹⁵⁶Ferm, op. cit., p. 318.

¹⁵⁷Ibid., p. 320.

¹⁵⁸Ibid., pp. 236 f.

the resolution in 1855.¹⁵⁹

The Hartwick Synod drew up its own doctrinal declaration in preference to the Platform for reasons of its own.¹⁶⁰ In 1855 the Virginia Synod condemned the document,¹⁶¹ and Northern Illinois added its rejection in 1856.¹⁶² Although Western Virginia heartily agreed with the doctrine of the Platform the synod unanimously condemned it in 1856, because "it is deprecating for a controversy."¹⁶³ North Carolina Synod voted that there be no new doctrinal statements and no changed requirements from those held by the general body.¹⁶⁴ West Pennsylvania, which had Schmucker within its membership, warned against the Definite Platform in 1855.¹⁶⁵ The German Pennsylvania Ministerium rejected the motherless document and asked that the other synods be warned against it. She encouraged all to remain loyal to the Unaltered Augsburg Confession.¹⁶⁶ Miami agreed with the doctrine,

¹⁵⁹Ibid., p. 255.

¹⁶⁰Neve and Allbeck, op. cit., p. 99.

¹⁶¹Ferm, op. cit., pp. 247 f.

¹⁶²Ibid., p. 320.

¹⁶³Ibid., p. 316.

¹⁶⁴Ibid., p. 321.

¹⁶⁵Ibid., pp. 242 f.

¹⁶⁶Ibid., pp. 310 f.

but rejected the Definite Platform in 1856.¹⁶⁷ As early as 1855 the English District of the Joint Synod of Ohio rejected the document, in the form of a solemn protest.¹⁶⁸

The synods which were favorably disposed towards the Platform were: the Olive Branch Synod in 1855;¹⁶⁹ the Wittenberg Synod, a district synod of Ohio;¹⁷⁰ the English Synod of Ohio in 1855;¹⁷¹ and the Central Pennsylvania Synod in 1856.¹⁷² However, Central Pennsylvania had such an internal disturbance thereafter that the president called a special meeting the same year to clarify their action on the Platform.¹⁷³

It became evident that the Definite Platform incited people to action, but generally not favorable towards the document. A growing confessional consciousness was definitely on its way up in America and the proponents of

¹⁶⁷Neve and Allbeck, op. cit., p. 99.

¹⁶⁸Ferm, op. cit., pp. 264 f.

¹⁶⁹"Vorwort zu Jahrgang 1856," Lehre und Wehre, II (1856), 3.

¹⁷⁰Neve and Allbeck, op. cit., p. 99.

¹⁷¹"Vorwort zu Jahrgang 1856," Lehre und Wehre, II (1856), 3.

¹⁷²Ferm, op. cit., p. 309.

¹⁷³Ibid., pp. 316 f.

liberalism became increasingly unpopular. But they did not give up easily. Even a native Lutheran preacher from Columbus, Texas, a Mister Scherer, complained to Kurtz of the growing number of confessional clergymen in his state.¹⁷⁴

Schmucker noted in the Observer of December 21, 1855 that the Evangelical Review¹⁷⁵ had taken a stand against the Platform.¹⁷⁶ Also the New York Lutheran Herold proclaimed that treason had been committed against the historic Symbols of the church. Schmucker branded the writers as "foreigners" who did not know how "to appreciate the liberties of America, either civic or religious."¹⁷⁷

Walther noted that with the exception of the Observer, the Lutherische Kirchenbote¹⁷⁸ of Gettysburg and the Evangelical Lutheran¹⁷⁹ of Springfield, there was no official publication of any Lutheran synod which recommended the

¹⁷⁴"Kirchlich-Zeitgeschichtliches," Lehre und Wehre, III (1857), 61.

¹⁷⁵Founded in 1849 by Prof. W. M. Reynolds then of Pennsylvania College. It existed within the General Synod.

¹⁷⁶Ferm, op. cit., p. 276.

¹⁷⁷Loc. cit.

¹⁷⁸Of the General Synod and under the same influence as the Observer.

¹⁷⁹The periodical was influenced by Sprecher and was published by S. W. Harkey.

Platform. All other leading publications opposed it.¹⁸⁰ And, certainly, those edited by him in the Missouri Synod were opposed to it. Pastor Walther was happy that the Platform was being so largely rejected by the bodies and their papers.¹⁸¹ In January of 1856 he called the document a dark cloud, hanging over the horizon of American Lutheranism.¹⁸²

When the Definite Platform rather divided the General Synod than helped unite her, and when it became evident that the controversy carried on in the pages of the Observer harmed the body further, leading men from both sides of the dispute in the General Synod signed an agreement and published it in February 1856, stating that they would desist and declare peace.¹⁸³ In this peace treaty, called the "Pacific Overture", the men agreed to

Unite and abide on the doctrinal basis of the General Synod of absolute assent to the Word of God as the only rule of faith and practice, and fundamental [sic] agreement with the Augsburg Confession.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸⁰"Vorwort zu Jahrgang 1856" Lehre und Wehre, II. (1856), 3.

¹⁸¹Ibid., pp. 3 f.

¹⁸²Loc. cit.

¹⁸³Ferm, op. cit., pp. 295 f.

¹⁸⁴Ibid., pp. 312-314.

Schmucker was one of those signing the overture, but since he was certain that some would not take his signature as genuine, he also inserted another article in the same issue of the Observer attesting the fact that he had really signed the agreement.¹⁸⁵ But later he decided that he was not obligated to silence except in the church periodical. He felt the need of answering Doctor Mann's pamphlet. He wanted to place the Platform in as favorable a light as possible for the coming conventions. So in April, 1856 he published a book of 192 pages bearing the title, American Lutheranism Vindicated; Or, Examination of the Lutheran Symbols, on Certain Topics: Including a Reply to the Plea of Rev. W. J. Mann.¹⁸⁶

But even after this was done, it had to be admitted that the Definite Platform failed to liberalize the General Synod, "but it encouraged the old school to prosecute its views with more boldness and ardor."¹⁸⁷ Many concluded that Schmucker with his liberal propaganda was actually harming the church of Christ. A. Biewend of Missouri was

¹⁸⁵Ibid., pp. 295 f.

¹⁸⁶Ibid., p. 300.

¹⁸⁷Ibid., p. 334.

one who was convinced of this.¹⁸⁸

Finally in 1864 a document known as the Pittsburgh Agreement,¹⁸⁹ drawn up by Charles Porterfield Krauth, was adopted by the General Synod. This agreement repudiated the doctrines of S. S. Schmucker,¹⁹⁰ thus underscoring the contention of many that Schmucker had acted most unwisely, even for his own interests. He defeated his own purpose by the manner in which the Definite Platform was distributed. He turned people against it who would have subscribed to its doctrine. After this setback liberal "American Lutheranism" never rallied thereafter.¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁸A. Biewend, "Wo die Lehre falsch ist, ist das Leben auch nicht recht," Lehre und Wehre, IV (1858), 70.

¹⁸⁹Ferm, op. cit., pp. 312 ff.
This document is not to be confused with the "Pittsburgh Agreement" of the twentieth century.

¹⁹⁰Ferm, op. cit., pp. 340 f.

¹⁹¹Weigle, op. cit., p. ix.

CHAPTER III

THE CONFERENCES

Preparatory Events

The conservative Lutheran theologians of America feared that the Definite Platform would threaten the very existence of confessional theology. These men realized that, at best, liberal theology would crumble under its own weight only after doing considerable damage to the church. That knowledge prompted the conservatives to take the action which we discussed in the preceding chapter. But most of the opposition to the Platform started with people acting individually. The results of their opposition were so pronounced and strong that other conservatives took heart. C. F. W. Walther, for one, was filled with joy and hope that there might soon be a united Lutheran Church in America.¹ The problem of uniting the conservatives was one of finding a method by which they could reach doctrinal agreement.

¹E. L. Lueker, "Walther and the Free Lutheran Conferences of 1856-1859," Concordia Theological Monthly, XV (1944), 533.

In Europe a kind of gathering had been instituted, in which people came together for the sole purpose of discussing the content of the Augsburg Confession.²

Vorwort

Walther concluded that conferences of that nature could well be utilized to unite the Lutheran churches of America in their doctrine.³ Therefore in January of 1856 he published a notice in Lehre und Wehre suggesting that such conferences might be used. He asked for comments from others on the practicability of the idea of inviting all who would subscribe to the Augsburg Confession.⁴

Endorsements came to encourage such conferences. In March Lehre und Wehre carried an endorsement by a person identified as A. B.⁵ This man suggested that the idea of having the free conferences might be practical, but it would be necessary for more persons of the same opinion to let themselves be heard.⁶ He, as an individual,

²W. A. Passavant, "Free Conferences," Missionary, IX (May 1, 1856), 54.

³"Vorwort zu Jahrgang 1856," Lehre und Wehre, II (1856), 4.

⁴Loc. cit.

⁵The writer is of the impression that the article was written by A. Biewend of the Missouri Synod.

⁶A. B., "Eine Freie Konferenz," Lehre und Wehre, II (1856), 84.

August Biewend

was convinced that a free conference of the nature suggested would unite the spirit of the people in the knowledge of a common faith, and in that way would serve to unite the church.⁷

In June of the same year, Walther published the first appeal for such a conference. This appeal bore the signatures of four men besides Walther. The four, all pastors in St. Louis, were, F. Wyneken, G. Schaller, F. Buenger, and A. Biewend. And each of them suggested that Columbus, Ohio be used for the meeting place.⁸

The second appeal, identical to the first, was

⁷Ibid., p. 84-5.

⁸"Aufruf," Lehre und Wehre, C. F. W. Walther, editor, II (1856), 186 f. The following is the text:

Aufruf zu einer allgemeinen Conferenz aller Lutheraner, Welche die ausburgische Confession als das Bekenntnis ihres Glaubens anerkennen.

"Die Unterzeichneten, Prediger der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche in den Vereinigten Staaten, lassen in der Ueberzeugung, dass die Einigkeit und das Wohl unsers lutherischen Zion durch den freien Austausch von Ansichten ueber die verschiedenen Interessen unserer Kirche in diesen Lande unter im Glauben einigen Bruedern kraeftig wird befoerdert werden, hiemit eine Einladung an alle Glieder der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche in den Vereinigten Staaten ergeben, welche die unveraenderte ausburgische Confession fuer eine getreue Darlegung der Lehren des goettlichen Wortes anerkennen, mit ihnen in einer freien und bruederlichen Conferenz ueber die gegenwaertige Lage und Beduerfnisse der Kirche in Amerika, in der Stadt-- Mittwochs den 1. October d. j. zusammenzutreffen."

published one month later and had a total of twenty-five signatures attached. (This included the five which appeared on the original appeal.)⁹ The men suggested three additional places which might be considered as possible locations for the conference. Not all of the signatures appearing on this second appeal were those of members of the Missouri Synod. And thirty-four more men signed an identical petition in August, dividing their place preferences among the same four places suggested in July.¹⁰

The fourth and final appeal was published in September, with twelve new signatures. Of the four cities which had been suggested by the petitioners as the meeting place the final count showed the following results: Columbus, Ohio was selected by fifty-eight as the most desirable place; eight preferred Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; seven chose Cincinnati, Ohio; and two requested New Market, Virginia.

Even before the appearance of the appeals, other publications and individuals began to take cognizance of Walther's suggestions for the meeting.

The Lutheran Standard welcomed the idea and endorsed the necessity of such conferences, stating that there was

⁹"Aufruf," Lehre und Wehre, II (1856), 216 f.

¹⁰"Aufruf," Lehre und Wehre, II (1856), 245 f.

genuine hope in meetings of that nature. The paper repeated the appeal of Walther verbatim. The editor further suggested that for a period of two months prior to the meeting, the announcement appear in all of the friendly church periodicals.¹¹ On June 13, 1856 the editor proposed that the conference be made self-sustaining so that the burden of supporting the conference would not fall on the people of the city which might be selected as the conference site. By doing so, the conference members would not have to wait for an invitation from any group, but could select the most suitable place for themselves.¹²

A member of the Ohio Synod expressed his joy in the pages of the Lutheran Herald. He said that it was such a good thing for the members of the rechtleubigen Synoden to gather and interchange ideas and share experiences with one another. They could do so at a Free Conference.¹³

But there were also some words of a different nature. In an article entitled "Free Conferences," in the May 1, 1856 issue of the Missionary, Passavant stated that he had

¹¹"Vorschlag in Betreff der allgemeinen lutherischen Conferenz," Lehre und Wehre, II (1856), 185 f.

¹²Loc. cit.

¹³"Eine Allgemeine Conferenz der lutherischen Prediger in America," Lehre und Wehre, II (1856), 149.

also had the opportunity to be in Germany when a free conference was held. At that conference, he said, there were people even of different denominations, discussing the Augsburg Confession. Passavant thought that such conferences could also serve as a pattern for America. And he stated that if the Americans hoped to have fruitful conferences, they would not limit their attendance to such as subscribed to the Augsburg Confession.¹⁴

A supporter of Walther's plan defended the churchman's position by noting that much more can be accomplished by brothers who are united in one house of faith and stand together against the outside.¹⁵ If others attended, such proximity would be lost.

But the editor of the Missionary did not let his ideas drop very easily. In October 23, 1856 he suggested that the next October there might be a free conference held at Reading, Pennsylvania in the same week as the General

¹⁴Passavant, op. cit., p. 54.

¹⁵"Die allgemeine Konferenz und der Missionary," Lehre und Wehre, II (1856), 183 f.

Synod. At this conference all those who were pastors or members of any Lutheran church would be welcome.¹⁶ He was apparently convinced that something might be done to form a larger organic union of Lutherans in America. But Walther would not be deterred. He contended that it is essential to be united in doctrine before two groups can cooperate. There could be no exception even in such things as publishing common Sunday school material, doing mission work and the like.¹⁷ Hence there was no point in getting together with those who are admittedly not of the same faith.

Soon after the pleas for the Free Conference began to be published, the South conference of the East Ohio District of the Joint Synod of Ohio resolved that they would be unable to attend such a conference because:

(1). Lip service and paper endorsement of the Augsburg Confession were common in America, but not a true acceptance of the symbols.

(2). The call to the conference did not mention any symbols except the Augustana.

¹⁶"Vermischte kirchliche Nachrichten," Lehre und Wehre, II (1856), 380.

¹⁷"Unionistische Werktaetigkeit," Der Lutheraner (1857), 53.

(3). The South conference was of the opinion that the Buffalo Synod would be excluded from the conferences. And all such as accepted the confessions should have been permitted to take part.¹⁸

Walther answered the objections of the conference in Der Lutheraner. In substance, these are his answers:

(1). The fact that there was an insincere acceptance of the Augsburg Confession in America did not militate against the purpose of the Free Conference.

(2). Any person who conscientiously rejected a doctrine taught in any of the Symbolical books, could not give an unqualified endorsement of the Augustana.

(3). He could not determine why the Buffalo Synod would be excluded from the proposed conference, unless she would refuse to attend because Missouri were there. If the Missourians were standing in the way of a true Lutheran union, then they would be most willing to stay away and bear the shame of not being in the true union, Walther concluded.¹⁹

¹⁸"Urtheil einer Conferenz," Der Lutheraner, XII (1856), 181.

¹⁹Ibid., pp. 181 ff.

The First Conference Results

The first Free Conference was held from the first to the seventh of October, 1856, at Trinity Church in Columbus, Ohio. Walther reported that there were seventy-three persons present, representing Ohio, Pennsylvania, New York and Missouri.²⁰ They had also received correspondence from many within the aforementioned synods as well as from some in the Tennessee, Scandinavian,²¹ and Iowa²² Synods.

The host pastor, F. W. Lehmann, a member of the Joint Synod of Ohio, opened the conference with a hymn, a prayer and the confession of faith in the words of the Apostles' Creed. The conference immediately took note of the divided condition of the Lutheran Church in America. Observing that oneness consists in unity of doctrine, the conference called on all members of the Lutheran Church in America to gather with them to form a union of faith.

²⁰"Die allgemeine Conferenz," Der Lutheraner, XIII (1856), 33.

²¹"Vermischte kirchliche Nachrichten," Lehre und Wehre, II (1856), 348 f.

²²"Die allgemeine Conferenz," Der Lutheraner, XIII (1856), 33.

In the second session of the Free Conference, the members decided to adopt a plan of reading an article from the Augustana and then discussing it. After some preliminary exchange of ideas, the conference discussed the forward to the Augsburg Confession and proceeded with the first article. The conference membership affirmed its acceptance of each of the articles as they completed discussing it. There were, however, some slight differences in the opinions of the proper application of the articles,²³ as the conference proceeded with the discussion of the first

²³The first noteworthy difference was voiced in the discussion of the fifth article. The conference participants recognized that among themselves they generally regarded Predigtamt and Pfarramt to be synonymous. But the Augustana made a difference in that the fifth article explained the means through which saving faith is attained, namely through the ministry of the Word and Sacraments. The Latin clearly illustrates it thus: institutum est ministerium docendi evangelii et porrigendi sacramenta.

After three sessions of discussing this difference, it was moved to discuss the difference further when they would come to article fourteen. Then the conference agreed that the term Predigtamt meant the services within the church, or the administration of the means of grace.

The members of the Free Conference expressed their agreement with the fifth article of the Augsburg Confession.

"Auszug," Der Lutheraner, XIII (1856), 50 ff.

seven articles.²⁴

²⁴In the discussion of the seventh article they observed that the "Church" described is one which has always existed. For that reason the Lutheran Church is historically not identical with the "Christian Church." However any church which is fully "the true church" must show the marks of the true church, which the Lutheran Church does in its historical development. It is not identical with "the Christian Church" because it has not always existed nor does it embrace all believers. But since the Lutheran Church confesses as the Christian Church has always confessed, it could be spoken of as the one holy Christian Church.

The opinion was expressed that the phrase "in which the Gospel is rightly taught and the Sacraments are rightly administered" can only refer to a visible organization, inasmuch as the preaching of the Word and the administration of the Sacraments is a visible act. The view prevailed, however, that the marks of the Church can be visible without the thing itself being visible. The presence of the marks of the Church indicates that the Church is present but does not indicate who the members of the Church are. It is easier to recognize the presence of the Church where the Word and Sacraments are present in their purity than where they are not thus present. It would be a mistake, however, to deny that the Church is also present there, where, in addition to destructive errors, fragments of the truth are taught. For also these fragments are the pure Word and hence marks of the Church. Yet this fact does not warrant the conclusion that one is free to join any visible church. Every Christian is bound upon pain of losing his salvation to flee all false prophets.

The conference agreed to the following in point of ceremonies. "Although the return to the doctrines of our fathers will more and more tend to instill a pleasure in the beautiful forms of church service which they had and a person may have it as a goal to lead our Lutheran people to them again, still the matter is and always will remain a matter of Christian freedom. . . ."

E. L. Lueker, "Walther and the Free Lutheran Conferences," Concordia Theological Monthly, XV (1944), 548 f.

The persons present then resolved to meet again on October 6, 1857. They closed the conference with prayer and "singing."²⁵

After that first conference, Walther was very enthusiastic about the venture. He said that all of those who were there were seeking God's will rather than their own, and many were examples of Christian humility.²⁶ All discussion, he said, was in the attitude of love and in the interest of truth and peace and for the purpose of attaining true unity. He was also highly pleased by the fact that the delegates understood that it was far less important that the state of organic union be established than that all agree in doctrine.²⁷ Taking these things into consideration, Walther concluded that the conference was a success and true blessing, even far beyond the fondest hopes which they had entertained.²⁸ There had been differences of opinion between those who came to the conference, but after they got there and the members saw each other face to face, many of the differences vanished and many misunderstandings

²⁵"Auszug," Der Lutheraner, XIII (1856), 49-52.

²⁶"Die allgemeine Conferenz," Der Lutheraner, XIII (1856), 33.

²⁷Loc. cit.

²⁸"Vermischte kirchliche Nachrichten," Lehre und Wehre, II (1856), 349.

cleared up, he said.²⁹

The conference proved most encouraging for many participants. Before the conference, they recognized that a large segment of the Lutherans in America had fallen prey to the spirit of laxity in doctrine. But at this conference, it had become evident that those who attended had not fallen into that temptation. This knowledge strengthened and encouraged those present. By their strengthening one another thus, Walther was of the opinion that the participants had come closer to their goal. Before the conference most of the men had found themselves in a dilemma, with a choice of either separating into small groups or uniting in a unionistic manner. Now they had found a possible answer to their problem and they had taken the first step in overcoming the situation³⁰ by making the beginning move toward a confessional union.³¹

Another of the men attending the conference from Missouri was Doctor Gustav Seyffarth, who had just come from Germany and accepted a post at Concordia Seminary.

²⁹"Die allgemeine Conferenz," Der Lutheraner, XIII (1856), 34.

³⁰"Vorwort zu Jahrgang 1857," Lehre und Wehre, III (1857), 1 f.

³¹"Die allgemeine Conferenz," Der Lutheraner, XIII (1856), 34.

Walther had a very high opinion of him, having known him while they were both still in Germany. He recognized Seyffarth as a great teacher who had instructed many of the pastors who had studied at Leipzig, and Walther considered Concordia very fortunate to get this man, who had other opportunities to get positions of prestige and good pay.³²

So far as the writer can tell, Seyffarth made no literary record of his impressions of the conference, but he gave a verbal report of his impressions to the St. Louis Pastoral Conference on October 11, 1856. According to the minutes on the report, Seyffarth's evaluation was considerably different from Walther's. Seyffarth said that the conference seemed to accomplish very little and lacked interest and enthusiasm until they finally got into a good discussion of the Augsburg Confession proper.³³

The Standard agreed with Walther that the first Free Conference was more productive than "even the best friends could have hoped." In enthusiastic fashion the Standard noted that the Apostolic church, with its entire membership,

³²C. F. W. Walther, Briefe von C. F. W. Walther, I (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1915), pp. 101-102.

³³Minutes of October 11, 1856, Protokoll-Buch der St. Louis Konferenz vom 8. Oktober 1853 bis zum 25. April 1864. This volume is in the archives of Concordia Historical Institute in St. Louis, Missouri.

was hardly any larger at one time than this gathering.³⁴ From this observation one can readily note the inference that the Standard saw a great potential in the conferences.

On the other side of the argument, the editor of the Lutheran Observer³⁵ found few favorable words about the Free Conference. Kurtz called the results poor and the accomplishments meager.³⁶

The Buffalo Synod said that she could not see any purpose in the Free Conferences nor would she expect any good to come of them. There was no reason for their being held, Buffalo continued. Of first concern, said Buffalo, should be the fact that a dispute existed between her and the Missouri Synod. Buffalo suggested that an uninterested Lutheran National Court be established in America to handle all difficulties between synods. Now, without even bothering to answer Buffalo's proposal, Missouri had gone to the Free Conferences and put Ohio on the spot between the two contending synods. Buffalo was certain, however, that God

³⁴"Vermischte kirchliche Nachrichten," Lehre und Wehre, II (1856), 381.

³⁵The Lutheran Observer was edited by Benjamin Kurtz of the General Synod. The periodical will hereinafter be referred to as the Observer.

³⁶"Vermischte kirchliche Nachrichten," Lehre und Wehre, II (1856), 381.

would take care of the situation.³⁷

This controversy was also noted by an outsider, who had previously called both of the contending synods confessional. Doctor Mann of the General Synod concluded, however, that Missouri was not the guilty party in the dispute.³⁸

The Second Conference

The second Free Conference was in session from October twenty-ninth through November fourth in 1857 at the First German Lutheran Church of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.³⁹ This conference, also, was opened with a hymn and prayer by Professor Lehmann, the previous year's chairman. This time the following synods were represented: Ohio, eleven delegates; Pittsburgh, five delegates; Tennessee, one delegate; New York, three delegates; Norwegian Lutheran, two delegates;

³⁷"Kirchlich-Zeitgeschichtliches," Lehre und Wehre, III (1857), 127.

³⁸"Kirchlich-Zeitgeschichtliches," Lehre und Wehre, III (1857), 125.

³⁹By going through the records of the charges of the pastors who were members of the second Free Conference, and by eliminating men in this manner, the writer has come to the conclusion that this conference was probably held at a Pittsburgh Synod Church, despite the fact that no Pittsburgh Synod pastor had joined the first Free Conference.

Missouri, twenty-two delegates and four delegates with no affiliation.

The conference began its doctrinal study with the eighth and ninth articles of the Augsburg Confession. After a lengthy discussion of the ninth article of the Augustana,⁴⁰ a non-conference-member insisted that the conference was deviating from its purpose and intent and had begun condemning individuals. He said that as soon as they condemned anyone, they were acting as a synod and were oppressing free thought. The conference answered the

⁴⁰In the ninth article, the conference noted the phrase "Baptism is necessary." Some concluded that this would mean that Holy Baptism is a requirement to salvation. In such a requirement, it condemned the anabaptists. But the point was made that the phrase does not refer to an absolute necessity, but rather, that such necessity flows from the divine command to perform the divinely ordained means.

The papists, who teach ex opere operato could teach the absolute necessity of Holy Baptism, but not the Lutherans who teach that man is justified by the faith which is generated in Holy Baptism, not by the mere performance of an act.

Anabaptists, on the other hand, are not condemned by their rejection of the absolute necessity of Baptism, but by their rejection of the divinely ordained means, and failure to follow the divine command.

It was further pointed out that the emphasis in the second article does not rest on Baptism, but on the words, "born again."

"Auszug," Der Lutheraner, XIV (1857), 81 ff.

objections⁴¹ and then concluded its discussion of the ninth article, proceeding next to the tenth.

Before its adjournment with a hymn, prayer and blessing, the conference resolved to have its next session earlier so that the teachers from the schools could more readily attend.⁴² This also would give an opportunity to the students of theology to attend. A number of them did attend the fourth Free Conference.⁴³

Reports of this Free Conference do not appear to be

⁴¹In substance the reply of the conference follows:

1. The conference by its action condemned no one, but was merely denying the right of such as do not accept the Unaltered Augsburg Confession, to bear the name Lutheran.

2. Every individual Christian and every Christian group has the right to condemn false doctrine and mark those who promulgate false doctrine. The conference demanded only that persons adhere to the verbal meaning of the Augsburg Confession.

3. The question here was not one of expediency, but one that pertained to the glory of God and the truth. It was not useless to correct false brethren.

4. The conference would have dealt unjustly if it had failed to condemn those who openly adhered to the Symbols, but actually rejected some of their doctrines.

5. The motion adopted would certainly not be directed against those to whom it did not pertain.

"Auszug," Der Lutheraner, XIV, (1857), 81 ff.

⁴²Loc. cit.

⁴³"Auszug," Der Lutheraner, XVI (1859), 10.

numerous,⁴⁴ but it is quite noticable that Walther, at least, was aware that confessionalism was gaining ground among the participants and their neighbors. He began the year 1858 in Lehre und Wehre by pointing out that it was the duty of the confessional church to lead others into the

⁴⁴W. A. Passavant gave his impression of this Free Conference in an article in the Missionary. Although Passavant was not a member of the conference, he gives indications that he attended the sessions and observed the delegates in all they did. His article carries the following observations.

The conference was true, in its complexion, to what might be expected, its being called primarily by the conservative Lutheran bodies of the west. The fact that it was held in the east did not deter the participants from holding to their confessionalism.

The dominating figure at the conference was Walther, of the Missouri Synod's Concordia College in St. Louis. He held his position as a leader in the discussion by the fact that he was a man of "singular power as a logician, a conversationalist and a profound theologian."

The other participating men were also remarkable men, according to Passavant. He says, "We are deeply thankful in being able to testify, that in our humble judgment, no class of ministers in this country are more sound in their doctrine of justification by faith, and all the great doctrines of God's word [sic]. If they are not Protestant, then were Luther and the early Reformers not Protestants."

But the candor and impartiality of the conference was remarkable, the members even going to the extent of courteously answering objections of a non-member.

However, Passavant could not be sympathetic to the Free Conference because he insisted that to draw outside people into the conference and convince them of the correctness of the Augsburg Confession, the conference would have to broaden its membership to permit also such as did not fully accept its teachings. As it happened, he said all were of the same opinion before they came.

W. A. Passavant, "The Recent Free Conference," The Missionary, II (Nov. 12, 1857), 166.

Word of God.⁴⁵ Other synods matched his words with action.

In the Tennessee Synod, some of the members wanted to increase the confessional requirements to include a subscription to all of the Symbolical books, instead of merely to the Augsburg Confession, as had been the case.⁴⁶ And in January of 1858, Walther noted that Tennessee was removing her "splinters" from her "body."⁴⁷ By May of that year, Pastor H. Wetzel of Tennessee had drawn up a constitution for English-speaking congregations. This model required that the entire Book of Concord be accepted as authoritative in doctrine.⁴⁸

⁴⁵"Vorwort zu Jahrgang 1858," Lehre und Wehre, IV (1858), 1.

⁴⁶"Kirchlich-Zeitgeschichtliches," Lehre und Wehre, III (1857), 352.

⁴⁷"Kirchlich-Zeitgeschichtliches," Lehre und Wehre, IV (1858), 28.

⁴⁸A portion of this constitution read as follows:

"Sect. 3. Our Congregation acknowledges

1st, All the canonical books of the Old and New Testament as the revealed Word of God.

2nd, The collective Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church as that form and rule drawn from the word of God according to which, because it is taken from the word of God, not only doctrine is to be held and examined in our congregation, but also all doctrinal and religious controversies are to be decided and regulated. These are the Three Chief Symbols, the unaltered Augsburg Confession, the Apology of the same, the Smalkald Articles, Luther's Smaller and Larger Catechism, the Formula of Concord, and the Articles of Visitation."

H. Wetzel, "Form einer Constitution fuer eine englisch-lutherische Gemeinde", Lehre und Wehre, IV, (1858), 153.

In her May meeting, the Wisconsin Synod, formerly an unconfessional group, pledged herself to the Unaltered Augsburg Confession with "heart and mouth."⁴⁹ Thus the confessional picture seemed to be changing so rapidly that Walther expressed surprise when the newly organized English District of Ohio required only the Unaltered Augsburg Confession as its doctrinal standard.⁵⁰ To require more, had been very unusual a few years before, even among the confessional bodies. But in 1858, Walther reminded the people that anyone who carried the name "Lutheran" should certainly believe, teach, and confess in accord with Luther.⁵¹

The Third Conference

Pastor H. C. Schwan announced that the third conference would be held at Zion Church⁵² in Cleveland, Ohio, beginning August 5, 1858.⁵³ There were twenty-five representatives from Missouri, sixteen from Ohio, three from

⁴⁹"Kirchlich-Zeitgeschichtliches," Lehre und Wehre, IV (1858), 285.

⁵⁰"Kirchlich-Zeitgeschichtliches," Lehre und Wehre, IV (1858), 381.

⁵¹"Vorwort der Redaction," Der Lutheraner, XV (1858), 1.

⁵²The writer is of the opinion that this church was Missouri Synod.

⁵³H. C. Schwan, "Die allgemeine evangelisch-lutherische Conferenz," Der Lutheraner, XIV (1858), 167.

New York, one from Tennessee and one unaffiliated member present at the sessions.⁵⁴

After this conference was opened with a hymn and a prayer by the chairman (of the previous year) Lehmann, someone present noted that many were not in attendance because they were unaware of the goal of the conference. Thereupon the conference referred back to the second session in Columbus, where the assembly had agreed to read the Unaltered Augsburg Confession together so that they might discuss its meaning in a brotherly fashion.⁵⁵ The conference then proceeded to discuss the eleventh and the twenty-fifth⁵⁶

⁵⁴"Auszug," Der Lutheraner, XV (1858), 19.

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 20. The reference from the second session reads:

"Sie wolle die ungeaenderte augsburgsche Confession gemeinschaftlich lesen, um sich durch daran knuepfende, freie, bruederliche Aussprache gegenseitig zu vergewissern, dass sie in ihren Gliedern im rechten Verstaendnisz derselben Eines Herzens und Sinnes sei, und sich dadurch in der Einigkeit des Glaubens zu staerken."

⁵⁶Since the eleventh and the twenty-fifth articles both deal with confession, the two related articles were discussed. In connection with these two articles, all of those who had discontinued private confession in their congregations were encouraged to reinstate it and offer absolution. Other notations from the discussion included:

1. That the church at the time of the Reformation retained private confession,
2. Why it was highly regarded,
3. Enumeration of sins is not necessary in confession,
4. Confession is a church institution.

"Auszug," Der Lutheraner, XV (1858), 19 f.

articles before proceeding to the twelfth⁵⁷ and thirteenth⁵⁸ articles of the Augustana. At the conclusion, the conference held at Zion Lutheran Church of Columbus, Ohio, was closed in the customary manner.⁵⁹

In December of 1858 Der Lutheraner took note of the fact that the Lutheran Herald was attacking the Missouri Synod for its stand against the unionism of the General Synod. And in January, a certain Anderson wrote a letter

⁵⁷In the discussion of the twelfth article note was taken of the fact that the Augustana speaks of repentance as consisting of the two parts: the smiting of the conscience through the knowledge of sin, and faith that, for Christ's sake, sins are forgiven. The conference noted that in theory this was correct, but that in practice, the two must always go together. The practice of some sectarians to preach Law first and wait for a certain amount of repentance before bringing the comfort of the Gospel, was incorrect. The two must always go hand in hand, so that the sinner might be comforted immediately.

They noted that contrition should continue throughout life, because of the constant presence of the Old Adam. But the conference bemoaned the fact that the Law and Gospel were currently being confused by many and that too little Gospel was being preached.

"Auszug," Der Lutheraner, XV (1858), 19 ff.

⁵⁸Relative to the thirteenth article it was noted that the Sacraments really and truly communicate God's grace to those who use them. And the Sacraments are used in the same manner as the Word wakens and requires faith to work for salvation, the Sacraments are efficacious only when used in faith. And, finally, as the Word is for the ears so the external signs are for the eyes that the heart might be moved.

"Auszug," Der Lutheraner, XV (1858), 27 ff.

⁵⁹Ibid., p. 27.

to the Lutheran Herald in which he denounced the Missouri Synod. Walther answered the charges by branding them all as lies. These attacks would indicate that the unionists were feeling the results of the influence of the conservatives, as they shared their common faith at the Free Conferences.

Differences Arise

In 1854 a committee, in compliance with a request from two pastors within the Ohio synod, brought a resolution to its convention expressing their findings on secret societies. The resolution was adopted. It condemned all societies outside the church, particularly secret societies which try to accomplish those purposes for which the church had come into existence,⁶⁰ or tried to render a religious service.

But on the seventeenth of May, 1859, Der Lutheraner carried an article in which Pastor P. Eirich of the Ohio Synod complained that Free Masonry was tolerated in the Ohio Synod.⁶¹ The article had originated as a pamphlet

⁶⁰C. V. Sheatsley, History of the Joint Synod of Ohio (Columbus, Ohio: Lutheran Book Concern, 1919), pp. 59 f.

⁶¹P. Eirich, "Ein erzwungenes oeffentliches Zeugnis . . ." Der Lutheraner, XV (1859), 157.

and after it had been so published, then Walther took it as a reprint.⁶²

In its May 27 issue, the Standard charged Der Lutheraner with becoming a complaint sheet. Editor Worley thereby gave notice that he would not be intimidated by Der Lutheraner nor would he forsake his present policy of operating the Standard.⁶³ He would be the judge of what would appear in his paper.

The June 18, 1859 issue of the Standard announced that Pastor Eirich had served notice to the Western District of the Ohio Synod that his conscience would not permit him to remain in the ministry of the Ohio Synod, therefore he would withdraw his membership.⁶⁴ The district, in return, announced that Eirich was no longer a member of the Ohio Synod and should not be granted any of the privileges of membership in it.

In a footnote to the article which Der Lutheraner carried, it called attention to the fact that Pastor H.

⁶²Eirich had served as a secretary at one of the Free Conferences.

⁶³"Der Lutheran Standard," Der Lutheraner, XV (1859), 175.

⁶⁴Loc. cit.

Koenig, formerly of the Missouri Synod, had preferred certain charges against the Missouri Synod while still in membership with her. These charges had never been accepted and Pastor Koenig had left without settling the differences. Without having made peace with his Missouri brethren he had been received into membership with the Ohio Synod.⁶⁵ The Standard immediately answered that the case of H. Koenig had been thoroughly investigated at the time he joined the Ohio Synod and that the case was not going to be opened again.⁶⁶

The Fourth Conference

Despite the verbal battle which was being carried on, in June, 1859, Doctor William Sihler of Fort Wayne announced in Der Lutheraner that through the courtesy of one of his members, delegates to the fourth conference traveling via the Pittsburgh, Fort Wayne and Chicago Railroad⁶⁷ would receive free return tickets.⁶⁸

When the fourth Free Conference was called to order, it was opened in the usual manner, but with a note of

⁶⁵Loc. cit.

⁶⁶"Lutheran Standard," Der Lutheraner, XV (1859), 203.

⁶⁷This railroad had completed its line only shortly before this time.

⁶⁸W. Sihler, "Zur Nachricht," Der Lutheraner, XV (1859), 183.

sadness because Doctor Walther, the chief promoter of the Free Conferences, could not be present. He was suffering from a throat ailment⁶⁹ which became so severe that he was forced to temporarily resign less than a year later.

The seventy-two pastors, teachers, professors and laymen who were present⁷⁰ continued to discuss and agree on the correctness of the articles of the Augsburg Confession.⁷¹ And before the end of the sessions, J. A. Ottesen, a clergyman from the Norwegian Lutheran Church, invited the pastors to attend a pastoral conference of his synod. Then the conference resolved to meet again on the first Thursday after the Festival of the Trinity in 1860 on the west side of Cleveland.⁷² The conference was closed with a hymn and a prayer.

⁶⁹"Auszug," Der Lutheraner, XVI (1859), 10.

⁷⁰Loc. cit.

⁷¹The conference discussed article five concurrently with article fourteen on the question of "Pfarramt" and "Predigtamt". They agreed that it is a divine arrangement that the Word be preached and the Sacraments be administered by a divinely called person. The call was discussed at length.

"Auszug," Der Lutheraner, XVI (1859), 10-12, 19-20, 27-28, 35-37.

⁷²Ibid., p. 37.

The Breach Widens

In October, 1859 Der Lutheraner contained an article sent to the paper on the discussion in the Southern District of the Ohio Synod. In the discussion, the thought was accepted that a certain priesterliche Qualitaet was necessary to make the forgiveness of sins valid when pronounced. The author of the article inquired whether the life and death of the Lord Jesus was insufficient to atone for our sins and wash us clean without the presence of the priesterliche Qualitaet.⁷³

This article of Der Lutheraner could hardly have reached the desk of the editor of the Standard before he printed excerpts of a certain letter written by Walther to Eirich. This letter had been in answer to Eirich's inquiry of what to do since the editor of the Lutheran Standard had refused to print his complaint against the Ohio Synod's laxness on the Masonic question. Walther had advised Eirich that he should remain within the Ohio Synod and fight the evil from there. He should let himself be

⁷³"Die den Gliedern des suedlichen Districts von Ohio in 'Priesterliche Qualitaet,' verkuendigte Absolution," Der Lutheraner, XVI (1859), 38.

heard by writing and publishing a pamphlet on the subject. If Eirich would do this, then Walther indicated that he would publish excerpts from it in Der Lutheraner.

Eirich had brought the letter to the Western District of the Ohio Synod's Convention and used bits of it in his complaint and announcement that he was leaving the synod. After having used it, he left it in the study of Koenig, who copied the letter and sent the copy to D. Worley, the editor of the Standard.

Because a part of the letter had been read to the convention, Worley argued that it had become the property of the Ohio Synod and could be used by them at their own discretion. Walther disagreed, stating that it is entirely illogical to assume that all of it would become the property of the synod, when only a portion of it had been used. He said that he was happy for the students at Columbus that Worley was not teaching logic or theology, because of his Jesuit logic. For the case in point, Walther contended that even if it were proper for him to use a letter of that nature, then it should have been published in full, not in excerpts which give an incorrect picture.⁷⁴

⁷⁴"Der gestohlene Brief," Der Lutheraner, XVI (1859), 44.

In the same issue of Der Lutheraner, Walther called attention to a complaint which Worley registered against the Missouri Synod in that it received Eirich into its membership. Walther replied that Der Lutheraner had not made an issue of the case when Koenig had left the Missouri Synod and had been received by the Ohio Synod. Assuming that the cases are alike, said Walther, then Ohio is indicting itself for the action it took in behalf of Koenig.⁷⁵

Worley had also called attention, with pride, to the fact that the Ohio Synod always managed to be in the correct middle-of-the-road and did not become guilty of the extremes doctrinally. Walther agreed that the Ohio Synod was inclined to compromise instead of supporting a doctrinal position which appeared extreme, therefore they did not necessarily support correct doctrine, he said. Their doctrinal position, said Walther, was correct only when Scripture condemned the extremes and demanded a middle-of-the-road position.⁷⁶

In the next issue of Der Lutheraner, Eirich printed

⁷⁵"Die Ohio Synode," Der Lutheraner, XVI (1859), 47.

⁷⁶Loc. Cit.

a report, in which he maintained that Worley was causing harm, not only to Eirich, but was involving many others and making attacks on the innocent. Worley had departed from discussion of principles and had been condemning personalities, Eirich said.⁷⁷

The same issue of the paper carried an open letter from Doctor Sihler to Walther. In it he pleaded that Der Lutheraner cease publishing materials pertaining to the Worley controversy, because no good would come of it if it were continued.⁷⁸ Walther heeded that letter and dropped the subject completely. But Worley was not satisfied, nor were others in the Ohio Synod. At the 1860 convention of Ohio, Worley got a hearing on his complaint that Eirich had been received by Missouri.⁷⁹

As time went on, Doctor Walther's health continued to fail and he did not expect to live long anymore. President Wynken pleaded with him that he give his work

⁷⁷P. Eirich, "Eine kurtze Erwiderung," Der Lutheraner, XVI (1859), 54.

⁷⁸W. Sihler, "Offener Brief an den Redakteur des Lutheraners," Der Lutheraner, XVI (1859), 59-60.

⁷⁹"Kirchlich-Zeitgeschichtliches," Lehre und Wehre, VI (1860), 382.

over to others and he take a trip to the mineral baths in Germany to restore his health. Therefore, in the February 7 issue of Der Lutheraner Walther announced that Theodore Brohm would edit Der Lutheraner and Rudolph Lange would take Lehre und Wehre.⁸⁰ Shortly thereafter Walther left for Germany, the cost of the trip being borne by the members of his congregation in Saint Louis.⁸¹

Although the Eirich Controversy was dropped, the May 15, 1860 issue of Der Lutheraner announced that the Standard had printed a letter written by some individual from the Missouri Synod and had given the impression that it represented the stand of that body. Brohm deplored the bringing of a private matter into the open to be aired.⁸²

In the same issue of Der Lutheraner an announcement appeared that the fifth Free Conference would be held at Trinity Church in Cleveland.⁸³ The announcement contained

⁸⁰"Den Gliedern unserer Synode und Lesern der Lutheraners," Der Lutheraner, XVI (1860), 102.

⁸¹C. F. W. Walther, Briefe (footnote) op. cit., p. 134.

⁸²"Die Lutherische Kirchenzeitung von Columbus," Der Lutheraner, XVI (1860), 157.

⁸³This congregation was probably a member of the Missouri Synod.

information of the method which the delegates were to use to make reservation.⁸⁴

But the announcement was of no avail, because the Ohio Synod chose its young German language periodical, Die Lutherischer Kirchenzeitung, to announce that the synod no longer cared to continue with the conferences, because they had keine Lust anymore.⁸⁵ And the Ohio convention of October 1860 clarified the stand a bit by announcing that the Missouri Synod had dominated the conferences and was trying to impose its ideas on the rest. Since they felt justified in their accusation, they decided that the Free Conferences would no longer serve any purpose.⁸⁶

The writer did not find literary references from the other participating bodies on their reaction to the thought of dropping the Free Conferences. It is therefore concluded that the responsibility for the conferences was carried chiefly by Missouri and Ohio. When one of these dropped out, the fifth conference was not held and the others did not encourage continuing the Free Conferences.

⁸⁴J. C. W. Lindemann, "Die allgemeine evangelisch-lutherische Conferenz" Der Lutheraner, XVI (1860), 158.

⁸⁵"Kirchlich-Zeitgeschichtliches," Lehre und Wehre, VI (1860), 153.

⁸⁶"Kirchlich-Zeitgeschichtliches," Lehre und Wehre, VI (1860), 382.

CHAPTER IV

SOME INTER-SYNODICAL RELATIONS

The abrupt ending of the series of conferences also brought to a close, with one exception,¹ the Free Conferences for the ten year period considered. The development of Lutheran bodies in America however continued through the intersynodical relations after the close of the Free Conferences. The groundwork was also laid for the formation of the General Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in North America.

¹Under the Leadership of Pastor Brobst (the writer assumes that this must be Samuel Brobst, although he did not have a congregation at this time), a Free Conference was held at Allentown, Pennsylvania, April 5-7, 1864. There were about thirty pastors present, who agreed that all such as accepted the Unaltered Augsburg Confession and Luther's Small Catechism should be invited to future conferences. The conference also resolved the following:

- a) That an immigrants' mission should be established in Castle Garden, New York, and that the mission be maintained by the New York and Pennsylvania Synods.
- b) That the above mentioned Synods should write to Germany in an attempt to secure good pastors who were suffering there. The Synods should also establish a German Theological seminary.
- c) That a plan similar to that of the college in Allentown be presented to the next convention of the Pennsylvania Synod.
- d) That the Pennsylvania Synod should take the lead and guide in establishing a new Pastors' periodical.
- e) That all pastors would work towards the enlargement of their Sunday Schools and direct them to good literature.

"Kirchlich-Zeitgeschichtliches," Lehre und Wehre, X (1864), 189.

Prior to the formation of the General Council, the Free Conference leader, the Missouri Synod, kept up her observation of other bodies. She was interested in promoting confessionalism, and did so by giving erring groups a verbal chastisement.

The Wisconsin Synod, which had adopted the entire group of the Lutheran Symbols in 1857,² showed only three years later that their adoption was not entirely genuine. In 1861 the editor of Lehre und Wehre noticed that the Wisconsin Synod was making excuses for having some pastors in her membership who did not accept the historic Lutheran faith. Wisconsin pleaded that it had been impossible to spot the Reformed men when they entered the body. The Missouri editor observed that he had not found it difficult to detect those who were Reformed.³

Four months later Lehre und Wehre reprinted a portion of the Wisconsin Synod president's address, in which he pledged the synod to the Symbols. Again the editor commented that the thoughts were pious and would be worth

²"Kirchlich-Zeitgeschichtliches," Lehre und Wehre, III (1857), 284.

³"Kirchlich-Zeitgeschichtliches," Lehre und Wehre, VII (1861), 220.

while, if they were only true.⁴

It became more evident as time went on that the Missouri Synod was not the only one to voice disagreement with another synod. In 1862 a letter appeared in the Lutherische Kirchenbote in which a pastor of the Wisconsin Synod stated that he was convinced that the Wisconsin Synod should consolidate its efforts in Watertown, Wisconsin. He stated that there was a Methodist Church and the Missouri Lutheran Church, with the Missouri Church practicing "unChristian exclusion." He felt that people should have the privilege of leaving the Missouri Church and still be counted as Lutheran. In answer to this, the Lehre und Wehre editor accused the Wisconsin Synod of being lax in its teachings and discipline.⁵

In 1863 the Lutheran Observer published the fact that the Wisconsin Synod was planning to open a seminary in Watertown and had authorized pleas to be sent to Germany requesting help in their venture. The Observer expressed its hope that this seminary would be the factor which

⁴"Kirchlich-Zeitgeschichtliches," Lehre und Wehre, VII (1861), 349.

⁵"Kirchlich-Zeitgeschichtliches," Lehre und Wehre, VIII (1862).

might build a General Synod of the West with Wisconsin, Ohio, Michigan and Minnesota participating.⁶

The Wisconsin Synod found a sympathetic listener in Doctor Wangemann of Germany. He re-emphasized the plea and asked that help be sent. He said that he was fully aware that the "young chick" (the Wisconsin Synod) still had some "eggshell" clinging to it, but he supposed that in time their practice would also become more uniformly Lutheran.⁷

The Missouri Synod, defending what it believed to be the correct doctrine, stood firmly on its criticism of Wisconsin, even though William Loehe expressed the hope that the two synods might form a closer union. The Lehre und Wehre editor stated that before a closer cooperation could exist officially, there would also have to be a closer cooperation in practice. In 1863 he said that there was a church which had formerly been Missouri Synod,

⁶"Kirchlich-Zeitgeschichtliches," Lehre und Wehre, IX (1863), 251.

⁷"Kirchlich-Zeitgeschichtliches," Lehre und Wehre, X (1864), 127.

but was now being served by a Wisconsin Synod pastor. That congregation, he charged, had been unwilling to submit to church discipline.⁸ Missouri found further fault in the fact that the Wisconsin Synod received and reordained pastors from the churches of the Prussian union.⁹

The Lutheran Standard, a paper of the Ohio Synod, seemed to be of little interest to the Missourians so long as Worley remained its editor. Missouri made very little mention of the Ohio Synod at all until in 1864, when the March 15 issue of the Standard announced that Pastor Loy would become the new editor. The Missourians expressed their confidence that the paper would become more worth while, and stated that up to that time the paper had merely reprinted sectarian materials.¹⁰ When the new editor took charge of the Standard, the Missourians referred to it more frequently and carried some news about the Ohio Synod. The interest was rekindled, which later

⁸"Kirchlich-Zeitgeschichtliches," Lehre und Wehre, IX (1863), 311.

⁹"Kirchlich-Zeitgeschichtliches," Lehre und Wehre, X (1864), 312.

¹⁰"Kirchlich-Zeitgeschichtliches," Lehre und Wehre, X (1864), 151.

grew to such an extent that the Ohio Synod institution in Columbus granted Walther his honorary doctorate and the two synods were among those forming the Synodical Conference.¹¹

Meanwhile the intersynodical relations between the Missouri Synod and the General Synod were usually made public through the periodicals. In 1862 Brauer, of the Missouri Synod, noted that the Missionary and the Lutheran of the General Synod had been combined into one periodical and immediately had begun to plead for union between the synods. But Brauer contended that the outward hand of fellowship would mean nothing without true doctrinal unity. He said that Missouri could not heed the call, because that would make it unionistic since the clergy of the General Synod were unionistic.¹²

In its hope that something might come of the invitation to join the bodies together, the new periodical

¹¹Henry Eyster Jacobs, A History of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in North America (Second edition; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1899), p. 499.

¹²Brauer, "Der Missionary und Lutheran," Lehre und Wehre, VIII (1862), 18-23.

commended the Missouri Synod's stand on doctrine in 1863¹³ and began to lead the way to a more conservative lutheranism within the General Synod. In 1864 the paper strongly supported the establishment of a new seminary in Pennsylvania.¹⁴ This seminary, when it was established, bound itself to all of the Symbolical Books.¹⁵

But the Missourians found much to complain about, even declaring that the General Synod had lost its reason for its existence because it could no longer produce a book which was acceptable to all of the synods within the body. But Missouri said that there were many men within the general body who were protesting against the laxity of doctrine, and were displeased at the unconfessional stand of the others.¹⁶

The liberal element in the General Synod found its champion in the Lutheran Observer, which criticized the Missouri Synod sharply, even blaming Missouri that there

¹³"Kirchlich-Zeitgeschichtliches," Lehre und Wehre, X (1864), 61.

¹⁴"Kirchlich-Zeitgeschichtliches," Lehre und Wehre, X (1864), 250.

¹⁵"Kirchlich-Zeitgeschichtliches," Lehre und Wehre, XI (1865), 310-311.

¹⁶"Kirchlich-Zeitgeschichtliches," Lehre und Wehre, X (1864), 25.

were so many of the "German Lutherans" joining the other Protestant denominations. The reason for this, said the Observer was that the people found the Missourians bigotted, and so turned from it in disgust. Missouri had been able to gain only 5,000 of the 50,000 German "Lutheran" immigrants of the eighteen years of its existence.¹⁷ An extremely liberal synod looked to the Observer as a bulwark against the flood of confessionalism.¹⁸

The paper also set aside a new section for S. W. Harkey so that he might devote it to the interest of the west. He immediately proceeded to explain that the various groups would have to forget that they had differences because the Word of God demanded that they have union.¹⁹ He said that the basic Christian teachings were sufficient for union.²⁰ The Lutheran and Missionary reminded the Observer that there was nothing doctrinally Lutheran in the basis of the General Synod which would bar the Missourians

¹⁷"Kirchlich-Zeitgeschichtliches," Lehre und Wehre, VIII (1862), 152.

¹⁸"Kirchlich-Zeitgeschichtliches," Lehre und Wehre, VIII (1862), 28.

¹⁹"Kirchlich-Zeitgeschichtliches," Lehre und Wehre, IX (1863), 62-63.

²⁰"Kirchlich-Zeitgeschichtliches," Lehre und Wehre, IX (1863), 91-92.

from membership.²¹

The Observer proceeded to condemn the Missouri Synod for its intolerance and commended the Evangelical Union, a Reformed group, as a good influence in the West.²² The Observer supporters however, could never quite bring themselves to completely condemn the Missourians. Repeatedly they stated that the Missouri Synod members had many commendable traits, among them was their devotion to Scripture and their exemplary lives, but that they were bigoted, exclusive, and too "high church".²³ But on the last count, the Observer lost even its bosom-friend, Der Lutherische Kirchenbote, another liberal publication from within the General Synod. The paper carried some "high church thoughts."²⁴

Those were the grounds for the observation of the Missouri men that the General Synod was falling apart and that, like carpenters, they were frantically trying to

²¹"Kirchlich-Zeitgeschichtliches," Lehre und Wehre, IX (1863), 378.

²²"Kirchlich-Zeitgeschichtliches," Lehre und Wehre, IX (1863), 379.

²³"Kirchlich-Zeitgeschichtliches," Lehre und Wehre, X (1864), 59-60.

²⁴"Kirchlich-Zeitgeschichtliches," Lehre und Wehre, X (1864), 61-2.

keep her together.²⁵ A Missourian, going by the initial "B", saw the two parties within the General Synod. The Observer was guiding the party sympathetic to the Reformed.²⁶ The General Synod, itself, took note in the 1864 convention that she would have to avoid all controversy and would try to do so with the old stand which "was broad enough, Scriptural enough and Lutheran enough" to take in all of the Lutheran Churches in North America.²⁷ But the resolution appeared to be rather fruitless to the General Synod. It had shown a steady growth between 1820 and 1850, but the introduction of the new catechism by Pennsylvania and the opening of the new Seminary to promote "ultraconfessionalism" fanned the flames for a genuine controversy.²⁸ And finally Doctor John Bachmann found

²⁵"Kirchlich-Zeitgeschichtliches," Lehre und Wehre, X (1864), 154.

²⁶"Die Observer-Partei innerhalb der reformierten Generalsynode," Lehre und Wehre, XII (1866), 13-19.

²⁷"Kirchlich-Zeitgeschichtliches," Lehre und Wehre, X (1864), 187.

²⁸"Der ueber die Generalsynode hereinbrechende Theologische Conflict," Lehre und Wehre, X (1864), 372-7.

himself in the position of having to defend himself against the onslaught of others.²⁹

The Pennsylvania Ministerium was still on the ascent towards confessionalism as it resolved in 1862 to receive only the ministers of other Lutheran synods into advisory membership at their convention. But at the very same convention, they heard the greetings from the representative from the German Reformed group and appointed their own representative to her as a return gesture of friendship.³⁰

Iowa stayed aloof of all other Lutheran bodies in America. A member of the General Synod thought that this meant that not even the Missourians were conservative enough or confessional enough for Iowa.³¹ Iowa did not participate with any other Lutheran organization until the formative meeting of the General Council.

The Ohio Synod and the General Synod also had their difficulties. At one time a notable member of the Ohio Synod swore under oath in court that the General Synod was

²⁹"Dr. Bachmann Vertheidigung gegen einige im Lutheran and Missionary wider ihn veroeffentliche Beschuldigungen," XI 360-75.

³⁰"Kirchlich-Zeitgeschichtliches," Lehre und Wehre, VIII (1862), 348.

³¹"Kirchlich-Zeitgeschichtliches," Lehre und Wehre, VIII (1862), 316.

not Lutheran and, therefore all ministers united with the body were not Lutheran.³²

Missouri and Buffalo continued the controversy already noted at the time the Free Conferences began.³³ The Norwegian Synod, which had attended some of the Free Conferences, seemed to feel a kinship to Missouri through their common stand on the slavery question and an indication that progress was being made on the prospect of having the Norwegian students study at the Missouri institution. Missouri published a complete account of the Norwegian Synod's convention of 1864.³⁴

In answer to all of these difficulties and synodical tensions and the fact that the Pennsylvania Ministerium had been dropped from the General Synod in its Fort Wayne convention, a call was issued for representatives from the more conservative bodies to meet with the intention of forming a closer relationship.

³²This reference is to Rev. Bierdemann. - "Kirchlich-Zeitgeschichtliches," Lehre und Wehre, VIII (1862), 254.

³³"Siebente Synode," Lehre und Wehre, VIII (1862), 51-55 and 65-84.

³⁴"Bericht der sechsten ordentlichen Synodalversammlung der norwegisch-evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche in America," Lehre und Wehre, IX (1863), 271-282, 306-309, 332-344, 360-368.

In response to that call, delegates assembled in Reading, Pennsylvania. The following synods were represented: Pennsylvania Ministerium, Joint Synod of Ohio, English District Synod of Ohio, English Synod of Ohio, Pittsburgh Synod, the Synods of Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Missouri, Iowa, Canada, the Norwegian Synod and the Ministerium of New Ygrk.³⁵

The Missouri Synod was represented by J. A. F. W. Mueller and the Wisconsin Synod had two delegates present.³⁶ Pastor Mueller of Missouri played a rather important part in the formative meeting of the Council,³⁷ but his synod did not ratify the Council. She insisted that differences existed between her and some of the members of the Council.³⁸

Each of the four districts of the Missouri Synod sent

³⁵ John G. Morris, Fifty Years in the Lutheran Ministry (Baltimore: Printed for the Author by James Young, 1878), p. 301.

³⁶ S. E. Ochsenford, Documentary History of the General Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in North America (Philadelphia: General Council Publishing House, 1912), p. 133.

³⁷ He presented a paper and also served on the committee to which all of the papers were referred. Ochsenford, op. cit., p. 135.

³⁸ Ochsenford, op. cit., p. 157.

its regrets instead of delegates to the next meeting of the Council, where they might have had "the privilege of debate and the open comparison of views." But Missouri declared that she could attend only a truly free conference.³⁹ She meant that persons should not attend as delegates of a synod but as individuals.

In answer to this statement, the General Council agreed to set apart a time of their sessions for a free conference.⁴⁰ But Missouri declined the invitation on the grounds that they would not feel that the conferences would be free in the true sense of the word if they were held as a part of the sessions of another body.⁴¹

After this answer in 1869, the Council suggested that a time be set aside before the next council meeting in the same place as the Council would meet, but not at the same time and with no official connection between the two.⁴² Missouri's answer was that some bodies would not send any delegates to any free conference. If any Missourians

³⁹Ibid., pp. 150-157.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 156.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 158.

⁴²Loc. cit.

attended, they would do so as individuals and not representatives of Missouri. With this communication, all official intercourse between the General Council and Missouri Synod ceased. And Missouri later became one of the originators of the Synodical Conference, which Ohio and Wisconsin also joined.⁴³

The Free Conferences did not effect an organic organization between Synods. The conferences probably played only a very minor part in such later organization but they did encourage and foster confessionalism, which to a greater or lesser degree, has taken hold of all of the American Lutheran Churches.

The joining of the Missouri, Ohio, and Wisconsin Synods into the Synodical Conference demonstrated that harsh criticism of one another need not stand in the way of fraternal relations if each of the synods is willing to maintain her confessional basis and charitably discuss differences of opinion and so arrive at a common conclusion.

⁴³ Jacobs, op. cit., p. 499.

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