

HISTORICAL ESSAY

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by

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“The Missouri Synod’s Slide into Heterodoxy, 1932-1947”

In just two years, our Concordia Lutheran Conference will mark its Golden Anniversary. To the world round about us, our little church-body, comprised of only seven small congregations, is statistically insignificant on the ecclesiastical landscape and barely worth a mention among the huge synods and federations that have arisen and grown by leaps and bounds during this same fifty year period. Nevertheless for half a century we shall have enjoyed the singular gracious blessings of our Lord and God for Jesus’ our Savior’s sake, whereof we are glad; and we have survived as a Conference— yea, we have flourished in many respects— much to the surprise of those who never even heard of us, much to the disgust of those who hate us and despise our stand, and much to the frustration of those whose bowl of pottage scraped out of the fleshpots of Egypt no longer satisfies them. For us, the unadulterated Holy Scriptures have been Manna for our souls and a fountain of living water springing up unto everlasting life. Therefore we gratefully ascribe all glory to God for having preserved unto us in their purity His saving Word and the sacred ordinances of His House as the precious means whereby He has strengthened us in the true and saving faith and promises to keep us therein even unto the end. In order to focus our younger members in particular upon the reasons for our existence as a church-body, it behooves us specially to consider retrospectively the reasons for the formation of our “parent” body, the Orthodox Lutheran Conference, in 1951, and to thank and praise our gracious God and Lord for having preserved us in true orthodoxy to the present day. *“That the generation to come might know them, even the children which should be born, who should arise and declare them to their children”* (Psalm 78:6), it is essential that we examine the events in history which caused our Conference’s “fathers” to “mark” the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod as a heterodox

church body and made it essential for them to “avoid” it and to go it on their own (Romans 16:17).

Our people, as well as others who may hear or read this essay, should understand that those who protested against the errors making steady inroads into the synod and particularly against the toleration of those errors by the very ones who were charged with maintaining doctrinal discipline within that body, dearly loved the Missouri Synod and its heritage of the truth championed by Dr. Walther, Dr. Pieper, and many others. As was the case with Luther in the early days of the Reformation, it was not their desire to leave the Missouri Synod and to form another (or a “competitive”) church body. On the contrary, it was their fervent hope and prayer that their earnest protests would not fall on deaf ears but would be heard as the clarion call of the Holy Scriptures to the pastors, laymen, professors and officers of the synod to be more zealous in “endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:3) by exercising vigilance, identifying variance, disciplining those who “cause[d] divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which [they had] learned” (Romans 16:17), and thus guarding the confessional position of the synod in both doctrine and practice. When this was not done, in spite of patient admonition, and they realized that they were viewed by the leaders of the synod (and even by the rank and file) as crackpots, troublemakers and self-serving saber rattlers, our faithful fathers had no choice but to leave.

Part One

Ironically, Missouri’s slide into heterodoxy —an admittedly *gradual* one— began some twenty years earlier as an unexpected result of what had seemed to be a completely legitimate, yea, a Godpleasing, interest on the part of our Lutheran forebears, namely, to seek to bring together the various synods bearing Luther’s name into a fellowship characterized by complete unity in faith and confession, in doctrine and practice, based on the verbally-inspired, inerrant, and completely clear and all-sufficient Word of God. This had been, after all, Dr. Walther’s fond desire which he saw at least partially fulfilled in the formation of the Synodical Conference in 1871. Sadly but not surprisingly, the yen for outward “union” soon replaced the insistence on true “unity” on the agenda of some of the staunchest theologians of the synod, especially between 1930 and 1950 (as can be seen by comparing their earlier writings with their later ones). The leaven of indifferentism spread like a cancer (II Timothy 2:17), and subtle compromise (couched in non-specific language which deliberately blurred points of controversy) became the order of the day not long after the adoption of the *Brief Statement* in 1932.

By 1930, the “Lutheran” landscape was still painted in black and white with a “muddied” grey-scale in between. But the “technicolor” hues had not yet hopelessly confused the picture, making even the grossest departures from God’s Word attractive to the casual and non-critical viewer as the situation is today. There were basically three “Lutheranisms” on the scene: Liberal Lutheranism, middle-of-the road Lutheranism, and orthodox Lutheranism. Since this year’s essay is intended to be fairly brief, we shall endeavor to distill the historical development of these as much as possible.

In 1918, the **United Lutheran Church in America** (ULCA) was formed by the union of the **General Synod** (dating from 1820, a rapidly growing body covering practically the entire eastern third of the United States, but characterized by laxity in doctrine and practice), the **General Council** (formed in 1867 by “conservatives” who had defected from the General Synod), and the **United Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the South** (a body composed of synods below the Mason-Dixon Line, organized in 1863, which had retained its separate identity

since Civil War days). This **United Lutheran Church in America** represented the most liberal and latitudinarian of nominal Lutherans in both doctrine and practice.

In 1930, the **American Lutheran Church** (ALC) was constituted by the union of the *Buffalo Synod* (founded by J. A. A. Grabau and other Prussian Lutherans in 1845), the *Iowa Synod* (founded in 1854 by Franconian Lutherans who had migrated from Michigan to Iowa), and the *Ohio Synod* (organized by Lutheran pioneers already in 1818). This **American Lutheran Church** then united in October of 1930 with the *Augustana Synod* (organized in 1860 by Scandinavian Lutherans who had left the *General Synod* because of its laxity), the *Lutheran Free Church* (of Norwegian Lutherans who did not join the larger Norwegian body in 1917 but organized their own synod), the *Evangelical Lutheran Church* (ELC), known until 1946 as the *Norwegian Lutheran Church* (organized in 1917 by most of the Norwegian Lutherans chiefly on the basis of their common language and heritage), and the *United Evangelical Lutheran Church* (UELCL), known until 1946 as the *Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church*, (organized in 1870 by Norwegian and Danish Lutherans). This federation, known as the **American Lutheran Conference**, was created to facilitate cooperation among all the above-mentioned bodies, and had as its doctrinal basis the *Minneapolis Theses* of 1925. The bodies comprising the **American Lutheran Conference** represented in 1930 the middle-of-the-road Lutherans in doctrine and practice.

Finally, we come to the **Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America**, referred to commonly as the **Synodical Conference**. This federation had been founded in 1871 as an advisory body whose main purpose was the expression, encouragement and promotion of unity in doctrine and practice and the practice of unity-based fellowship in cooperative church work and worship. The constituent bodies of this orthodox fellowship were the *Missouri Synod*, now known as the *Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod* (LCMS), founded in 1847 by Saxon immigrants under Dr. C. F. W. Walther and others, who had left Germany because of religious oppression; the *Wisconsin Synod*, now known as the *Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod* (WELS), founded in 1850 by Germans who came to America as missionaries to those who had earlier emigrated but had no preachers and teachers of the Word; the *Norwegian Synod*, now known as the *Evangelical Lutheran Synod* (ELS), a minority remnant of the old *Norwegian Synod* which refused for doctrinal reasons to merge with others into the large *Norwegian Lutheran Church* (ELC) in 1917 [See paragraph above.] and formed its own synod in 1918; and the *Slovak Synod* (SELC), founded in 1902 by Lutheran congregations of Slovak descent and language. When the slide of the Missouri Synod into blatant heterodoxy was plainly marked by its sister synods in the late 40's and early 50's, and the Missouri Synod refused their admonition and pleas to correct their self-destructive course, the Synodical Conference broke up with the withdrawal of the ELS in 1961 and of the WELS in 1963. It became totally inactive in 1966 and was dissolved in 1967. Ironically, the synod founded by Dr. Walther in 1847 destroyed his dream of Godpleasing Lutheran union based on true unity of faith and confession. Within less than a hundred years after its founding, the **Synodical Conference** was scuttled because of the consistent and unabating slide of the Missouri Synod into persistent heterodoxy!

While the years immediately following World War I have been characterized by many church historians as a time of “rapprochement,” a period during which concerted efforts were made on the part of the various Lutheran groups to come to a “meeting of the minds” in matters of doctrine and practice and thus eventually into some sort of pan-Lutheran organization, this is an oversimplification. This may indeed be the view of those who regard the entire matter of Lutheran union to be “political” in nature, to be settled by “negotiation” in which the art of “compromise” is the tool which crafts eventual agreement; but it fails to consider the requirements of Holy Scripture for truly Godpleasing fellowship, namely, true unity in faith and

confession, in doctrine and practice, based alone on God's inerrant Word, without compromise, without ambiguity, without accommodation, without "yielding aught of the eternal, immutable truth of God for the sake of temporal peace, tranquility and unity" (Thorough Declaration, *Formula of Concord*, XI, 95, *Triglotta*, p. 1095).

Significant social pressure was brought to bear during this period for pan-Lutheran cooperation in the spiritual care of Lutherans in the armed forces. In 1917, a *National Lutheran Commission* was created for this very purpose representing all of the Lutheran bodies except the members of the Synodical Conference, the latter synods maintaining "purely external cooperation." But a year later, a more permanent intersynodical organization, the *National Lutheran Council*, came into being under a series of "regulations" which included by 1926 the declaration that the unity of this council was based upon the basic doctrinal agreement of its member-bodies. This so-called "agreement" was tenuous at best due to variations in "interpretation" of Lutheran doctrine and practice, and it turned out to be the virtual *sham* of "agreement to disagree" which set the tone and standard for later efforts at Lutheran union. And for the *Synodical Conference*, there was always the question with respect to such organizations—as well as chaplaincy in the armed forces then and later—as to how much "cooperation" could be rendered that would remain "purely external." The heat was being turned up.

Still a fellowship of truly orthodox synods, the *Synodical Conference* was constantly being accused of standing in the way of progress toward Lutheran union. Specific reference was made to the "unreasonable" insistence of its constituent bodies that full agreement in doctrine and practice be the sole requisite not only for church *fellowship* but also for church *work* ("cooperative endeavors") with other Lutheran groups. With the view toward shedding the label of arbitrary obstructionism, representatives of the Missouri and Wisconsin Synods joined an Intersynodical Committee which included members of the Buffalo, Iowa, and Ohio Synods to hammer out a document which, it was hoped, could become the basis for mutual cooperation and eventual fellowship. The initial draft of the "*Intersynodical (Chicago) Theses*" was presented in 1925, but the committee itself could not reach a consensus on the wording until 1928, when the document in its final form was presented. In 1929, the Missouri Synod rejected the Theses as totally inadequate because a) certain paragraphs did not address the specific points of controversy, b) others were so ambiguously phrased that both parties could find in them their own positions, and c) at times the statements represented the false position of the opponents rather than the orthodox position of the Missouri Synod and Synodical Conference. The Synod decided instead to draw up *its own* theses addressing the specific unresolved controversies, and to make this document the doctrinal basis for any further discussions toward fellowship and church relations. This document, crafted by a committee appointed by President Pfotenhauer (which included Drs. Pieper and Engelder), was entitled "*Brief Statement of the Doctrinal Position of the Missouri Synod*." It was adopted by the Missouri Synod in 1932, was never amended by the Synod, nor withdrawn, nor retracted; and, as the sound and "living" document it continues to be, having had its roots in the now long-gone days of the Missouri Synod's orthodoxy, it still belongs to the Confessional Standard of our *Concordia Lutheran Conference* today.

What then happened to start the Missouri Synod on its downward slide into heterodoxy? What changed shortly after the adoption of the *Brief Statement* to steer the synod onto a different course? And was a real mid-course correction ever made to bring that body back to its insistence on *true unity* as the only basis for Christian fellowship and cooperative church work? In this first part of our essay, we shall address these questions and answer them briefly. But we shall save the crowning evidence, the "proof of the pudding" of Missouri's patent heterodoxy, for Part

Two.

Not long after the *Brief Statement* was adopted and the clear assumption was established that discussions were thence to be based upon *its* Scriptural declarations, the representatives of the American Lutheran Church filed their reaction to that document and the result of their deliberations. In their *Declaration* of 1938 (also known as the *Sandusky Declaration*), they stated that, on the basis not only of the *Brief Statement* but also of the *Minneapolis Theses* of 1925 (the agreement which paved the way for the organization of the American Lutheran Conference) and of the *Chicago Theses* (already rejected by the Missouri Synod as defective), they were issuing a series of summary statements. Those statements watered down the unequivocal wording of the *Brief Statement* and insisted that certain differences be acknowledged as not being divisive of Church fellowship. The subsequent resolution of the American Lutheran Church in the same year reiterated this position and further insisted that the *Brief Statement* be viewed in the light of their *Declaration* as not being in contradiction to the *Minneapolis Theses*, inasmuch as they were not about to give up their membership in the American Lutheran Conference. They therefore declared that the *Brief Statement* together with their *Declaration* constituted “a sufficient doctrinal basis for Church fellowship between the Missouri Synod and the American Lutheran Church.” —So near, and yet so far! The power-play had been made. The ultimatum had been laid down: All or nothing! Take it or leave it! Missouri would either agree to the ALC’s terms or would have to bear the stigma of having scuttled the negotiations! The ball was in Missouri’s court!

Suddenly, the once unbending, uncompromising, orthodox synod of Walther, Pieper, and Engelder *yielded* and accepted the conditions stipulated by the American Lutheran Church, even though it stopped short of the ALC’s expectation that it would immediately establish Church fellowship on the basis of what had been mutually accepted. The Wisconsin Synod was furious over the fact that Missouri had accepted a document that was not only defective but represented an easy compromise couched in deliberately ambiguous language. The *Declaration*, they held, did not state the truth clearly and did not exclude error in controverted doctrines. Moreover, the Wisconsin Synod pointed out that the ALC’s *Pittsburgh Agreement* with the United Lutheran Church in America showed its true and completely transparent intention, namely, to attempt union with *both* the Missouri Synod *and* the radically liberal ULCA at the very same time! The outrage of their Synodical Conference brethren — not an accusing conscience because of the forbidden fruit it had just swallowed— caused the Missouri Synod to issue in 1940 an explanation to the American Lutheran Church about “candidly what in our view...still stands in the way of actual fellowship between our two bodies.” And Missouri carefully back-pedaled into safer territory. The ALC, too, saw the impractical and almost insurmountable task of becoming the bridge between the Missouri Synod and the ULCA; and it backed away from both of them. Yet the sugary-sweet taste of the fruit lingered on the tongues of all three parties; and, as the “loss of innocence” makes carnal indulgence easier the next time around, the loss of true orthodoxy in an *attitude of latitude*, in a lapse of *confessional standards*, in ambivalence toward *doctrinal purity*, and in the willingness to couch disagreement in *deliberately crafted ambiguous language*, became evident in the subsequent appearance of *A Statement* in 1945 and in the easy and frankly “sleazy” way in which the signers were permitted to escape virtually unscathed!

These were the “official” dealings of the “officials” of the Synod that signaled the beginning of the end of Missouri’s orthodoxy. But there were other symptoms of the festering cancer of heterodoxy eating away at the heart and other vital organs of the once orthodox Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States. Indeed, the blame for Missouri’s fall from its once cherished perch on “*the foundation of the apostles and prophets*” (Ephesians 2:20)

cannot be laid solely at the feet of her leaders.

The orthodoxy of the Missouri Synod after 1932 began to take on the stench of “dead orthodoxy”— an orthodoxy professed, an orthodoxy preached, an orthodoxy taught, an orthodoxy committed to paper, pointed to and boasted of by one and all as the hallmark of “Synod” (a name which almost *personified* the institution)— but an orthodoxy that *in practice* was a sham! [“Practice” is defined as the consistent application of doctrine (Exodus 34:11; James 1:22; Luke 6:46; etc.)] The rank and file of both clergy and laity became infected with the insidious contagion. “Doctrinal discipline” (whereby brethren hew to the mark of God’s inerrant Word and by sound doctrine both exhort and convince gainsayers in their fellowship) was neglected; and those pastors who practiced it in pastoral conferences and conventions were sometimes actually booed down and told to keep their dogmatics to themselves! [Your essayist recalls from his childhood an instance in which his father and several other orthodox pastors in a conference out East were labeled “SOB’s” by their fellow pastors—“super orthodox brethren”! Some fellowship!] “Church discipline” in the local congregation according to Matthew 18:15-17 was also sorely neglected, and the principles of Holy Scripture became purely “theoretical” for the average church member, principles to be confessed on Sunday mornings and to be ignored during the week. The doctrinal position of the Missouri Synod was “solid” on paper—concerning the inerrancy of Scripture and its verbal inspiration, unity as the requisite for fellowship, close communion, sinful religious unionism, the chaplaincy, lodge membership and Scouting, merchandising to support the work of Christ’s church, modern social dancing, gambling, engagement being tantamount to holy marriage, etc. Even a casual look at the books and tracts published during this period bears this out. BUT *in practice* things were otherwise! Practice on these matters varied from pastor to pastor, from congregation to congregation, from member to member within the same congregation; and virtually NOTHING was done about it! Personal variance was not considered “divisive of fellowship” in spite of I Corinthians 1:10, Ephesians 4:3, and many other passages. “Personal unionism” in joint prayer between individuals not in fellowship with one another was not as bad as “institutional unionism” between church bodies. Toleration of occasional lodge membership was not as bad as “synodical policy” approving it. Bake sales, suppers, and bazaars to support the church were okay as long as the synod was “on record” as opposing them. Modern social dancing was perfectly acceptable, even at wedding receptions in parish halls, as long as books and tracts were published “officially” condemning it. Is it any wonder that the American Lutheran Church was suspect of the Missouri Synod’s insistence on complete agreement in doctrine and practice for the establishment of fellowship? The *synod itself* wasn’t consistent; the *pastors* didn’t want to be consistent; and the *laymen* were quite content with the inconsistent application of their precious orthodoxy. Some orthodoxy! The Missouri Synod was already in a precipitous slide, and there was no evidence of an imminent turnaround in spite of the vigorous protests of a precious few who dared to raise their voices.

Part Two

Suddenly and completely “out of the blue” —particularly for those who were either indifferent to or oblivious of the creeping heterodoxy that was eating like a cancer from within the body— organized dissatisfaction with the official orthodox position of the Missouri Synod was widely publicized, dissatisfaction particularly with its Scriptural requisites for Godpleasing union with other Lutherans and its refusal to enter into fellowship with the A. L. C. Forty-four pastors and professors, many of them renowned theologians in the synod, representing themselves as voices of reason and legitimate concern, met in Chicago, Illinois, on September 6-7, 1945, to mount an offensive against what they termed “some of the most vexing problems confronting our Synod.”

To illustrate these alleged “problems” they preferred vaguely-worded general accusations against unnamed members (and presumably also officers) of the synod without supporting evidence and without proof, and they drafted and signed *A Statement* which they represented as their sincere effort to combat those “problems”.

A copy of this *Statement* was sent by Dr. E. J. Friedrich, one of the leaders of this renegade group, to Synodical President John W. Behnken on September 19, who, the very same day, in a long distance phone call, asked Dr. Friedrich to postpone the publication of the *Statement* until the praesidium [the President and the four Vice Presidents of Synod] had an opportunity to discuss its contents with the signers. This request was denied. On October 2, Dr. Behnken and the rest of the praesidium urgently telegraphed their protest against the publication of the *Statement*, but a representative committee of the signers declined to honor the protest. Thereupon the document with its cover letter was distributed throughout the Missouri Synod, putting into print and thrusting into the public eye the pernicious views of those who *today* would no doubt still be regarded by “modern” Lutherans as “genuinely concerned *moderates*” and “pleading *voices of reason*” in the interest of Christian unity. This precipitous circularization of *A Statement* threw down a red-hot gauntlet at the feet of President Behnken, which, as it soon became evident, he was both unable and unwilling to pick up and deal with in accordance with Scripture as the chief executive officer of the Missouri Synod, charged with guarding the confessional position of that church body against error and public offense. Moreover, the subsequent lengthy defense of *A Statement* contained in a booklet entitled “*Speaking the Truth in Love*” grossly perverted that Bible text (Ephesians 4:15) and used it for the propagation of error. It is therefore in direct testimony *against* that perversion that we have taken Ephesians 4:15 as the motto of this present convention of our beloved Conference and now uncover in retrospect the lies, slander, and false doctrine that were permitted to stand, “*that the generation to come might know*” (Psalm 78:6) the truth about *A Statement* and the official cover-up which effectively sealed the doom of the Missouri Synod as a heterodox church body.

What About the Charges? —In the cover letter that accompanied it, the signers of *A Statement* published general accusations against unnamed members of Synod, without the evidence and proof required by Holy Scripture, charges which, understood in the context of *A Statement* and the agenda of its signers, targeted those pastors and synodical officers who remained steadfast and unmoveable (I Corinthians 15:58) on the doctrinal position of the Missouri Synod (*Brief Statement* of 1932) and resisted any and all efforts to compromise that doctrinal position for an “easy union” with the American Lutheran Church. The “*good words and fair speeches*” (Romans 16:18) in which the charges were cloaked were perniciously deceptive. They had been cunningly crafted in their language so as to beg the question and entice the reader to accept them as legitimate outrage at false doctrine and practice, when, in actuality, they couched condemnation of true orthodoxy in fair-sounding terminology. Would not **we ourselves**, not knowing of the wicked machinations of these 20th Century “*men of Belial*” (I Kings 21:10-13), have been outraged to learn that there were those in our church body who showed:

- “a pernicious spirit, utterly at variance with the fundamental concepts of the Gospel”??
- “a wrong approach to the Holy Scriptures”??
- “a misconception of the essence of the Gospel”??
- “barren, negative attitudes and unevangelical techniques”??
- “unsympathetic, legalistic practices”??
- “self-complacent and separatistic narrowness”??

- “utter disregard for the law of Christian love”??
- “ecclesiastical persecutions”??

Yet, there was no evidence, no proper witness, no proof; so that even if the allegations *had been true*, they would have constituted **false witness** according to the Eighth Commandment (See Luther, *Large Catechism*, §109-112), **slander** (Psalm 50:19ff.), and blatant **defamation** (Proverbs 11:9). What these amounted to were the counter-accusation of and *ad hominem* attack upon the defenders of the truth that Ahab threw in the face of God’s servant, Elijah: “*Art thou he that troubleth Israel?*” (I Kings 18:17).

What About the Content?? —While not everything in *A Statement* is contrary to Scripture, several sections are *questionable* because of the inferences that can be drawn from them on the basis of the signers’ quite public and undisguised agenda:

Section One: “We affirm our loyalty to the great evangelical heritage of historic Lutheranism.”

The term “Lutheran heritage” is deliberately vague here. The signers obviously do not affirm loyalty to the *Sola Scriptura* heritage, or they would affirm loyalty to the inerrant, verbally-inspired Scriptures. Their “Lutheran heritage” can better be characterized as a “Melanchthonian” heritage.

Section Two: “We deplore a tendency in our Synod to substitute human judgments, synodical resolutions, or other sources of authority for the supreme authority of Scripture.”

This sounds nice at first hearing, but when we consider that the “human judgments, synodical resolutions, or other sources of authority” objected to by the signers are those resolutions whereby an easy union with the A. L. C. had been blocked (including, of course, the *Brief Statement of 1932*), the color of the horse suddenly looks different!

Section Three: “We deplore all man-made barriers and all ecclesiastical traditions which would hinder the free course of the Gospel in the world.”

We would deplore the same —*if* that were what this section actually deplores. In point of fact, the signers deplore here proper Scriptural “practice” in the Synod including prohibitions against unionistic services, joint prayer with the heterodox, and participation with false church bodies in evangelism programs. They found the regulations of Synod against such things restrictive of the Gospel.

Section Four: “We deplore a loveless attitude which is manifesting itself within Synod ... in suspicions of brethren, in the impugning of motives, and in the condemnation of all who have expressed differing opinions....”

This, too, is fair-sounding until we understand that the signers equated “lovelessness” with admonition and doctrinal discipline in the Synod, the denunciation of sinful religious unionism, and the condemnation of those who “*cause divisions and offenses*” by espousing false doctrine and/or permitting false doctrine to stand alongside the truth without discrimination.

Section Six: “We believe that there should be a re-emphasis of the privileges

and responsibilities of the local congregation also in the matter of determining questions of fellowship.”

Dr. Friedrich’s official denial notwithstanding, this wording clearly opens the door to *selective fellowship* apart from joint recognition of brethren on the part of the synodical organization. In proper joint recognition of fellowship on the part of a church body, there is no hierarchical rule established for the synod or conference over the congregation, but only a safeguard against subjectively selective fellowship which ultimately results in religious unionism. Such a safeguard should be valued, not deplored.

Besides the above, **four sections** are definitely *objectionable*, namely, sections **five, eight, nine** and **eleven**. Let us look at each briefly:

Section Five: “We affirm our conviction that sound exegetical procedure is the basis for sound Lutheran theology. We therefore deplore the fact that Romans 16:17-18 has been applied to all Christians who differ from us in certain points of doctrine. It is our conviction based on sound exegetical and hermeneutical principles, that this text does not apply to the present situation in the Lutheran Church of America.”

1) NOT exegetical procedure (the method of expounding Scripture) but CLEAR SCRIPTURE ITSELF (the prooftexts or *sedes* which stand on their own without interpretation) is the only basis for sound Lutheran theology! 2) Romans 16:17-18 does not allow for the variances and exceptions forced upon it by modern exegetes. It is a *sedes doctrinae* or prooftext which forbids religious unionism, that is, church work and worship between those not united in doctrine. Even in 1945, the face of “Lutheranism in America” was a multi-faceted, spiritually schizophrenic mess! Today, it’s so bad that the “face” of outward Lutheranism is hopelessly disfigured and repulsive! The application of Romans 16:17-18 is NOT an “exegetical question”!

Section Eight: “We affirm our conviction that any two or more Christians may pray together to the Triune God in the name of Jesus Christ if the purpose for which they meet and pray is right according to the Word of God. This obviously includes meetings of groups called for the purpose of discussing doctrinal differences.”

1) This section could not have been “affirmed” if Romans 16:17-18 had not already been dismissed by the statementarians as not being applicable to fellowship between the orthodox and the heterodox (Section 5). Nevertheless other passages as well show that fellowship with the heterodox is contrary to the will of God and that joint prayer with those who err in doctrine and/or practice and refuse to heed correction is prohibited: Amos 3:3; Acts 2:42; I Corinthians 1:10; Ephesians 4:3ff., etc. 2) Since when do “Lutherans” espouse the Jesuitical principle that “the end justifies the means”? If the purpose for which they meet is Godpleasing, why would they deliberately fly in the face of God’s Word by practicing fellowship before fellowship is established?

Section Nine: “We deplore the tendency to apply this non-Biblical term [*“unionism”*] to any and every contact between Christians of different denominations.”

While the term is “non-Biblical,” that is, it is not found written anywhere in the Bible, both the *term* and the *concept* are completely Scriptural. This characterization of the statementarians

only seeks to detract from the importance of understanding the pernicious nature of sinful religious unionism. Moreover, by “any and every” the signers do not refer to *equal yokes* between the orthodox and heterodox; they want to exclude from the term “unionism” such things as joint prayer, joint mission work, joint youth activities, joint chaplaincy ministries in the military, joint hospital chaplaincies, etc., as well as indiscriminate exercise of fellowship between individuals.

Section Eleven: “We affirm our conviction that ... fellowship is possible without complete agreement in details of doctrine and practice which have never been considered divisive in the Lutheran Church.”

It is simply NOT TRUE that there are “details of doctrine and practice which have never been considered divisive in the Lutheran Church.” A doctrine is no more and no less than a clear teaching of Scripture. Differences other than doctrinal differences are not divisive, as our Lutheran fathers have consistently held, namely, “human traditions, that is, rites and ceremonies instituted by men” (Augsburg Confession, VII); BUT concerning doctrine, “The Word of God shall establish articles of faith, and no one else, not even an angel” (Smalcald Articles, *Triglotta*, p. 467, 15). In all such matters, God’s Word demands complete unity in doctrine and practice (I Corinthians 1:10). Note that the unscriptural character of *A Statement* laid down in Section Five reaches its ultimate and logical conclusion and purpose in Section Eleven.

What About the Cover-Up? —While it is true that President Behnken and the four Vice Presidents initially requested the signers NOT to send out *A Statement* until they had opportunity to discuss it with them, no action was taken when public offense was given in its immediate dissemination. Instead, the following chain of events took place which at the same time represented the President’s meager efforts at “damage control” and demonstrated his unwillingness to see it through to a Godpleasing resolution:

1) On December 10, 1945, President Behnken and the First Vice President of Synod met with the representative Continuation Committee of the signers and, in Behnken’s words, “voiced our disagreement with some of the points in *A Statement* as well as with the accompanying letter and insisted that these be corrected or withdrawn.” But nothing was done.

2) A subsequent meeting was arranged for February 14-15, 1946 in St. Louis, for the praesidium, the district presidents, and the signers. By the time this meeting was held, several hundred protests had been received by Behnken’s office from conferences and individuals all over the synod. At this meeting, the signers “explained” the statement and its accompanying letter; but two separate requests from the praesidium that they “withdraw” or at least “suspend” *A Statement* were declined. In direct contradiction of this fact, the *Lutheran Witness* reported on February 26: “The signers did not retract, nor were they asked to retract.” (p. 72). It was immediately obvious in what camp the *Lutheran Witness* had chosen to align itself. One positive step came out of the meeting: A committee of ten men chosen by the President was established to study *A Statement* in the light of God’s Word and to meet with a corresponding committee of the signers.

3) By April, 1946, the President’s Committee of Ten was established; but it soon became evident that it had no real status as far as reaching a final settlement was concerned. When the committee stated that it was essential for the President himself to define its status and the scope of its work and asked him for a meeting toward the end of that month, Behnken suggested that approval of such an arrangement be sought from the *signers’* committee! The President’s Committee deemed such a procedure entirely out of order. In the meeting that was eventually held on April 27, it was agreed that the committee would be regarded only as “advisory to the

President of Synod.”

4) The two committees of “Ten and Ten” met together three times (August 13-16, September 23-25, and November 12-15, 1946). In the first meeting, the President’s Committee presented to its counterpart committee a detailed list of objections to *A Statement* and to its accompanying letter; and, since the signers had been soliciting *additional* signatures throughout the summer and had been distributing the booklet “*Speaking the Truth in Love*” in defense of the *Statement*, President Behnken stipulated that no further solicitation be made and that distribution of the booklet should cease. Nevertheless, just two days after the conclusion of the second meeting, the chairman of the signer’s group (who had been present at the first meeting as well) issued a letter dated September 28, urging his fellow signers to do just the opposite and adding: “It seems as though it should be an easy matter to secure additional signers.” When at the meeting of November 12-15 the signers’ committee was called to account for these breaches which were agitating against a proper Godpleasing settlement, the signers’ committee gave no assurances of cooperation or compliance.

5) Following the November meeting and in view of mounting apprehension in Synod about the end result of its efforts, the President’s Committee decided that it had to make an immediate summary report to the President on negotiations to date and to request that the report be shared with Synod’s clergy for their assurance.

6) When, however, the final draft of the committee’s report was presented to President Behnken, he suggested a scenario of “writing *finis* to *A Statement*” —putting the whole matter to rest— by getting the signers simply to agree to the following: a) The Continuation Committee of the signers would cease to function; b) there would be no further propagandizing for *A Statement*; c) the “Statementarians” as a group would dissolve; d) the issues involved would be studied further at “conferences;” e) there would be no further solicitation of adherents; f) “*Speaking the Truth in Love*” would no longer be circulated; and g) the President would offer to local pastoral conferences “materials” for discussion of the issues raised by *A Statement*. The President’s Committee thereupon unanimously informed Dr. Behnken that his proposal was **unsatisfactory** because it did not provide for retraction of the defamations in the accompanying letter and did not mark as false nor require the retraction of any of the sections in *A Statement*. After the praesidium had privately considered these objections, the President stated regarding future procedure: “It is evident that *finis* cannot be offered to the church.” Although this statement was defective because of what was not said, namely, what exactly Behnken intended to do to bring a proper Godpleasing *finis* to this controversy, the President’s committee hoped, as late as the end of December, that he would heed its objections and not proceed with his compromising proposal. It still trusted that he would present its report to the Synod, as it had requested him to do, and then that he would act accordingly —Scripturally, forthrightly, honestly, and uncompromisingly in the best tradition of his predecessors in the office of Synodical President.

What About the Conclusion? —The subsequent action of Dr. Behnken, in direct violation of his assurances to his own advisory committee, has been variously characterized as a betrayal, a sell-out, a back-door escape, a pact with the devil, and the product of the stereotyped “smoke filled room” of big-time politicians. On January 11, 1947, the President and the First Vice President arranged a brief meeting with the chairman and secretary of the President’s Committee simply to inform them *after the fact* that the praesidium had met five days before, January 6, in Ft. Wayne, Indiana, with the committee of the signers and with the St. Louis seminary professors allied with them—but without any of the *President’s own* committee present— and had reached

An Agreement to settle the controversy. In effect, however, it only **disposed** of the controversy **without settling it**. That *Agreement* was a **travesty** —an artful compromise worthy of Melancthon and a textbook example of the heterodoxy which had taken hold of the Missouri Synod at the highest level of its leadership! The *Agreement* stated in part:

“An earnest evaluation of the discussions involved in ‘*A Statement*’ has demonstrated that we are agreed on many of its assertions, even though agreement has not been reached on some of the specific questions raised. ... Nothing has developed, however, which is divisive of church fellowship. ...

“It has therefore been agreed in a meeting of the Praesidium and of the representatives of the Signers that in the interest of peace and harmony in our midst and for the furtherance of the Kingdom of God at large ‘*A Statement*’ and ‘*The Accompanying Letter*’ be withdrawn as a basis of discussion so that the issues involved may be studied objectively on the basis of theses prepared under the auspices of the President of Synod.

“The withdrawal of ‘*A Statement*’ as a basis of discussion shall not be interpreted as a retraction... .”

In spite of Dr. Behnken’s promise that the issues involved would be studied further in the light of God’s Word and that further “theses” would be written to clarify matters, subsequent meetings and studies were nothing but a sham! Behnken steadfastly refused to formulate antithetical statements which would specifically reject the wording of *A Statement* or would state unequivocally that *A Statement* expressed false doctrine. His attempt at developing “guidelines” for the clergy’s eventual further study became transparently lopsided when the Springfield seminary’s faculty found the St. Louis seminary’s faculty “opinion” on Romans 16:17-18 *unacceptable*, and yet the St. Louis opinion was published by Concordia Publishing House as official for use in dogmatics courses in the St. Louis seminary.

Moreover, at the 1947 Convention, many overtures and memorials to the Synod regarding *A Statement* were not published. Other attempts to address the issue were killed by parliamentary maneuvering on the floor. And yet, in spite of such obstacles, the Synod went “on record” as reaffirming the *Brief Statement* and as giving its “definite support” to Memorial 607 which clearly defined the doctrines in controversy and actually rejected the errors contained in *A Statement*. Nevertheless failure on the part of the synod’s officials to take proper and effective disciplinary action against erring members has been repeatedly excused on the grounds that, because of the *Agreement*, *A Statement* “no longer exists.” Nonsense! Several years after the *Agreement*, signers were still defending *A Statement* and their subscription to it. “*Speaking the Truth in Love*” was still being distributed. And the “proof of the pudding” lay (and still lies) in the **practice of the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod**, in the **official publications and documents of the synod**, in the **residual effects** of the *Agreement* seen in **subsequent controversies** (including that which precipitated our separation from that body when it adopted the *Common Confession* three years later), and in the **lack of doctrinal discipline still today** in a church body whose slide into heterodoxy began ironically shortly after its adoption of the *Brief Statement* in 1932 and was all but set in concrete just twenty-five years later! After now almost fifty years of retrospective consideration of all that has gone over the dam since we left the Missouri Synod in 1951, we thank God for His gracious deliverance of His people from “*Egypt*” and for His continuing mercy in sparing us from the lure of its “*fleshpots*”. We have seen what malnutrition has resulted in those who sold their birthright of orthodoxy for a mess of “*Egyptian*

pottage” and in those who, having once left “*Egypt*” in obedience to God’s Word, returned to their spiritual detriment! And we wonder what child of God, having once tasted the sweet Manna of His unadulterated Word and having been raised on a diet of pure doctrine and faithful practice, would knowingly return to a spiritual garbage can to forage upon the maggots of heterodoxy?? “From this preserve us, Heavenly Father!”

Soli Deo Gloria!