

Unity, Union, and Unionism

The Norwegian Synod of the American Evangelical Lutheran Church

2002 Reprint of 1969 edition

Preface to the 1938 Edition

In 1935, a series of six theses on Unity Union, and Unionism was prepared by a committee of Norwegian Synod pastors and submitted to the Pastoral Conference of their Synod in January, 1936. Essays on the several theses were later contributed by various pastors. These essays were revised and edited by said committee and submitted to the Pastoral Conference June, 3–4, 1936. The theses together with the essays were unanimously approved by the Conference. At the synodical convention of the same year the theses and essays were heard and discussed and ordered printed in the Convention Report. Said Convention Report was approved by the Synodical Conference at its 1938 Convention in Watertown, Wisconsin. The theses and essays are now reprinted by special request as a pamphlet.

Mankato, Minnesota, November, 1938.

Publication Board

Preface to the 1967 Reprint

During the years since 1938 a number of events have taken place in the Lutheran Church to which the contents of this pamphlet are very apropos. It was just because such developments were foreseen, if men would not heed the admonitions of Scripture, that this pamphlet was issued in the first place. It is being reprinted, with just a few minor editorial changes which in no way affect the theses or the argumentation in support of them, as a demonstration of what happens when Scripture is set aside.

Milton H. Otto, Chairman E.L.S. Doctrinal Committee.

Foreword

Two years ago the following words were addressed to our annual convention. “The Melanchtonian spirit of synergism, compromise, and unionism all but succeeded in preventing the giving of the Augsburg Confession to the world. After Luther’s death, the same spirit raised its head again and made protracted and insidious attacks on Scripture truth as confessed at Augsburg. This time it brought forth an Altered Augsburg Confession. It has been active ever since, though its voice has at times been somewhat muted and its operations varying in degree of boldness.

“The forces thus set in motion within the early Lutheran Church, and which have their deep-set roots in natural man’s reason and inclination, are today bringing forth a bountiful harvest of indifferentism to, and misuse of, God’s Word, of compromise and of related sins. Throughout the length and breadth of our land a strong, influential voice is now reverberating, bearing the message. ‘God’s Moment is Now’ for ‘recognition and fellowship’ among American

Lutherans. Voices are also lifted in the interest of the ‘whole problem of American Church Unity’ which express the hope that ‘the tide toward a true, free national church in America’ may set in.

“The wave of indifferentism and unionism that threatened to swamp us, and that did wash overboard many of our friends and brethren two decades ago, was relatively small and timid as compared to the great and bold wave now advancing on orthodox Lutheranism in America and the world. The prevailing winds are against us, the tides and currents are contrary, the sea is rough. Brethren, the need of the hour is faithful — repeat, faithful, fearless, consecrated captains with firm hands to the helm, eyes fixed on the compass and chart — the open Bible — and a vigorous ‘get thee hence, Satan’ to every suggestion of reason, convenience, and self-aggrandizement.”

Since then the wave has continued to advance and has increased in boldness. Realizing the imminent danger, and awake to their responsibilities as watchmen, our pastors are sounding the warning.

The Theses

In view of the fact that continued efforts are being made to unite all Lutherans in one Fellowship, we adopt the following theses as expressing the principles which must guide us in seeking to effect such fellowship.

Thesis I

The spiritual unity of the Holy Christian Church, which is the body of Christ, is not dependent upon any such externals as a common organization or language, but alone upon the possession of the saving faith in Jesus Christ. True Christians will, however, “endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” Eph. 4:3, and will therefore also seek to establish and maintain church fellowship with all who are one with them in confessing the true faith.

Thesis II

We acknowledge one, and only one, truly unifying influence and power in matters both of doctrine and of practice, namely the Word of God; and only one God-pleasing procedure in striving for unity: That “the Word of God is taught in its truth and purity, and we as the children of God lead holy lives according to it.”

Thesis III

Through such teaching of the Word, unity and (when deemed desirable) union have been attained in the past. Examples: the early New Testament Church, the Lutheran Reformation, and the Synodical Conference.

Thesis IV

We hold that inter-synodical committees are useful in promoting Christian fellowship only: a) when the various groups or synods have, through their public ministry of the Word, given each other evidence of an existing unity in spirit, and it remains merely to establish the fact of such unity and to arrange for some

public recognition and confession of that fact, b) or where it is clear that those in error sincerely desire to know “the way of God more perfectly.” Acts 18:26.

Thesis V

Where such evidence of unity is lacking, or where it is clear that those in error do not sincerely desire to know “the way of God more perfectly,” but such committees nevertheless are elected to confer with them with the view to church fellowship, there is grave danger that the work of these committees will result in indifferentism and in compromise of Scriptural doctrine and practice. (For examples of this, consider the mergers and unions of recent years among Lutherans.) The duty of testifying to the truth of God’s Word and thus promoting unity, rests at all times upon all Christians. Cf. I Peter 3:15.

Thesis VI

Scripture warns us clearly and emphatically against entanglements with errorists (Romans 16:17. Titus 3:10. I Timothy 6:3-5). Any reluctance to heed these warnings and commands of Scripture is unionism already conceived in the heart, which if allowed to develop, will result in full-fledged unionism, as history also attests.

Unity, Union, and Unionism

Before considering the several theses, we pause here to ask. Why not subscribe to the U.L.C. statement of 1934 (Conv. Report p. 416): “Inasmuch as our now separated Lutheran Church bodies all subscribe to these same confessions, it is our sincere belief that we already possess a firm basis on which to unite in one Lutheran Church in America.”, and thus be done with statements of principles governing fellowship?

Answer. We would gladly do this if observation and experience had not disillusioned us and taught us that “the real standpoint of a church is not the one written and subscribed to on paper, but manifests itself in her actual teaching, life, and practice.” —Bente

We need no further experiments to learn “that there is no guaranty of peace in *words* when men do not agree in *things*.” —Krauth

It is truly regrettable that the many expressions of admiration for our uncompromising stand from other Lutheran quarters and their declarations of full agreement with us in doctrine must be met with hand cupped to the ear and saying, “What you *are* speaks so loudly that I cannot hear what you *say*.” —Emerson.¹

Alas, many honor Lutheranism and its confessions with the lips, but their teaching and practice are far from it.

Thesis I

The spiritual unity of the Holy Christian Church, which is the body of Christ, is not dependent upon any such externals as a common organization or language, but alone upon the possession of the saving faith in Jesus Christ. True Christians will, however, “endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” Eph. 4:3, and will therefore also seek to establish and maintain church fellowship with all who are one with them in confessing the true faith.

This thesis is fundamental to the matter in hand. We speak of the Holy Christian Church, and in order that there shall be no misunderstanding and

¹All quotations From Bente’s “American Lutheranism” vol. II, pages 10, 183, 166, respectively.

confusion, it is necessary briefly to explain what we mean by that name, or what it is we call “The Holy Christian Church.” We refer to the same thing as we confess in the third article of the Apostolic Creed with these words. “I believe in the Holy Christian Church, the communion of saints.” We say that the Christian Church is the body of Christ because the apostle Paul, being moved and guided by the Spirit of God, compares the church to the body and its members, and shows that as the members of His physical body of man each have their peculiar work and use and by the creative act of God are fitly joined together to form one body, so are also the individual members of the Church given each the particular place and work in the Church and constitute one communion. And he ends his arguments by saying to Christian members of the Church at Corinth. “Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular.” I Cor. 12:27. Cf. Rom. 12:3ff. From this we learn that the Church consists of individual believers, each one given his particular place and work, so as to form a spiritual body.

The “Holy Christian Church” consists only of those persons who have a true and living faith in Jesus Christ, having been called by the Holy Ghost through the Gospel of Christ which “is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth” (Rom. 1:16); “being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 3:24); “who have been regenerated” “born of water and of the Spirit” (John 3:5), and made “heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ” (Rom. 8:17); and of whom it is said. “Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and the renewing of the Holy Ghost” (Titus 3:5). Only those are the members of the “Holy Christian Church” then, whom the Holy Ghost has called by the Gospel, redeeming them by the blood of Christ “which cleanseth us from all sin” (1 John 1:7), and “purifying their hearts by faith” (Acts 15:9.)

From this it is evident that the Church of Christ or the Kingdom of God is a spiritual kingdom, as the Lord Jesus declares to the Jews. “The Kingdom of God cometh not with observation; neither shall they say, Lo, here! or, lo, there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you” (Luke 17:20–21). For that reason we confess that we “Believe the Holy Christian Church.” It is only by the revelation of the Word of God and by faith in that Word that we know of that One Holy Church; for we cannot look into the hearts of men and observe the kingdom of God therein. Hence, in accordance with the Word of God, we confess that the Holy Christian Church is “the communion of saints.” This indicates spiritual union. In this sense, the Church is the aggregate of all who truly believe in Christ as their only Savior. It is all believers collectively. By “the Church” we denote not a mere abstract concept or idea of Christianity as a whole or in general, disregarding the individual persons who constitute the Church. For the Church of Christ consists of individual persons who truly believe the forgiveness of sins for Christ’s sake, being “perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment” (I Cor. 1:10).

The faith and hope of the individual persons who constitute the Church are centered upon the same thing and sustained by the same means, and thus

they constitute one body, as the apostle declares. "There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all" (Eph. 4:4-6). The Christian Church is, therefore, *one Church*, not many churches. It consists of many persons who are the saints of God and dwell together in one communion and fellowship with one another in one faith and one hope. There is a perfect unity in the Church of Christ, which is not established or created by external organization or one language, but which the Holy Ghost has created by converting the hearts of sinners through the power of the Gospel of Christ.

That this unity of the Church is not a product of outward organization or external fellowship of church bodies is evident from the description of the Church and its members by the apostle Peter when he writes "to the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ" (I Peter 1:1-2), and tells them. "Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people that ye should show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light. Which in time past were not a people, but now are the people of God. which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy" (I Peter 2:9-10). The unity of the Church is, therefore, a spiritual union which binds together many individual persons, most of whom are strangers to one another in this world and are scattered among different peoples, nations, and tongues, but, nevertheless, have fellowship with one another in the same mind and the same Spirit.

The unity of the Church is a creation of the Holy Ghost, established and maintained by Him through the means of grace, the Word and the Sacraments. To regard it as a result of external organization or any contrivance of man is contrary to the doctrine of the Word of God (Cf. Luke 17:21). It is, indeed, true that members of the Church of Christ are visible persons present in this world, and their fellowship and unity is manifested by their assembling of themselves together to hear the preaching of the Gospel and to use the Sacraments in accordance with the institution of Christ. The Lord Jesus prayed for His Church and its members, saying. "I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil" (John 17:15). And they are earnestly admonished not to neglect coming together for mutual edification for the day of the Lord's appearing. "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching" (Heb. 10:25).

From these and other passages it is clear that the Church of Christ and its members are actively present in the world in assemblies and congregations where the Word and Sacraments are used. Jesus has promised to be present in the assemblies of His disciples, whether they be large or small. "For where two or three are gathered together in, my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matt. 18:20). "Again, I say unto you, that if two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them by my Father

which is in heaven” (Matt. 18:19). But it is evident that His promises are based on the fact that they are gathered together “*in His name*” and “*Agree to ask in His name.*” It is the duty of, and indeed a great blessing for the disciples of Christ to practice outward fellowship with each other; but only those are the disciples of Christ who keep His Word. “If ye continue in my word then are ye my disciples indeed, and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:31–32). And again. “Verily, verily I say unto you, if a man keep my saying, he shall never see death” (John 8:51).

As disciples of Christ, we love the brethren and would fellowship with them, but since we cannot know the hearts of men, we know not who are the disciples of Christ except by the confession of the Word of Christ; that is, we can fellowship only with those assemblies or congregations which teach the pure doctrine of the Word of God and “observe all things whatsoever Christ has commanded us” (Cf. Matt. 28:20). We are admonished to avoid those who cause divisions and offenses by teaching other doctrines than we have been taught by the Word of God, as it is written. “Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which yet have learned; and avoid them” (Rom. 16:17).

Fellow believers, be assured the Church of Christ is a unit; it *does* stand a solid phalanx against sin and the devil. Christ’s promise. “The gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Matt. 16:18), is an impregnable fortress surrounding it. Why then, “O ye of little faith” this feverish concern for mergers and unions of visible groups, as if they could save the Church from being swamped by the surging tides of godlessness and unbelief? It is the Word of God alone that can build, support, and defend the Church. Therefore, we are interested in the visible church only in so far as it fulfills its divinely appointed function, namely of being the agency for administering the means of grace through which the Holy Ghost grafts branches on the vine, Jesus Christ (Cf. John 15:5).

Thesis II

We acknowledge one, and only one, truly unifying influence and power in matters both of doctrine and of practice, namely the Word of God; and only one God-pleasing procedure in striving for unity. That “the Word of God is taught in its truth and purity, and we as the children of God lead holy lives according to it.”

By the closing remark on Thesis I, grafting was brought to mind. Grafting of trees and shrubs has been practiced a long time. St. Paul makes figurative use of it in Rom. 11:17ff. That the principle of grafting was fully understood by him, is clear from v. 17. “... grafted in among them, *and with them partake of the root and fatness of the olive tree.*” In surgery a graft is defined as a “junction between a piece of animal tissue cut from a living person or animal and the tissue of another subject.” The success or failure of grafting depends upon, whether or not the life-fluid of the grafted body can be induced to flow through

the engrafted part. It is, indeed, axiomatic in plant- as well as animal-tissue grafting that the life-fluid is the only power that can unify the *scion* with the *host*, that is, cause the parts grafted together to unite into one living organism; therefore, no procedure is even attempted which is not based, on this fact. In plants the life-fluid is called sap, in the human body it is called blood. It is the blood that carries life to every part and tissue of the body, and it is the blood that must nourish a part engrafted upon the body and thus unite it to the body. “The life of the flesh is in the blood” (Lev. 17:11).

The Word of God is the life-blood of the Church. Sinners can not, as branches, be engrafted on the vine, Jesus Christ (John 15:5) and, therewith, become a part of the Church, unless that life-blood, the Word of God, is made to course through the “stony hearts” (Ezek. 36:26) and spiritually dead souls with its quickening power. It is the Holy Ghost alone (meaning none other, and He, unassisted) who performs this miracle of grace.

The much-vaunted *character* of the lodge-member, the works of the self-righteous Pharisee, the conduct, attitude, “forhold,” of the synergist have never aided this process of grafting a particle, nor have “science,” modern learning, or “civilization” helped. That the Eskimo, e.g., learned to desire the white man’s food and ways of living; that he has been introduced to the use of soap; that rules of sanitation have been adopted and have decreased infant mortality, that he has learned to read and write English and can run a motor boat instead of paddling a kaiak — this has not engrafted a single Eskimo on the vine, Jesus Christ. The “Social Gospel” is impotent to produce life, for it is a blood-less Gospel.

Let all who love and seek the unity which Jesus prays for, (John 17:11) — such unity as alone can make union desirable — realize the futility of any and all union efforts save: “Preach the Word: be instant in season, out of season: reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and doctrine” (II Tim. 4:2).

Thesis III

Through such teaching of the Word, unity and (when deemed desirable) union have been attained in the past. Examples: the early New Testament Church, the Lutheran Reformation, and the Synodical Conference.

“When the Word of God is taught in its truth and purity” a God-pleasing method for attaining unity has been instituted. Compromise with error, hedging on disputed points, cowardly failure to teach *all* things whatsoever the Savior has commanded, is not, and cannot be, the basis for the establishing of a true union, nor of true unity. Union, without unity, without unanimity in doctrine and practice, is unscriptural and therefore impossible to us. Loyalty to the truth of God’s Holy Word, orthodoxy in doctrine and practice, opposition to all error and heresy, fidelity to the symbols of Christendom and to the confessions of our Lutheran Church, will promote true unity.

Such unity may lead to union if union be thought desirable, advantageous or necessary. It need not lead to outward organic union as an integral or component part of its essence. Circumstances may be present which (conceivably) would make such union unprofitable or impracticable. Ordinarily, we will grant, some kind of external union will be deemed desirable so that the work of the Kingdom of God may be carried out as effectively and efficiently as possible, since “in union there is strength.”

In support of this proposition we appeal to the past. The records of the early New Testament Church, of the Lutheran Reformation, and of the Synodical Conference prove that that which we hold to be “the only one, truly unifying influence and power in matters both of doctrine and of practice” has indeed brought about, established, promoted, fostered and maintained unity, and that from such unity, church unions of various types have resulted.

The divinely inspired sources of the History of the Early Christian Church, the Church of the Apostolic era (*ca.* 30–*ca.* 75 A.D.) tell us of the church in Jerusalem. “And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers” (Acts 2:42). “And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and one soul” (Acts 4:32). The persecutions, although disrupting the visible union of the church to a large extent, did not violate the existing unity, for “they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word,” (Acts 8:4). There can be no doubt from the language of the text, even if the express words are lacking, that it was the same word that was being preached by all those who were scattered abroad. Whether it was in the cities of Judea, or in Samaria, in Phenice, in Cyprus, in Antioch or in Damascus the same message designated as the Word was preached. Philip expounding Isaiah to an Ethiopian eunuch, Ananias strengthening Saul of Tarsus, this same Saul witnessing for the truth, Peter preaching in Cornelius’ house — all preach the same Gospel of repentance, baptism, and forgiveness of sins. Paul’s questions: “Walked we not in the same spirit? walked we not in the same steps?” (2 Cor. 12:18) are to be answered in the affirmative. They show that there was unity among Paul and his co-workers and that this unity was brought about by the preaching of the pure Word of God. James, Cephas, and John give Paul and Barnabas “the right hands of fellowship” (Gal. 2:9), “as if they would have said; We, O Paul, in preaching the gospel, do agree with thee in all things; therefore, in doctrine we are companions, and have fellowship together therein; that is to say, we Have all one doctrine, for we preach one gospel, one baptism, one Christ, one faith.” (Luther). As there was purity among the teachers, there was unity among the churches, so that they exchanged letters, greetings, and gifts. Who will deny that this unity was founded on the teaching of the pure Word of God?

That dissension and disputation, false doctrine and divisions are to be found in the early New Testament Church is true. But these were due not to the pure preaching of the Word of God, but to the perverseness of the human heart and the wiles of the devil. The preservation of the truth demands, however, not only that unity of doctrine be maintained, but also that error be combated, as the leaders of the Apostolic Church did.

The Church of the Reformation shows us, again, that unity must be based on the pure preaching of the Word of God. The work of Luther and his collaborators in Germany, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, based on fidelity to God's Word, resulted in a God-pleasing unity. For example, when the Wittenberg Concord of 1536 was signed, Luther said to the representatives of the South German cities, "Because you stand thus, we are one, and we acknowledge and receive you as dear brethren in the Lord." The strife and divisions within the Lutheran church after the death of Luther were due not to insistence on *sola Scriptura* (the Bible alone) but to a willingness to compromise. It was only the consistent and persistent testimony of men like Andreae and Chemnitz, who remained faithful to the pure Word of God, the continued preaching of the Word of God in all its truth and purity, and their opposition to all error and to indifferentism, that eventually restored unity to the strife-torn Church, as evidenced by the adoption of the Formula of Concord.

"The authors of the Formula solemnly declare. 'We entertain heartfelt pleasure and love for, and are on our part sincerely inclined and anxious to advance with our utmost power that unity (and peace) by which His glory remains to God uninjured, nothing of the divine truth of the Holy Gospel is surrendered, no room is given to the least error, poor sinners are brought to the genuine repentance, raised up by faith, confirmed in new obedience, and thus justified and eternally saved alone through the sole merit of Christ.' (1095, 96). Such was the godly peace and true Christian unity restored by the *Formula of Concord* to the Lutheran Church. And what it did for *her* it is able to do for the Church at large. Being in complete agreement with the Scripture, it is well qualified to become the regeneration center of the entire present-day corrupted, disrupted, and demoralized Christendom.

"Accordingly Lutherans, the natural advocates of a truly wholesome and God-pleasing union based on unity in divine truth, will not only themselves hold fast what they possess in their glorious Confession, but strive to impart its blessings also to others, all the while praying incessantly, fervently, and trustingly with the pious framers of the Formula. 'May Almighty God and the Father of our Lord Jesus grant the grace of His Holy Ghost that we all may be one in Him, and constantly abide in Christian unity, which is well-pleasing to Him! Amen.' (837, 23)" Triglotta, I, 256.

The unity which existed among the signers of the Formula of Concord existed, and still exists, among their spiritual heirs, the members of the Synodical Conference. The Synodical Conference was formed in 1872 as "an expression of the unity of the spirit existing among the respective synods." Concerning a preliminary meeting which was held at Ft. Wayne (Nov, 14-16, 1871) Dr. C.F.W. Walther wrote in the *Lutheraner*:

"We speak the truth, when we assure you, that this Convention in Ft. Wayne reminded one of that picture of the Church, which the saintly Luke sketches in the words. 'The multitude of them that believed were of one heart and one soul' (Acts 4:32). It was not a matter of first establishing unity, much less of producing the appearance of unity from without by all sorts of forced joint resolutions and formulas, but of giving expression to the already existing unity. With joy those

present recognized, that not the counsels of men and church politics, but true unity of faith and confession had brought them together, so that the inner unity appeared also outwardly through the bond of peace. It did, indeed, seem that there was justification for it when the enemies of (confessional) fidelity declared disdainfully that such fidelity calls forth only division; but God, who requires nothing from His stewards but that they be found faithful, has helped hitherto that now everyone must recognize that fidelity to His Holy Word does not separate but truly unites.”

That divisions arose within this body (e.g., the Predestinarian Controversy) was due again to the false teachings of those who did not adhere to all the words of Jesus. Heresy and error is always the disuniting force; purity of preaching is the unifying force. The records of the Synodical Conference bear out this contention.

The lesson of history, then, is clear: the only truly unifying force (leading at times also to outward union) is the preaching of the Word of God in its truth and purity. Error causes divisions, and such division have been found throughout the history of the Church. Let us ask God to preserve to us His pure Word that we might thereby help to bring about unity, praying, too:

“Thou Fountain whence all wisdom flows,
Which God on pious hearts bestows,
Grant us Thy consolation,
That in our pure faith’s unity
We faithful witnesses may be
Of grace that brings salvation.
Hear us, cheer us by Thy teachings;
Let our preaching and our labor
Praise Thee, Lord, and bless our neighbor.”

Thesis IV

We hold that inter-synodical committees can be useful in promoting Christian fellowship only: a) when the various groups or synods have, through their public ministry of the Word, given each other evidence of an existing unity in spirit, and it remains merely to establish the fact of such unity and to arrange for some public recognition and confession of that fact; b) or where it is clear that those in error sincerely desire to know “the way of God more perfectly.” Acts 18:26.

In the early history of the Lutheran Church in this country so-called Free-conferences were frequently held (Columbus, Ohio, ’56. Pittsburgh, Pa, ’58; Chicago and Ft. Wayne, ’60; Rushford, Minn., ’70; Decorah, Ia., ’72. Minneapolis, ’77; St. Ansgar, Ia., ’81. Roland, Ia., ’82. Menomonie, Wis., ’83; and many, many others) to discuss the differences in doctrine and practice separating the various synods. These Free-conferences were open to all Lutherans who

wished to take part, lay-men as well as clergy. One hundred and sixty-five pastors from different synods were reported present at Roland and a large number of lay-men, were active participants. The attendance at some sessions of the meetings was estimated at one thousand. The Free-conferences were, as a rule, held in response to an invitation extended by some congregation, not by resolution of synods, nor was it customary that anyone was officially authorized to speak for the synod to which he belonged. Synodical committees were sometimes appointed to make minor preliminary arrangements for a proposed conference meeting. (See e.g. *Kirketidende* '72, p. 142) The purpose of these public discussions was to get a clearer view of the doctrinal position held by members of each synod, and, if possible, to come to a God-pleasing agreement. It should also be noted that quite full and detailed reports of the Free-conferences were given general publicity through the synodical organs concerned. Outstanding speeches were quoted and the speakers named. Thus the general membership and pastorate of the several synods were kept well informed.

During the last three or four decades, it has become more and more common for groups and synods to negotiate through especially appointed smaller committees. Though such intersynodical committees are not, as a rule, vested with authority to make final decisions on behalf of their respective synods, they do, nevertheless, through their official standing possess a prestige which is certain to go a long way in shaping popular opinion in regard to the results of their negotiations.

Within the proper sphere such committees can no doubt fill a real need and useful purpose. When it is quite evident that unity of spirit exists between various groups or synods, they may be very helpful in formulating a definite declaration of principles in doctrine and practice; they may be able to suggest what real and alleged errors, if any, must be specifically and clearly renounced; to work out a basis for organic union, if desirable, or suggest rules for cooperation in their work, if they choose to continue under their existing organizations.

The question may pertinently be asked. How can a synod discover whether or not real unity of spirit exists between it and other synods? We answer: Through their official organs and the published reports of conventions and other meetings, through addresses made by representative members on important occasions, through the constitutions and by-laws, and through the discipline practice, on their congregational and synodical level, a fairly accurate judgment may be formed. More intimate and dependable knowledge of a synod may be gained in this way than can be obtained through questions and answers and guarded discussions in relatively small committee meetings.

In the earlier periods of the Lutheran Church in this country, while new settlements were constantly being established, new synods were organized in various states. That error of doctrine should creep into some of them is not strange. At that time there were instances where great blessing resulted from negotiations with brethren who, by the grace of God, had reached a higher degree of Christian knowledge and experience. If it should appear today that any group or synod which may err in some points, sincerely seeks to know the truth and is willing to listen to the doctrine, reproof, and correction of the Word

of God and stands ever ready to renounce what the Word denounces, God forbid that we should ever lay a straw in the way of negotiations with them. In such cases, committees may accomplish much good.

Thesis V

Where such evidence of unity is lacking, or where it is clear that those in error do not sincerely desire to know “the way of God more perfectly” but such committees nevertheless are elected to confer with them with the view to church fellowship, there is grave danger that the work of the committees will result in indifferentism and in compromise of Scriptural doctrine and practice. (For examples of this, consider the mergers and unions of recent years among Lutherans.) The duty of testifying to the truth of God’s Word and thus promoting unity, rests at all times upon all Christians. Cf. I Peter 3:15.

Today conditions have become quite well settled, so that there can be little excuse for not knowing the spirit which prevails in the various Lutheran synods. Every group has its own official organ, through which it gives expression to its position in doctrine and practice. Extensive articles, written by prominent members, are published from time to time dealing with different doctrines and various phases of their church work. Although the authors have not always been designated as spokesmen for the whole group, yet, so long as no protest is made and the same doctrine and principles are repeatedly held forth and defended, it must be regarded as the acknowledged stand of the whole synod. If the contention is made that the synod gives room for various views on important Scriptural doctrines, the synod thereby brands itself as being so indifferent and unionistic that an orthodox church cannot have fellowship with it.

At the present time there is also little excuse for any Lutheran synod to continue in error through ignorance. Hitherto, except during periods of negotiations between inter-synodical committees, erroneous doctrines and unscriptural practices have always been publicly pointed out and corrected. All possible encouragement has thereby been given to those in error to examine carefully their doctrine and practice in the light of God’s Word. If they still persist in their errors, they are without excuse.

If we are asked to negotiate through committees with groups and synods which by their public testimony plainly show that they continue to hold erroneous views on Scriptural doctrines in spite of warning and admonition, and in their practice fail to follow the guidance of Scripture, what then? Scripture has made adequate provision for such contingency. To pastors it says. “Preach the Word, be instant in season, out of season” (II Tim. 4:2). It is made the clear duty of all Christians at all times to bear testimony for the truth in word and deed, not only to those that call themselves Lutherans, but to all men (Cf. I Peter 3:15).

The great danger of negotiating with confirmed errorists through synodical committees (a danger from which Rom. 16:17, Titus 3:10, etc., graciously safeguard us) is indicated in the passages which describe the nature of those who teach false doctrine. In Eph. 4:14 we read. "That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the *sleight of men*, and *cunning craftiness*, whereby they *lie in wait to deceive*." And in Rom. 16:18, after having admonished us to avoid those who cause divisions and offenses contrary to the true doctrine, the apostle says of these false teachers, "And by good words and *fair speeches they deceive* the hearts of the simple."

False teachers are shrewd, cunning, crafty, and are bent on deceiving. This description is not to be applied only to open enemies of the truth who consciously try to wreck the foundations of our Christian faith. It is equally true of all false teachers. Scripture does not distinguish between great and small error. All error is condemned, none condoned. Every error is a lie, and back of it stands the father of lies. Those who promote error, whether, humanly speaking, great or small, go the errands of the devil, whether they realize it and intend to do so or not.

When we elect a committee to be closeted in confidential negotiations with like committees from errorist bodies who will strive to gain acceptance of their false views, we have every reason to fear that we must reckon with all the wily tactics of the arch-enemy of truth. If I Peter 3:15 is cited to justify such procedure, the passage is misapplied, and, though unintentionally, made to nullify Rom. 16:17; Titus 3:10, etc. Let it be noted, too, that the prospects of convincing by our testimony to the truth a committee which represents a body confirmed in error, and through it the body itself, are very, very poor indeed. Be it remembered also that the champions of false doctrine are usually satisfied if they gain for their error equal standing with the truth; hence every manner of compromise is resorted to. The danger is multiplied when, as is common, the errorists shower praises upon their opponents in order to gain their personal good will. When the champions of truth are brought to admire the errorists for their gentlemanly behavior and their fair-mindedness, and begin to think of the many able and good men and women whom they represent, then "the lust of the flesh" is near to victory.

Brethren, have we the right to expose ourselves or a committee to the machinations of the tempter? Are we so certain that we, or more especially our committee, shall be able to discover the snares which are laid for them and to hold unflinchingly to the truth? Scripture warns us very earnestly. "Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall" (I Cor. 10:12). This warning applies to sins both in life and doctrine. The apostle Paul, after having shown how the Jews have fallen away because of unbelief, warns the Christians in Rome against boasting of their superior knowledge in these words. "Be not highminded, but fear" (Rom. 11:12). And the disciples were reminded by their Savior, "The Spirit indeed is willing but He flesh is weak" (Matt. 26:41).

Looking back upon the sad experiences of our old Norwegian Synod, we have also historical reasons for taking the warnings to heart. An "heretic, after the

first and second admonition, reject.” That is the stern command of God. If we still continue to negotiate with errorists on intimate terms, the punishment will not fail to come. “God is not mocked.” We believe it in place and beneficial to append here a short history of union movements among the Norwegian Lutherans in America, which resulted in the compromise merger of 1917 and, as it seems, gave impetus to unionism and indifferentism and new hope to unionists throughout the Lutheran world.

Historical Evidence

Efforts to unite all Norwegian Lutherans in America into one body began very early. A series of seven so-called Free-conferences were held during the period from 1871 to 1887. Pastors and laymen calling themselves Lutherans were invited to take part in discussing doctrinal differences. Though these discussions may have been of considerable value to individuals as a means of getting information about the doctrinal position of other synods, there is nothing to show that any progress was made thereby toward real unity in doctrine.

At the last one of these Free-conferences, which was held in Willmar, Minn., October 6–12, 1887, it was decided to continue these meetings. No more general Free-conferences were held, however, owing to the fact that the Norwegian Synod shortly after this was divided as a result of the Election controversy, and the Anti-Missourian party became busy negotiating union with other bodies, which resulted in the organization of the United Norwegian Lutheran Church in 1890.

January 6–12, 1892, a so-called Delegate Meeting was held in Willmar, Minn. Thirty elected pastors and laymen from the Norwegian Synod and an equal number from the United Church assembled to discuss doctrinal differences. The printed report of the discussions would indicate that the prospects of attaining doctrinal agreement were now more remote than ever.

With the year 1900, the union movement entered upon a new era. The District meetings of the Norwegian Synod, held that year, passed resolutions inviting the United Church and the Hauge Synod through their respective presidents and theological faculties to meet with a similar committee of the Norwegian Synod, for the purpose of discussing doctrinal differences with a view to ascertaining the exact doctrinal position of each body, and, possibly, of arriving at a God-pleasing agreement. The United Church accepted the invitation, and a meeting of the joint committee was held shortly before Easter in 1901. It was decided to meet again the following year, but as Dr. F. A. Schmidt, contrary to the decision of the joint meeting, published an account of the colloquy together with a sharp attack on the procedure followed in the discussions, the Norwegian Synod at its general meeting in 1902 passed a resolution to ask the United Church to appoint another man to take the place of Dr. Schmidt as a member of the committee. As an answer to this request, the United Church demanded evidence to prove the contention of the Norwegian Synod, that Dr. Schmidt “By his conduct during the long doctrinal controversy, as well as now, during and after the colloquy, had shown himself to be a hindrance, not only to reaching an agreement, but also to an understanding between the two synods.”

The Church-council of the Norwegian Synod published a pamphlet setting forth the evidence asked for. This brought out a bitter answer from the members of the United Church committee. It now seemed for a time that no more efforts would be made to continue these negotiations.

In 1905, however, an invitation to open negotiations between the Norwegian Lutheran bodies came from an unexpected source. The Hauge Synod, which up to this time had consistently refused to take part in these inter-synodical discussions, extended an invitation to all the Norwegian Lutheran bodies to open doctrinal discussions through committees, five members from each body. This invitation was accepted by the United Church and the Norwegian Synod, each appointing committees.

These committees held regular meetings once and twice a year, and in 1908 it was reported that theses on Absolution, Lay-preaching, The Call, and Conversion were agreed upon. No serious objection to these theses have been raised. A strong demand was expressed, however, especially by members of the Norwegian Synod, that antitheses would be added, in order to make sure that false doctrines formerly championed by other Synods were no longer held by them. The committee members from the Norwegian Synod assured us that this would no doubt be done.

At the meeting of the joint committee held November 10–13, 1908, the doctrine of Election was taken up for consideration. A subcommittee had been appointed at the previous meeting to prepare a basis for the discussion. This sub-committee reported that they had not been able to agree on anything to present to the plenary committee. Two sets of theses, one by Dr. Stub and the other by Dr. Kildahl, were presented, and a third set was read by Dr. Boeckmann. It was decided to make Dr. Stub's theses the basis of discussion. These theses were then discussed at this and the two following meetings, March 30–April 2, and November 2–5, 1909. At this last meeting, the committee members from the United Church moved that question 548 in Pontoppidan's "Sandhed, til Gudfrygtighed" be made the basis for discussion, since no headway was made. It was decided, however, to elect a sub-committee to consider carefully if a satisfactory basis could be found, and to report at a meeting to be held March 30–April 1, 1910. The subcommittee failed to agree on a report. It submitted three sets of theses. Though it had been decided at the previous meeting that the discussion should not be continued unless the subcommittee agreed on a report, a majority of the joint committee decided to continue the discussion on the basis of theses prepared by President Eastvold of the Hauge Synod. The committee members from the Norwegian Synod now left the meeting.

The 1910 District conventions of the Norwegian Synod endorsed the theses prepared by Dr. Stub. The President of the United Church, Rev. T. H. Dahl, in his annual report to the convention of this body blamed the Norwegian Synod committee members for breaking up the negotiations, and denounced the doctrines held by the Synod as "unbiblical and un-Lutheran." The committee members from the United Church issued a pamphlet entitled, "Election and the Union Movement" which was given wide publicity, in which they stressed their synergistic doctrines as strongly as they had ever done before. There is nothing in

this pamphlet to indicate that they in any way had profited by the discussions which for many years had been carried on in the inter-synodical committee.

In the meantime there seemed to be much dissatisfaction within the United Church with the action of their committee members. Seventeen pastors published a protest in the Norwegian press, and demanded that a new committee be elected. In response to this demand, a new committee was elected at the convention in 1911. The Norwegian Synod magnanimously followed their example, though no dissatisfaction with the old members of the committee had been expressed. The Hauge Synod, which had not taken part in the Election Controversy, did not take active part in the deliberations which followed,

This new committee met in the fall of 1911. After this first meeting, several of the committee members from the Norwegian Synod expressed themselves to the effect that they had never suspected that there was such a great doctrinal difference between the United Church and their own Synod. However, a sub-committee was elected, two men from each of the conferring parties, to prepare theses to be considered at a later meeting. The whole committee met again in February 1912, and the sessions were continued about eight days. The result of these deliberations was the so-called "Opgjør", in which the conferring parties declared that they had reached a full agreement on the doctrine of Election. One of the members of the Norwegian Synod delegation was asked by a friend after coming out from the last session. "Well, did you get what you wanted?" He answered. "Not exactly, but we pressed them pretty hard."

A better characterization of "Opgjør" than this remark has probably never been given. Nevertheless, the result of the committee's deliberations was heralded throughout the length and breadth of the land as the Lord's doing. A wave of enthusiasm swept over the congregations of the conferring bodies. Little or no effort was made to put the new theses to a real test. The rank and file of the people simply refused to discuss them. They were satisfied with the assurance which the authors of "Opgjør" gave them that a real settlement of the Election controversy had been effected. And it is to be feared that history will always repeat itself in this respect under similar circumstances.

A considerable part of the Norwegian Synod voiced strong objections to "Opgjør" at the District meetings in 1912; but the committee members were on hand, offering oral explanations on the disputed points, explanations which never became a part of the document itself, nor were they ever endorsed by the committee members of the other bodies. This, together with the strong pressure which was brought to bear by the popular demand for union, squelched the opposition, and "Opgjør" was accepted by a large majority of votes at these meetings. The theses of the former committees were also endorsed, and no opportunity was given for adding the much needed anti-theses. No opportunity was ever given for a fair consideration of the agreement. Unscrupulous leaders made full use of the popular demand for union to intimidate and brow-beat the objectors, and the consummation of the merger was hurried along with all possible speed.

The more influential Norwegian newspapers were requested by the leaders not to publish articles that might disturb the progress of the union movement.

They complied. The church organs were practically closed to articles expressing dissatisfaction with “Opgjör”. The crusaders’ cry, “God wills it” was heard on every hand. The regular general pastoral conference meetings were not held. The officers failed to arrange for and call said meetings.

The last act in breaking down the resistance of the objectors was the so-called Austin Agreement, a shrewdly formed, but meaningless document, intended to soothe the consciences of those who lacked the courage to stand up for the truth to the bitter end.

We, who have observed at close range and studied the history of the efforts made to bring the Norwegian Lutherans into agreement by means of committees, are constrained to say, when asked to follow this method again; “*Vestigia terrent.*” We are afraid of history repeating itself,² and therefore consider it a God-given duty to sound a warning to all earnest defenders of the truth against exposing the true welfare of the Church of Christ to the dangers involved in this procedure.

Thesis VI

“Scripture warns us clearly and emphatically against entanglements with errorists (Romans 16:17; Titus 3:10; I Timothy 6:3–5.) Any reluctance to heed these warnings and commands of Scripture is unionism already conceived in the heart, which if allowed to develop, will result in full-fledged unionism, as history also attests.

God himself demands that we do not unite with errorists, that we separate from them, that we avoid them” says Prof. Laetsch in C. T. M., Vol. VI, p. 8. “Let us” he continues, “study some of the pertinent passages.” This we have done and we endorse and subscribe to Prof. Laetsch’s expositions which we here quote.

“In the well-known passage, Rom. 16:17 we read. ‘Now, I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned and avoid them.’ The apostle speaks of such as cause divisions and offenses. The word divisions occurs only, three times in the New Testament, Rom. 16:17; I Cor. 3:3; Gal. 5:20. It is derived from *δικοστατέω*, which is translated by Liddell-Scott ‘to stand apart’ or ‘to disagree.’ *Δικοστασία* Cremer translates *Verwirrung*, confusion. The word offense, *σκάνδαλον* means properly a trigger, then a trap, then anything whereby one is trapped or caught, a stumbling-block, offense. The articles before *δικοστασίας*, *σκάνδαλα*, *ποιούντας* do not refer to any special class of divisions or offenses or to any special group of such as cause these special divisions and special offenses. The articles rather point to the whole class of divisions and offenses and makers of such irrespective of degrees, variations, etc., which may, and actually do occur within this class. The article is used in the same manner as in Rom. 14:1, where not a special, well-known weak person, but the whole class of weak Christians is referred to.

²cf Addendum, page 33

Every one and any one that is weak is the weak brother who is to be received. In like manner the article is used in John 10:12. (ὁ μισθωτός, ὁ λύκος — the hireling, the wolf). The Savior has in mind not a particular species of wolves or hirelings or only a well-known wolf or hireling; but every wolf, be he timber-wolf or jackal or gray wolf, may be ‘the wolf’ who is coming to destroy, and any and every hireling is ‘the hireling’ of whom the Savior here speaks. Compare on this use of the article Rom. 13:7 and Rev. 5:12 where the article is used but once, and v. 13, where it is placed before every noun. Any dissension, any offense, becomes *the* dissension, *the* offense, which an individual is causing; and any maker of such dissension *the* maker of dissension, whom we should avoid. The apostle therefore has not in mind only such outspoken, anti-Christian errorists as openly and flatly deny every fundamental truth of Christianity. He does not say, Avoid such as subvert completely the Christian truth or as at least deny some of the basic doctrines of the Bible. He warns us against such as cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which we have learned. Contrary to παρά (properly beside, alongside of, side by side with); hence these teachers may still be professing and teaching parts of the Christian doctrine. But side by side with this doctrine they make dissensions and thus cause offenses. The reason for such dissensions and offenses is the failure of such teachers to continue in the Word of Christ (John 8:31). They do not teach all things Christ commanded, but either add to, or take away from, the doctrine as revealed in the Bible. In this manner they themselves are standing apart from the Word of Christ and are causing others to stand apart by creating differences of opinion, dissensions, divisions, beside, and hence contrary to, the doctrine laid down, divisions that would be impossible if all accepted, and continued in, the words of Christ. In making such divisions, they are certainly putting stumbling blocks in the way of their fellowmen, over which many a person may fall, receive painful injuries, perhaps die. Through their false doctrine they will deprive people of the liberty which Christ has earned for them, fill their hearts with fear and trepidation, cause spiritual security, perhaps spiritual death. The makers of such divisions may not realize that they are teaching false doctrine. They may spread their errors with the purpose of serving God. Christ tells us that they who kill the Christians think they are doing God a service (John 16:2). And Paul confessed that in his bigoted zeal for the Jewish religion he thought that he was serving God by persecuting the followers of Christ (Acts 22:3–4; 26:9; Phil. 3:6). We cannot look into the hearts of these errorists and determine their intentions. Neither need we do that. What the apostle impresses upon us is, ‘Mark them and avoid them.’ By their words they are judged, and by their words they are condemned (Matt. 12:37). And their words prove them to be creators of divisions, disturbers of that unity of the Spirit which characterizes the Church of Christ. Mark them, observe them, plead with them, patiently show them the error of their way. If they hear you, you have not only gained them, you have also removed the offense and restored peace and thus kept the unity of the Spirit intact. But if they continue making divisions, if they persist in teaching their error or remain in membership with a body that teaches such error and thus help to create and maintain the division and offenses caused by errorists, then the clear and

plain injunction of the apostle is, ‘Avoid them,’ sever fraternal connection with them. Ἐκκλίνετε ἀπ’ αὐτῶν. The apostle does not say κατακλίνετε σὺν αὐτοῖς, lie down, associate with them, but ‘avoid them’ turn out of the way, away from them. Causing divisions and offenses within the Christian Church is not a light matter. The apostle tells us v. 18. ‘For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple.’ These seem harsh words, yet truer words were never spoken. And they refer to all that cause divisions and offenses.³

“Does anyone who causes divisions contrary to Christ’s doctrine thereby serve the Lord Jesus? Certainly not. For Jesus has not told us, You may make divisions, but rather, Continue in My Word. If one does not serve Jesus, does he not serve the devil, does he not actually serve his own belly, his own interests (note the emphatic position of ἑαυτῶν), and not even the higher but the lower, material, selfish interests? And are not all his good words and fair speeches placed into the service of leading man into error and falsehood? Whether they do this intentionally and consciously or not is not for us to determine. The point of the apostle’s admonition is to avoid those, all those, who cause those divisions. Neither should we wait until they have actually deceived, misled, people, until they have by their actions betrayed their true character; but as soon as they teach contrary to the doctrine laid down in the Bible, they are to be marked, admonished, and, if they continue, avoided. If they will stand apart, do not follow them, let them severely alone. If this rule were followed by all Christians, if schismatics would gain no adherence, there either would be no schisms, or, if they occurred, they would end with the death or the return to the church of the schismatics.

“Another very instructive passage is found, Titus 3:10. ‘A man that is an heretic,’ one who is inclined to denominationalism, sectarianism, should not be permitted to follow his inclinations. His brethren should admonish him, and if he persists in teaching his own chosen opinion, (ἄρεσις) in contradiction to God’s Word, if he continues in this sin, which excludes from the kingdom of God, Gal. 5:20, then we should reject not only his doctrine, but him, the heretic, and thus sever fraternal relations with him.

“John, the apostle of love, writes, just because he is the apostle of true love: ‘If there come any unto you and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him Godspeed; for he that biddeth him Godspeed is partaker of his evil deeds’ 2 John 10–11. The doctrine of Christ, of which the apostle here speaks, is not the doctrine concerning Christ, but the doctrine which Christ teaches and reveals in the Bible. Wherever in the New Testament the word διδασχῆ (doctrine) occurs with the genitive of the person, the genitive

³Mark: *hoi toioutoi*, not *houtoi*. The apostle shows hereby that he is speaking in general, “those that are such” as cause divisions and offenses contrary to — i.e. all those who barter truth for error, whether much or little, then or now, whether many or few, whether openly and consciously or secretly and unconsciously. The expression aims more at the nature of the wrong than the persons of those who commit it, as if the apostle would say: for in this that they cause divisions and offenses they serve not the Lord Jesus but their own belly. —*The Committee.*

is invariably the subjective genitive. Cf. Matt. 16:12, the doctrine of the scribes and Pharisees. Acts 13:12, the doctrine of the Lord. Revelation 2:14, the doctrine of Balaam; v. 15, the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes. Cf. also Matt. 7:28; 22:23; Mark 1:22, 11:18. Luke 4:32. John 18:19; His doctrine, and Acts 5:28, your doctrine. In fact, the only passage in which διδασχῆ is used with an objective genitive is Heb. 6:2, and even here quite a number of commentaries do not accept this as the objective genitive. In view of this general usage of the term διδασχῆ τινος (someone's doctrine), we are practically forced to take the 'doctrine of Christ' in this sense here also, especially since this interpretation is in full keeping with the context. In v. 7 the apostle warned against anyone who denies Christ's person and redemptive work. In v. 8 he admonishes to faithfulness in retaining all those things which we have wrought in order that we receive a full reward. And in vv. 9-11 he warns against every apostasy from the doctrine of Christ, against every deviation from the truth of God as laid down in the Bible."

Reluctance to heed the warnings and commands of Scripture, whether it come in the guise of wisdom, of brotherly love or of mere procrastination, has its roots in unwillingness to obey the Word and a hankering after that which is forbidden.

Unionism is a lust of the flesh. All sins are first conceived in the heart. A thief is first tempted, then desires, then plans before he steals. Civil law punishes only the crime itself, but before God the initial steps are also transgression, as we learn, Matt. 5:28. "Whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart." James 1:14-15 records the progressive steps from lust to the consummated sinful act and to the final punishment. "Every man is tempted when he is drawn away from his own lust and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin when it is finished bringeth forth death."

Conclusion

Fellow Christians, we have again heard the instructions and warnings from God's Word regarding unity, union, and unionism. These have been supported by the lessons of history and have been applied to conditions today. We have heard about the unity of the invisible Church, how this unity is brought about and preserved, namely by the life-giving Word, and how this unity has found expression among those who have adhered to the pure teachings of this Word. We have been warned against pernicious steps to bring about union when unity does not exist, fortified by the records of sad experiences which some of us have had. We have been clearly taught what the warnings of the Holy Spirit against those who teach contrary to the doctrines which we have learned really imply. Let us heed these warnings and lessons!

"One baptism and one faith have we,
One Spirit sent to win us,

One lord, One Father, and one God,
Above, and through, and in us.

Never by schism, or by sin,
May we that union sever,
Till all, to perfect stature grown,
Are one with Thee forever.”

Addendum

The fears expressed by our fathers thirty years ago, that history would repeat itself, are being realized today. For many years the Lutheran Synodical Conference was a bulwark against all unionism and liberalism. But because the principles enunciated in this brochure, principles that have their origin in Scripture, were no longer being heeded by all member-synods of the Conference, the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (formerly the Norwegian Synod) and the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod withdrew from said Conference in 1963. This withdrawal left the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and the Synod of Evangelical Lutheran Churches to continue the Lutheran Synodical Conference.

In recent years the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod again entered into doctrinal discussions with the new American Lutheran Church, with a view to establishing pulpit and altar fellowship with each other. There are individual pastors and teachers in the two bodies just referred to who by word and in print have indicated that they no longer regard the entire Scripture as the inspired and inerrant Word of God. Others repudiate the cherished Scriptural principles on fellowship which their synods contended for throughout their earlier history. Since 1965 the Synod of Evangelical Lutheran Churches has been along in these discussions between these two Lutheran church bodies.

The latest development is that the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and the Synod of Evangelical Lutheran Churches have joined with the liberal Lutheran Church in America and the American Lutheran Church to form the Lutheran Council in the United States of America. This Council has been founded on the myth that since all subscribe to the Lutheran Confessions all therefore teach and practice according to them. Also, it is not clear to what extent the Council obligates the individual synods “to further the witness, the work, and the interests of the participating bodies”, (Const. Art. IV, a) be they liberal or conservative.

These developments are the result of ignoring the danger signs that were pointed out in this pamphlet in 1938. Not only have the two aforementioned synods, which make up the Lutheran Synodical Conference today, become more involved with liberal Lutheran groups, but all have become more liberal in the process. The fact is that in 1967 there are only three or four Lutheran bodies, comprising but a small percentage of all the Lutherans in this country, which are heeding the Scriptural injunctions expounded in this pamphlet. The observation of 30 years ago is even more to the point today. “*Vestigia terrent.*”

Note from the Publisher

Infrequently has the Norwegian Synod issued theses such as these, and only upon serious occasions. This document remains the position of the Norwegian Synod as it exists today, called the Evangelical Lutheran Synod for the last several decades.

The Norwegian merger mentioned here was one root of the huge church body recently formed in 1987, called the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. One can see from recent history how “merger mania” took hold through the course of time, and it is safe to suppose that it has not run its course. Even more certainly may we say that the spirit and forces present in the Norwegian merger have prevailed also in the Missouri Synod, so that even there only a minority desires to confess the truth in word and deed.

The outlook of American Lutheranism may seem bleak. The principles outlined here touching upon unionism may seem to have been forgotten long ago. Yet by God’s grace, the small Evangelical Lutheran Synod continues to confess and practice those principles. Much more encouraging: the Word of God continues to work powerfully to produce God-pleasing unity among all who receive it. May we remain as steadfast in that Word as our fathers did, and may God receive all the glory.

Rev. Jesse Jacobsen
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