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## Miscellanea

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## Miscellanea

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### Steps Taken in 1867 to Compose the Differences between Wisconsin and Missouri

[In the *Northwestern Lutheran* of March 14 and March 28, 1948, Prof. J. P. Meyer of the Theological Seminary in Thiensville, Wis., published the article here reprinted. We are confident that this historical sketch given by our esteemed colleague will be read with genuine interest.—A.]

#### I

The Synodical Conference of North America, having been founded in 1872, reached its diamond anniversary in the past year. But since no meeting of the Synodical Conference was held in 1947, the formal observance of the anniversary will be combined with the convention to be held in Milwaukee during August of the present year. In a former sketch we drew attention to the strained relations that from the beginning existed between the two synods of Missouri and of Wisconsin, two churches that were eventually to be united in the Synodical Conference, and that by the grace of God still hold membership in it. What was it that caused the friction between these two bodies? And how was it removed and the way paved for a federation?

In the heading we mention the year 1867. There were no committees appointed, or negotiations carried on, between the two synods in that year with a view to composing the difficulties. But an important preparatory step was taken by our own Wisconsin Synod to remove the greatest stumbling block.

The founders of our Synod, particularly our first President, Pastor J. Muehlhaeuser, came from circles in Germany that were under the influence of the Prussian Union. They wanted to be Lutheran, but their views had been tainted by Unionism.

Our Synod, up to 1867, received support from German Mission Societies that were unionistic in their constitution, particularly the one of Berlin, which sent sorely needed pastors into our State, pastors who were to work under the auspices of our Wisconsin Synod. These men all were Lutheran, but since they came from unionistic circles and our Synod accepted help from unionistic societies, the suspicion of Unionism against us currently held in church bodies outside our own would not down.

We may mention in passing that our Synod was very careful in investigating and establishing the unity of faith before receiving into membership the men sent over by the unionistic societies. In the year 1867 the Berlin Society sent over three men; but before they were recommended to any congregation they had to submit to a colloquy to establish their Lutheran orthodoxy, while at the same time a pastor from the Iowa Synod was accepted on the strength of a letter of recommendation from the president of that body without a colloquy.

In December of 1866 a meeting had been called to Reading, Pennsylvania, for the purpose of organizing a conservative Lutheran general body. The meeting was attended by two representatives of our Synod. There had been trouble in the Old General Synod of the eastern states between a vociferous liberal element and the conservatives. In spring of 1866 the conservatives left the old body, and made arrangements for the December meeting, which was attended by delegates from sixteen Lutheran synods of the United States and Canada. (At least, so the President of our Synod, who himself was a delegate, reported; while Dr. A. R. Wentz in his book *The Lutheran Church in American History* says there were 13.) The General Council was founded, a body which gave promise of being genuinely Lutheran. That it would fail in this, could not be foreseen from the beginning.

Since our Synod was seeking closer association with other Lutheran bodies in the General Council, and since this new federation in the beginning exhibited a firm confessional stand, our Synod owed it to the other constituents of the Council that it make its own confessional stand clear, above all, that it remove the suspicion of Unionism. In the debate during the seventh session of the synodical convention in 1867 the thought was expressed in this way: Our Synod owes it to itself and to synods already joined with us and to such as still oppose us, as well as to the Lutherans in Germany, that we issue a clear testimony on our position over against the Union and on the question whether from the nature of our connection with the unionistic Mission Societies a leaning to Unionism in some form may be rightly inferred.

Our feeling toward the Mission Society was one of gratitude. They had helped us in times of dire need. They had sent over missionaries when the few men in the field were unable to supply the spiritual needs of the rapidly increasing population of our State. Although the societies were organized along unionistic lines, they had never demanded of our Synod that we also must become unionistic. The men whom they sent over were Lutheran, as our Synod took care to ascertain before it employed them. Hence all members of our Synod, no matter how sternly some opposed Unionism in any form, were united in the feeling of hearty gratitude toward the German Mission Societies for their aid which they so unselfishly rendered.

In the President's report of 1867 we find the following paragraph on our relation to the German Mission Societies:

"Of the German Societies only the honorable Berlin Society kept up its official relation with us during the past year in writing and in deed. As already reported (in the paragraph on the employment of new laborers) we owe thanks to the Society for the welcome sending of the pastors Baarts, Keller, and Ebert. Moreover, the Society tried its best to establish a pre-seminary school, although so far without tangible results; and in its organ *Ansiedler des*

*Westens* tries to stimulate interest in the German Evangelical Church for the needs of America, and to keep such interest alive."

The idea of a *Proseminar* in Germany was to prepare young men in their homeland on the basis of Luther's Small Catechism and the Augsburg Confession, then to have them come to Wisconsin in order to complete their theological training in our own Seminary, which at that time was combined with our College in Watertown.

To expedite the discussion on the Union question the President of the Synod appointed a committee, of which Prof. A. Hoenecke was a member; the other members were the pastors G. Thiele, H. Quehl, Th. Meumann, A. Kleinert, and the lay delegates Bunt-ruck, Kieckhoefer, and Loehrke.

The Committee did not submit a unanimous report, but handed in both a majority report, signed by four of the pastors and two laymen, and a minority report, only Pastor Meumann being mentioned as presenting it.

Both reports are contained in the printed proceedings of the 1867 convention, the minority report in a somewhat modified form. Our Synod made the minority report its own, without, however, rejecting the majority report. There is no difference in the substance of both reports. That of the majority, headed by Prof. Hoenecke, presents the truth in clear and unequivocal terms, while that of Pastor Meumann, without denying the truth, strikes a more conciliatory tone in presenting the same truth.

The Synod adopted the minority report, but also resolved to have both reports plus the essential points to the debate printed in the proceedings. And although the propriety of having both committee reports printed was questioned several times in subsequent sessions, the Synod upheld its resolution which it had adopted in the seventh session, in the forenoon of June 24, in order to give full expression in this way to the position which we take over against the (Prussian) Union and Unionism.

God granting, we shall present both documents in our next issue in a free translation. We shall also bring some of the thoughts as they were developed in the debate. Both documents are important and, although adopted by our Synod more than 80 years ago, are still valuable today.

## II

The dilemma with which our Synod was confronted in 1867 can hardly be overestimated. On the one hand we owed a debt of gratitude to the German Mission Societies for their generous help in our difficult times, and indeed, our fathers felt heartily grateful toward them; on the other hand we owed it to the Truth of the Gospel that we renounce Unionism in every form and unequivocally express our stand on the Lutheran Confessions.

We saw that the convention of 1867 heard two committee reports on the matter; of which it made the one an official document by adopting it unanimously, while it also ordered the other to be included in the printed report, because it clearly set forth the position of the Synod.

The report which the Synod ultimately adopted as its official pronouncement underwent some changes during the discussion on the floor. The text as it finally evolved is the following:

"Since for years our Synod has been charged with secret Unionism by various (Lutheran) synods of our country, because of the connection which it maintains with several Societies in Germany, particularly the one of Berlin;

"Since, however, 15 Lutheran synods of this country have united with us for organizing a new General Synod, and since thus the charges against one member would involve the entire body;

"Therefore we herewith issue the following declaration:

"It has been known to our Berlin friends for a long time that we reject every form of doctrinal Unionism, moreover, that also with respect to a purely administrative Union, as it is found in some German states, we side with those Lutherans, within and without those national churches, who advocate a dissolution of the enforced association with the Reformed in the Union, because it infringes on the guaranteed right of the Lutheran Church to an independent existence, and because in it a free expression of the Lutheran Confession both in the form of worship and in matters of organization is greatly hampered, and thus consciences that are bound by the Lutheran Confession must feel heavily burdened.

"As long, however, as in those united state churches there still are Lutherans with whom the Gospel is preached in its purity and the Sacraments are administered correctly, and as long as these Lutherans protest against the Union imposed on them against their will as against an injustice perpetrated and perpetuated against the Lutheran Church:

"We can only with thanks accept the services of the Unionistic Societies, which are instrumental in bringing laborers to us, laborers who place themselves at the disposal of the Lutheran Church in this country, from such Lutherans as remain in the state churches under constantly repeated protest."

This is the report which our Synod officially adopted. The cumbersome language and the involved structure of the sentences show sufficiently how keenly the difficulty of the situation was felt by our fathers.

The majority of the committee was headed by Prof. A. Hoenecke. The Synod subscribed to the truths as presented in this report and accordingly ordered its printing, but it did not by a resolution make it an official document.

"1) Your Committee understands the question: What attitude does our Synod take over against the Union? in this sense: What must be our position in principle towards the Union? — or in other words: What must be our considered opinion on the Union?

"2) As far as your Committee could ascertain, our Synod has so far not yet given a definite declaration on this question to circles outside our own.

"3) Under present conditions of the Church it is not sufficient to state positively that we are Lutheran; rather, also the negative statement must be added that we reject the Union.

"4) The reasons are:

"This course is required a) by truthfulness and honesty, because there are many who call themselves Lutheran but are not; b) by the example of the fathers of our Church; c) because even the Reformed Church, which is favored by the Union movement, has testified against the Union: would this not put us to shame? d) faithful Lutherans within the state church testified valiantly against the Union: is it not our solemn duty to strengthen these brethren?

"5) There are two kinds of Union: one is the work of God, the other is a human makeshift.

"6) The latter, man-made, Union is either a doctrinal Union, or an administrative Union, such as may be established by an abuse of the power of government over churches.

"7) By this latter man-made Union, as is well known, a crying injustice was inflicted on the Lutheran Church, since consciences were violated and the Church herself robbed of her treasures.

"8) For that reason not only an artificial doctrinal Union but also a forced administrative Union must be condemned as decidedly evil. Your Committee recommends to the honorable Synod to pronounce such a judgment."

When the two reports, which we reproduced above in a free translation, were discussed on the floor of the Synod it became evident at once that all were agreed on the sinfulness of any man-made Union. Some members, indeed, felt that a declaration of this kind was not called for, since the respective Mission Societies never demanded Unionism of us as a condition of their service. Yet the Synod as a whole considered such a statement as a matter of duty.

In the debate the question was raised how we could at one and the same time express our sympathy both with Lutherans who left the state churches, and with such as remained within them, though under protest. It is pointed out that, as long as there is agreement in principle (namely that the Union is sinful) people may well differ regarding the best mode of procedure in dealing with their specific case. Pastor Harms of Hermannsburg was quoted: "If I had been born and raised in the Prussian State Church, I would have fought within it for the good right of the Lutheran Church." The question for Lutherans in Germany was not whether they wanted to join the Union, but whether their testimony against the Union could be more effective if they separated at once, or if they continued to bear their testimony within the Union as long as Lutheran doctrine and Lutheran practice (Lord's Supper) were tolerated.— Thus we sympathize with both groups of Lutherans because of their unequivocal protest against the Union, without passing judgment on their mode of procedure.

All members of the Synod gave expression to their heartfelt gratitude for the aid we had received from the German Mission Societies, and also those who had drafted the majority report joined in the unanimous adoption by the Synod of Pastor Meumann's minority report.

We thank God who gave to our fathers His Holy Spirit to lead them into the knowledge of the Truth under their trying circumstances, so that in true meekness they confessed the Truth without violating their obligation of gratitude, and, on the other hand, fulfilled their duty of gratitude without denying the Truth.

Let us not imagine that now the problem has been solved for all time to come. Let us rather learn from the fathers to be ever on the alert, to watch and pray, that we may properly meet the danger of Unionism when it attacks us today or at any time in some new guise.

### Luther Used Rough Language

By THEODORE G. TAPPERT, Philadelphia, Pa.

The *Lutheran Companion* (April 21, 1948) prints an article by Prof. T. G. Tappert of Mount Airy Theological Seminary, which was written to avoid any possible misunderstanding of the attitude and action of Luther that might be caused by the publication of J. E. Perkins' English translation of Luther's book entitled *The Jews and Their Lies*. The editor of the *Lutheran Companion* prefaces the article. "When Jonathan E. Perkins of Tulsa, Okla., announced that he had discovered a 'rare book' by Martin Luther entitled, *The Jews and Their Lies*, and that he proposed to issue an English translation of it, the Division of Public Relations of the National Lutheran Council sought to dissuade him from carrying out his purpose on the grounds that Luther's book had reference to a definite situation in his own day and would serve no good purpose by being resurrected now. However, when the Oklahoma man refused to desist from his avowed purpose, Dr. Theodore G. Tappert, who is professor of Church History at Philadelphia Theological Seminary and a translator of the Luther biography *Road to Reformation*, by Heinrich Boehmer, was asked to write this article."

JOHN THEODORE MUELLER

Statements have gone out from Tulsa, Okla., over the signature of Jonathan E. Perkins, to announce publication of an English translation of Luther's book entitled *The Jews and Their Lies*. It is true, as Mr. Perkins declares, that "no English translation is available." It is not true, however, that "practically all of the German language copies have been destroyed," for this book is reproduced in all the standard collections of Luther's works, the best critical text being that of the Weimar edition, Volume LIII, pages 417-552.

Whether the projected publication becomes the "most sensational translation of the century" remains to be seen. For the present it is enough to observe that Mr. Perkins' announcement of it is both sensational and misleading. To publish this one utterance of Martin Luther, apart from his other utterances, is not only likely to do violence to Luther but is also unlikely to contribute to the solution of the "Jewish problem" today.

### His Concern Was Theological

Luther's book can be understood aright only in its historical context. If it is lifted out of this context and applied to the present "fight over Palestine" and the campaign "organized by the political Zionists," it will certainly be misread and misapplied. Luther's fundamental concern was not political, economic, or racial. His concern was theological. He was a critic, not of the Jews as a race, but of Judaism and its implications as Luther understood them. To call Luther anti-Semitic, as Mr. Perkins does by implication, is therefore to give the term a connotation which it does not properly have.

It is true that in this book Luther used violent language with reference to the Jews. The fact of the matter is that most of his polemics were seasoned with earthly and sometimes (especially for modern taste) abusive language. Princes, Luther wrote for example, "are usually the greatest fools and the worst knaves on earth." Peasants he called "perjured, disobedient, rebellious murderers and blasphemers." "It is almost impossible for lawyers to be saved," he wrote.

Merchants he described as "manifest thieves, robbers, and usurers." He asserted that the pope is "Anti-Christ" [which, of course, is true.—J. T. M.], and monks are "tame dogs that lie on pillows." But for his own countrymen Luther usually reserved his sharpest words: "I know well that we Germans are brutes and stupid beasts" and "swilling swine." "We Germans are much worse than the Jews." It would appear that, if Luther was an anti-Semitic, he must also have been anti-German.

This is not to suggest that Luther is above criticism. He was given to overstatement, was not always well-informed, and shared many of the prejudices of his contemporaries. Toward the close of his life, when he was debilitated by illness and wracked with pain, he was often irritable and subject to volcanic outbursts of wrath. Such an outburst was the work in question which appeared three years before Luther's death.

### Jews were Persecuted

The Jews had suffered disabilities throughout the Middle Ages. In the year 1215 the Fourth Lateran Council decreed that Jews must wear yellow badges to distinguish themselves. They suffered from crusade and inquisition. They were banished from all the major countries of Europe until, at the very close of the Middle Ages, Germany and Poland were the only countries in which they enjoyed relative quiet. Yet even there this freedom was often severely curtailed.

In the early years of the Reformation Luther criticized the treatment of the Jews. He directed his criticism especially against the church for its inhumanity and for its failure to acknowledge its missionary obligations. He hoped, as he expressed it in his



first tract entitled *That Christ was Born a Jew* (1523), that "if we treat the Jews fairly and instruct them in the Word, many of them will become Christians."

### Luther Disappointed in Hopes

In this hope Luther was disappointed. A few Jews were baptized, but almost all of them remained secret adherents to Judaism. Gradually Luther came to the reluctant conclusion that the Jews had hardened their hearts against Christianity. This conviction was confirmed by his reading of medieval books by and about Jews.

It was strengthened by reports that some Jews, as tools of his ecclesiastical opponents, were plotting to poison him. Yet despite this change in attitude, which can be traced especially in his *Table Talk*, Luther proposed, as late as 1537, to expound the Christian faith for the Jews once again in the hope that some might be converted from their "folly."

### Distorted Luther's Views

In the following year Duke Wolf Schlick, of Falkenau, wrote to Luther about Jewish propaganda in Moravia which was influencing some Christians to adopt the Sabbath, circumcision, and other Jewish practices and beliefs. To rebuke these people Luther wrote the tract, *Against the Sabbatarians* (1538). Afterwards he alluded from time to time to his intention of treating this subject at greater length.

In the meantime, while engaged in the preparation of his commentary on Genesis, Luther encountered rabbinical interpretations with which he disagreed violently. On May 18, 1542, he received from Duke Wolf Schlick a copy of a Jewish reply to his *Against the Sabbatarians* in which, in the form of a dialog, a Jew so twisted and distorted Luther's tract as to make the Christian faith appear ridiculous. It was the reading of this reply, in addition to the duke's request for a refutation of it, which caused Luther to write the angry book, *The Jews and Their Lies*.

### Refutes Claims of Jews

There is hardly any use in trying to persuade Jews to embrace Christianity, Luther asserted in this book, but if his writing "should help to make some Jews better, it is so much to the good."

His real purpose, Luther explained, is to warn Christians against the proud boasts of Jews and against their interpretations of the Scriptures, which he calls lies. He singles out five: (1) The claim that Jews are descended from the best people on earth and that Gentiles are worms by comparison; (2) the assertion that circumcision is uniquely Jewish and a good work; (3) the boast that God gave the law only to the Jews, although no one ought to boast that he has the law if he does not keep it; (4) the insistence that God gave the Jews Canaan, Jerusalem, etc.; and (5) the expectation of a Messiah other than Jesus Christ.

### He Used Strong Language

Thereupon Luther discussed current reports and rumors concerning the plunder and murder of Christians by Jews. In their worship, he declares, the Jews curse Gentiles and invoke misfortune upon them. They call Jesus illegitimate and say that Mary committed adultery with a blacksmith. Such lies must stop, and those guilty of telling them must be dealt with severely.

Their synagogues, schools, and homes should be destroyed. Their blasphemous books should be burned. Teachers of such blasphemy should be silenced and their freedom curbed. The Jews' practice of usury should be forbidden. They should be made to work as other people do, in the sweat of their brows. And it would be best if they returned to their homeland.

Such wrathful and drastic proposals are accompanied by more moderate advice and temperate assertions. Christians ought to avoid Jews but "must not curse them or do them bodily harm." Jews may believe what they wish, but they should not be permitted to "vilify and hinder our faith." The wrath of God is upon them, Luther stated. "Dear God, heavenly Father, turn about and let Thy wrath come to an end for the sake of Thy dear Son. Amen." "May Christ, our dear Lord, mercifully convert them. Amen."

### Blaspheming a Civil Offense

It must be remembered that this book was written at a time when blasphemy was a civil offense punishable with confiscation or banishment. It must also be remembered that it was written by a theologian who would not have shared what is often referred to today as the "Hebrew-Christian religion," for Luther believed that there is a difference between Judaism and Christianity.

Accordingly his criticism of Judaism is in itself no more anti-Semitic than a criticism of Mohammedanism is anti-Arabic. Above all, it must be remembered that this book was written by a very human and fallible person whose views were conditioned by the age in which he lived and by the infirmities of approaching death.

The translation of Luther's works deserves encouragement. But the selection of this particular piece for the purpose suggested by Mr. Perkins seems to be about as wise as the publication, let us say, of a translation of Deuteronomy 21:18-21 for the solution of the problem of juvenile delinquency today.

