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## Brief Studies

Carl S. Meyer

*Concordia Seminary, St. Louis*

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## BRIEF STUDIES

### INTER-LUTHERAN RELATIONS: A BIBLIOGRAPHICAL STUDY

*Documents of Lutheran Unity in America*, edited by Richard A. Wolf<sup>1</sup> provides a first-rate guide for pastors and students in the history of Lutheran unity efforts. The lucid, exact introductions to the chapters furnish the "textbook"; the documents bring the evidence. The 672-page book with hard covers sells for the unbelievably low price of \$2.50, which figures out to one cent per document, since there are 250 documents in the volume. They go back to 1730, but most of the documents come from the 20th century. To illustrate the richness of the collection we can point to the Knubel-Jacobs Statement of 1919 (no. 134), the Minneapolis Theses of 1925 (no. 146), A Brief Statement, 1932 (no. 158), the Statement on Church Fellowship of the Church of the Lutheran Confession, 1961 (no. 179), and correspondence between John W. Behnken and Frederik A. Schioltz in 1959 (no. 246).

The union negotiations in the past 50 years or so have produced an almost bewildering array of official pronouncements, pamphlets, articles of various kinds in a variety of theological journals and otherwise, not to say anything about the minutes and proceedings of church bodies, committees, and commissions. It is imperative to go back to some of the basic documents, at least. Wolf's *Documents* provides a worthwhile selection. Often the documents are abbreviated (properly indicated by ellipses), which may be just enough of an incentive for someone here or there to check the complete document. At any rate, it would be well to have Wolf's volume at hand for any discussion, whether in pastoral conferences or in congregational study groups, on the question of inter-Lutheran fellowship.

<sup>1</sup> Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966.

A few documents in another collection, under the caption "Interchurch Relations," sum up Missouri's principles and practices. Additional documents are under the headings "Areas of Cooperation Between the Missouri Synod and Other Lutherans" and "Unity and Union Efforts."<sup>2</sup>

Fred W. Meuser has included 51 documents with his chapter on "Pulpit and Altar Fellowship Among Lutherans in America" in the volume edited by Vilmos Vajta.<sup>3</sup> Incidentally, the chapters by Johannes Meister on "Church and Altar Fellowship in the Evangelical Churches of Germany" and Carl H. Lyttkens on "Altar Fellowship in the Scandinavian Churches" bring dimensions seldom come by and add greatly to an understanding of the total question.

The pamphlet *Doctrinal Declarations*<sup>4</sup> is now out of print, but its successive editions brought doctrinal documents with very little comment and served a highly useful purpose.

John H. Tietjen has treated the history of various efforts to unite Lutherans of this country in his *Which Way to Lutheran Unity?*<sup>5</sup> Well written and easily read, it tends to oversimplify the story and neglects some significant developments. No one else,

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Coates and Erwin L. Lueker, "Four Decades of Expansion, 1920—1960," *Moving Frontiers: Readings in the History of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod*, ed. Carl S. Meyer (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1964), pp. 406—31.

<sup>3</sup> *Church in Fellowship: Pulpit and Altar Fellowship Among Lutherans* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1963), pp. 25—72.

<sup>4</sup> A collection of official statements on the doctrinal positions of Lutheran church bodies in America, published by Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, first published in 1939.

<sup>5</sup> St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1966.

however, has put the record together so well in a narrative of less than 200 pages, and a goodly number of pastors have welcomed (or will welcome) Tietjen's contribution. More restricted, but set in a much broader context than Tietjen's study, was Theodore Hoyer's succinct section on "Union Movements in the Lutheran Church in America" in the essay that he read to the Synodical Conference in 1936 and continued in 1938 on "Union Movements in the Church."<sup>6</sup> An article by Alfred O. Fuerbringer and Martin H. Franzmann may be regarded in a sense as a continuation of Hoyer's essay. The Fuerbringer-Franzmann article appeared under the title "A Quarter-Century of Interchurch Relations: 1935—1960."<sup>7</sup>

Few will want to neglect the chapter "In Pursuit of Unity," which John W. Behnken included in his autobiography, *This I Recall*.<sup>8</sup> For instance, he refers to the Missouri Synod action in 1929 as "our Synod's somewhat summary refusal to accept the Chicago Theses."<sup>9</sup> He wrote: "What a blessing it would be if by means of such systematic and continuing theological studies all of America's — indeed, the world's — Lutherans could unite *on the solid foundation of Holy Writ and the witness of the Lutheran Confessions*."<sup>10</sup> Elsewhere Behnken also supplied a valuable background history of the Lutheran Council in the United States of America.<sup>11</sup> An earlier essay on "The Way We Have Come"<sup>12</sup> supplied information from this

<sup>6</sup> For this section see Synodical Conference, *Proceedings*, 1938, pp. 32—49.

<sup>7</sup> CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY, XXXII, 1 (January 1961), 5—14.

<sup>8</sup> St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1964.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 165.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 185. Italics in the original.

<sup>11</sup> *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly*, XXXIX, 4 (January 1967), 147—56.

<sup>12</sup> *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly*, XXXIX, 2 (July 1966), 51—63.

same participant that is helpful in amplifying the record.

The year 1917 was a crucial year for Lutheran union movements. For the Missouri Synod it meant the election of an Intersynodical Committee and the publication of Friedrich Bente's *Was steht der Vereinigung der lutherischen Synoden Amerikas im Wege?*<sup>13</sup> Both acts say something about Missouri. Erwin L. Lueker wrote about "The Stance of Missouri in 1917."<sup>14</sup> A brief survey of Missouri's attitude on union and unionism in 1917 with extensive references to published articles is found in another issue of the *Quarterly*.<sup>15</sup> A third issue offers an article containing some documents hitherto unpublished that reveal not only attitudes within the Missouri Synod on unionism but illustrate too where some of the decisions were being made.<sup>16</sup> The record would be incomplete without O. H. Pannkoke's historical-autobiographical work.<sup>17</sup>

Theodore Graebner wrote much on the question of Lutheran union. Two titles can be cited here. One is his essay "The Problem of Lutheran Union."<sup>18</sup> Graebner was a journalist with a flair for the historical. He wrote as a personal participant in the scene, which makes the essay one that cannot be neglected; it is, nevertheless, slanted. Between

<sup>13</sup> St. Louis, Concordia Publishing House, 1917.

<sup>14</sup> *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly*, XL, 3 (October 1967), 119—26.

<sup>15</sup> Carl S. Meyer, "Some Aspects of the Observance of the Reformation Quadricentennial by America's Lutherans," *ibid.*, XLI, 1 (February 1968), 16—20.

<sup>16</sup> Alan Graebner, "World War I and Lutheran Union Documents from the Army and Navy Board, 1917 and 1918," *ibid.*, XLI, 2 (May 1968), 51—64.

<sup>17</sup> *A Great Church Finds Itself: The Lutheran Church Between the Wars*. (Quitman, Ga.: Privately printed, 1966), see especially pp. 9—107.

<sup>18</sup> *The Problem of Lutheran Union and Other Essays* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1935), pp. 1—106.

1935 and 1943 the issue of prayer fellowship joined that of altar and pulpit fellowship, and in 1943 (it seems strange today) Paul E. Kretzmann joined Theodore Graebner in essays on prayer fellowship, pulpit and altar fellowship, unionism, and cooperation in externals.<sup>19</sup> The essays themselves remain valuable exhibits for the thinking of the period. The authors said: "We are living in an age which calls for a rethinking, a new thinking-through of all of our principles of church work, not in order to revise them, but in order to obtain a clear understanding of their application to new issues and new conditions."<sup>20</sup>

There are admittedly other pamphlets and mimeographed essays that purport to tell the story of Missouri's *Werdegang* in inter-synodical matters; they are omitted here largely because of their subjective nature. We still need a significant number of specialized, objective studies of the movements among the Lutheran bodies since 1918. One such study is E. Clifford Nelson's "A Case Study in Lutheran Unity Efforts: ULCA Conversations with Missouri and the ALC, 1936—1940."<sup>21</sup> Another is a biographical sketch that Dorris A. Flesner wrote, honoring the first president of the United Lutheran Church in America, "Frederick H. Knubel: Pioneer in American Lutheran Participation in the Modern Ecumenical Movement."<sup>22</sup> Flesner and Nelson have shown what ought to be done to provide detailed information for an adequate understanding of past events. Such was the objective of the present writer's

<sup>19</sup> *Toward Lutheran Union: A Scriptural and Historical Approach* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1943).

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 231.

<sup>21</sup> Chapter 9 in *The Maturing of American Lutheranism: Essays in Honor of Willard Dow Allbeck*, ed. Herbert T. Neve and Benjamin A. Johnson (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1968), pp. 201—23.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 162—81 (chapter 7).

contributions to this journal on *A Brief Statement*.<sup>23</sup>

Frederick K. Wentz has put together the history of the National Lutheran Council.<sup>24</sup> Within that history there are topics that call for further exploration—one cannot exhaust or even touch on every topic in a 221-page book. Wentz had access to the archives; a scholar's carefulness pervades the work.

This stamp of approval must be placed on a spate of histories that marked the mergers of Lutheran church bodies in the early 1960s. Histories of church bodies or synods generally partake of the partisan predilections of their authors. We do not expect any historian to be without presuppositions, likes, and dislikes. A man who writes the history of a denomination will usually be a member of that denomination or church body and may reflect his personal loyalties in his writing. When combined with the scholar's desire to investigate fully, to weigh the evidence critically, and to arrive at a conclusion judiciously, this kind of bias is not altogether to the bad.

Fred W. Meuser's Yale dissertation is a case in point.<sup>25</sup> The subtitle may indicate a bias; the footnotes on every page reveal far-ranging research in published and unpublished primary sources. His account of the relations between the Ohio and Iowa Synods takes up the bulk of the narrative. The story had to be told, and Meuser has told it with completeness and exactitude.

<sup>23</sup> Carl S. Meyer, "The Historical Background of 'A Brief Statement,'" *CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY*, XXXII, 7 (July 1961), 403—28; XXXII, 8 (August 1961), 466—82; XXXII, 9 (September 1961), 526—42.

<sup>24</sup> *Lutherans in Concert: The Story of the National Lutheran Council, 1918—1966* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1968). See also *idem*, "Beginnings of the National Lutheran Council," *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly*, XL, 2 (October 1967), 133—42.

<sup>25</sup> *The Formation of the American Lutheran Church: A Case Study in Lutheran Unity* (Columbus, Ohio: The Wartburg Press, 1958).

The work is out of print, but even after 10 years it deserves to be reprinted so that it is more widely available.

A two-volume history of the Evangelical Lutheran Church by E. Clifford Nelson and Eugene L. Fevold tells the story of Norwegian Lutheranism in this country from 1825 to 1890 in the first volume. The second volume, authored by Nelson, continues the story from 1890 to 1959.<sup>26</sup> This "serious attempt at honest historiography" is a gold mine of information. Chapter 6 on "The Union of 1917" and Chapter 9 on "The Church Discovers Other Churches" are especially noteworthy for a specialized study of inter-Lutheran relations. Herman A. Preus summarized the events among the Norwegians leading to 1917 in an essay written from a somewhat different perspective from that adopted by Nelson.<sup>27</sup> Nelson's work has a selection of documents in a 38-page appendix. Another history of the Norwegians, somewhat older and certainly from a different point of view from that of Nelson's, is *Grace for Grace*.<sup>28</sup> It has a section on "The Doctrinal Controversies of the Norwegian Synod."

The histories of the smaller synods should not be disregarded. Enok Martensen has written a charming account of the Danish group that joined with the United Lutheran Church in the formation of the Lutheran Church in America.<sup>29</sup> John Jensen performed the same task for the group of Danes

that became a part of The American Lutheran Church.<sup>30</sup> In each case the moves that led to the respective merger are told.

The account of the Augustana Synod and its merger with the United Lutheran Church and the American Evangelical Lutheran Church by G. Everett Arden must be regarded as a major contribution to the historiography of Lutheranism in America.<sup>31</sup> Arden is a good writer, a good research scholar, a good historian. He does not disguise his high regard for the Augustana Synod, exceeded, however, by his regard for Lutheran unity. Chapter 17 has the title "Destiny Fulfilled," in which he treats the consummation of the merger in the Lutheran Church in America.

For reference purposes the reader will want to have ready access to the three-volume *Encyclopedia of the Lutheran Church* produced under the auspices of the Lutheran World Federation.<sup>32</sup> He will turn to articles on the "American Lutheran Church" (by Fred W. Meuser, E. Clifford Nelson, et al.), on the "American Theology in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries" (by G. Everett Arden), "Lutheran Church in America" (by Theodore G. Tappert, Dorris A. Flesner, et al.), "Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod" (by Erwin L. Lueker), "Lutheran World Federation" (by Abdel Ross Wentz), and the "National Lutheran Council" (by Helen M. Knubel).

Of great help to the reader and researcher will be the tabulation of Lutheran synods and synodical structures compiled by Robert C. Wiederaenders and Walter G. Tillmanns,

<sup>26</sup> *The Lutheran Church Among Norwegian-Americans: A History of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*. Two volumes (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1960).

<sup>27</sup> "History of Norwegian Lutherans in America to 1917," *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly*, XL, 3 (October 1967), 99—118.

<sup>28</sup> *Grace for Grace: Brief History of the Norwegian Synod*, ed. S. C. Ylvisaker (Mankato, Minn.: Lutheran Synod Book Co., 1943).

<sup>29</sup> *The Danish Lutheran Church in America: The History and Heritage of the American Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Philadelphia: Lutheran Church in America, Board of Publications, 1967).

<sup>30</sup> *The United Evangelical Lutheran Church: An Interpretation* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1964).

<sup>31</sup> *Augustana Heritage: A History of the Augustana Lutheran Church* (Rock Island, Ill.: Augustana Press, 1963).

<sup>32</sup> *The Encyclopedia of the Lutheran Church*, ed. Julius Bodensieck. Three volumes (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1965).

*The Synods of American Lutheranism.*<sup>33</sup> Produced as Publication No. 1 of the Lutheran Historical Conference, the book is an "exhibit" of an intersynodical and interdisciplinary approach to a problem in Lutheran historiography. Beyond any value for study

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<sup>33</sup> St. Louis: Printed by Concordia Seminary Print Shop for the Lutheran Historical Conference, 1968.

in inter-Lutheran relations the Wiederaenders-Tillmanns volumes will be of tremendous worth as a *Nachschlagewerk*, a handy tool to have alongside the *Encyclopedia* and *Moving Frontiers* and *Wolf's Documents*.<sup>34</sup>

CARL S. MEYER

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<sup>34</sup> And, of course, your *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly* and CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY.