

TABLE TALK

Official Publication of the LMS-USA
 ...these words... shall be upon your heart; you shall
 teach them... and talk of them... Deut. 6:6,7



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Two Years to Reflected and Celebrate

A brief history of the LMS-USA can be found on the synod website (www.lmsusa.org). There one will see that there were some significant things happening in 1994 which ended up in the formation of the LMS-USA as a church body in 1995.

A small group of pastors and congregations who were members of the recently formed (1987) TAALC (The American Association of Lutheran Churches) met over concerns as to the direction that church body was taking, specifically its Charismatic/Pentecostal leanings. This group took on the name *AALC Forum* (i.e. *four* pastors and congregations meeting in *forum*). This group gave support to a resolution that was being presented to the June convention of the AALC in an attempt to hopefully curtail the synod's shift from confessional Lutheranism.

That effort failed with the result that three pastors and their congregations resigned from the AALC. They were then joined by another pastor to organize the first Indianapolis Conference on Scripture which was held in August of 1994 at St. Matthew Lutheran Church, Indianapolis, IN. The outcome of that conference was the *Indianapolis Statement on Holy Scripture*.

From this point things moved fast. A second Indianapolis Conference was planned for April of 1995 and at that conference the decision was made to form a new church body. Also the 1994 Statement on Holy Scripture was given final form as the *Annotated Indianapolis Statement on Holy Scripture* and was adopted as one of the subscriptional statements for membership in the LMS-USA.

At the annual Conference and Convention of the LMS-USA this June, attention will be on the 20th anniversary of the beginnings of what would become the LMS-USA. Next year (2015) we will be celebrating the 20th anniversary of the LMS-USA.



The first issue of what would become *Table Talk* (November 1994), was a report on the Inerrancy Conference held in August of that year.

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Humble Beginnings

The Lutheran Ministerium and Synod-USA

by LMS-USA President, Rev. Dr. Ralph Spears

After Paul discussed the various callings which make up the Church, “to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for the building up of the Body of Christ”, he rhapsodized about a sense of unity that resulted in a solid and mature fellowship. “Until,” he said, “we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God”. A now mature Pharisee spoke fondly of a sense of peace in the body, where brothers would “speak the truth in love!” [Ephesians.]

Everyone of mature faith seeks this kind of fellowship in the great Ecclesia - the Church - and reflects on the briefest of Psalms (133) with special delight;

*Behold how good and pleasant it
is when brothers dwell together
in unity!*

To begin with, this aim was in mind when we began our Fellowship, the LMS-USA, even before the pretense of a name. Our initial founding meeting consisting of four of us, hence the Four-um (corrected to Forum), was held on a bolted down metal table in a fly-over rest stop of a busy Chicago freeway. There we noted an appropriate quote from Martin Luther to the effect that “everyone who accepted the first thirteen of The Augsburg Confessions, should be welcomed as brothers.” – an adequate beginning. We knew however, that it would re-

quire of us much more than a shallow acknowledgment of that sentiment. Fellowship of this type takes work and commitment, first to the WORD as the unquestioned guiding principle and commitment to one another with more than a modicum of trust.

In short, we were looking for a ‘fit’ like Paul in Ephesians and Peter in the 3rd Chapter of his First Epistle:

*Finally, all of you, have unity of
spirit, sympathy, love of the
brethren, a tender heart and a
humble mind.*

Hence, our humble beginning. It comes as no surprise that such a fit has much to do with feeling. A Church fellowship is as much as anything like putting on a comfortable pair of old shoes, nothing stretched or strained for this understanding! When the fellowship is right, there is no need to watch your theological “back” or your liturgical “front”. There is a flow of ideas and shared experiences that is comfortable to all. It is comfortable because it falls within a tried and true Orthodoxy of the authentic, true Church. Gone is the tendency of some to reinvent the theological wheel or join a race to be more orthodox than the next by some recently rediscovered principal of an obscure father of the faith that would turn epistemological history on its ear.

Another principle was an agreement that if indeed disagreement came, to

state the problem up front and part, if necessary, as friends. Not all made the cut to be sure but many others somewhat to our surprise, were attracted like magnets to the growing fellowship. Oh yes, and furthermore to refrain from unnecessary criticism of some of the other Lutheran bodies with alphabet soup prefixes from which we had come. To note important distinctions from them - YES! To bash and belly ache about them— NO! This was a crucial process indeed but it was something like an airplane flying by means of the Spirit giving it wing, as it lifted above the mundane and even man's best intended mechanizations to the contrary. Quite an experience!

The Four Solas of Luther were adopted and found their way into our logo. There is simply no way to improve upon the Solas -

*Christ alone,
through Scripture alone,
by Faith alone,
through Grace alone -*

for fidelity, completeness and brevity. These are expressed in our five principles of being Biblical (The Divinely inspired, inerrant and infallible Word), Confessional (subscribing to the entire Book of Concord as it is the true exposition of Scripture), Evangelical (making disciples of all by Christ's love), Liturgical (staying with the historic liturgy), and Congregational (leaving autonomy with the local congregation), as a practical polity. This is elegantly simple, yet complete therefore that to which we hold all congregations and pastors for their subscription.

This has been a remarkably trouble free and gratifying experience, approaching twenty years now. By holding to these principles as basic, like the first thirteen Articles of the Augsburg Confession, "we have it!" even as Luther said, "Believe and you have it!"

We have remarked often how meaningful our Convention and Ministerial gatherings have been. Over the years they have always been most uplifting and gratifying.

We might like to say that we have done it, but we know that we have not. Our humble beginnings have carried us throughout our brief time together and as we assess it from the other side, we can say with humility;

Behold how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell together in unity!" Ps. 133:1

. . . when that unity is **in the LORD!**

So Be It!

Amen!

*The Church's One Foundation.
Is Jesus Christ her Lord:
She is His new creation.
By water and the word:
From heav'n He came and sought her
To be His holy Bride:
With His own blood He bought her.
and for her life He died.*

*'Mid toil and tribulation,
And tumult of her war,
She waits the consummation
Of peace forevermore:
Till with the vision glorious
Her longing eyes are blest.
And the great Church victorious,
Shall be the Church at rest.*

*Yet she on earth has union,
With God, the Three in One.
And mystic sweet communion
With those whose rest is won:
Oh, happy ones and holy!
Lord, give us grace, that we,
Like them, the meek and lowly,
On high may dwell with Thee. Amen.*

The LMS Annual Conference and Convention

Christ Lutheran Church
Chetek, WI
June 20 - 22, 2014

*Thanking, Celebrating, and Reflecting, on
our beginnings - 20 years ago*

Friday - June 20 - Ministerial meeting

Saturday - June 21 - Annual Conference/Convention

Sunday - June 22 - Festival Worship Service

If you plan on attending the LMS gathering this year you should not wait on housing until the last minute. There is housing available in Chetek, but you might also look at Rice Lake, WI (20 minutes away) where there are any number of motels. If you have questions you may call Christ Lutheran Church at 715-924-2552.

The idea of the forum, a platform for discussion, that was central to the group that first met back in 1994, was immediately brought into the LMS when the church body was formed. And this has continued to be a most important part of who we are as a synod. The major part of our time together each year is spent in theological conversation among clergy and lay in our annual Conference. Papers are presented and discussed. This year we will be revisiting some of the papers presented 20 years ago. It will be interesting to see how relevant the issues raised may yet be for the church today.

The paper that follows is an example of the papers that have been presented and discussed by clergy and lay alike at the annual Conferences of the LMS. This paper was presented this past year, the final paper of several dealing with the issue of Election.

Please note: Due to space limitations - footnotes are numbered but not included, nor are three most helpful Appendixes or the bibliography. All are included in the PDF copy that can be found on our website copy of the paper [lmsusa.org -under publications].

THE LUTHERAN UNDERSTANDING OF CHOSEN:
THE ELECTION CONTROVERSY IN MIDWESTERN
LUTHERANISM AND ITS LASTING RAMIFICATIONS

by

Rev. Jeffrey A. Iverson

A Research Paper
Presented to the 2013 Conference of the
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INTRODUCTION

The Election Controversy touched all of the Lutheran church bodies in the United States, but was felt most strongly among those in the Midwest. It generally pitted the recent Midwest immigrants of a more doctrinally orthodox Lutheran persuasion against those who were either less orthodox, or whose orthodoxy was more of a pietistic bent. It generally set synod against synod, but one group, the Norwegian Synod, was split asunder.

When Norwegian immigrants in the mid-nineteenth century began to form Lutheran churches in America, two distinct approaches to church life emerged. Some followed the more pietistic tradition of the Norwegian lay-evangelist Hans Nielsen Hauge and eventually formed Hauge's Synod. Another group patterned itself after the state-church of Norway and formed the Norwegian Synod. The Norwegian Synod found natural allies in the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, led by the great theologian C.F.W. Walther. The Missouri Synod, the Norwegian Synod, the Ohio Synod, the Illinois Synod, the Minnesota Synod, and the Wisconsin Synod formed a church fellowship called the Synodical Conference in 1872.

The Ohio Synod left the Synodical Conference over the Election Controversy, as did the Norwegian Synod. A group calling itself the "Anti-Missouri Brotherhood" split from the Norwegian Synod in 1887. Pulling together some smaller groups, the Anti-Missouri Brotherhood formed the United Church in 1890, mixing elements of both orthodox and pietistic groups. In 1917, the Norwegian Synod, the United Church, and Hauge's Synod merged to form the Norwegian Lutheran Church, uniting most Norwegian-American Lutherans in a single church body. The merger was facilitated by the "Madison Agreement" of 1912 which had effected an understanding on the doctrine of election, the issue which had precipitated the schism in the Norwegian Synod in the 1880s.

How did this merger of such divergent views come to pass? Was it a true

meeting of the minds, or was it an agreement to disagree? Was it union or unionism? The answer to these questions still has an effect on American Lutheranism today.

I. THE MISSOURI SYNOD

The Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States (Missouri Synod) was founded in Chicago in April 1847. It drew together the Saxon immigrants who had settled in Perry County and St. Louis, MO and churches led by missionaries sent from Germany by Johann Loehe. The Missouri Synod was led by C.F.W. Walther, who came to lead that body after its first leader, Martin Stephan was accused of misconduct.

Walther was a keen theologian who went on to lead the Missouri Synod's Concordia Seminary in St. Louis for many years and was a key player in the Election Controversy. After Walther's death, Franz Pieper, author of the still-used three volume Christian Dogmatics, took up the mantle as Missouri's lead theologian.

The Missouri Synod became the prime mover in the creation of the Synodical Conference and Walther was elected its first president.

In 1880, one of the many groups that used the name "Illinois Synod" merged into the Illinois District of the Missouri Synod.

II. THE IOWA SYNOD

The Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Iowa and Other States (Iowa Synod) was formed in 1854, primarily by Loehe men who disagreed with Walther on the doctrine of the ministry. The lead theologian of the Iowa Synod was Gottfried Fritschel. The Iowa Synod became one of the main opponents of Missouri in the Election Controversy, as well as on several other theological issues, including Chiliasm (millennialism).

Because of its differences with Missouri, Iowa never joined the Synodical Conference. It became friendlier with the Ohio Synod after that body left the Synodical Conference and eventually merged with the Ohio and Buffalo Synods to form the American Lutheran Church in 1930.

III. THE OHIO SYNOD

The Joint Synod of Ohio was formed in 1818 by the former Ohio Conference of the old Lutheran Ministerium of Pennsylvania. The Joint Synod of Ohio began under the influence of the confessionally lax "American Lutheranism" of the English-speaking eastern Lutherans, but under the influence of W. F. Lehman of the synodical seminary at Columbus, became more and more orthodox. In 1872, the Joint Synod of Ohio joined the Synodical Conference. It was to break with the Synodical Conference and Missouri in 1881 over the Election Controversy, a mere three years after awarding C.F.W. Walther an honorary Doctor of Divinity. In 1930 it joined with the Iowa Synod and the Buffalo Synod to form the American Lutheran Church.

IV. THE WISCONSIN SYNOD

The Wisconsin Synod was founded by three graduates from Germany of the Barmen missionary school in 1849. Like Ohio, Wisconsin began with a laxer form of Lutheranism, but grew to a more confessional stance under the leadership of Adolf Hoeneke.

The Minnesota Synod was founded in 1860 by J. Heyer and other pastors who had migrated from Pennsylvania.

In Michigan, a group known as the "Mission Synod" or Michigan Synod was formed in 1860.

The Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Michigan Synods joined the Synodical Conference in 1872. These three synods began a tight working relationship in 1892 and in 1917 functionally united into Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States. The name was changed to the Wisconsin Evangelical

Lutheran Synod (WELS) in 1959.

V. THE NORWEGIAN SYNOD

Substantial numbers of Norwegian immigrants began arriving in the United States in the 1840s when the Midwest was opening up for settlement. They first settled in northern Illinois and in southern Wisconsin. From there, Norwegian settlement eventually expanded throughout Wisconsin, Iowa, Minnesota, and the Dakotas.

Among the Lutheran Norwegians, two distinct approaches to church life appeared. The first inherited the pietist heritage of Hans Nielsen Hauge (1771-1824), a Norwegian revivalist who emphasized lay preaching, conversion, and sanctification. The second trend inherited the traditions of the state Church of Norway, with a greater emphasis on an educated clergy, a formal liturgy, and doctrinal clarity. It is, however, *extremely* important not to carry these caricatures too far. Most Norwegians, lay and clergy alike, were neither “mindless” enthusiasts nor “heartless” orthodox dogmaticians. Most blended, to greater and lesser degrees, elements of both these traditions as taught by Professor Gisle Johnson at the University of Christiania (later Oslo).

After a couple of false starts, the Norwegian Synod was formally organized in 1853 at Luther Valley in Wisconsin. Its first president (1853-62) was A.C. Preus (1814-78), who returned permanently to Norway in 1872. His cousin, H(erman) A(mberg) Preus (1825-1894), succeeded him as the second president of the Synod (1862-1894).

From its founding, the Synod encompassed individuals whose sympathies were with the second group described above, *i.e.* they were sympathetic to a more formal ecclesiology and were strongly concerned with maintaining a confessional Lutheran doctrine. These characteristics led the Synod to cordial relationships and formal affiliations with the like-minded Missouri Synod.

To train its pastors, the Synod established a Norwegian professorship at Missouri’s Concordia Seminary in St. Louis. The position was initially filled by Pastor Laur. Larsen in 1859. Larsen left the post in 1861 when the seminary closed during the Civil War and went on to become one of the founders and the first president of Luther College. The position at Concordia remained unfilled until 1872 when it was filled by F(riedrich) A(ugust) Schmidt (1837-1928) who remained there until the Synod opened its own seminary, Luther Seminary, in Madison in 1876.

Confessional crises among the eastern Lutherans in the 1860’s, and dissatisfaction with the resulting synods, led the Midwestern Lutherans to form the Synodical Conference in 1872. They wrote:

We would have preferred to join one of the existing associations ... if this had been possible for our conscience which is bound by the word of God and whose duty lies in the most strict faithfulness to our confession.¹

In the Synodical Conference, the Norwegian Synod joined with the Joint Synod of Ohio, and the Wisconsin, Illinois, Minnesota, and Missouri Synods.

The first twenty-five years of the Norwegian Synod’s existence were something of which to be proud. Nelson and Fevold write:

In the year of its founding, 1853, it numbered but six pastors serving thirty-eight congregations with an estimated membership of 11,400. By the time of its twenty-fifth anniversary, 1878, it had grown to the point where it numbered 137 pastors, 570 congregations, and 124,367 souls.

...after a quarter century, the Synod pastors could look at their church and conclude that it was remarkably united in its point of view.²

But this unity did not last long.

VI. THE ELECTION CONTROVERSY

The theological debate over the doctrine of election or predestination did not begin with Lutherans in 19th century America. The church father Augustine of Hippo (354-430) taught a doctrine of double predestination where God elects the

elect and damns the damned. He was challenged by a British theologian Pelagius (*ca.* 354 – *ca.* 420) who taught that man was not totally depraved and could freely choose salvation. Pelagianism was condemned by Council of Ephesus in 431. A milder form known as semi-Pelagianism arose that taught that man must cooperate with God's grace to be saved. This, too, was condemned by the Synod of Orange in 529, though it later became the position of the Roman Catholic church and was the position espoused by Erasmus in his debate with Luther.

Erasmus expounded his position in a 1524 treatise to which Luther responded with his well-known *De Servo Arbitrio*, known in English as the *Bondage of the Will*. Luther's view approaches double predestination at times, but never really gets there. The Lutheran view became known as "single-predestination," wherein God elects the saved by his grace, but the damned are condemned by themselves. Luther believed this is what Scripture teaches and we are not to delve into seeming contradictions that our human reason cannot resolve. Luther always emphasizes the grace of God and the work of Christ.

The so-called "Reformed" tradition also battled over the issue of election. John Calvin (1509-1564) emphasized the sovereignty of God and double predestination. Arminius (1560-1609) espoused a semi-Pelagianism where the elect cooperated in their salvation.

Luther's protégé Philip Melancthon (1497-1560) in the first edition of his *Loci Communes Theologici* (1521) espoused Luther's view, but throughout his life he moved toward a cooperative or "synergistic" view. A controversy over election arose among Lutherans after Luther's death between the so-called "Phillipists" and the "Genesio (true)" Lutherans. The theologian Martin Chemnitz espoused a view on election which leaned toward the Genesio side and was incorporated into the *Formula of Concord*, Article XI, in 1577. A copy of this article from the *Epitome of the Formula of Concord* is attached in Appendix B.

Concerning the Election Controversy of the nineteenth century, Eugene Fevold writes that "It is somewhat unexpected that the Lutheran church should have been so thoroughly disturbed by a conflict that is not central to Lutheran teaching."³ I disagree with this assessment in that two very important principles of the reformation, *sola gratia* (by grace alone) and *sola fide* (by faith alone), converge in the doctrine of election, or predestination. If any doctrine is stated (or understood) in such a manner that these two principles seem to conflict, fireworks are bound to happen. The disagreement took shape over whether the Latin phrase *intuitu fidei* (in view of faith) was the term best suited to describe the doctrine.

According to Edward Busch, the phrase *intuitu fidei* was commonly used by 17th century Lutheran orthodox theologians such as Jacob Andrea, John Gerhard, John Quenstedt, and John Baier.⁴ C.F.W. Walther (1811-1887) looked rather to the *Formula of Concord* and to the earlier dogmaticians of the 16th century. Walther apparently became more and more convinced that the term was not proper. In 1872, Walther wrote "the expression God has elected 'in view of faith' is an infelicitous term."⁵ The matter more or less entered a more public forum in 1877 at a meeting of the Western District of the Missouri Synod where it was stated:

God foresaw nothing, absolutely nothing, in those whom he resolved to save, which might be worthy of salvation, and even if it be admitted that He foresaw some good in them, this, nevertheless, could not have determined Him to elect them for that reason; for as the Scriptures teach, all good in man originates with Him.⁶

By 1880, Walther was writing that *intuitu fidei* was a term introduced by Aegidius Hunnius (1550-1603) and that:

Those who, in harmony with our confession, and with a Luther, an Rhegius, a Chemnitz, a Kirchner, and others, deny that election has occurred *intuitu fidei* teach so much more positively that the elect have from eternity been chosen or ordained for justification and salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, and on account of the most holy merit of Christ.⁷

The phrase *intuitu fidei* had developed among the dogmaticians as a defense

against the Calvinist doctrine of “double predestination.” So when Walther dismissed the term, the obvious reaction among many was to accuse Walther of Calvinism. Walther’s dismissal of this term also caused a particular problem for Norwegians. Erik Pontoppidan’s (1698-1764) *Sandhed til Gudfrygtighed (Truth unto Godliness)*, an explanation of Luther’s *Small Catechism*, had used similar language to describe election. Pontoppidan’s work, while having no official status, had long been used for catechetical instruction in Norway and was widely revered by all Norwegian Lutherans.

In the Norwegian Synod, Prof. F. A. Schmidt took up the anti-Walther position. Schmidt had been a student and colleague of Walther. Though of German background, he became fluent in Norwegian and taught at Luther College in Iowa. When the Norwegian Synod arranged to teach their pastors at Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, Schmidt was assigned a Norwegian professorship there in 1872. When the Norwegian Synod opened its own seminary in Madison, WI in 1876, Schmidt was called to teach there. He hoped to be called to Concordia in his own right, but Walther refused him. Many speculate that this personal grudge fueled his growing hatred of Walther and the Missouri Synod and that the Election Controversy was a convenient foil because as late as 1878 Schmidt had defended Walther’s position on election.⁸

In 1880, Schmidt began publishing a theological journal called *Altes und Neues* to support his position. Schmidt was particularly quick to label his opponents as Calvinists. Schmidt and his fellow professor H.G. Stub, along with U.V. Koren, B.J. Muus, and two others were the Norwegian Synod delegates to the 1882 Chicago convention of the Synodical Conference. Four synods remained in the conference, Ohio having left earlier over its disagreements with Walther and Illinois having merged into Missouri. Three of these, Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Missouri protested the seating of Schmidt because of his public charges of Calvinism against them. Schmidt refused to answer U.V. Koren’s question about whether he came to the convention as a friend or foe. After four days of deliberations, four of the five Synod delegates joined the others in voting against Schmidt. Only Muus supported him.⁹ It appears that Schmidt’s belligerent attitude turned even most of his colleagues against him. Even so, the Synod’s leadership was charitable to Schmidt. To avoid further confrontations, the Synod voted in 1883 to withdraw from the Synodical Conference.

Schmidt and his growing anti-Missourian party continued to agitate within the Synod. Pastors were forced to resign their congregations by anti-Missourians. Yet, the Synod leadership remained conciliatory. Pastor U.V. Koren presented to the General Pastoral Conference meeting in Eau Claire in 1884 a set of 63 theses termed *An Accounting to the Congregations of the Norwegian Synod* (known in Norwegian as “*En Redegjoerelse*” or “*An Accounting*”).¹⁰ Koren vehemently repudiates the charges of Calvinism and often quotes Pontoppidan. He goes on to state:

That presentation which limits election to the bare decree concerning salvation and which excludes from it God’s decree concerning the way and means of salvation, we do not acknowledge as the presentation of Scripture and the *Formula of Concord* (XI, 6 and 9). However, so long as the doctrine of sin and grace is kept pure, we do not regard anyone who has used, or uses, that incomplete concept of election as a false teacher. Therefore we acknowledge, not indeed as a complete definition of the concept of election, but still as a correct presentation of the last part of it, the answer given to Q. 548 of Pontoppidan’s *Sandhed til Gudfrygtighed*, which reads: “That God has appointed all those to eternal life whom He from eternity has seen would accept the grace proffered them, believe in Jesus and persevere in this faith unto the end (Rom. 8:28-30)” (2 Tim. 1:13).

This is to be understood in the manner in which it is developed by John Gerhard....

Therefore, we declare also that we stand in fellowship of faith with those who like Pontoppidan and John Gerhard teach correctly regarding sin and grace and who, like them, reject the doctrine that God has been influenced in electing men by their conduct.¹¹

U. V. Koren, whom Clifford Nelson called “the keenest of the Synod dialecticians”¹² had in 1884 said “we stand in fellowship of faith with those who like Pontoppidan and John Gerhard.” This, in many ways, foreshadows what is said in the Madison Agreement of 1912.

While the Synod leaders struck what may be called a tolerant position, Schmidt took an even more intransigent stance. In response to Koren's *Accounting* Schmidt writes:

I believe and teach now as before, that it is not synergistic error, but a clear teaching of God's Word and our Lutheran Confession that 'salvation in a certain sense does not depend on God alone.'¹³

At an October 1885 meeting the Anti-Missourians resolved that pastors who had signed *An Accounting* should be removed from office and that Pres. B. Harstad of the Minnesota District, and Pres. U.V. Koren of the Iowa district should be removed from office.¹⁴ Once again it seems that the stereotypes of the rigid Synod dogmaticians have been misplaced.

Schmidt did not teach in the 1885-86 school year and in 1886 the Anti-Missourians established their own seminary at St. Olaf's school in Northfield, Minnesota, which began classes in the fall of 1886. The schism was a *fait accompli* and in 1887-88 nearly one-third of the Synod left to form the Anti-Missourian Brotherhood. In 1890 the Brotherhood joined with two smaller groups, the Norwegian Augustana Synod and the Norwegian Danish Conference, to form the United Norwegian Lutheran Church, the Synod's main sparring partner in the next round of merger negotiations.

VII. PRELUDE TO MERGER OF THE NORWEGIAN-AMERICAN LUTHERANS

The United Church suffered two small schisms in the first few years of its existence. The first developed over a controversy surrounding Augsburg Seminary. Augsburg had been the seminary of the Norwegian-Danish Conference and was designated to be the official seminary of the new United Church. A controversy arose over the ownership of the school and the role of its college *vis-a-vis* St. Olaf. Supporters of Augsburg formed a group known as the "Friends of Augsburg" and in 1897 split off to form the Lutheran Free Church. In 1900, a small group of persons caught up in a revival movement split from the United Church to form the Church of the Lutheran Brethren.

It was also in 1900 that the Norwegian Synod issued an invitation "inviting the presidents and the theological faculties of the United Church and Hauge's Synod to a colloquy on doctrine."¹⁵ The dominant feeling among many in the United Church and most in the Synod was that doctrinal agreement was a necessary prerequisite to closer fellowship.

The United Church accepted the offer and the group met in March 1901. Once again it appears that F.A. Schmidt was a cause of contention. Nelson writes:

the synod presidents and professors gave evidence of reaching a common view of the assurance of salvation based upon the theses presented by President Hoyme [of the United Church]. Thereupon resolutions were adopted to continue the discussions the next year. Previous to the next meeting, however, Professor F.A. Schmidt had published a partial account of the proceedings. As this was contrary to the wishes of the colloquy and since Schmidt described Hoyme's theses as a 'compromise to bridge the chasm between truth and error,' the Synod passed a resolution in 1902, requesting the United Church to replace Schmidt with another man who was less likely to be 'a hindrance' to the cause of union. This the United Church refused to do; consequently no further discussions were held.¹⁶

Despite this, Nelson writes one page later "The United Church, committed to the task of furthering the cause of bringing all Norwegian Lutherans under one ecclesiastical roof, had seemingly exhausted every possibility of rapprochement."¹⁷ It seems to me that quelling the voice of someone as cantankerous as their own Schmidt would have been a step to try. In fact, this had to be done before the Madison Settlement could become reality (see below).

In 1905, Hauge's Synod issued a new call for church union. Committees from Hauge's Synod, the Norwegian Synod and the United Church began meeting in 1906. Over the next three years, agreement on theses regarding absolution, lay activity, the call, and conversion were readily reached, but a deadlock was developing again over the doctrine of election.

VIII. THE MADISON AGREEMENT

The union committees labored over the doctrine of election from 1908 to 1910. In 1908 a subcommittee was named to prepare a set of theses on the issue of election. The subcommittee was unable to agree on a common proposal so two members, Prof. John Kildahl (1857-1920), president of St. Olaf College of the United Church, and H(ans) G(erhard) Stub (1849-1931), professor at Luther Seminary and vice-president of the Norwegian Synod, each prepared a set of theses for discussion. Stub's theses were selected for discussion by the union committee on the tie-breaking vote of the chairman, Carl Eastvold (1863-1929) of Hauge's Synod.

Discussion of Stub's theses proved fruitless. A second subcommittee was asked again to prepare a joint declaration. It was resolved that if the subcommittee failed, the joint committee would no longer meet. Once again the subcommittee was unable to agree on a set of theses for discussion. Despite this, a committee of the whole met in March 1910. The United and Hauge members joined together to support the discussion of a set of theses prepared by President Eastvold. The representatives of the Norwegian Synod left the meeting. Synod district meetings that year approved Stub's theses, but still holding out hope for the merger discussions, most were careful to state that the *intuitu fidei* form of election need not be divisive:

1. The Synod recommends that the Union Committee of the Norwegian Synod, the United Church and Hauge's Synod continue its work as long as it has any hope that unity on the basis of truth can be attained.

...

3. It (the Synod) also declares that the two doctrinal forms of election set forth in the confessions of the Lutheran Church and by John Gerhard should not be regarded as schismatic, and would much deplore if that should be the case.¹⁸

Once again, the position of the Synod was conciliatory. However, in his address to the 1910 convention of the United Church, President T.H. Dahl (1845-1923) "charged the Synod theses (Stub's) with being unbiblical and un-Lutheran."¹⁹ A second union committee meeting in December that year ended with the same result as the March meeting: the committee voted to discuss Eastvold's theses and the Synod representatives left. It appeared that merger discussions with the Synod were over.

Now, as in the 1880s, the Norwegian Synod seems to be willing to say that the *intuitu fidei* expression of election need not be divisive of church unity. It appears that throughout this long controversy the opinion and personality of one man, F.A. Schmidt, played a decisive and divisive role. Even Nelson admits:

Unfortunately, F.A. Schmidt of the United Church continued to accuse the Synod of Calvinism at every turn. Schmidt could not forget that he was no longer back in the nineteenth century. On occasion, he acted as though he were still fighting Walther. It must be admitted that the presence of Schmidt on the union committee and the hesitation of his colleagues to silence him or to apologize for his occasional inexcusable outbursts played no little part in the cooling union interest among the leaders of the Synod.²⁰

Heretofore, most of the members of the union committees had been men who were theologians and/or church leaders, who, many will say, were overly concerned about doctrinal minutia and, as Nelson notes, were still fighting the 1880 battles over election. The impasse on election was first breached when the 1911 meeting of the United Church elected an entirely new set of representatives to the union committee: Pastors Peder Tangjerd, Gerhard Rasmussen, S. Gunderson, H. Engh, and M.H. Hegge. The Synod responded in a like manner by electing Pastors J. Norby, R. Malmin, J.E. Jorgensen, G.T. Lee, and I.D. Ylvisaker as their representatives. The Hauge Synod chose to remain out of any further negotiations on the doctrine of election, feeling that the issue concerned a standing disagreement between the other two bodies and confident that a resolution acceptable to both would be acceptable to it.

On February 22, 1912, the union committee meeting in Madison, Wisconsin announced that it had reached an agreement on the doctrine of election. The "Madison Agreement" of 1912 basically stated that there exists one doctrine of

election which may be stated in two different “forms:”

1. The Union Committees of the Synod and the United Church, unanimously and without reservation, accept that the doctrine of election which is set forth in Article XI of the Formula of Concord, the so-called First Form, and Pontoppidan’s Truth unto Godliness (Sandhed til Gudfrygtighed), question 548, the so-called Second Form of Doctrine.²¹

The Madison Agreement (or *Opgjør* as it was known in Norwegian) has been subject to many historical interpretations. Fred Meuser calls it “a compromise which the former committee of theologians would never have proposed.”²² O.G. Malmin, whose father Rasmus Malmin had been on the Union Committee writes that *Opgjør* was:

admittedly a compromise, yet it established the fact which should not have been lost sight of during the controversy, that the doctrine of Election can be stated in more than one way, and that both the ways current in Lutheranism are acceptable.²³

Clifford Nelson sums it up this way:

The *Opgjør* itself can best be described as the instrument of an ecclesiastical rapprochement rather than an astute and flawless display of theological finality with regard to the doctrine of election. Both sides, eager for union and weary of conflict, sought desperately to find a way in which they could be delivered from the clutch of bitterness and each could join the other without giving up his own views. It was a case of the victory of the heart over head.²⁴

All reports indicate that the announcement of the Madison Agreement was received by the Norwegian-American community with a great deal of joy. At the same time however, the Madison Agreement created misgivings among certain persons in the Synod.

IX. THE MINORITY MEN AND THE AUSTIN AGREEMENT

Hauge’s Synod and the United Church overwhelmingly accepted the Madison Agreement, as did a majority in the Synod:

By a vote of 394 to 106 the Norwegian Lutheran Synod of North America late Monday afternoon, June 16 [1913], in extraordinary session in Zion Norwegian Church, Lyndale Avenue and Twenty-sixth Avenue N., adopted the union policy proposed by President H.G. Stub in his message to the Synod. The discussion of the majority and minority reports occupied the entire day, and although the feeling was tense at times, heated discussions that were expected did not develop.²⁵

A significant minority in the Norwegian Synod opposed the Madison Agreement on the ground that Article 4 contained a “synergistic” error by reference to “man’s sense of *responsibility* in relation to the *acceptance* or rejection of grace.”²⁶ They also had concerns with Article 1 because of the phrase “without reservation.” Synod men had long been tolerant of the “second form,” but felt compelled always to qualify their acceptance by reference to proper understanding of “*intuitu fidei*.” The so-called “Minority Men,” led by Prof. C.K. Preus and the Reverend I.B. Torrison requested the Union Committee to modify the offensive passage. Christian K(eyser) Preus (1852-1921) was the oldest son of Synod founder and second president H.A. Preus. In 1898 he accepted an instructor position at Luther College and in 1902 was elected its president.

On October 4, 1916, Preus and Torrison wrote to the Union Committee with their requests for changes. The Committee met from October 10-12 in Minneapolis and after explaining why they could not change the Madison Agreement itself, offered the following reply:

IV. But as far as the essential points raised are concerned, the Union Committee will nevertheless yield to the aforementioned request by recommending to the annual meetings of the respective bodies the adoption of the following resolution:

While the annual meeting reaffirms its position on the unaltered ‘Agreement’ as basis for the merger of the three conferring bodies, it expressly takes cognizance of the three reservations concerning Sections 1, 3, and 4 in the ‘Agreement’ as stated in the request of Prof. C.K. Preus and the Rev. I.B. Torrison; nevertheless the annual meeting hereby invites that group of men and congregations whose views are expressed in the above cited request to participate in the formation of the new body with full equality and mutual brotherly recognition.²⁷

The proposed statement was not sufficient for Preus and Torrison and a meeting was arranged with a subcommittee in Austin, Minnesota. The so-called “Austin Settlement” was reached and approved in December by the Union Committee in

Minneapolis. The new agreement read in part:

IV. But as far as the essential points raised are concerned, the Union Committee will nevertheless yield to the aforementioned request by recommending to the annual meetings of the respective bodies the adoption of the following resolution:

The annual meeting expressly takes cognizance of the three reservations concerning Sections 1, 3, and 4 in the 'Agreement' as stated in the request of Prof. C.K. Preus and the Rev. I.B. Torrison and declares that there is nothing in the aforementioned request which is contrary to Scripture and the Confessions, and that we regard the position taken in that document as a sufficient expression of unity in faith. Therefore that group of men and congregations whose position is stated in the above request are invited to become members of the new body with full equality and mutual brotherly recognition.

Note. It is obvious that the above cited resolution must not be construed to mean that 'Agreement' as a basis for the union of the three contracting bodies thereby has been abridged or altered.²⁸

The "Austin Settlement" claimed to recognize the concerns of the minority and declared them to be in unity of faith, but in reality made no changes in the Madison Agreement.

Did the Minority Men realize that the Austin Settlement did not concede anything of doctrinal substance? Should the Minority Men now join the new body? Although the Norwegian Synod left the Synodical Conference in 1883, many men in the Synod continued close relations with Missouri. Preus and Torrison solicited the opinion of their colleagues Franz Pieper (1852-1931), W.H.T. Dau (1864-1944), and Theodore Graebner (1876-1950) at Concordia Seminary in St. Louis. Pieper was the author of the three volume *Christian Dogmatics*, the standard textbook of repositionation theology. Dau was the co-editor and co-translator of the *Concordia Triglotta*. Graebner had been ordained in the Norwegian Synod and was longtime editor of the *Lutheran Herald*, the Synod's English language journal.

Preus and Torrison met with these three men at the end of December and solicited their opinion of the Austin Settlement. In a letter to Preus and Torrison dated January 9, 1917, Pieper, Dau, and Graebner stated:

In the matter which was the subject of our discussion, the point at issue was not whether the minority ought to make first entrance into a situation as now pending in the Norwegian Synod - this we should advise no one to do - but the point at issue was whether the minority should be under constraint to leave the Norwegian Synod now for reasons of conscience, or whether matters were still in such a state that it is your duty to continue to bear witness to the truth.

Our opinion is this:

First - Whereas, the Union Committee concedes that the demand of the minority, - that Thesis I be stricken from "Opgjør" - is in harmony with Scripture and the Confessions; and Secondly - Whereas, the Committee on Union publicly declares that the expression in Thesis IV of "Opgjør" - (feeling of responsibility with reference to acceptance or rejection of grace) - is to be understood as meaning that God alone is the cause of acceptance and man alone the cause of rejection; and

Thirdly - Whereas, the minority is not under constraint to remain silent, but has been specifically conceded freedom of speech with reference to the "Opgjør";

Therefore, we hold that the time has not yet arrived for the immediate severance of connections with the Norwegian Synod, but that your duty lies in the direction of securing, with God's help, free recognition for the truth in the Norwegian Synod, by bearing witness to the same.²⁹

The Minority Men had three options at this juncture:

- Leave the Synod before the merger;
- Accept the Austin Agreement and agree to merger; or
- Do neither at this time, but wait for "free recognition of the truth."

Which did Missouri counsel? Most clearly not the first option: "the time has not yet arrived for the immediate severance of connections with the Norwegian Synod." But which of the second two? This is a point of contention between the players. Considering the fast track the merger was on, was the third option realistic? The Minority Men met on January 17-18, 1917 at the West Hotel in Minneapolis to consider the Austin Agreement. Preus and Torrison recommended

union. The result was the following communication:

The minority hereby accepts the invitation [to join the union] with the prayer that God will lead this step to the blessing of His church.³⁰

Had the Minority Men made the correct interpretation of Missouri's recommendation? Had they misinterpreted it? Had they chosen to ignore it? The Rev. O.T. Lee solicited a clarification from Graebner. In a letter dated February 11, he received this reply:

You are certainly right, when you say, that the advice to go into the new church-body is not found in the letter addressed by Dr. Pieper, Prof. Dau and myself to Prof. Preus and Rev. Torrison. The question we answered was, no, not now, because by the terms of the Austin Agreement you are given an opportunity to make a strong effort within the Synod to have Opgjør corrected. There is no word in the letter about joining the new body. It only says that as long as the right of open testimony is conceded to the minority they should remain and speak, and not now leave the Synod. Anything that goes beyond this meaning and purpose of the letter is an unwarranted interpretation.³¹

If Graebner's interpretation is correct, Preus and Torrison either misinterpreted or ignored their advice. Perhaps Preus and Torrison were simply anticipating the next step. In their yearly meetings before the merger, each synod approved the Union Committee's recommendation, i.e. the Austin Agreement. Nelson puts a more cynical spin on the situation:

In this way [approving the Austin Agreement], the churches prepared the way for the acceptance of the Synod minority into the new church, thus allowing the minority to fulfill its real desire for union without losing face.³²

If in their own minds the Minority Men felt they had "won," they were deceived. Their interpretation of Opgjør was supposedly accepted by all three synods, but how deeply this acceptance went is of course open to debate.

X. THE AFTERMATH

Not many in the new Norwegian Lutheran Church cared whether the Minority Men were duped or not. Those in the minority who did care formed a new church body in 1918 which eventually came to be known as the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS) based in Mankato, MN. They joined the Synodical Conference in 1920. The Missouri Synod made overtures to the Iowa and Ohio Synods in the 1920s with the Intersynodical (Chicago) Theses. Front and center in these theses was the First Form of election, so the effort was unsurprisingly unsuccessful. Ohio and Iowa joined with a remnant of the Buffalo Synod to form the first church body known as the American Lutheran Church (1930-1960).

In 1932, the Missouri Synod issued a series of statements called the *Brief Statement* which summarized their position on important doctrines. The section on election is reproduced in Appendix C.

Anecdotes abound about two men in the Norwegian (now Evangelical) Lutheran Church who did care about the doctrine of election. They were both professors at Luther Theological Seminary in St. Paul: Herman Preus and George Aus. Preus was a grandson of the Norwegian Synod founder of the same name and was a dogmatician and 1st Former to the end. It was said that he carried a well-worn copy of the *Concordia Triglotta* (three language *Book of Concord*) with him wherever he went in case someone needed to be corrected. George Aus was a more pietistic-leaning man and a thorough 2nd Former. It was said that Preus' nephews Jack and Robert (who later joined the ELS and then the Missouri Synod) worked behind the scenes to persecute Aus on behalf of their uncle.

By the time of the great mergers of the 1960s, the ALC and the LCA, the doctrine of election was for most persons in these bodies a matter of doctrinal indifference. Only the church bodies in the Synodical Conference, the LCMS, WELS, and ELS, maintained a strong position on the issue, and this was for the 1st Form. But the Synodical Conference was having other troubles. In the post-war period, the LCMS was becoming more open to fellowship with other Lutherans and Christians. One way that this was apparent to hardliners in WELS was its newfound tolerance of Boy and Girl Scouting. WELS thought that participating in these organizations was a form of "unionism." WELS and ELS withdrew from the Synodical Conference in 1963 and the Synodical Conference was formally dissolved in 1967. Ironically for WELS, a group of ultra-conservative

pastors and congregations in that body did not think that WELS acted fast enough and withdrew from that body to form the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) in 1961.

The Association of Free Lutheran Congregations (AFLC) was formed in 1962 by congregations of the former Lutheran Free Church (LFC) that did not want to follow that body into its merger with the ALC in 1963. Reclaiming the pietistic background of the LFC and subscribing only to the Augsburg Confession and Luther's Small Catechism, my guess is that most of the AFLC would fall into the 2nd Form camp, but I think they would not consider conformance with this interpretation required for fellowship.

The Church of the Lutheran Brethren (CLB) was formed in 1900 when a group of revival-minded pastors and churches split from the United Church. They also claim a pietistic background and subscribe only to the Augsburg Confession and Luther's Small Catechism. I think they would definitely fall into the 2nd Form camp, if not Arminianism.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) was formed in 1988 by a merger of the LCA, the ALC, and the AELC (a liberal remnant of the LCMS that had left that body when it cracked down on liberal teaching at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis). Doctrinal indifference runs rampant in that body, and they now have full fellowship with both Calvinist and Arminian church bodies. However, when I was at Luther Seminary in the 1990s, two professors, James Nestingen (now emeritus and working with the North American Lutheran Church (NALC)) and Gerhard Forde (now deceased) were openly 1st Formers. Although I do not know him personally, judging by his articles in *Logia*, current faculty member Steven Paulson would also be in that camp.

In the recent past, two major groups have left the ELCA. Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ (LCMC) was formed a little more than ten years ago and is a federation of congregations and congregational groupings called Districts. Some are more confessional and those who care might be 1st Formers; many are less confessional and would lean toward the 2nd Form. For most it is probably an open issue.

The North American Lutheran Church (NALC) contains members whom I know to be 1st Formers, and the organization's statements are a bit more confessional than LCMC's, but I would again guess that for most it would be an open issue.

The International Lutheran Council (ILC), of which we are now formally a member, does not have a specific statement on election that I could find, but as it subscribes to the entire *Book of Concord*, I would think that the *Formula of Concord*, Art. XI would be controlling.

Where stands the LMS-USA? Again, as we subscribe to the entire *Book of Concord* in a quia sense, and say so in our Deerfield Statement, saying that the writings in it "are to be accepted, not insofar as [*quatenus*], but because they are [*quia*] the presentation and explanation of the pure doctrine of the Word of God and a valid summary of the faith of the Lutheran Church, and recognizes them as normative for its theology," I would think that the *Formula of Concord*, Art. XI would be controlling for our theology on the doctrine of election and would mainly put us in the 1st Form camp. Does that mean that the 2nd Form, properly interpreted (and that is the key) would not be acceptable among us? Pieper, in a little book published in 1913 did not think so, writing "Fellowship of faith and church fellowship with those who hold Gerhard's position [*inuitu fidei*] does not cause the slightest difficulty. Such is the clear verdict of experience."³³ He goes on to state that *inuitu fidei*, while perhaps not the best term because of the confusion it can cause, when it is understood in the manner of Gerhard and Pontoppidan, that is that faith is not a cause of election, but proceeds from it, it is acceptable. Walther and Schmidt's debate had devolved to the point that the debate was over the term, not the theology behind the term.

So in a sense, we are back to where the Norwegians were in 1917 – both forms – properly understood – are correct, as long as the extremes of Calvinism (double-predestination) and Arminian (synergistic) are avoided.

Table Talk
P. O. Box 31
Chetek, WI 54728

To:

The LMS-USA is Lutheran Church body describing itself as *Biblical, Confessional, Evangelical, Liturgical and Congregational*. It is a Forum in which there is an on going discussion of theological issues and concerns among clergy and lay alike. The LMS-USA meets annually for a Theological Conference and this publication, besides carrying news of the Ministerium and Synod, functions also as a vehicle for this continuing dialogue.

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For information or to make
comment write:

President/Pastor, LMS-USA
2837 East New York St.
Indianapolis, IN 46201

Internet Contact:
revralph@sbcglobal.net