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## Editorial

Herbert T. Mayer

*Concordia Seminary, St. Louis*

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of Abraham in Early Christianity  
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Genesis 22:1-14: From Text to Proclamation  
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Homiletics

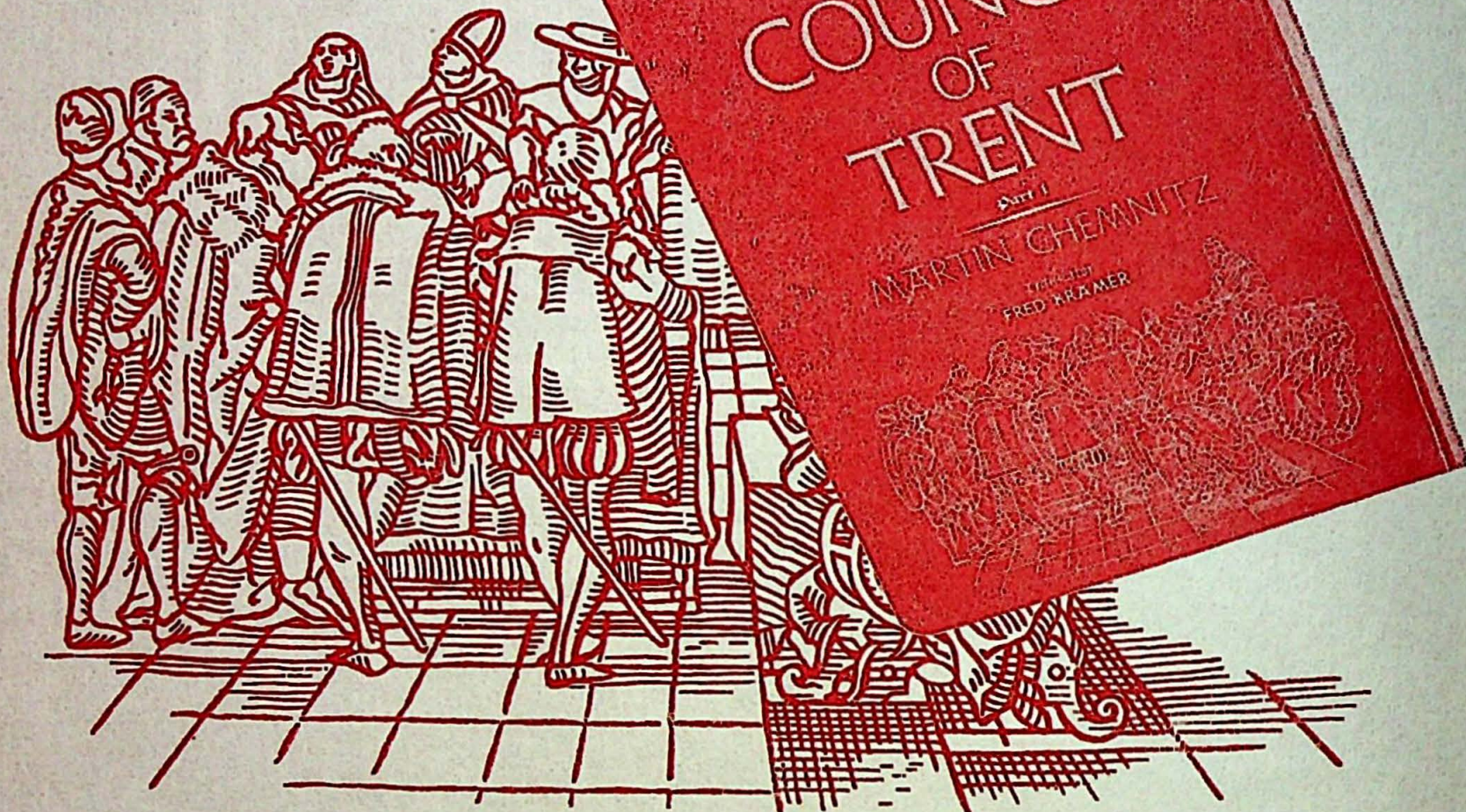
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Vol. XLIII

December

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**THE LUTHERAN CHURCH—MISSOURI SYNOD**

*Edited by*  
**THE FACULTY OF CONCORDIA SEMINARY  
SAINT LOUIS, MISSOURI**

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# Editorial ✠

## A Place for Loyal Opposition

**"Unless we believe in the power of the Spirit of God, and unless we trust one another, we must settle for no program at all or a coercive ecclesiastical police state . . . . [T]he assumption of our Church [is] that we are a 'voluntary fellowship,' that 'authority is declarative and ministerial,' and that we have accepted the liability of 'freedom under law' which can only depend for its power upon the good will and mutual respect and love of the brethren."**

That paragraph is taken from an editorial in the February issue of the *Presbyterian Layman* where Dr. James W. Baird pleads for structures in the church through which the loyal opposition can creatively express its disagreement with the leadership and the programs of the church. He argues that the Presbyterian Church as he knows it suffers from a "serious lack of provision in its basic organization for the normal outlet and expression of creative disagreement. As a result, forces which seek expression and which are basically loyal to the Church, but which are in strong disagreement with trends in program and mission, must either risk the discipline and rejection of the Church or feel that they must 'go underground' in order that they may pursue those aspects of mission in which they sincerely believe."

Dr. Baird bases his argument on the seventh section of chapter one of the constitution of the United Presbyterian Church: "All church power, whether exercised by the body in general or in the way of representation by delegated authority, is only ministerial and declarative; that is to say, that the Holy Scriptures are the only rule of faith and manners; that no church judicatory ought to pretend to make laws to bind the conscience in virtue of their own authority; and that all their decisions should be founded upon the revealed will of God."

He argues further that "provision should be made in the formation of all judicatories for the representation of the opposition in all committee membership and on the boards and agencies. Rather than being swept under the rug, the built-in disagreement with the Church should be creatively provided for in some way in the Constitution," so that instead of "ending in frustration, it could become another source of strength for the Church."

Our own inability within The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod to solve the problem of loyal, creative disagreement has frequently risen to haunt us in the recent past. Since World War II we have been unable to deal constructively with the "Statement of the Forty-Four," a vigorous protest against incipient legalism containing concerns which the signers felt they could not express through regular channels. More recently a group of loyal members of the Synod brought their concerns to light in the document known as "A Call to Openness and Trust." In addition to that we have almost unnumbered pastors busily mimeographing their convictions and protests and sharing them with the church. We have magazines appearing on all sides of the issues because it seems that



the Synod has not yet developed a way of harnessing and creatively using the loyal opposition.

The boards and agencies established in the constitution and bylaws provide ample opportunity for the creative use of the loyal opposition. However, when creative dissent is stifled, either by packing a group or by permitting an atmosphere to develop where one no longer is free to express his opinions, then creative dissent is forced underground and often becomes something other than creative.

It seems that each board, agency, and faculty in the Synod should represent as completely as possible the complete spectrum of permissible opinion held by members of the Synod. When such representative boards and faculties function in an atmosphere of openness and mutual respect, an effective self-correcting process works. Brethren who are moving to disputable positions or to extreme positions find themselves corrected and embraced within the fellowship of a given committee or faculty. There is no substitute for this kind of evangelical balance-wheel operation. Thus two things are necessary in order to make constructive use of the loyal opposition. Official committees and faculties must be representative and they must be able to function in an atmosphere of mutual trust and respect. Providing these two ingredients is the primary responsibility of the synodical president. Since the constitution was designed to function in this way, the framers felt that a legal system of checks and balances were unnecessary. We believe that they were right, and we hope that our present distress will not be solved by incorporating into the constitution a cumbersome system of such legal checks and balances.

HERBERT T. MAYER